ESCAPING TO PSYTRANCE

The case of psychedelic trance in Cape Town, South Africa

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Abstract

The music genre of psytrance has been localised throughout the globe. Especially now we can see that in postmodern times, where identities have become increasingly fluid and fractured, populations are looking for a place where they can find community and belonging. And it seems that in a post-Apartheid Cape Town where segregation was such a big part of life, being able to have a space to come together away from the structure of racial categorisation is important. Cape Town has a large following of the psytrance outdoor festival scene, however, not much has been written about the psychedelic trance scene in Cape Town. This study examines the psytrance scene in Cape Town, South Africa. Two months of research attending and observing at psytrance outdoor festivals in the Cape Town area, using audio visual recordings, and semi-structured interviews. The thesis comprises of a text and ethnographic film. The text touches upon the outdoor psytrance festival culture in Cape Town, looking at the need that people have to attend these multiple day outdoor festivals. Escape, reconnecting with nature and the active meditation that comes with dancing to repetitive and psychedelic music. My key research finding is that the outdoor psytrance festivals give Capetonians a space where they can escape their daily lives, work through problems that they might have, and create a sense of community and identity.

Key words: Escape, Cape Town, *communitas*, Khoisan, liminality, psytrance.

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1. Introduction

I packed my bags and left the tent behind. Walking back to the parking lot I could see the groups of other people leaving as well, looking broken but laughing and joking with friends as they talk about the experiences that they had this last weekend. I got to my car, packed it up and got in. As I closed the car door and suddenly realised how quiet it was, the reverberations of the continuous bass from the last few days still in my ears. I sat and enjoyed the silence as I let the experience that I had at the festival sink in. Starting the car, I drove back to reality.

Global capitalism has influenced how we work, play and identify ourselves in our daily lives. Pressures of global capitalism on the postmodern identity. With capitalism and globalisation on the rise culture has become increasingly postmodern. The postmodern is defined as being very fluid. The term postmodern has a wide definition, one of great complexity with many facets, however it seems that this is the best term that I can use to describe the city life that people are 'escaping from' when going to psytrance festivals. Authors have been describing the psytrance genre as postmodern, however I disagree, as it is the psytrance culture that seems to give people something to hold on to and to find a form of stability in their lives. The movement of people and information, also known as globalisation, is a complex process and capitalism is increasingly leading people to living more individualistic lives of consumption. The combination of these two processes creates a fluid and individualistic society. And it seems that music has become more important when it comes to the formation of individual and group identity. What once would have been viewed as 'countercultural' is now becoming the 'mainstream' in methods to form a community and belong to an identity. With the consumption of psytrance music one can feel like they belong to a greater whole. The psytrance culture is " a cultural "petri-dish", then psytrance festivals are cross-fertilised seedbeds, ecologies of

sound in which multitudinous styles coexist" (St John 2010:2), however the 'golden rules' are all the same, creating a culture where people feel welcomed and can create a sense of community. The one basic common denominator that can tie people together who feel lost and overwhelmed by the postmodern living.

Frith (1996) describes identity as something that does not come from within but is placed upon a person. The materiality of culture has become increasingly important in everyday life, especially with the rise of consumerism from global capitalism. This is also done with music, people appropriate certain styles associated with music genres into their daily lives and mould new identities. "And once we start looking at different musical genres we can begin to document the different ways in which music works materially to give people different identities, to place them in different social groups" (Frith 1996: 124), we can see that music can be an important part of how a person identifies themselves.

How do people consume psytrance music, and the culture around it, and appropriate it in their daily lives to form new identities in a postmodern city such as Cape Town? This idea of needing a way of creating an identity not associated with the capitalist postmodern society is prevalent in a city such as Cape Town, a city that has been "compared to postmodern global cities" (Jackson 2003: 65). Being labelled as a postmodern city it is safe to assume that there is a great influence of global capitalism on the local population of Cape Town, where there are a lot of pressures of competing in a capitalist society, and "so-called 'globalised 'capitalism is placing pressures and demands on the city" of Cape Town (Freund 2005: 27). Field, Meyer & Swanson (2007) also discuss the increased pressure that global capitalism has placed on Cape Town, influencing the postmodern identities created by local populations with an already segregated past; "New forms of inequality and social tensions are emerging, triggered by insecurity and social fears, as people compete with one another for scarce resources such as jobs and housing" (Field, Meyer & Swanson 2007: 5). The increased stress of living in a capitalist postmodern city can lead to people feeling alienated in their daily lives, in turn leading to people searching for forms of community and escape.

By doing this research I will expand the information that is collected and analysed about different ways that local contexts appropriate and mould music cultures that have 'flowed' globally. The process of globalisation is not a simple one, and I feel that it is important to look at the localisation of a music genre, and what factors would influence this localisation. Tsing (2000) attempts to show the 'danger' of focusing on one of these global visions. Globalisation is not something in the air. It is something physical, that is also greatly influenced by physical factors. It is indeed interesting to look at psytrance as a global phenomenon, however I find it important to also look at the local contexts and places that influence this global phenomenon, otherwise the way that is written about does not have the level of complexity that will allow for a deeper understanding of the psytrance culture.

Especially when looking at psyculture in Cape Town, it seems that this specific localisation has not been examined yet in detail. St John (2015) touches upon the impact of certain localisations on the global psyculture but does not go into detail about how this would go about in Cape Town, he only explains that the psytrance culture has been localised as a form of "settlers reconciliation with indigenous populations" (St John 2015: 245). Given the history of Apartheid in South Africa, it seems that it is important to see how people in Cape Town are finding ways of trying to "help the process of reconciliation and nation building" (Uzzell & Ballantyne 1998: 9). It seems that psytrance is shown to be a method in which the indigenous population of South Africa, the Khoisan, can 'reclaim' space in the modern day South African society after enduring an oppressive past.

2. Methods

2.1. Ethnographic methods

The main method that I used was participant observation as well as semi structured interviews. This helped me to experience and get insight into community of the outdoor psytrance festivals. By doing the participant observation I was able to understand what the interlocutors were talking about during the interviews that I conducted separately. Whilst doing the participant observation I realised that it felt vastly different to just attending a festival, I was a researcher. "I am somebody. I am doing" (Dalsgaard in Suhr and Willerslev 2013: 101), and I am doing research and experiencing the festival. It felt like I focused a lot more on the people walking around the festival and how they dressed in comparison to how I would normally walk around a festival.

In the research period I attended three outdoor psytrance festivals, at these festivals I observed and participated, mostly by 'hanging out 'near the dance floor at the main stages of the festivals. The main methods I used were observation, and participant observation. This is a good basis method for the research, and it easily led to the method of interviewing. Participant observation is when an "ethnographer immerses him- or herself in a group of extended period of time, observing behaviour, listening to what is said in conversations both between others and with the fieldworker, and asking questions" (Bryman 2012: 432). Observing allowed me to experience the psytrance festival first-hand.

I also took fieldnotes, "these should be fairly detailed summaries of events and behaviour and the researcher's initial reflections on them" (Bryman 2012: 447). Sometimes it was difficult to be able to take notes in the moment, however, this was partially be helped by having the camera with me to film certain moments. I also took photographs to help support my field notes.

