

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

‘IT’S TAKING OVER’: A CULTURE OF MORE ON THE  
LEBANESE PSYCHEDELIC TRANCE DANCEFLOOR

by  
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Together, we have woven a storyline of wisdom and understanding for our scene, our underground home of unfettered expression. To those who have attempted to obstruct my path, I wish you find your own course down the river, rather than remaining anchored on the sidelines trying to obstruct the flow of others'. On the other hand, to each soul who has touched mine, thank you for joining me in this dance of growth and exploration.

We are all personalized aspects of the universe, make you fair share count: “[...] that we are all one consciousness experiencing itself subjectively, there is no such thing as death, life is only a dream, and we are the imagination of ourselves. Here’s Tom with the Weather.” (Bill Hicks)

# ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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This thesis begins with a historical ethnography of the Lebanese Psytrance scene, tracing its development from its inception to the present day. The research draws on three types of ethnographic fieldwork: participant and non-participant observation, auto-ethnography, and the go-along method. The fieldwork spanned from June 24, 2023, to the end of April 2024.

The core argument suggests that participation in the music and communities of Psytrance culture can significantly alter individual and collective socialites. Through a heightened state of suggestibility induced by the sound phenomena of the music, access to alternative modes of perception, and a deliberate curvature of inclusive shared experience through communal bonding, members explore and become attuned to an expanded version of themselves and their environment, a *para-social culture of more*.

The exploration begins by situating the Lebanese Psytrance community within a broader cultural trend towards spiritual exploration beyond traditional religious paradigms. Here, spirituality emerges as a dynamic process enabling self-discovery and alternative modes of relationality with the world, influencing personal identities and social perceptions.

A critical examination of sound follows, highlighting its materiality and phenomenological impact on shaping social realities within the local Psytrance milieu. This section unpacks the symbiotic relationship between spirituality and sound, illustrating how these elements intertwine to create unique cultural expressions and individual experiences.

The thesis then addresses the perceived decline in the artistic quality of Psytrance music over time, particularly noting a shift towards noise-based tracks and faster BPMs. This evolution has sparked internal debates within the community regarding the preservation of traditional storytelling and spiritual elements versus adapting to contemporary tastes and socio-political landscapes.

Further exploration focuses on cultural shifts within the Lebanese Psytrance scene, particularly the trend towards darker, more aggressive musical styles. This departure signifies a rupture in cultural continuity and ritualized practices, reflecting broader societal movements towards hedonism and raw emotional expression amidst Lebanon's socio-political turmoil. It also examines how certain 'dark sound' aesthetics serve as outlets for artistic resistance and resilience.

The thesis then examines the spiritual quest inherent within the Psytrance scene, likening participation to a form of askēsis—a rigorous training through ritualistic engagement. Participants navigate chaotic environments akin to meditative practices, seeking personal growth amidst societal challenges and cultural transformations. Controversies surrounding specific Psytrance events underscore societal anxieties, moral panics, and legal challenges faced by the community, highlighting its resilience and adaptive strategies in navigating external pressures.

In the chapter on sensorial experiences, the study delves into the multifaceted sensory landscapes and embodied practices defining Psytrance culture. Psytrance raves are portrayed as immersive sensory experiences cultivating "sensational knowledge" and alternative modes of cognition. These experiences not only shape social interactions, aesthetic encounters, and personal reflections but also blur the boundaries between self and environment, celebrating sensory diversity as a pathway to spiritual exploration and collective euphoria.

Additionally, the thesis explores the practice of decorating the psychedelic body as more than mere aesthetic enhancement, serving as a profound means of externalizing and embodying the unique sensory and aesthetic order of this subculture. Moreover, dance is analyzed not merely as physical movement but as a profound way of being in the world, cultivating a shared phenomenological embodied understanding that defines cultural identity within the vibrant Psytrance culture.

An exploration of activities in Psytrance raves, including yoga sessions, martial arts workshops, guided meditations, and various forms of dance, underscores their role in enhancing the holistic experience of participants. Concepts like sport ecology and body ecology highlight how these activities contribute to physical well-being and awareness within natural settings, reinforcing the immersive nature of Psytrance events.

Psytrance culture in Lebanon is depicted not only as an activity but also as a mechanism for community-building that shapes social dynamics and identities. These raves serve as gatekeepers of cultural codes, establishing social boundaries and inclusion/exclusion dynamics without resorting to violence. Within the underground scene, concepts of authenticity and the dichotomy between underground and mainstream play pivotal roles in fostering community cohesion. This culture exhibits neo-tribal characteristics, drawing on prehistoric social forms to forge intimate bonds and alternative familial structures based on extended kinship networks, promoting a greater sense of belonging and camaraderie among its members based on more humane and natural relationalities.

Despite advocating liberal values, significant inequalities and power dynamics persist, with men typically occupying dominant organizational roles while women are often relegated to supportive tasks or objectified within the scene's dynamics. Furthermore, the music is embedded within a socialization framework based on moral education and an ethics of responsibility within the Psytrance community, guiding members through virtues of tolerance, acceptance, and unity. This para-culture offers a sanctuary from societal norms, promoting authenticity, selflessness, and personal growth through shared musical journeys and controlled chaos. Experienced ravers serve as role models, nurturing moral virtues through their actions and interactions; yet the decline in mature

guidance coupled with an influx of younger participants has altered the scene's dynamics. The scene, as well, shaped identities and everyday practices through negotiated role-identities and emotional rewards that reinforce group membership.

The thesis also examines the micropolitics within the community—a network of power nodes and fluid relationships where ideological exchanges, material resources, and social capital shape dynamics of support, competition, and inclusion/exclusion among members. Lastly, in response to societal and legal stigmas surrounding Psytrance in Lebanon, community members have developed a strategy known as 'neo-nomadic politics.' This approach involves strategically navigating legal frameworks and societal norms. Participants adopt fluid tactics to evade scrutiny, embodying a resilient adaptation to the complex, unregulated yet regulated landscape of Lebanon.

By doing so, this study seeks to create space for the “untold, unheard, unseen, and heretofore unimagined possibilities” inherent in Psytrance culture, offering insight into its impact on socio-political dynamics within the larger context of traditional and state social configurations (Clair, 1998, p.186). My research transcends mere methodological documentation of my anthropological trip; it serves as a conduit for exploring the nexus of local history, politics, culture, and the essence of being within the Arab World. By preserving these narratives, it contributes to the longevity of collective memory, ensuring that significant moments in history are not only remembered but actively studied and understood.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: EXPLORING THE EVOLUTION AND IMPACT OF GLOBAL PSYTRANCE CULTURE

#### A. June 24, 2023

I was adamant, I wanted to go; the allure of attending a party in Faqra, proposed by a friend, beckoned me. He expressed concern that my presence might disrupt his experience, as I was a newbie to the scene, and I might ‘trip’ him out. Undeterred, I was adamant, I wanted to go.

The date was June 24, 2023. The temperature, which in Beirut had started to become warm, I assumed would guide my dress choice. My friend, however, advised: "Wear whatever feels most comfortable; it's Psy – people wear their PJ's." With simplicity as my guide, I searched fervently to find a matching set that felt ‘hippy’ to me. Alas, a white crop-top and some baggy black pants seemed best to forge or fabricate a sense of prior involvement with the community.

Upon arrival, my friend embarked on a mission through the maze of cars, searching for the perfect parking spot. This was no ordinary quest; whereas my previous parking endeavors for parties entailed maneuvering within Valet blind spots, this particular party demanded a more individualized exploration, seeking out a patch of stable and empty forest land spacious enough to accommodate our vehicle—hopefully without diving into too much mud.

After parking our car, we strolled towards the individuals at the entrance to settle our admission fees. These were no ordinary bouncers; some had a punk vibe, while others exuded a tribal look. Adorned with tattoos and piercings, and clad in loose black linen attire, they were a diverse bunch. To my surprise, two of the three were

women. As we approached, one of the women inquired, "Are your names on the door list?". Instantly, a wave of embarrassment washed over me. Of course, there was a list. Could she detect that it was my first time? To my rescue, she asked, "Do you know anyone inside? How did you hear about the party?". Quickly recalling a friend who was a regular in the scene, I blurted out his name. Relieved that we were connected to members of the community, they granted us entry. The damage was surprisingly more affordable than the rates I was accustomed to at clubs: ten dollars a head.

Once I reached the dancefloor, the world suddenly seemed to transform: I was engulfed by the music, an intense energy blast. Only this time, the music was composed of the sounds of life, saturated in spacetime:

The metrical polyrhythm of a heartbeat;  
The kick of crashing ocean tides on a boat;  
The clanking and welding of a daily mechanic;  
The spiraling screams of trumpets;  
The accelerating roar of a motorcycle;  
The sirens of an industrial spillage;  
The hooting of Amazon chimps;  
The Phrygian scales of an Adhan;  
The sonorous tolling of church bells;  
The soft whispers of children;  
The sounds of passing gas;  
And the croaking of frogs.