The next method I used during my research is the interview. Interviews are important when wanting to gather information that might not be easily observed or understood simply through observation whilst doing research. I interviewed DJ's, organisers and visitors of the psytrance festivals. I managed to get in contact with the DJ's via a friend of mine, we met at their respective houses and I

interviewed them whilst recording with my camera. I also met with one of the people who did an opening ceremony for the Origin festival. I kept the questions that I prepared before the interview simple and minimal. There were the basic questions of how the interlocutor is related to the psytrance scene, and which festivals they attended and what kind of experiences they had there. But I felt that having semi structured interview questions would really allow me to build from what the interlocutor said and create a more dynamic and therefore insightful conversation. All the interlocutors that I arranged an interview with were very enthusiastic to help me with my research, and they all felt that the research that I was doing was important. I also made sure to let the interlocutors knew that I would bring my video-camera with me to record the interview. This way I made sure that the people would be prepared and not surprised by the fact that a camera was suddenly entering their environment. It seemed that the interlocutors that I interviewed had no real issue with the camera being there and just talked about their experience with psytrance. I also tried to ask a broad set of questions and explain that even if they feel like they do not have information about the psytrance scene, that their experience is valid and helpful data.

2.2. Audio-visual methods

I was also using visual methods. This ~~is~~ was quite ~~a~~ new terrain for me as a researcher as I had not done a lot of visual research during my studies. As explained by MacDougall "the relation between knowledge and aesthetics is tricky, and that between anthropology and film especially so, in part because the legitimacy for anthropology of a kind of knowledge expressed in images has yet to be fully addressed" (MacDougall 1998: 140-1).

By collecting footage with the camera, I was able to properly record the environment that I was in during the festival. The combination of visual and audio is very important in the psytrance scene, as the music is inescapable during a festival, and in the interviews all the interlocutors explained that the great attraction to the psytrance music genre is the repetitive music, which enables one to dance and stomp away their frustrations. This helped me realise that when recording

and when I was making the documentary I would have a good focus on the music of the festivals, "the world of sound and smell is less localized and can encompass the person; this is illustrated by the way it is easy to avert one's eyes or look away from something, but less easy to escape an unwelcome sound or smell by moving the head" (Irving in Suhr and Willerslev 2013: 79). By adding the music of the festival and a few soundscapes it will allows the audience to be fully immersed in the outdoor psytrance festival scene.

As it is difficult to describe the experience of music, each person has their own explanation of how they experience it. But the only way to really 'show 'this experience is by listening to the music. And even then, each person or audience member has their own experience an interpretation that will influence how they think of it. By having the recorded footage and music in the documentary, and "by way of montage, create a real physiological result, made up of all the stimuli that play together at the same time" (Dalsgaard in Suhr and Willerslev 2013: 103). It allowed me to portray the experience and atmosphere that I found during the outdoor festival. I ~~have~~ also included some 'psychedelic patterns' in the documentary because one of my interlocutors explained that it will allow audiences to really experience the psychedelic. I will not be adding any voice-overs during these sections, as this allows the audience to truly focus on the experience of the festival, and the psychedelic together.

The shapes that one can see in the psychedelic patterns coming across the screen feel quite organic and natural of shape, and this combined with the intense colours and patterns brings one into a different world.

2.3. Ethics

Ethics are important when doing ethnographic research, especially regarding consent and access.

'3. Obtain informed consent and necessary permissions '(AAA Code of Ethics). When looking at the ethics of consent I will have to be careful as I will be filming people in an environment where there is consumption of alcohol and drugs. This could be an issue when asking for consent, as alcohol

is a drug that influences the decision making of people. I will need to be clear with what I will be doing with the footage being shot, and allow people room to be able to say that they do not want to be in the footage, and if that is said I need to respect people and not include them in the documentary.

'2. Be open and honest regarding your work '(AAA Code of Ethics). Another issue of consent is the knowledge of the subject on the representation of them in the documentary or text. "Your subjects may be "media literate"— that is, recognize fleeting two-dimensional motion pictures for what they are—and their understanding of your film about them has as much validity as any other, but they probably won't be in a position to gauge how your representation of their lives will be received by others" (Barbash & Taylor 1997: 51). Here we see that the audience is again an important factor when looking at ethics. The way that a film is interpreted is greatly influenced by the audience.

A filmmaker can make sure that they represent somebody or a group of people in a certain way, but the final interpretation rests on the audience viewing the film. One of the main points that is touched upon by Marion and Crowder (2013) and Barbash and Taylor (1997) is that the interpretation of the audience has a large influence on the ethics of filmmaking. The point that the authors make in this text is that when looking at ethics and filmmaking the audience that you make it for is an important factor.

'7. Maintain respectful and ethical professional relationships '(AAA Code of Ethics). The role and relationship of the researcher and the subjects or participants of the research is also an important issue. I have attempted to intervene as little as possible when observing the festival and how people move around it.

Assuming a professional relationship was quite an interesting challenge for me, as I usually like to attend outdoor festivals in my free time, but I felt like I could always nicely keep the role of being a researcher in the back of my head. For this research I have assumed the role of the overt ethnographer when looking at the outdoor psytrance festival. When attending the festival to see how people experience psytrance in Cape Town I do not know yet what kind of role I want to assume.

3. Theoretical framework

Before starting the research, I looked at a few concepts that I felt were important for the research. Firstly, it is important to see where psytrance came from, and shortly how it has developed. Then will I discuss localisation in general. It is important to see in the literature why psytrance has become popular in Cape Town. After which I turn to look at the Cape Town in the local context, and the post-Apartheid development of the city. I also touch upon the Khoisan revival. Following this I turn to look at the concept of the postmodern. I use this term to describe the daily lives of the Capetonians. Lastly, I examine the concept of liminality and *communitas*. As it is quite an important aspect of the psytrance festival.

3.1. Psytrance: A Global Phenomenon

Psytrance is a global music genre that has origins in Goa, India. The hippie population of America was searching for an escape, a place where they could feel safe and not judged. A place where one need not worry about the 'rules' of everyday life and the 'struggles' that come with living in a capitalistic society. In the 80's electronic dance music was introduced to the parties and thus psychedelic trance was born. With the option to sample and remix and create songs that had a repetitive and higher BPM than the psychedelic rock music of past. (Quote from Rom & Querner). Since then psytrance has been globalised and has developed as a general global music genre. The mushrooming of the global psyculture makes the definition of psyculture quite complex. However, there is still an umbrella definition of psyculture and the psytrance genre that I will be highlighting in this section. The characteristics of the general psytrance genre include: a beat tempo of around 145BPM, mono tonal and little to no harmonic variations, synthesis favoured over sampling and it includes a psychedelic aesthetic (Lindop 2010).

O'Grady writes about the idea of 'play 'in psytrance, and how this concept is an important factor when examining and analysing psytrance festivals. "Play is transformational. It has the ability to lift us out of and beyond our immediate circumstances while, simultaneously, providing us with the means to confront our everyday reality" (O'Grady 2015: 150), the idea of 'play 'can be linked with the liminal spaces that are created during a psytrance festival that enables the audience to 'escape 'and 'lose themselves 'in the environment that the festival has created. Through the ritual of dancing to repetitive music a liminal space is created. This liminal space is where people can mentally reset through the active meditation of dancing, and create connections with people that they would not otherwise make connections within their daily lives.

Having fun and being able to relax in a safe environment are some basic principles that are associated with the psytrance music genre; "fun, sociality and connections are highly prized products" (Ledesma 2013: 1).

Another characteristic that is associated with psyculture and psytrance music is ritual, healing and being one with nature, it is not necessarily nature as in the environment but nature as in the natural state of being in the mind, because the psytrance is used to get back to the natural baseline which allows for the new connections with oneself and others to be made, "where dancing, well-being and healing go hand in hand" (O'Grady 2015: 153). St John (2014) also describes this abundance of 'intentional ritual' in the psyculture. And that this intentional ritual has been able to flourish globally, developing a multitude of sub-styles and subgenres that have also all been influenced by local contexts, but which all originated in the Goa Trance music genre. Linking the idea of going to a psytrance festival as a sort of 'rite of passage'. Which also brings us to the liminal aspects of the psytrance festival.

3.2. Localisation

Now I will touch upon globalisation, as it creates a good basis for discussing the circulation and localisation of psytrance. I want to look at how the process of the globalisation of a music genre and the process of the localisation of a music genre, influence each other. By doing this I can get a clearer picture of the factors that influence these processes which will help me to understand how psytrance has been localised in Cape Town. Cape Town has been described as quite a hybrid city, "many Capetonians today still believe that their city was a haven of ethnic harmony and integration before 1948" (Bickford-Smith 1995: 63). It has a rich history of cultural mixing and racial separation. The city is also often labelled as quite a global city, still shown to be "the historical 'halfway station 'between west and east" (Field, Meyer & Swanson 2007: 4).

Globalisation has become part of the fabric of many people's lives, it has created an interconnected world and can on the one hand include and on the other hand exclude groups of people. Globalisation has created a world where "borders and boundaries have become increasingly porous, allowing more and more peoples and cultures to be cast into intense and immediate contact with each other" (Inda & Rosaldo 2008: 4). The process of globalisation is a complex one, where the circulation of music genres is largely influenced by local contexts. This is important as it shows that the globalisation process that is not 'all dominating'. The role of the local context is extremely important when looking at globalisation.

The circulation of music is also an important aspect, "music is thus the cultural form best able both to cross borders sounds carry across fences and walls and oceans, across classes, races and nations - and to define places; in clubs, scenes, and raves, listening on headphones, radio and in the concert hall, we are only where the music takes us" (Frith 1996: 125). Frith explains that music is a cultural product that has the best chance of crossing boundaries and borders from one place to another. By having a product that can circulate globally so easily it is important to see how music circulates and how it is localised in specific local contexts.

St John also touches upon the localisation of psytrance in different parts of the globe, as these localisations in turn also influence the global psytrance subculture. Describing how in certain countries there have been different types of influences when looking at the development of the of psytrance genre. "The mushrooming of psyculture events has also been influenced by regional, political and cultural developments like reunification (Germany), new state libertarianism (e.g. in the former Soviet states) and settler reconciliation with indigenous populations (e.g. Australia, South Africa, Canada, Brazil)" (St John 2015: 245). Here he also speaks of the influence that South Africa could have had on the 'mushrooming of psyculture', however he does not seem to go into greater detail about this issue. It seems that the history of Cape Town has an impact on the cultural products that are appropriated by the local population. There has been a *Khoisan revival* occurring in South Africa; "the phenomenon of people identifying as Khoisan (descendants) and asserting indigenous rights" (Verbuyst 2016: 83-4), where the Khoisan populations are attempting to inhabit more 'space ' in the South African society. In his article about the Khoisan revival, activism and land claims, Verbuyst explains that Cape Town is the "hub for the Khoisan revival" (Verbuyst 2016: 84). The assumption could be made that the Khoisan population in Cape Town is attempting to create a space where they can let their voices and concerns be heard through the psytrance festival.

3.3. The Cape Town context

City centre of Cape Town from the Table Mountain

"Suddenly the great outdoors seemed like the place to hold parties.

The new found spirit of joy and post-apartheid freedom combined

with the stunning surroundings, made Cape Town an ideal hub for the

power and magic of tribal togetherness" (Mac in Rom & Querner

2011: 229).

In the quote above the author Mac explains that the reason why psytrance has become so popular in Cape Town is due to the sudden freedom felt with the abolishment of Apartheid in South Africa. The Apartheid was the main factor in creating these divisions between people and the importance that people place on race. Even though Cape Town was perceived to be quite a 'flexible' and mixed city before the Apartheid there are still issues of segregation and division between certain populations. "The end of apartheid meant the collapse of legislated identity. The vision of an overarching South African 'rainbow nation' emerged" (Moodley & Adam 2000: 51), however it seems

that the racial divisions that were perpetuated during the apartheid period are still lingering in South Africa. The divisions today are more economic, and class driven. However, the categories of class and economic welfare are still greatly linked with race.

McDonald (2008) looks deeper at the uneven economic development in Cape Town. It is important to look at this as it is a general context of Cape Town, which can help explain why certain people flock to the outdoor psytrance festivals. The way that the city has economically developed since Apartheid has an influence on the cultural development of people, which in turn has an influence on who is able to attend the festivals. "In a country such as South Africa where class correlates so strongly with race the introduction of neoliberal reforms has served to deepen income-related inequities and entrench spatial segregation along racial lines" (McDonald 2008: 284). The populations in South Africa are still greatly segregated, but not because of Apartheid, but instead separated by economic class, which is still greatly linked to racial categorisations.

In Cape Town is has become apparent that, even though Apartheid is something of the past and something that people want to distance themselves from, these 'racial' categorisations are still to be found in everyday life. The economic 'class' of a person is very strongly associated with the colour of their skin, and their 'country of origin'; "the conventional wisdom was that coloured people were a distinct racial group that resulted from miscegenation between European settlers and a heterogeneous black labouring class of African and Asian origin" (Adhikari 2009: 2).

When one refers to a 'black' person, one means a migrant who has moved to South Africa from another country, they are largely associated with a lower economic class. The 'coloureds' are the descendants of the Indian and Malay slaves from the VOC era mixed with the indigenous South African population, the Khoisan, they are greatly associated with being a part of the lower / middle economic class, "it is the descendants of these indigenous peoples and imported slaves, plus offspring of mixed-race relationships, that came from the so-called 'coloured' population of Cape Town (a term first introduced by the British in the 1840s and formally codified under apartheid" (McDonald 2008:

272). And finally, the 'whites', the descendants of the British and Dutch populations who colonised

South Africa, they are greatly associated with being a part of the middle / upper economic class.

3.4. Escaping the postmodern

"Driven by romantic, esoteric, utopian and postcolonial

responses to late modern conditions, many events

illustrate the common desire to return to community,

often connoted in the popular 'tribal 'or 'neotribal '

moniker, which is seasonally enabled by the recurrence

of parties, clubnights, gatherings and festivals help in

locations worldwide" (St John 2015: 256)

In the quote above St John explains the need of 'escaping' the late modern life, and the need for belonging to a community. The postmodern is associated with the distancing of culture and place. With the increased influence of capitalism on cultures globally, there is a disconnect that occurs between identity and place, "identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured" (Hall 1996: 4) making the formation of an identity more fluid and fragmented. By not having place to ground their identity in, people will turn to music or fashion for that connection of identity, "music seems to be a key to identity because it offers, so intensely, a sense of both self and others, of the subjective in the collective" (Frith 1996: 110). Being able to identity oneself and be part of a community has become increasingly important to populations who feel alienated by the individualistic and anonymous global capitalism that has influenced so many aspects of one's quotidian life.