Life's palette of sounds harmonized, creating a vibrant but twisted composition that echoed the diverse rhythms of existence. The sounds of life.

The air was electric, charged with unique frequency vibrations—a vibe unlike anything I had ever experienced. The spaces between our bodies filled with these sounds, and this felt heavy and strange in a great way, with the atmosphere changing almost completely.

The party unfolded in a picturesque setting, nestled within the serene embrace of nature. A ground flat situated amidst towering mountains provided a panoramic backdrop that was nothing short of breathtaking. To the right, a thick layer of trees created a natural curtain, offering both privacy and a sense of seclusion. On the left side of the gathering, a camping ground unfolded. The land, treated and adorned with wooden elements, provided a cozy and inviting space for campers. Tents were pitched with a carefree spontaneity, forming a makeshift village under the open sky. In the foreground, the high mountains stood proudly, creating a majestic frame for the festivities. Their towering presence added a touch of grandeur to the scene, adorned with UV faces to create a stunning amphitheater-like setting. In the heart of the mountains, a flat expanse housed the designated dance floor for the revelers. The organizers opted for a minimalist approach: only a DJ booth stood proudly center stage, ornamented with the essential elements—a set of speakers, a backdrop, and a DJ deck.

Adding to the immersive atmosphere (indeed it was immersive), the surroundings behind the DJ booth were decorated with mandalas of pastel pink, blue, and green, overlaid by mesmerizing projections of LSD-inspired visuals. Dream catchers hung gracefully alongside tapestries, both handwoven and store-bought in every conceivable color. Some were of Baba Ganesh, while others were of patchwork. Hippy accessories adorned the space, completing the kaleidoscopic ambiance.

In no time, I felt the music weaving its enchantment around me, and my body responded instinctively. Gone were the constrained movements I had performed and memorized in my prior clubbing experiences; instead, my limbs moved with a newfound freedom. My hands ascended gracefully, moving in a trance-like, ritualistic, and mystical manner, guided by every detail overlaid in rhythmic cycles of sixteen. Quickly, I changed into my tie-dyed shorts and hoodie that I had stashed in my car as a backup. My friend's advice rang true—comfort became the priority.

As the rhythm took hold, my feet began to stomp in sync with the hypnotic tunes, creating a grounded connection to the pulsating energy of the dance floor. I merged with the collective spirit of the crowd, and the crowd, in turn, became an extension of my being. It wasn't until the first light of sunrise illuminated the mountainous landscape that I realized where I had found myself—an unexpected journey into my first-ever rave, a 'Psytrance' or Psychedelic Trance rave.

## **B. What is Psychedelic Trance?**

Psytrance carries a variety of cultural, musical, and stylistic patterns that have come to define it. At its core, Psytrance is part of electronic dance music (EDM) that has over time demonstrated a fusional integrity and paradoxical temperament in respect to its praised though often slandered, site of becoming: the Northern beaches and hinterland of former Portuguese province, Goa, India.

The complexity in defining the contours of Psytrance is fundamental in the culture it is embedded in—a counterculture “whose ecstatic and conscious impulses” structure its burgeoning and alteration in our current day (St John, 2010, p. 1). Attempts to fabricate boxed definitions (frequently using crude and ambiguous

delineation like ‘scene’, ‘neo-tribe’, ‘subculture’, ‘genre’, and ‘counterculture’) encounter challenges, largely as a result of its erudite culture, musical origin, shimmering aesthetics, and multiplying transnationalism. I propose employing the concept ‘assemblage’ when denoting or using the terminology ‘the scene’ to capture its expansive intricacies and elements of formation adequately.

These events are often held in diverse settings, ranging from natural landscapes to urban venues—either from dusk till dawn or over the span of multiple days. The atmosphere is eclectic, fostering a sense of unity among participants who come from various local and global backgrounds.

The aesthetics of Psytrance raves contribute significantly to the overall immersive experience. The visual landscape is a kaleidoscope of vibrant colors, intricate psychedelic patterns, and luminescent decorations that synchronize with the pulsating beats. Light shows, lasers, and projections enhance the atmosphere, creating a mesmerizing dance between sound and visual stimuli. Participants often express themselves through eclectic clothing, embracing a fusion of futuristic, tribal, and cosmic styles. The immersive nature of these aesthetics transports attendees to an otherworldly realm, where music and aesthetics intertwine to evoke a sense of transcendence and exploration.

While its ‘underground’ status is recurrently disputed, these instantaneous and comparatively autonomous space empowers connoisseurs to mockup and experiment with the ‘Goa vibe’—a psychedelic aesthetic exported from Goan beaches and modified throughout global exotic spaces, whether cosmopolitan hubs, exiled lands, and/or cyber realms. In a post on one of my dear friends and responders, I found he best describes how Psytrance remains an underground music culture in some cases:

“Underground music is music with practices that are considered to be counterculture to modern-day norms. It is a practice based on self-organized production and promotion. The term "underground" indicates the way how people work and the philosophy underneath. It is a practice based on self-organized production and promotion” (Networklb, 2022).

It is:

“Music that isn't mainstream; Music for the mind; Resistance; The music that makes half the crowd leave the dancefloor. Only the great remain; Innovative. Forward thinking. rebellious, creative, and provocative forms of art; It could be any genre, as long as it's not mainstream and commercialized; Music not everyone has access to. Not your typical radio station tunes; Unreleased, yet commonly used by privileged peeps to feel a lil special" (Networklb, 2022).

Indeed, the most fitting description of the underground psychedelic trance assemblage still is that it is "heaven and hell at the same time" (Networklb, 2022).

## **C. The Origins of Psychedelic Trance**

### ***1. Reaching Goa***

Psytrance originated from the Psychedelic Rock lunar festivities carried out on Goa's Anjuna beach throughout the 1970's. Initially showcasing Psychedelic Rock music, these gatherings eventually became a seasonal occurrence characterized by a distinctive electronic 'trance dance' culture spearheaded by DJs in Goa during the 1980s (St John, 2012). This dance music experience gained a clearer definition in the mid-1990s, eventually earning recognition under the term 'Goa trance' (St John, 2010). Eventually, the former would birth and transfuse internationally what would later come to be christened as 'Psytrance' or Psychedelic trance as the millennium approached (St John, 2010).

The countercultures of the 1960s and 1970s including the flower power Hippies and the Freaks undeniably laid the groundwork for the psychedelic surge, the quest for

*nirvana* states, and the pursuit of expanded consciousness that thrived in the vibrant atmosphere of Anjuna. The ‘hippie trail’, spanning from Europe to the Middle East and Asia, was not primarily about self-identifying as a hippie but rather about venturing into destinations where the cultivation and consumption of cannabis captivated a substantial tourist population (Elliott, 2010).

Regardless of one's intention to replicate the association between a widely mass-mediated identifier and the cultural ethos/rituals it signifies, it's evident that the revered use of cannabis and psychedelic substances, emblematic of the San Francisco youth culture in the late 1960s, became ingrained in a traveler culture that moved seasonally across Europe, the Middle East, and into Southern Asia. It was during this time that Goa was ‘discovered’ by the traveler lore as a serene coastal haven, devoid of tourist infrastructure and exclusively publicized through informal channels, though with no specific ties to the cultivation or processing of cannabis (Sherwood, 2006).

Goa Gil, long-standing Goan resident and Haight–Ashbury roadie/guitarist and later prototypical trance DJ and Western sadhu, in his recollection of the discovery of Goa describes it as a holiday destination for the reunification of voyagers that had once congregated on the hippie trail—whether horse-back riding in Afghanistan, learning Indian musicology, nomadizing with shamans, or lounging on Bali beaches. As time passed, Gil reminisced,

“A lot of people started to spend long periods of time there, and even live there. A whole scene. Because the people were tolerant, they were happy to have us there, ‘cause they had nothing going on” (St John, 2010, pp. 27-28).

The 1970s advanced and the Latin-influenced *nibbana* started attracting more and more types of tourists, especially following the introduction of electricity to numerous smaller coastal villages in the mid-1970s. Remarkably, this ‘hippie spectacle’

catalyzed a twofold increase in Indian tourism between 1967 and 1971, a period marked by minimal global growth in tourism (Angle, 2001).