One could say that the genre of psytrance is postmodern, as it has been heavily influenced by globalisation (a complex flow), however I do not think that it does the genre justice. Especially because it seems that globally the genre of psytrance is not really influenced by a lot of different factors. It is quite a 'basic denominator 'which can easily fit onto different geographical locations and attract many people. I understand why one could classify psytrance as postmodern, however I argue that psytrance is an escape from the postmodern: "On the one hand, psytrance is clearly global in

nature (despite some European skewing) and a central aspect of it is certainly 'virtual'; yet it is also the case that it is not characterised by intense postmodern fragmentation (Bauman 1992)" (Greener & Hollands 2007: 413).

It is the culture of the everyday that is postmodern, whereas psytrance culture is something quite constant that can be placed anywhere in the world, and people can feel like they are in a community. This is quite noticeable when you look at the psytrance outdoor festival from an outside perspective. The festival, with all its colours, decorations and loud music, is placed on these landscapes all over the globe. The decorations and the music all seem to be quite uniform, following the style of the psychedelic, and there seems to be little influence of a local context on the actual outdoor festival itself. Psytrance is a constant that has been spread throughout the globe, and this is what makes it so attractive to one that is living in a postmodern time. The postmodern identity is heavily influenced by globalisation and capitalism. Where the spread of information has grown so exponentially, and where identity is harder to 'pin down'. Even though the term is quite polarising (the modern identity seems to be more complex than just something that is 'fluid'), I still prefer to use this term instead of 'youth culture' or 'subculture'. As these terms do not fit into the research that I have done. The people that attend psytrance festivals are diverse of age, and 'subculture' is not a term that I wish to associate with as it describes more of a 'lifestyle' that 'goes against the mainstream', and I have perceived the psytrance festival to be more of an escape for one who wishes to deal with issues that they face with in their daily lives, and then allow them to return to their daily lives with their 'issues solved'.

3.5. Liminality and *communitas*

Turner (1969) writes about the liminality that is created in certain 'rites of passage 'or rituals. Even though he does not write about psytrance, it seems that this idea of a liminal ritual can easily be linked to the outdoor psytrance festival. St John uses the term liminality in his works about the psytrance festival. The idea that one can attend a psytrance festival and enter a liminal state where they are "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (Turner 1969: 359). A 'safe space 'where one can escape their daily lives to rest and heal with the assistance of the repetitive trance beats and feeling of community. "There is a dialectic here, for the immediacy of *communitas* gives way to the mediacy of structure, while, in rites de passage, men are released from structure into *communitas* only to return to structure revitalized by their experience of *communitas*" (Turner 1969: 373). Shows that the liminality that people can escape to be able to give a certain structure in one's life. A 'tool 'that one can use to deal with issues that they may have whilst living in a city. The structure that Turner writes about can be interpreted as generally being the 'daily lives 'that people live, with the influence of globalisation and capitalism (so the postmodern), but the structure can also be seen as the still prevalent categorisation of race in Cape Town.

Communitas is something that occurs in the liminal state. The outdoor psytrance festival is a liminal space where people can escape the 'structure' of their everyday life. With the postmodern identity one is heavily influenced by the exponential increase in the movement of people and information globally, and greatly influenced by the 'individuality' that is encouraged by capitalism. This idea of economic competition is one that is greatly associated with capitalism, where one needs to 'earn more money' to be respected and seen as 'achieving' something with their life. Which can lead to socio-economic segregation, and increased individualism. With the history of Cape Town as

well there was a strong association that 'white' made a man 'more' than his darker skinned counterpart. Turner speaks of two juxtaposing 'models' of human interrelatedness, "the first is of society as a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of "more" or "less"" (Turner 1969: 360), which can relate to the historical context of Apartheid in Cape Town. And the second, which is something that occurs more during the liminal period, "is of society as unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *communitas*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders" (Turner 1969: 360).

The psytrance outdoor festival as a space that exists outside of 'space and time'. Seen as an escape from the structures and stresses that one experiences in their daily life. St John borrows the term *liminality* from Victor Turner. The outdoor psytrance festival could be perceived as being a part of a ritual. The ritual of escape from postmodern life. "It is common for participants to express the view that they feel more 'alive' within these contexts than at any other time" (St John 2015: 243). When Turner writes about liminality and *communitas* he describes it as being a part of a ritual, where one moves from the preliminal to the postliminal (Tuner 1969). When looking at psytrance there is a slight difference, the ritual is not intended to create a passage one can move through, but instead it is intended to "inaugurate or prolong a state of liminal being" (St John 2015: 244). "It is as though they are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life" (Turner 1969: 359), this quote is interesting, even though the psytrance festival is not a *ritual*, as understood in Turner's literature, there is still a link with experiencing the psytrance festival. In a broader sense it can be interpreted as a ritual. Visitors arrive at the party and dance for around three days straight, and then they go home exhausted, breaking down their emotional barriers and allowing for a renewal of energy.

The creation of liminality and liminal spaces can encourage the escaping of postmodern life. "The liminal 'state of mind 'sought and cultivated in Goa and transposed globally is a world of experience, enhanced by sensory technologies" (St John 2014: 253), with the usage of specific decorations, type of music that is played and the overall 'vibe 'that is created, as St John labels it. Psytrance can give people an escape from their daily lives, and let them connect and bond with other people during the festival through mutual consumption of music and dancing, "they only get to know themselves as groups (as a particular organization of individual and social interests, of sameness and difference) through cultural activity, through aesthetic judgement" (Frith 1996: 111). This feeling of community is what people are searching for in their daily lives it seems.

In the chapters above I have alluded to two stories that can explain the reason as to why psytrance has become popular in Cape Town. The first, which is the one that I have focused on extensively, is the need to escape the 'structure 'of postmodern living. And that has occurred as a reaction towards the sudden freedom that the country encountered after the abolishment of the Apartheid. And now it is perceived as a place where categorisations and other 'structures 'that influence the daily lives of Capetonians are left behind, where one can go to 'be themselves 'and feel like they belong to a community. The second story of why psytrance has localised in Cape Town is as a method to reconcile with the indigenous Khoisan population, by giving them a space to practice their trance rituals and blessings.

In the next chapter I will be showing the experience that I had at the psytrance festivals in Cape Town, and the interviews that I did with my interlocutors, in order to answer the question, why has psytrance been localised in Cape Town?'

4. Analysis

4.1. The Festival experiences

Mainstage: Alien Safari Masqued Ball

> *"At night, the kaleidoscopic whirl of colored lights, the "trippy" music, the*
>
> *fluorescent backdrops lit by UV light and the fractal-like patterns contribute to the*
>
> *perplexing sensory experience of a carnivalesque juggling mechanism that then*
>
> *resonates well with the obscurity of the environment. Nature becomes part of the mix,*
>
> *and in exchange it radiates its own influence on the music and decorations. For*
>
> *instance, one particular style within the dark psy subgenre is called forest psytrance*
>
> *because, in the words of producer/DJ Vipin, "the sounds that are used are woody and*
>
> *organic, and there are a lot of squeaks" (focus group, December2012)" (Vitos 2017:*
>
> *550)*

Arriving at each of these festivals was almost like entering a new world. Each location was unique and breath-taking. Even the drive up to the festivals from the city was beautiful. With the amazing mountain ranges and the winding roads. In the maps above, one can see that the travel to the festival is quite long and through certain mountain ranges. Each festival had a little marketplace with different stalls selling psychedelic clothing, or basic festival needs. There were also bars where one could buy alcohol with cash or pin and an area with food stalls. Whilst walking around the festivals you immediately noticed the loud music continually playing, from the afternoon until the next morning it would continue the whole night through.
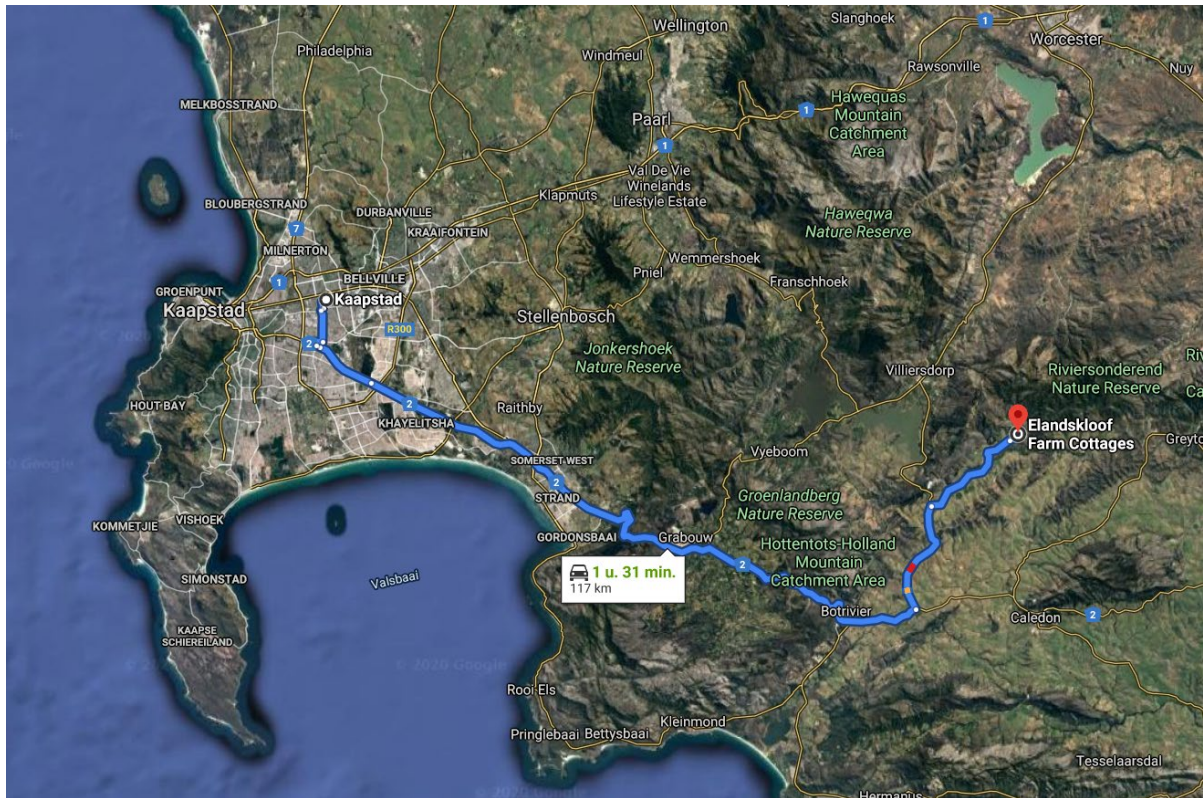

Mainstage: Equinox Experience

Figure 1 Google maps route from Cape Town to the Origin festival terrain.

The first festival I attended was Origin. This festival was quite often said to be a 'commercial'

psytrance festival. There were three stages where they played different music. The mainstage played

psytrance, and there was a second stage that played a mixture of psytrance and house music, and the

third stage was for more mainstream music. Walking around I noticed that there were a lot of young

people attending this festival. When I was standing in line at the entrance I spoke to a group of 18

year old's in front of me, and they explained that they were all just finished with their matric, or high

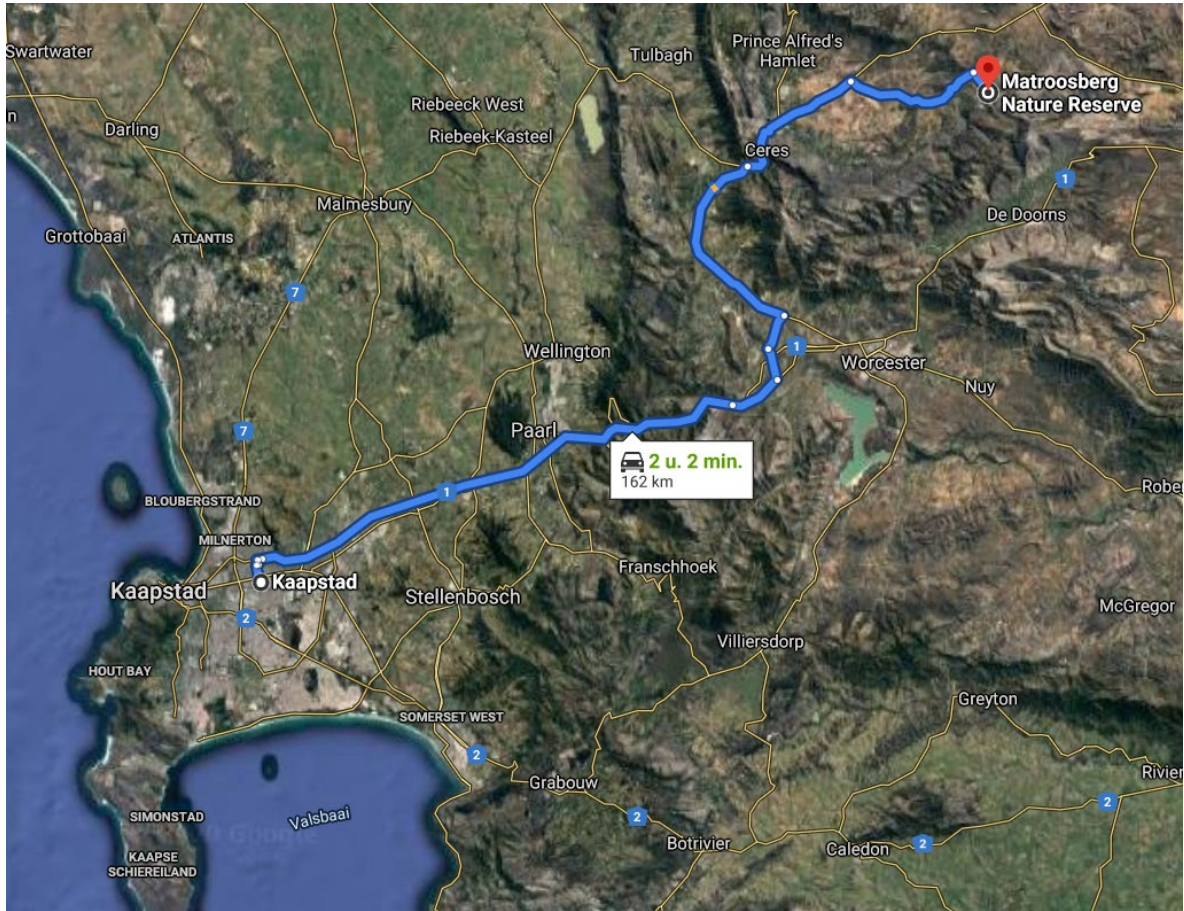school, and had never been to a psytrance festival before.