Locals may assert that the primary motivation for the influx—and potential settlement—was the absence of a police force in the area. It fostered an unrestricted environment where nudity was accepted, and drug usage carried no repercussions (Joshi, 2021). Locals recall that Anjuna was especially an attractive host for hippie tourists, as it allowed drug-friendly immigrants to use while not having to disburse *bakhsheesh* (bribes). Psychoactive substances such as Hash, LSD, which remained legal in the U.S. until 1968 and 1985, respectively, were readily accessible in this area. Given the United States' intensification of the 'war on drugs' during the '70s, many found solace in relocating to Goa (Kalepu, 2015).

This reaction was not merely a drug-fueled craze; it was a congenital retort to systemic socio-cultural, economic, and historical conditions. It is undeniable though, that the *freakish* ostracism to Goa had most importantly arisen from a tradition of cultural exile from unsustainable conditions elicited by the *cul-de-sacs* of the 1960s and 1970s nuclear family versus the likelihood of nuclear war. While not entirely the case amongst all proto-freak emigres (e.g. infamous Eight Finger Eddie<sup>1</sup>, who descended from Armenian immigrants in the Depression era in Boston), the privileged upbringings

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<sup>1</sup> Eight Finger Eddie, an elderly American hippie also known as Yertward Mazamanian, gained renown in Goa, India. In his 85 years, he became a symbol for putting Goa on the global map, earning titles such as "the original freak." Eddie, a US expatriate of Armenian descent, arrived at Anjuna Beach in 1965 at the age of 40. A pivotal figure, he initiated the popular Anjuna flea market in 1975, originally conceived as a space for tourists to barter or sell their belongings.

Beyond his entrepreneurial endeavors, Eight Finger Eddie assumes significance as a somewhat emblematic figure, akin to a colonial specter, credited with the "discovery" of Goa's beaches. He is bestowed with the authority of being the 'first conqueror' and recurrently surfaces in various articles on the Goa trance subculture, often likened to the Vasco da Gama of subcultural tourism. Eddie, along with other 'first arrivals' such as Goa Gil, played a pivotal role in the colonial conquest that paved the way for the influx, by the late 1960s, of "hundreds of thousands of freaks streaming overland into South Asia". For further insights, refer to Davis, E. (2004). Hedonic Tantra: Golden Goa's Trance Transmission. In Rave Culture and Religion (pp. 256-272). Routledge.

allowed freaks to cherry-pick their Goan exile. This exile permitted them to engage in prohibited practices, existential exploration, and to experience the disillusionment and cognitive dissonance already faced by the middle class at the time. As such, this is the tenacity of a *freak*, a social actor that, unlike the political exile, is self-exiling, instigated by circumstance to fixate on a processual exodus from the malaises of modern *vivendi*.

## **2. Musical Evolution**

On the beaches of Goa, music played a pivotal role in shaping a unique culture that would later be replicated worldwide. This era was marked by digital musical experimentation and travel, where artists freely exchanged tracks, especially in the earlier years where copyright enforcement or label involvement did not constraint music sharing.

Tracks from influential German act Kraftwerk, for instance, who had been producing what composer and vocalist Ralf Hütter described as 'robot dance music' since the late 1970s, strategically leveraged the mechanical capacity to generate flawlessly repetitive loops, popularizing 'trance' states in listeners (Kalepu, 2015; Zhen, 2020).

In addition to Kraftwerk, the French DJ duo Fred and Laurent introduced a sonic shift on the beaches of northern Goa. This pair pioneered the use of two tape decks to blend or arrange (read: mix) synthesizer-heavy and experimental electroacoustic music. As Laurent's initial playlist frequently involved musical acts that precluded the emergence of dance music forms and Techno and House, Goa's most primitive electronic dance party soundtracks did not transpose any particular generic musical form; the up-and-coming style of music was synthesized from what was dubbed at the

time as psychedelic Rock-and-Roll, Electro(Disco), Industrial, Krautrock and synth-pop (typically with the subtraction of the vocal slices) (Aittoneimi, 2012)<sup>2</sup>.

As the decade drew to a close in the late 1970s, the emergence of a new dance music movement and the simultaneous decline of the old resonated through the tunes of Tangerine Dream, Kraftwerk, and Yellow Magic Orchestra (to name a few, although, in reality, it was a collective effort involving numerous artists of the time), echoing along the shores of Goa. However, the shift towards electronic production encountered initial resistance from seasoned acid heads, who favored live bands accompanied by taped music during intervals (Shahjabin, 2022). While Ambient Electronica consistently found a warm reception in this milieu (a sentiment that persisted through the evolution of psychedelic trance), what was labeled as ‘Techno’ faced opposition, with older enthusiasts expressing disdain for the novel electronic sounds (Shahjabin, 2022).

In an interview for the documentary project ‘Goa Hippy Tribe’ (a 30-year reunion of Goa freaks facilitated by Facebook), Steve Devas (2010) unequivocally noted that "something changed." Around 1978, a wave of younger enthusiasts, returning from European summers spent in the underground Disco scenes of Berlin, London, Paris, and other cities, introduced innovative blended sounds. According to Devas (2010), "a whole group of new people [...] brought out new amplifiers. Very powerful amplifiers. So they set up a party, and they had the best equipment, and they had all this music, which seemed to flip from the high hippie music to Techno.” The emergent music form is perhaps best narrated as a collection of emphasized, propulsive rhythms with ethereal, alien-esque, cosmic, and aural fusions, produced by synthesizers, heavy

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<sup>2</sup> The precise moment and manner in which psychedelic and progressive rock, presented both in live performances and on recordings, transitioned to an unforeseen dominance of new wave, industrial rock, and synth-heavy pop are intriguing subjects of debate. This evolution mirrors the mythologization of origin.

effects, and analogue manipulation, such as slowing down, reversing, and tape playback.

Throughout the 1983–84 season, many artists had begun delivering all-night sets featuring an explosive blend of novel sounds, such as the earliest European Post-Punk experimental music, Neue Deutsche Welle, and Electronic Body Music acts like Front 242, Nitzer Ebb, and Canadian industrial group Skinny Puppy (Elliott, 2010). As the decade concluded and further influences reached Goa by the Frankfurt Techno-Trance sound, Detroit Techno, and Acid House from Chicago (Rietveld, 2010), seasonal anthems emerged, with notable tracks like The KLF’s “What Time is Love?” (1988). It was around the year 1992 that the genre was eventually coined as ‘Goa trance.’ The foundation had been laid. Goa tracks began circulating, demonstrated by Jungle High’s ‘Jungle High’ release in 1992. Nevertheless, the hippie/freak legacy consistently decreed that the musical programming remain within the contours of stylistically psychedelic sound.

### ***3. Technological Advancements***

In addition, the collaborative effort in 1983 by six major synthesizer companies rendered possible by the emergence of new consciousness technologies companies to establish a standardized control protocol marked a pivotal moment for the development of various genres falling under the umbrella of EDM. This joint venture aimed to create compatibility among electronic instruments from different manufacturers, leading to the establishment of the MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) standard for instrument control data. MIDI functioned as a universal language, enabling electronic instruments like synthesizers and drum machines to interface seamlessly through a

sequencer, which recorded and played back multitrack scores using simple binary code transmitted along affordable cables (Théberge, 1997). Notably, MIDI orchestration could be saved and exported, serving as a medium of exchange for early EDM producers, many of whom lacked formal training in music or sound engineering.

Released in 1986 was the Digital Audio Tape (DAT) by Sony/Phillips (replacing vinyl and cassette), albeit remaining costly tech (Chan, 1998). As digital media started to gain foothold with the more well-off Goan expatriates, the concern of music fidelity was resolved without troubling exclusivity. Production was now aimed at generating music for the sake of Goa parties, a phenomenon that would start to gain traction outside Goa in the early 1990s (St John, 2015).

In 1993, while in Goa, Erik Davis conducted an interview with the German musician Johann Bley, also known as Mandra Gora, who was among the rare Goa trance artists actively creating music in Goa. Bley, who shared his DAT tapes with friends and DJs, remarked on the ‘perfect feedback loop’ between his music and the events. He observed that the music Davis was investigating was “already dead and gone”, heading towards becoming a marketable and genericized product (Davis, 2004, pp. 268–269). Mandra Gora’s tracks, entitled ‘Gypsy Trance’ and ‘Wicked Warp’, emerged in 1993 on a Dragonfly Records compilation called ‘Project II Trance’—a release that is considered by many as the initial publication and label of a Psychedelic trance collection (Trancentral, 2016). This suggests that, amongst literati at least, disenchantment with the commercialized and popularized trajectory of the music significantly preceded the first ever published Goa trance (St John, 2010).

Goa trance appeared evidently in 1995-96 (St John, 2013a) as a commercial genre, showcasing on multiple reissued CD compilations. Some contention lies around

the origin of the genre label; former uses of the 'trance' lexicon as a stylistic identifier for some European dance music that used anthem-like melodic slices stood in stark comparison with the exotic, wilder 'trance' concomitant with Goa/Psychedelic music. Less prone to contain major scales, Goa/Psychedelic trance adopt more Phrygian and ebbed blues scales, establishing the infamous sixteenth leading melody and syncopated thirty-second note, usually encoded as an automated synthesizer generating tones from the tonic, flat second, flat seventh, flat third and perfect fifth (Cole and Hannan, 1997).

As the sound became ever-more predictable with a burgeoning networking plethora of recognized labels and artists, Goa (now troubled by policing, drug busts, and noise complaints) found itself in the background of a growing global emergence of its genealogical musical legacy. Nearly immediately after the Goa psychedelic beach party recipe started to take place in satellite areas, Goa trance marketing labels began preferring less constraining, Psytrance genres. As Goa trance became publicized, this transformation was inevitable; Goa trance engendered the darker Psytrance. However, Goa aberration with transcendence and mind expansion remained with the expansion of Psytrance, unlike the budding of Techno, House, and more mainstream trance music. The Internet and rise in air travel served to proliferate Psytrance. Psytrance never achieved recognition in mega-clubs, however, and never intended to.

Goa's simultaneous decline and global de-territorialization sparked the evolution of classificatory categories of Psytrance, capable of both splintering and revitalizing local scenes. These include genres like 'Full-on,' 'Scandotrance,' 'Trauma Trance,' 'Psytek,' 'Suomi-Saundi,' 'Progressive Psychedelic,' 'Psybient,' 'Dark Psy,' 'Spuggedelic,' and 'Psybreaks' (including 'Psydub'), 'Trance Fusion' bands (blending electronic and acoustic elements), and traditional 'trance' (incorporating instruments like djembe,

gamelan, or didjeridu). Among countless others, these genres constitute the legacy of 'Goa trance'—each genre instigating a novel form of national or transnational stylistic development based on some degree of continuity and providing a reason to engage in post-Goa psychedelic parties in the woods, beaches, or mountains.

Participants often attend metropolitan, regional, national, or continental events, forming different levels of 'Psy' communities throughout the year in their local scenes or global ones.

#### **D. Thesis Claim and Chapter Roadmaps**

Participation in the music and communities of this culture can hold the potential to alter individual and collective behavior. Indeed, after immersing in the local Lebanese Psytrance scene, I argue that their experience catalyzes a major change in their individual and collective sociality. Through a heightened state of suggestibility induced by the sound phenomena of the music, access to alternative modes of perception, and a deliberate curvature of inclusive shared experience through communal bonding, members explore and become attuned to an expanded version of themselves and their environment, *a para-social culture of more*.

The chapter on spirituality commences by situating the Psytrance community within a broader cultural trend in Lebanon towards spiritual exploration beyond conventional religious paradigms. Here, spirituality emerges as a dynamic process of self-discovery, access to alternative modes of living, realities, and relationality with the world, fostering profound transformations in personal identity and social perception.

A critical exploration of sound follows, examining its materiality and phenomenology in shaping social realities within the local Psytrance milieu. This

section unpacks the symbiotic relationship between spirituality and sound, illuminating how these elements intertwine to create unique shared and individual experience and cultural expressions.

Moving deeper into the chapter, attention turns to the perceived decline in the artistic quality and depth of Psytrance music over time. The discussion centers on the evolution towards noise-based tracks and faster BPMs, which have eclipsed traditional storytelling and journey elements integral to the traditional Psytrance experience. This shift has sparked internal criticism, highlighting tensions between preserving complex and spiritually favorable music and adapting to newer tastes, commercialization, and contemporary socio-political landscapes.

The subsequent section delves into the moral and cultural shifts within the Lebanese Psytrance scene, symbolized by a noticeable gravitation towards darker, more aggressive musical styles. This departure from traditional artifacts signifies a rupture in cultural continuity and ritualized practices, reflecting broader societal shifts towards hedonism and raw emotional expression.

Further exploration reveals how certain shades of ‘dark sound’ are embraced as necessary outlets for expression amidst Lebanon's socio-political turmoil. Artists across various roles—dancers, promoters, and DJs—utilize this aesthetic to confront oppression and despair, transforming darkness into a form of artistic resistance and resilience.

The chapter continues with an examination of the spiritual test inherent within the Psytrance scene, a form of askēsis—a rigorous training through ritualistic participation. Participants navigate chaotic environments akin to meditative practices, seeking personal growth amidst societal challenges and cultural transformations.

The chapter culminates in a critical analysis of specific events that have shaped the Lebanese Psytrance landscape, including controversies surrounding the 2015 Psylienz New Years party and the 2016 Hexaplex festival. These incidents highlight societal anxieties, moral panics, and legal challenges faced by the community, underscoring its resilience and adaptive strategies in navigating external pressures.

In the chapter on sensorality, I delve into the multifaceted sensory landscapes and embodied practices that define the Psytrance scene. The first section explores how Psytrance raves serve as immersive sensory experiences, cultivating what can be termed as "sensational knowledge" and alternative modes of cognition. Participants are enveloped in a kaleidoscope of sights, sounds, and smells, inducing both predictable and unpredictable sensations. This sensory richness not only shapes social interactions, aesthetic encounters, and personal reflections but also blurs the boundaries between self and environment. Ultimately, Psytrance culture celebrates sensory diversity as a pathway to spiritual exploration, collective euphoria, and the production of experiential knowledge.

The next section focuses on the exploration of the psychedelic body modification within the Psytrance community, revealing it to be more than mere aesthetic enhancement. It serves as a profound means of externalizing and embodying the unique sensory and aesthetic order of this culture. Practices such as tattooing, piercing, branding, and scarification are employed to imbue the body with symbols and motifs deeply meaningful within the psychedelic realm.

Moreover, dance is explored not as a mere physical movement but as a profound way of being in the world, influencing others with positivity and fostering communal connections. This embodied experience is intricately linked to the music's rhythms and

energies, with dancers interpreting and responding to its dynamics. Through dance, Psytrance enthusiasts not only engage kinesthetically but also cultivate a shared phenomenological embodied understanding that defines their cultural identity within this vibrant subculture.

The upcoming section explores the diverse activities integrated into Psytrance events to engage participants and shape their experiences. These include yoga sessions, martial arts workshops, guided meditations, and various forms of dance. "Silent zones" are designated for breaks from music, promoting contemplative practices and mindfulness. Concepts like sport ecology and body ecology underscore the impact of bodily practices in natural settings on physical well-being and awareness, highlighting how these activities contribute to the holistic experience of Psytrance events.

In the chapter on community, I explore how Psytrance culture in Lebanon functions not only as an activity but as a community-building mechanism that shapes social dynamics and identities. The section highlights how these raves serve as gatekeepers of cultural codes, establishing social boundaries and inclusion/exclusion dynamics without resorting to violence. Within the underground scene, concepts of authenticity and the dichotomy between underground and mainstream play pivotal roles in fostering community cohesion. This culture exhibits neo-tribal characteristics, drawing on prehistoric social forms to forge intimate bonds and alternative familial structures based on extended kinship networks, promoting a sense of belonging and camaraderie among its members based on more humane and natural relationalities.

Additionally, the chapter examines the complexities surrounding gender and sexuality within Lebanese Psytrance societies. Despite espousing liberal values, significant inequalities and power dynamics persist, with men typically occupying

dominant organizational roles while women are often relegated to supportive tasks or objectified as part of the scene's dynamics. Traditional gender roles and societal norms constrain women's participation and reinforce heteronormative standards, leading to ongoing challenges in reimagining gender identity and inclusivity within these spaces.

Furthermore, the chapter delves into the socialization based on moral education and an ethics of responsibility within the Psytrance community, where members are guided by virtues of tolerance, acceptance, and unity. This para-culture offers a sanctuary from societal norms, promoting authenticity, selflessness, and personal growth through shared musical journeys and controlled chaos.

It goes on to examine the micropolitics within the community—a network of power nodes and fluid relationships where ideological exchanges, material resources, and social capital shape dynamics of support, competition, and inclusion/exclusion among members.

Last, in the face of societal and legal stigmas surrounding Psytrance in Lebanon, community members have developed a strategy known I term 'neo-nomadic politics.' This approach involves navigating the underground scene by strategically slipping in and out of legal frameworks and societal norms. Participants adopt fluid tactics to evade scrutiny, embodying a resilient adaptation to the complex unregulated and yet regulated landscape of Lebanon.

## CHAPTER II

### A REVIEW OF THE EXISTING LITERATURE

The literature on Psytrance culture offers a wide exploration of differing themes, primarily centered around sacra-religiosity and spirituality within the culture, neo-tribal connectedness, technics and mind/body/mechanical technologies, transcendence, and economy and sub-cultural capital.