Figure 2 Google maps of the route to the Equinox Experience terrain

Equinox Experience was the smallest festival that I attended, and one had to register and be accepted to buy tickets for the festival. At this festival there seemed to be fewer younger people, and more of the 'trancers', psytrance fanatics. There were people at this festival that I recognised from Origin. They also had bouncy castles and a ball pit where people could play in, a sort of return to one's childhood.
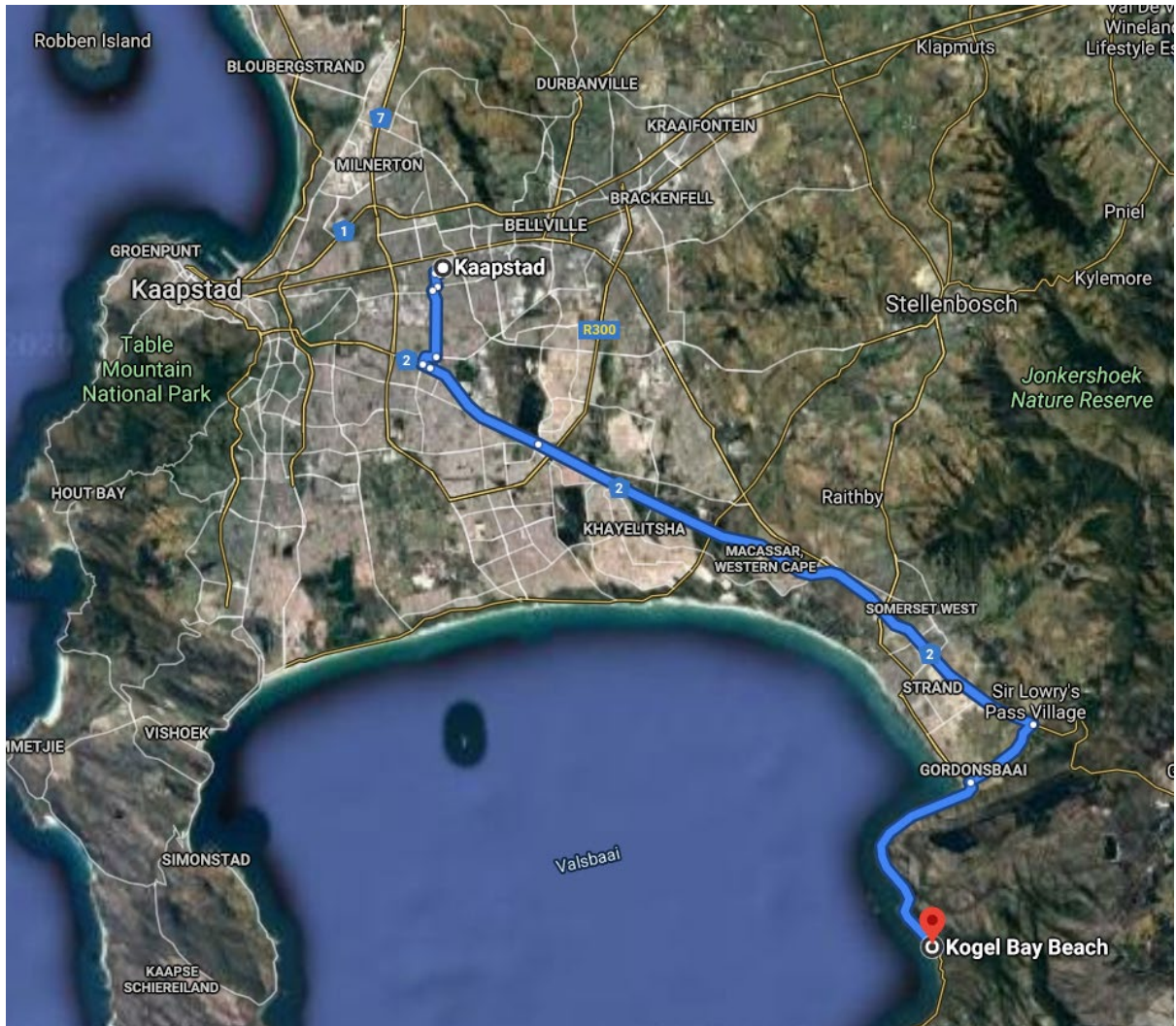
Figure 3 Google maps of the route to the Alien Safari Masqued Ball terrain

The last festival that I attended was Masqued Ball Alien Safari. The festival was located on a

beach in Kogelbaai, near Gordons Bay. This was an hour drive from the city centre of Cape Town. This

festival was slightly larger than Equinox Experience, but not as large as Origin. Here I saw more of a

mix of younger and older people walking around. And there seemed to be more people walking

around with darker skin tones.

4.2. Escaping into the psytrance music

By having psytrance festivals be at least an hour's drive from the city centre of Cape Town, one absolutely experiences the feeling that one is escaping to a magical place. Especially being surrounded by mountains and incredible landscapes, one has the feeling of being in a psytrance 'bubble', untouched and safe from the cosmopolitan postmodern, a place where one can escape the segregation that they feel in the city.

En route to Equinox Experience

Everybody that I interviewed explained that during the outdoor psytrance festival they have the feeling as if they are out in nature, with the added 'bonus' of the active meditation with the music. When speaking to my interlocutors they all explain that the outdoor psytrance festival a space is where people can 'gather' and 'get together' for the love of the music and the dance. Cape Town and the surrounding area has amazing natural environments, beautiful mountains and 'beaches by the thousands' (Brad). The connection with nature is not a new phenomenon in Cape Town, having the Table Mountain and a large botanical garden Kirstenbosch, right next to the city centre, and being surrounded by the coast, one of the most common past-times in Cape Town would be to go walking or hiking, or go swimming in the ocean. Going out into nature is seen to be a literal escape, mostly for middle to upper class populations, from the politics and segregation that was experienced during Apartheid in the 20th century. I do find it interesting that the people that I have interviewed link this idea of being in nature, and being one with nature, so strongly with the visiting of a psytrance festival. It was explained that this feeling occurs due to the mountainous surroundings of the festival, or being located on the beach, or even being near a river.

Since when one first thinks of a music festival one does not associate it with being very 'natural'. The loud booming bass that goes through the night, the intense flashing lights, and the vibrant colours that are used for the decorations and staging seem to imply otherwise. It seems that the return to nature feeling that people get is a very mental feeling.