#### **A. Spiritualism and Ritualization in the Psytrance Culture**

Spirituality is a central element the literature has focused extensively on as the Psytrance music culture has continued to flourish; the increasing interest in the spiritual aspect of the scene is categorized by a range of analysis and debate, with much of the focus on a *vibe* that may either lead to self-transcendence, reflexive consciousness alternatives/expansion, and self-expression (Saunders and Doblin, 1996; Stephenson, 2003) or trauma, disturbance, and destruction (Reynolds, 1997).

Psytrance is “imbued with certain para-religious qualities”, flourishing since the 1960s (Tramacchi, 2004, p. 146). The culture accommodates an “eclectic alternative spiritualism featuring occultic characteristics” (St John, 2009, p. 42; Partridge, 2004). This “cultic spirituality” is “self-oriented [...] and epistemologically individualistic”, while simultaneously inclined towards coalescing into networks and communities, which Campbell describes as “the mystic collectivity” (Partridge, 2004, p. 63). Drawing from this, St John further complicates the scene by characterizing Psytrance as tribal due to the inclination of members to engage in these mystic communities of shared beliefs without formalizing an organized religion (i.e. through religious institutions or sects) (St John, 2009). For Sylvan (2002):

“(This)... musical subculture provides almost everything for its adherents that a traditional religion would. In the heat of the music, it provides a powerful religious experience which is both the foundation and the goal of the whole enterprise, an encounter with the numinous that is at the core of all religions” (p. 6).

Woodhead (2001) explains that advocates of these “new spiritualities” pronounce a dedication to spiritual relativism, which witnesses a proliferation of religions and symbolic systems assumed with the impression that they grant divine truths: a “new age” of unity, harmony, and spiritual awakening; the perception that lived reality manifests “a deep and unifying spirit or life-force” found in the synoptic/ecological mantra “All is One”; and an animated “radical immanence” in which participants access this underlying “life force” or “energy” through direct experience (Woodhead, 2001, pp. 81-2).

Employing a more cultural and historical perspective, Partridge (2004) provides a unique addition to the literature by suggesting that Psytrance’s presumed spiritual dimension is sourced from various European roots. He characterizes Psytrance as a micro-culture, assimilating pagan philosophies and motifs in a common visual and exoticist interest in Eastern mysticism.

Pertinent to this spiritual experience is the *vibe*. According to Fikentscher, the crucial rhythmic element that aligns music (read: sound) with dance (read: movement) in the underground clubbing scene creates what clubbers perceive as “the vibe”—“a sensation of nowness” (2000, p. 80; St John, 2009, p. 38). This vibe is further shaped by elements, such as location, environment, crowd, decorations, light, time of day or night, type of music, and BPM. This vibe is recurrently identified as the “communion” of “trance dance” (Ott and Herman, 2003), the “psychedelic communitas” of Australian doofs (Tramacchi, 2000), or indeed the feeling of “connectedness” (St John, 2004).

While the vibe may resemble a religio-spiritual experience, it is the type that individuals pursue replicating while not essentially being 'religious' in the manner normally understood (e.g. as formal and institutionalized); the vibe is more accurately perceived as being spiritual with regards to the "spiritualities of life" that Luckman characterizes as "secondary institutions" operating external to the "dictated life" of primary institutions (Lynch and Badger, 2006).

Ritualization has emerged as another common theme within the study of the sacra in Psytrance. Sylvan investigates the neo-ritualization of Psytrance by unpacking the temporal and spatial ordering dimension of Psytrance (2002, p. 138). These sequences performed before, during, and after these parties ritualistically include, for instance, hunting down locations and after-party chill-out times. In more recent studies, Sylvan christens the term "ritualization" in the process of carrying out various identifiable "activities and practices such as planning, publicity, set up, transportation, DJ-ing, dancing, chilling out and after-party" in a consistent manner (2013, p. 98). These 'religious rituals' involve participation that mirrors religiosity, even though members may not specifically perceive it in religious terms (Sylvan, 2013). St. John later reinforces this concept, suggesting that such rituals, aimed at upholding event details, allow communities to tap into the culture's transformative potential (St. John, 2009).

The deployment of spiritual artifacts is integral to the 'neoshamanic' or 'technoshamanic' portrayal of the DJ/Producer, and more so, the self-shamanizing tendency of members (Takahashi, 2005; St. John, 2013). Remixing popular cultural debris for the sake of enabling the gnosis of a liminal experience positions the DJ as transformed into a revered sage (St. John, 2013). Gore finds, "DJs [...] are like chief

priests, simultaneously guardians of a musical tradition as well as potential innovators” (1997, p. 64). Represented as a shaman, the DJ can lead the dancing community through a 'hell' of loss and back again, ideally finishing the experience of total loss with a re-embodiment anthem (Rietveld, 1998, p. 195). Likewise, Sylvan (2005) views the DJ (frequently male) as a preacher exploiting technologies to guide the flock to a promised land. “The DJ is responsible for leading dancers into the powerful experiential states that connect them to the sacred; (He)... has a set of tools and strategies to facilitate the peak dance-floor experience” (Sylvan, 2005, pp. 112-13). Furthermore, D’Andrea (2007) underscores a fluid, possessed element, with the DJ—a flamboyant and priestly icon with technical nous emulating traditional shamanic methods and skills—“taking the crowd on a journey” where conventional perceptions of time, space, and self are suspended (p. 106).

## **B. Psytrance Communitas and Neo-Tribes**

Of relevance here besides spiritualism is the theory of *communitas*, frequently observed in most conceptualizations of Psytrance culture. St John uses Maffesoli’s (1995) theory of “deindividuation” to comprehend the proclivity of Psytrance movements to organize into communities as in Psytrance (2009). Maffesoli’s theory posits that the European predilection for Dionysian tendencies, characterized by the inclination to gather in affective communities, is a consequence of the concurrent disintegration of traditional institutions such as the Church, nuclear family, and clan.

The central dedication of neo-tribes lies in the creation and recreation of moments of collective existence. In this perspective, individuals navigate through fleeting or liminal spaces of empathetic and intensified social interaction, where

multiple venues act as gateways in a vibrant galaxy (St John, 2009). Dance scholars (e.g., Bennett, 1999; Gaillot, 1999; Gore, 1997) find merit in this interpretative framework, recognizing the contemporary dance club, party, or festival as a prolific site for affiliation and identification. Within these communities, individuals, while often strangers, experience an impulsive "flash of mutual understanding on the existential level, and a 'gut' understanding of synchronicity" (Turner, 1982, p. 48).

Turner's concept of "spontaneous communitas" has additionally gained significant traction among dance scholars and ethnographers, who explore the profound intercorporeality within Psytrance rave communities. This concept is particularly relevant when considering the dance floor as a space for abandoning sociocultural roles and status expectations that typically divide individuals (Gerard, 2004; McAteer, 2002; Olaveson, 2004; St John, 2004; Sylvan, 2002; Takahashi and Olaveson, 2003; Tramacchi, 2000). Such scholars relate Turner's explanation of "direct, immediate and total confrontation of human identities which tends to make those experiencing it think of mankind as a homogeneous, unstructured and free community" (1974, p. 169) with the dynamics observed in Psytrance rave communities.

St John employs Turner's concept of communitas but critiques it for its lack of homogeneity and non-corporeality, a criticism he revisits in his earlier work on rave culture. St John points out the problematic essentialism in Turner's limen, where communitas serves as a modality. Particularly in the context of pilgrimage, communitas has been criticized for being a reified and all-encompassing "primal unity" that overlooks the underlying diversities, tensions, and multiplicity of voices (St John, 2001).

Alternatively, St John's critique of the fundamental and disembodied nature of *communitas* serves as a valuable corrective, underscoring the importance of recognizing the intricacy and corporeality inherent in contemporary ritualized social movements and gatherings, such as rave and dance events.

The term "tribe" is just as often used as a general marker for these *communitas*. The association with "tribalism" highlights the festal role. As explored in other works (St John, 2009, 2010, 2012), trance dancescapes exhibit a "tribal" dynamic where participants use the term "tribe" to signify a particular aesthetic, practice, technique, or language that distinguishes an individual or group from others or signifies the dissolution of such distinctions. This elective festal dynamic is central to Psychedelic trance and requires an interpretation that deviates from traditional perspectives. These contemporary tribal groups function as heterotopias, shaped by a diverse concept of time (*cronos*) and space (*topos*) (St John, 2020, 2012, 2010).

Through participant discussions, the tribal label signifies a nostalgic yearning for a social connection, albeit temporary, perceived to have been lost or forgotten in the contemporary context marked by separation, privatization, and isolation. It serves as a response to prevailing social conditions, prompting producers and participants to seek alternatives.

In a previous discussion, I explored the concept of the *vibe* within the literature of spiritualism in Psytrance. St John extends this exploration by characterizing the *vibe* as "inter-subjective/inter-corporeal," concurrently experiencing a sacred sociality within micro-*communitas*—a "social warmth" often absent in our contemporary world dominated by individualism, privatization, and isolation (St John, 2009, pp. 38-9). Psytrance raves, as an advanced manifestation of this interplay, offer a platform for

participants from diverse national, cultural, and stylistic backgrounds to express their uniqueness and to amplify the experience of individuality, while at the same time belonging to a singularity and a collective.

### **C. Mind, Body, Digital, and Electronic Technologies**

Transitioning to the pivotal role of technology in the study of Psytrance, a considerable body of literature highlights the transformative impact of technological appropriation in facilitating bodily sensation and sonic identity. Comparing raving to the Bahian Carnival in Brazil, Schütze (2001, p. 158) notes that in "carnivalizing the technologies of a command-and-control society," raves exhibit a positive "technophagic" nature. This "technophagic seizes technological means (electronic, pharmaceutical, logistic) and inverts their control and productive function into one of unleashing energies that modulate the vibratory body" (Schütze, 2001, pp. 161–2). Central to this technological landscape is a do-it-yourself (DIY) ethos (St. John, 2003; St John, 2011).

Leveraging new technologies and the advent of the Internet also facilitates the emergence of diverse sonic identities within different regions or even at a single event. This dynamic enriches the culture with diversity, fluidity, and internal adaptability (Reynolds, 2007; Simão, 2015). Rietveld (2004, p. 53) further suggests a global shift towards "cyborg-like subjectivity" through postindustrial sacrificial repetitive-beat rituals, providing a temporary yet relived homeland for the alienated in Brazil and beyond.

Various chemical, audio, digital, and cyber technologies are assimilated and reprogrammed to improve or amplify the avenues for ecstatic dance—an aspiration

believed to be facilitated by contemporary means (Taves and Bender, 2012). In Psytrance, the convergence of these technologies and symbolic frameworks transcends traditional boundaries, offering a unique lens through which to understand the quest for transcendence within this cultural movement (St John, 2013b). This interplay has been frequently cited to produce a technologically mediated spirituality (St John, 2013b) and transitory environments of euphoric encounters facilitated by technological apparatuses, with the underlying intention of breaking down and reconfiguring individual identities (Hutson, 2000; Corsten, 1998b; Hemment, 1998; Saunders et al., 1995).

The Boom Festival has been subject to thorough examination, with a focus on its technological aspects and the role of tech enthusiasts in its evolution (St John, 2013c). Boom has undergone significant transformation, particularly in its adept use of advanced multimedia technologies. In an effort to modulate ecstatic and reflexive countercultural modalities, Boom has expanded the festival's connections with the trance and world music industry while also growing a robust technical bureaucracy base (Bender and Taves, 2012).

#### **D. Self-‘Trance’ndence**

The recurring themes of self-transcendence and introspection prominently surfaces throughout the literature on Psytrance. While dance events are often perceived in popular discourse as venues for self-transcendence, social transformation, and values transmission, the liminality within Psytrance is characterized by a prolonged and intricate transition. This heightened sense of liminality fuels the cultural movement of Psytrance, contributing to its super-abundant festival life that significantly influences the lifestyles of its participants (St John, 2010). In this context, “rather than belonging

exclusively to a subsection of a parent culture and being aware of how (and why) that respective group deviates from general culture, subculture has become a discursive construct, more akin to a palette of tastes that the individual can draw from, modify and remix in achieving a reflexive understanding of self' (Robards and Bennett, 2011, p. 313). Self-recreation becomes part of this reflexive understanding of the self among Psytrance enthusiasts (St John, 2013c). In a quilt of novel spiritualist phantasmagoria, participants in Psytrance persist through various occultic journeys towards truth, self-realization, and consciousness (St John, 2013c).

St John (2009) further expands the notion that Psytrance raves, whilst they may serve as a setting for self-immolation within the dance domain, simultaneously function as a recital for the self. He contends this performance of persona extends beyond the ordinary self, transforming into what St John refers to as the freaky self. Throughout countercultural history, the freak has never been direct, quiescent, or complete; instead, the freak has existed in a constant state of liminality, perpetual purgatorial intermediacy, and entirely ambiguous regarding moral codes, dress rules, gender norms, disciplined embodiment, and legal states of mind. Trespassing dogmas and psychic limits, pursuing forbidden knowledge, and journeying between marginal sites as ontological and territorial nomads, freaks are characterized by mobility and obscurity (St John, 2009).

Accommodating imaginative fusion of aesthetics, unbridled embodiment, and psycho-somatic experiences, Psytrance raves, with Boom as an exemplary festival, functions as a theatrical space for the expression of what Turner termed the "subjunctive mood" (St John, 2009)—an experimental ambiance where attendees, adorned in outfits featuring theriomorphic, anime, superhero, mythical, and extraterrestrial themes with stylized (e.g., fractalized and UV-reactive) symbols on clothing, badges, and

personalized patches engage in innovative dance expressions and assume alternate personas.

Gender norms are often subverted, with women adopting queer androgynous appearances and men embracing effeminate styles. Whether on the dance floor or throughout the festival grounds, illuminated by UV lights, immersed in lasers, portrayed through hypnagogic projections, showcased in various hair aesthetics, body modifications, and performances like fire staff and glow poi twirling, club and globe ball juggling, and trekking through spectacular altered states of consciousness, attendants become, in and of themselves, “freaks on display” (St John, 2009, p. 47).

Olaveson (2004) explores the concept of the raving self by examining the ineffable nature of ecstasy, which creates an epistemological gap by existing beyond language. This state of ecstasy, experienced as a desubjectified, non-reflective awareness, diverges from rationality and higher-order thought. Olaveson draws on Rietveld's idea of returning to a pre-linguistic state and correlates ecstasy with the Lacanian Real, a stage before the formation of the ego, emphasizing ecstasy's autonomy from discursive understanding and its transcendence of the Cartesian cogito. The subversive relationship of ecstasy to binary thought emerges as the rave-assemblage propels participants into the Real, a cognitive realm transcending the ego and its organizational frameworks. This transcendence is facilitated by the rhythmic and repetitive patterns of electronic music, transforming the temporal experience as dancers enter “tranc[ed] out” ecstatic states (Reynolds, 1999, p. 203). The synergy of music, substances, and dance serves as an invitation to connect with a deeply rooted, primal aspect within us, potentially awakening our "reptilian" brain, surpassing our egos, and

encouraging us to dance freely, surrendering ourselves to the beat—an experience that transcends language and subjectivity.

Expanding on this concept, St John (2008) argues that in this context, the playful overturning or restructuring of conventions and language, typical of festival and carnival performances, gives way to the dissolution of language and meaning. Instead, there is a direct encounter with self-dissolution or "surrender," a process intentionally orchestrated, particularly within trance parties. "Horizontal displacements," involving journeys to distant geographical locations, along with the "vertical displacements" of self and identity during "tripping" encounters—with the guidance of DJs like Sadhu Goa Gil—Psytrance-goers find themselves liberated from the constraints of egoic judgment and inclined towards a complete "surrender to the vibe" (D'Andrea, 2007, p. 249; McAteer, 2002, p. 29).

### **E. Consumption and Subcultural Capital**

St John (2009) finds Bataille and Hurley's (1988) theory of "general economy" useful to focus on excess and consumption within the realm of Psytrance. In this "general economy", the extravagant consumption akin to a potlatch, where society's "accursed share" is extravagantly burned, serves to attain a sacred otherness. This sacred realm allows formerly distinct individuals to intimately share experiences as they engage in profitless consumption. Bataille and Hurley emphasize that immoderate consumption becomes a form of revelation, unveiling one's intimate self to fellow beings. Consumption, in this view, is the medium through which separate individuals communicate, with everything laid bare and an open, infinite connections established among those who consume intensely (Gauthier, 2004). Psytrance festivals serve as an

exemplary arena for this unique form of communication, especially as participants on the dance floor exchange drinks, share a chillum, and immerse themselves in sustained bass pressure (St John, 2009).

St John additionally investigates how the self-aware performance of consumption influences the spending economy (2010). Importantly, he scrutinizes the alignment of the inclination toward Psytrance consumption with Psytrance technoaesthetics. St John observes that casualties resulting from transgressions—such as extreme weather, dehydration, sickness, and excessive substance use in Psytrance festivals, labeled as "natural sites of excess" and venues for the unbridled consumption of surplus "energy"—do not escape notice within a Bataillean general economy of sacrifice. In this conceptual framework, becoming "wasted," the non-productive expenditure of one's self through extravagant limit-pushing ventures in the presence of strangers, is deemed productive (St John, 2010, p. 231). This theory of excess recognizes the value of waste, transgression, and the transformative potential inherent in the apocalypse of subjectivity (St John, 2010).