Equinox Experience: the chameleon looking over the

Alien Safari Masqued Ball

Origin: The river where people swam in

The picture below is from the Equinox Experience. It was taken from a distance, and it really shows the contrast of the idea that one is truly in 'nature' when there are large structures with multi-coloured lights. Shaun explained that the feeling one gets when going to a psytrance festival is really the feeling of being out in nature, 'rolling in the mud, swimming in the river, it really appeals to me, it feels a lot like camping', a holiday from the mundane. During the interview Dani and Shaun also told me that even though there are these outdoor festivals that happen almost every two weeks there are also indoor parties that people go to. These indoor parties are more central in the city and are held in clubs, and one can find a couple of psytrance parties to go to every weekend. They explained that they prefer the outdoor weekend festivals, mostly because not everybody is going to these festivals to get 'fucked up' like the crowd that goes to the indoor parties.
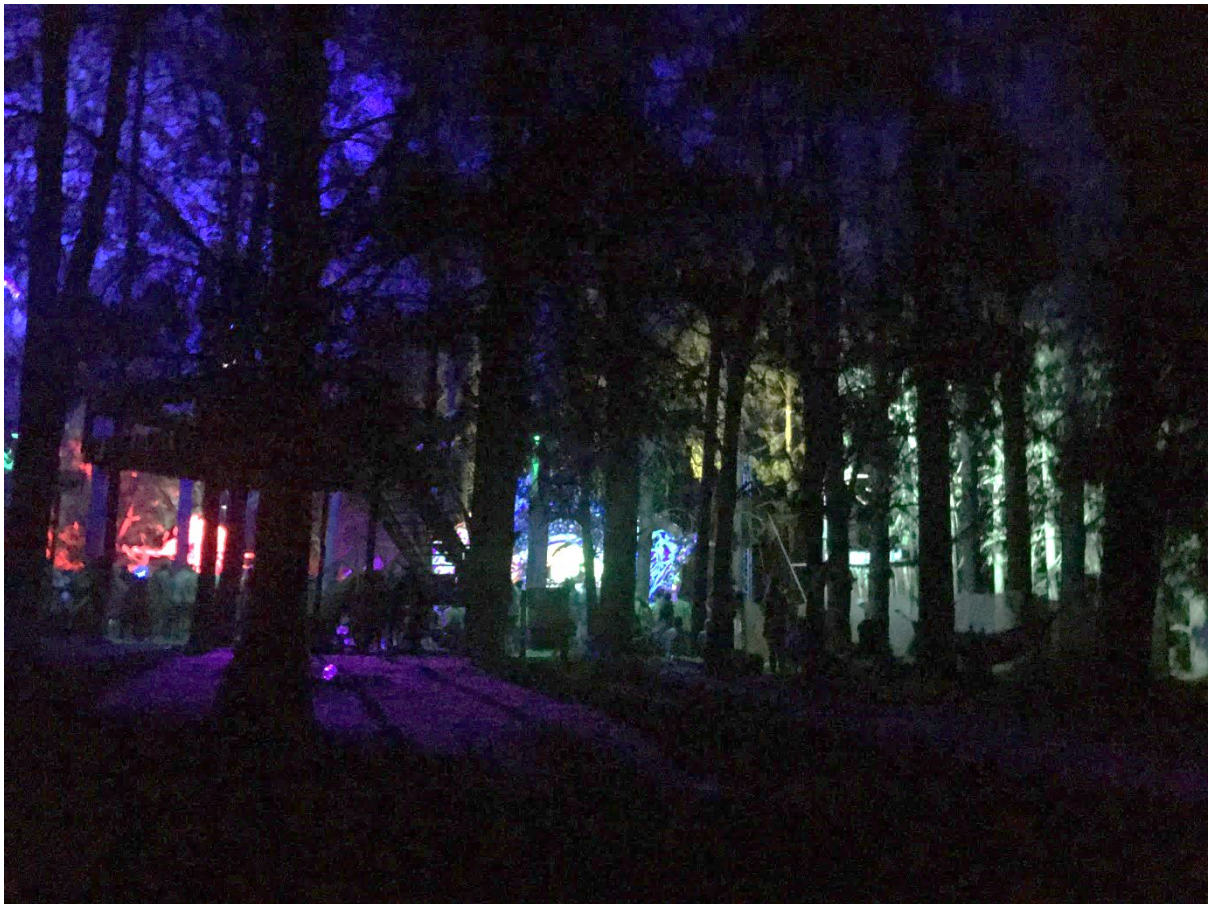
At a psytrance festival 'the golden rule is love and accept one another' according to Gabriella. And this was really the feeling that one had when walking around the festival. It did not matter if you were dancing, just standing or sitting around. Desmond explained that for him, the psytrance festival was a place where he learned a lot about himself as a person. This idea of not being judged was something that I also experienced at the outdoor festival. Most of the time I would be walking from stage to stage or sitting around and watching people walk by. Even just standing on the dancefloor in between the dancing people, nobody seemed to care what was going on. Desmond explained that growing up as a coloured he experienced the 'struggle', and the outdoor psytrance festival was a space where he could forget the struggle and feel 'normal' and like he belonged to something, instead of being segregated because of his skin colour.

I met Dani and Shaun at the Alien Safari Masqued Ball festival. I asked if I could sit next to them on a bench in the chill tent near the main stage and we started talking. They asked me what I was doing, and I explained that I was doing a master's research on the psytrance scene in Cape Town. I interviewed them at their home in Sea Point. Dani talked about how even though the music is especially important when it comes to psytrance, the main reason why she is attracted to the psytrance outdoor festival is the dancing. She describes it as being a form of therapy: 'psytherapy'. One could assume that this is a form of music therapy. "Music therapy helps people to develop skills, adapt behaviour, and overcome obstacles in their lives" (Wheeler 2015: 5). Even though psytrance music is not created by professional music therapists, the idea the repetitive beats induce a form of trance which can lead to healing is not something new. This is something that has been done by the Khoisan people of South Africa for centuries. Whilst interviewing Kevin we spoke about the healing that is done during Khoisan rituals and ceremonies. Kevin explained that during these Khoisan ceremonies trance is achieved through dance with no aid of drugs. The sounds are all tonal, with a 'layered and slow beat. It's not what you'd be used to in psytrance, which is a hell of a lot faster. But this is your basis of how trance started' he explained. Where concentric patterns of sounds and rhythms, combined with tonal noises and clapping, all induce a trance-like state where the Shaman

achieving 'rapture' can see into the beyond. Whilst achieving rapture through trance they can 'view your body from an altered reality', which enables them to see what is ailing a person, and then 'heal' them. This can be related to the idea of 'psytherapy' and active meditation; "Dance… …dance is active meditation…. ….When we dance, We go beyond thought, beyond mind, and beyond our own individuality… To become One in the Divine Ecstasy of union with the Cosmic Spirit…. This is the essence of the Trance Dance Experience"[1].

4.3. The Khoisan experience

Psytrance is a place where people can escape and work through any problems that they have, but what makes Cape Town so special? In the Theoretical Framework I discussed the quote of St John about the settler reconciliation of indigenous populations that psytrance enables in Cape Town. In this part of the analysis I will be discussing the experience that I have had with the reconciliation that

Mainstage: Origin

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[1] Goa Gil interview by Chaitu of www.goatrance.free.fr. http://www.goagil.com/goatranceinterview.html
Accessed: 20/06/2020

psytrance outdoor festivals seem to facilitate. It is interesting because it seems that the psytrance genre has been 'placed' in the mountains in the Western Cape and has not really been 'moulded' by the local contexts.