Consequently, the EDM event transforms into a "ritual of expenditure," where the subject extravagantly wastes surplus energy rather than consuming it through other forms of ostentatious activities, typical of the image associated with the modern subject of consumption (Kyriakopoulos, 2019, p. 86). Thus, getting wasted on the dance floor for "consecutive days and nights" becomes not only an act of sacrifice of the "accursed share", but also a "sacrificial consumption of order, usefulness, and productivity" (Gauthier, 2004, p. 66) that favors the "temporary destruction of the imaginary self" (Rietveld, 2004, p. 52).

Building on the exploration of consumption within the context of Psytrance, the examination of subcultural capital adds another layer to our understanding of the dynamics shaping this vibrant culture. Ryan (2010) introduces the notion that, despite the utopian ideals of equality and communal values prevalent in Psytrance and cyberculture, Sarah Thornton's debated theory of subcultural capital and hierarchical structures based on status continues to be relevant in these contemporary contexts. Notably, within the Psytrance community, individuals accumulate "hipness capital" through the adoption of specific styles and the acquisition of particular knowledge, with a discerning taste in music carrying significant value, as evidenced by the widespread popularity of certain DJs.

#### **F. Middle Eastern Psytrance Scenes**

The Psytrance culture in the Middle East offers a fascinating intersection of music, identity, and resistance against socio-political landscapes. From Palestine's raves as sites of resistance and Lebanon to Saudi Arabia's state-supported EDM events marking societal transformation, and Egypt's burgeoning scene amidst historical landscapes, the region showcases diverse manifestations of Psytrance's influence. Despite varying degrees of cultural and political contexts, these scenes underscore a shared pursuit of self-expression, community, and cultural reclamation through electronic music. This section delves into these unique contexts, exploring how Psytrance has been documented not only as a form of musical expression but also as a social and political force shaping contemporary narratives in the Middle East.

## 1. *Palestine*

Academics have analyzed the Palestinian rave music culture as a means of shaping a shared identity against the backdrop of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the lens of resistance. A two-year qualitative fieldwork conducted in Ramallah and Haifa by Withers (2021) investigates the negotiation of everyday power through Psytrance raves in Palestine. The study focuses on how DJs and participants on dancefloors navigate and express non-conformist identities. With a particular emphasis on attire and dance movement patterns, the research reveals that individuals affirm femininities, masculinities, and queer subjectivities rooted in pleasure and entertainment. However, the study also underscores the role of economic disparities in shaping personal identities, as financial resources are crucial for active participation in rave culture, involving expenses such as clothing, event tickets, and leisure time. The expression of gender and sexuality on dance floors among Palestinians is not simply a rebellion or submission to social norms but is influenced by class division, creating new forms of control as these divisions become more pronounced.

Kiefer's examination of Palestinian raves, on the other hand, aligns with the tradition of conceptualizing these informal spaces as hotspots for resistant liberation (2022). Despite the outward appearance of Haifa's raves—including loud music, flashing lights, and drug use—participants perceive them as a profound expression of freedom and an unspoken manifestation of their Palestinian identity. The narrative of liberation takes on a personal dimension, as articulated by a queer Palestinian DJ who suggests that personal liberation precedes broader liberation from Israeli occupation. From this perspective, achieving *taharrur* (freedom, liberation) from occupation requires individuals to first liberate themselves: "we have to liberate ourselves from the idea of

having to be free. We are free. There is only an appearance of occupation" (Kiefer, 2022; Karkabi, 2020, p. 691). Kiefer discusses, however, raves in general and not Psytrance ones in specific. There is a noticeable gap in the existing literature when it comes to examining how the distinctive situation of occupied Palestine integrates into the Psytrance culture.

## **2. *Saudi Arabia***

The Saudi Arabian rave scene, on the other hand, highlighted by the Soundstorm festival in December 2019, has evolved from an underground counterculture into a state-supported mass gathering. With over 400,000 attendees, this state-sponsored EDM event marked a departure from traditional portrayals of Saudi Arabians. The event in the Saudi desert resembled a typical rave until the music ceased for the Islamic call to prayer, prompting attendees clad in ripped skinny jeans and combat boots to observe a moment of silence. After the religious duties concluded fifteen minutes later, thousands of partygoers resumed their festivities, engaging in carefree dancing—a sight unimaginable in the conservative kingdom just five years ago.

The electronic music festival in Saudi Arabia served as a testament to the transformations sweeping through the traditionally conservative nation under its controversial crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman. A member of the royal family and entrepreneur, Prince Fahad Al Saud, who was present at the event in a psychedelic-patterned jacket and sparkling eyeliner, emphasized the desire for progress and self-representation. He stated, "allow us progress, allow us to represent ourselves in the way that we feel fit. We are very eager to be part of the international community, but we

can't be stifled every time we try to make progress because it doesn't look like what you want to see." (Bloomberg, 2021)

Derbal (2020) examines this phenomenon in the context of the modernization initiatives of the new Saudi political elite, emphasizing the role of rave culture in presenting a modern and cosmopolitan image to a global audience. Rave culture is explored here in the context of the modernization initiatives of the new Saudi political elite. Derbal finds raves are a particularly valuable tool in presenting a fresh image of the kingdom to a global audience, one that significantly departs from the traditional Wahhabi image of the state.

### **3. *Egypt***

In 2019, the Indigo Festival, recognized as a major event in the Psytrance music scene, relocated to Sinai in Egypt, specifically at Coral Resort Nuweiba. Despite this, Egypt is conspicuously absent from the list of destinations hosting premier Psychedelic trance festivals globally. According to Mahmoud Dabbous, a sound engineer and DJ, "the Psytrance music scene in Egypt is probably around 60 to 100 people, and we usually do small gatherings on our own and produce music even if no one listens." Dabbous emphasizes, "it's all about the art. It's not about how the scene is set because you set your own scene and everyone comes in with their own experiences. If there will ever be more Psytrance festivals in Egypt, it would be like paying homage to Egypt's history and identity, showcasing how we're trying to introduce new music to break the dynamic here in Egypt." One participator envisions Psytrance as a fresh start and a new taste of music in Egypt, making it easier for new talent to enter the market and build their own foundation (Sayed, 2020).

The Sinai region bore witness to the emergence and subsequent lapse of Psychedelic trance and art projects. The dormant period came to an end in 2011 when the German Psytrance crew "Freunde Der Sonne," led by organizer and DJ Jannik Beathead, ventured to Dahab, a quaint Hippie paradise on the South Coast of Sinai. The revival gained momentum in 2012 with the inaugural Desert Dance Festival set against the enchanting backdrop of the desert surrounding Dahab (SceneNoise Team, 2018).

Through collaborative efforts involving locals, Bedouins, and European artists, the festival swiftly evolved. Dahab became a hub for a continuous Psytrance parties, whether at indoor parties, clubs, private venues, the beach, or the desert—all flourishing in this locale. The scene has taken root and is thriving. Drawing interest from a myriad of Middle Eastern and European performers and travelers, Desert Dance has become an international psychedelic gathering, proudly claiming the title of the first-ever held in the mystic and ancient land that has imparted profound inspiration and wisdom about the people and culture (SceneNoise Team, 2018).

#### **4. *Lebanon:***

The EDM underground rave scene, including Psytrance, booms in Lebanon, where the country's young enthusiasts fervently embrace various genres of Psytrance music. Lebanon, known for experiencing all four seasons, witnesses a surge in party activities all throughout its season, especially in the summer when the outdoor season commences (Sharif, 2017; Mushroom Magazine, 2016).

Few sources, however, discuss Lebanon's underground Psytrance scene; nevertheless, what is documented are the club and pub spaces. Over the past, Lebanon has earned a reputation as the go-to nightlife club and pub destination in the region (Abdallah, 2015; Buchakjian, 2015; Shooter and Chahoud, 2022; El Maalouf et al.,

2015; Bonte, 2022; Bonte, 2015; Kegels, 2007). Within this body of literature, Beirut's nightlife is commonly portrayed as a form of resistance and an escape from the daily challenges within the state. During periods of peace, affluent Lebanese youth utilize the glamorous yet tightly regulated nightlife of Beirut as a platform to envision themselves as a class apart from the tumultuous everyday reality of a politically and economically unstable country. In times of war, nightlife persists, providing the young and trendy an opportunity to perceive themselves as quintessentially Lebanese (Kegels, 2007). Operating under the slogan “war or no war, a real Lebanese continues his or her life in spite of everything,” members of Beirut's party scene affirm their Lebanese identity by integrating their clubbing activities into a national discourse of resistance and resilience (Kegels, 2007).