One of the first interviews that I had during the research was with Kevin. When we did the interview, he told me honestly that he has little to no experience with psytrance festivals, and that he is researching trance with the Khoisan people in the Kalahari Desert. He explained that the Khoisan use trance to heal any ailments that people are suffering from. They would form a large circle and start stomping on the ground, and with the aid of rhythmic beats one could achieve 'rapture 'and 'bliss'.

After I came back from the Origin festival, I interviewed Brad. He did tell me of an opening ceremony/blessing that was done for the Origin festival. We both had missed the opening ceremony, me because of the lack of knowledge of said ceremony, and Brad because he left to the festival after his workday was done. This discussion was prompted when I asked him about any local influences, he could see in the psytrance outdoor festival. He first explained that a lot of designers who come from South Africa had made quite an impact in the international psytrance festival scene. Having designed stages internationally or creating certain structures or tents for festivals in Europe. Then he explained that there is a Khoisan group who do these opening blessings for psytrance festivals locally and even internationally, 'we love to integrate that sort of thing, it's a nice special way to open a party. It gives it a little bit of essence, just a really nice feeling to start an event that way' Brad told me. However, I was quite surprised that I had not noticed this whilst walking around the Origin festival. Remembering the quote of St John (2015) that psytrance was localised in South Africa as a method to reconcile with indigenous populations, I was wondering what this looked like in the psytrance scene here. I was also struck with a feeling of frustration as to having missed this opportunity to experience this opening blessing. I would have expected workshops on the Khoisan, and discussion groups. On the next page is a photograph of a presentation that was done on different types of psychedelic drugs, and the impact that it can have on a person.

I managed to meet up with one of the people who performed the opening blessing at the Origin festival. Gershan agreed to meet with me to have a coffee and a chat about his experience at the Origin festival. When we met, he immediately started giving me a simple summary of the history and discrimination that the Khoisan has endured in South Africa. He then invited me to his house nearby. When we arrived at his house, he invited me inside and he started to prepare his room for a little demonstration of the music that he makes.

After he performed the song I asked, 'Is it really reconciliation that is happening between the 'settlers 'and the indigenous Khoisan population at psytrance festivals?'. He simply explained that Origin has made an important step by asking the local tribes' people to do a blessing for the festival. However, that was it, a step in the right direction, apart from the blessing ceremony there seemed little influence of the Khoisan that could be seen at the festival itself.

It seems that psytrance has become popular in South Africa, not specifically for the indigenous reconciliation, but more as a response to the sudden freedom that the abolishment of Apartheid presented. This is evident when examining the festival attendees and finding that the scene is largely made up of white people. There is talk of a Khoisan revival as touched upon in the Theoretical Framework, however the only 'reconciliation' that I was told about was with the work that one of my respondents did outside of the psytrance scene. When talking about issues with 'neighbours and the festival' it seemed that the only issues would be with conservative 'Afrikaanse boeren' (the white farmers), as they mostly inhabit larger pieces of land outside of the city centre of Cape Town.

When walking around the festival, as can be seen in the documentary, the people who attend the psytrance festivals are mainly 'white', something that is almost strange for an African country, however Cape Town is still quite a 'white' city in South Africa, "even though whites make up an (ever-dwindling) minority of the city's population, it has a distinctly white—almost apartheid-era—feel to it. Going to a restaurant or an entertainment venue or a park can feel like stepping back in time, where almost all the patrons are white and the staff are black, largely hidden from view" (McDonald 2008: 269).

In the picture above one can see a white visitor of the festival talking to a black man who has been tasked with carrying the bags of the visitors to and from the parking lot with a wheelbarrow, a service that is not easily found when going to festivals in Europe. It also led me to notice that the security people on the festival terrain were also of a darker skin tone, in comparison to the very white skin colour of the festival visitors.

A possible explanation for this is that the costs of visiting a psytrance festival is not all too cheap. One needs to buy the tickets, usually round 750 rand, pay for transport to and from the festival, and then there is the cost of food and drink on the festival terrain itself. This then strengthens the argument that most of the people who can attend the festival are middle to upper class people, and the people who are part of this economic class are predominantly white. It does not mean that there are no 'coloureds' who attend the festival, it shows that the socio-economic class that is perpetuated in Cape Town does bleed into the festival scene. And in such a way it is remarkably

interesting to be discussing the issues of race and belonging and having a space that is not associated with segregation with 'white' people. However, Desmond did explain that the psytrance festivals did give him a space where he felt safe to just be himself and exist as a person. The term coloured is contested in South Africa, most people now use the term to describe the populations that have a Malay origin. However, according to Verbuyst, the term coloured was also used to describe the indigenous Khoisan population of South Africa. Some 'coloured' people that I spoke to even defined themselves as coloured, whereas Gershan attempts to distance himself from the term as much as he can, as it implies a sort of 'mixing' that is not associated with being part of an indigenous population.

5. Conclusion

Throughout the thesis I have discussed the possible reasons of why psytrance has been localised in Cape Town, South Africa. Two reasons have crystallised as to why it has become so popular, the first as an escape of the postmodern city living in Cape Town, and the second reason being the reconciliation of the Khoisan populations in South Africa.

In the theoretical framework I specifically examined the two different reasons as to why psytrance has become localised in Cape Town, touching upon the basics of the psytrance music genre, the local context of Cape Town and its post-apartheid development and the concepts of *postmodernism, liminality and communitas*.

In the analysis I have shown what the psytrance scene looks like in Cape Town, and the experiences that I have had during the observation and interviewing in my research period. I realised that the issues of 'race' and segregation are still at play in Cape Town. Even though Apartheid has been abolished, there are still traces of it that can be found in the fabric of the city life. Navigating the post-Apartheid society and having an increasingly multinational and globalised city can create certain tensions between groups of people. Psytrance is seen as an aid to help people cope with the stresses of living in a segregated postmodern city. It is interesting that there is a space where there are still a lot of 'racial structures' that still exist, but there is also talk of a certain postmodern that is spreading as well in the city. People are dealing with the structures that are still in place, whilst having an increased fluid identity. The issues of the postmodern identity are also prevalent in Cape Town, as it is a metropolitan and international hub.

I also discovered that the psytrance outdoor festival did not seem to be localised in Cape Town as a way for settlers to reconcile with indigenous populations. Instead it seems that it became popular in South Africa more as an escape of the city life and an escape for Apartheid. And the actual reconciliation with indigenous populations is not as present as I had expected. On paper is seems like the Khoisan revival happening in Cape Town is something that would have a link with the psytrance community. As it is described as "a postmodern tribalism that is driven by the impulse of separateness

and quest for purity" (Ruiters in Adhikari 2009:121). However, it seems that the Khoisan revival is not something that is really linked with the visiting of psytrance festivals in Cape Town.

Throughout the research I was told that the outdoor festival scene is starting to decrease in overall popularity, and that indoor 18-hour or 24-hour events are becoming more popular, especially with the youth in Cape Town. As it is said to be cheaper and easier to get to these parties. I looked at the outdoor festivals as I felt that a good introduction to the world of psytrance that has developed in Cape Town. I would recommend building further on the research that I have done on the psytrance scene and research the indoor psytrance scene to get a more holistic picture of the psytrance music and culture in Cape Town.

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