Bonte conceptualizes Lebanon's nightlife activities (more specifically to her research in the pub scene) as a social movement. Bonte dubs the enduring existence of the nightlife spaces as "political areas" in Lebanon (2022). This phenomenon stems from the aftermath of the civil war, where conflicts resulted in a sectarian split. Bonte (2015) embodies what Khalaf (2012) refers to as a "culture of escapism". Throughout events such as the Civil War and for a post-civil war generation skeptical about a shared future, nightlife has often provided an escape. Lebanon's nighttime economy, despite all this instability, has continued to thrive as individuals seek a “playground” to get away from the state's instability (Bonte, 2015; Khalaf, 2012; Kegels, 2017).

### **G. Unexplored Frontiers: Literature Gaps and Research Rationale/Objectives**

The scholarly landscape on Middle Eastern Psytrance assemblages is notably sparse. Predominantly relegated to grey literature, including mere references in blog

posts, magazine pieces, and Op-Ed articles that focus more on EDM culture than Psytrance specifically, the extant literature exhibits a deficiency in documenting the authentic size, scope, and features of these Arab informal and yet very political spaces that exhibit a great potential in transforming the sociality and social configurations of members.

Moreover, there is a notable absence of robust theoretical frameworks dedicated to comprehensively understanding the cultural dynamics in the region and their scenes; the global discourse is predominantly confined to ethnographic accounts recollecting and analyzing experiences stemming from Western Psytrance scenes. Despite this, our scenes are thriving and grinding, a notion I have been assured by from many personal accounts that Lebanese and other Arabs have shared with me about rave scenes throughout the Arab world, including in Oman, Saudi Arabia, and Syria. All Arab ravers know about other Arab raves; we teach each other and exchange tips and tricks continually. However, these scenes are known only locally and in neighboring countries, not by the global community. Raving, particularly Psytrance raving and its associated taboos, faces more legal and cultural challenges in our Arab countries than in Western ones. Despite these difficulties, we have not been deterred. Although it requires extra effort, we have successfully brought our art to life. These dynamics underscore the need for greater attention and care from the academic community for Arab cultural and lived practices outside the boundaries defined by Western paradigms and sensibilities, which has largely overlooked these multi-faceted felt and practiced unique experiences and challenges.

The available literature also fetishizes a conceptual understanding of Psytrance in terms of modernity, alienation, and Western societal progressions. This proclivity is

marked by a conspicuous absence of thoughtful consideration of how Psytrance scenes intersect with more external relatable existing socio-cultural realities and how these realities are navigated within the scene. This deficiency, one where the literature is confined predominantly to the study of Western modernity and logocentrism and the controlled environments of the festival, impedes a comprehensive exploration of the intersectionalities inherent in Psytrance culture—constraining its capacity to engage with the diverse and multifaceted complexities of real-life experiences besides those presented and conceptualized as stemming from the dawn of modernity.

More so academic literature more focused on club and pub culture cannot be generalized to rave culture studies, as the phenomenon of raving at its core ethos stands intentionally in stark contrast to the clubbing/pubbing industry and culture, positioned as an antithesis and an ‘other’ to the latter. Due to this fundamental divergence, the two phenomena exhibit significant differences. Consequently, while theoretical frameworks on club and pub culture are useful for the rave underground electronic scene and may overlap, it is essential to recognize the distinctive nature of the latter, warranting its own dedicated analysis and study.

For this reason, this thesis contributes to the expansion of this scarce literature on the Psytrance rave counterculture assemblage within the socio-political context of Lebanon. Against this backdrop, the main objective of this study is to document the embodied culture, social organizations, and experience of the Lebanese Psytrance assemblage as ground zero for subsequent examination and comprehension.

The analysis begins in contextualizing this experience in Lebanon unlike any other existing study and returns to unpack it to afford individuals immersed in these experiences with greater agency and understanding, while also offering external

observers a deeper insight into the identity, behavior, and characteristics of Lebanese Psytrancers in relation to the country they live in. A central aim in this analysis is to shift towards viewing culture as the tangible manifestation of ongoing adaptation to the environment experienced by Lebanese Psyheads, and the subsequent transformations therein.

Through the exploration and delineation of sociological conventions within this specific cultural milieu, my research aims to elucidate the learned and collectively held knowledge shaping local practices and interpretations of experience. By doing so, this study seeks to create space for the “untold, unheard, unseen, and heretofore unimagined possibilities” inherent in Psytrance culture, offering insight into its impact on socio-political dynamics within the larger context of traditional and state social configurations (Clair, 1998, p.186).

My research transcends mere methodological documentation of my anthropological trip; it serves as a conduit for exploring the nexus of local history, politics, culture, and the essence of being within the Arab World. Throughout my work, I endeavor to navigate these complex phenomena without rigidly categorizing them into Western artificial bifurcation, recognizing the limitations and biases inherent in such dichotomies. Because of the current absence of more nuanced Middle Eastern frameworks and the monopolization of space of Western work within the global field of anthropology, this work attempts at “listening for the unsaid” in our unique everyday as a means of constructing sincere and trustworthy knowledge (Dresch, 2000, pp. 122–125).

Beyond rectifying the existing scarcity in literature, the study is an avenue for researchers to identify new trends and patterns that enrich our understanding of the intersections between rave culture, music, and sociology in the Arab world.

Last, the particular setting of this study further amplifies its distinctiveness. For this, another objective of this research is archiving the essence of this culture, as well as highlighting key figures within the scene across history. This archival effort not only serves the purpose of documentation and historicization but also extends a valuable resource for fellow researchers. By preserving these narratives, it contributes to the longevity of collective memory, ensuring that significant moments in history are not only remembered but actively studied and understood. The research further unprecedentedly historicizes the scene throughout this documentation endeavor, by creating an ethnographic cartography of the genealogy of the Psytrance scene in Lebanon.

I chose to examine both the spiritual, sensational, and communal aspects of the local Psytrance culture because my experience as a Psytrance raver demonstrated their evident significance within the scene. Further research revealed that these aspects are also the most studied facets globally, as evident in the existing literature review, representing significant components of the Psytrance experience. This approach aims to demonstrate that Arab scenes, particularly in Lebanon, are not backward but rather align with global Psytrance scenes while possessing unique intricacies that have been largely understudied. In this manner, the study can also exhibit “theoretical informedness” (despite being largely Western-oriented), while staying true to our local exclusivity (Willis and Trondman, 2000).

By documenting and analyzing the Lebanese Psytrance scene within its socio-political context, this study contributes a unique perspective to the sparse literature on global Psytrance counterculture. It aims not only to provide deeper insights into the identity and behavior of Lebanese Psytrancers but also to foster a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of rave culture within the broader spectrum of global sociology and cultural studies.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### **A. Ethnographic Methods Employed**

In this thesis, I am engaging both a popular readership and an academic audience—each with its distinct concerns—recognizing the complexity of balancing these two groups. Psytrance ravers, on one hand, will seek to validate my credibility as an individual deeply immersed in the culture, and I believe my extensive firsthand intimate involvement fulfills this requirement. On the other hand, scholars will be interested in ensuring that my insider perspective has not compromised my ability to conduct objective research and analysis, and they will seek confirmation that I have established a robust theoretical and methodological framework for this reason.

I employed three branches of formal ethnographic methodologies: participant and non-participant observation, auto-ethnography, and the go-along method. Through this methodological framework, my aim was to immerse myself fully in the local assemblage, participating in a substantial number of events and activities, and involving community members in the knowledge-production process.

This ethnography lasted from June 24, 2023, to the end of April 2024. Over this period, I actively participated in six Psytrance raves, delving into the vibrant energy and cultural dynamics of these events. Additionally, I attended numerous organizational meetings as well as behind-the-scenes meet-ups, providing valuable insight into the coordination and community dynamics within the scene. I am also part of the community and lived along as well as observe many of their experiences. Additionally, the research participants for this study consist of individuals aged 18 and above who are

actively engaged in or have extensive experience with the Psytrance Lebanese rave scene.

The fundamental epistemological foundation of anthropology's primary methodology, 'participant and non-participant observation,' assumes paramount significance in this context. It is grounded in the notion that one is meant to “become,” rather than merely “be,” a part of a community (Dahl, 2016, p.154). The proficient anthropologist maintains a close enough proximity to comprehend and elucidate the community's dynamics, yet remains judiciously distant to avoid losing objectivity and inadvertently interjecting personal perspectives (Lichterman, 2017).

Psytrance rave culture, characterized by its unique set of imaginaries, performances, and social interactions, benefits from an anthropological approach that encourages immersion and understanding from within the community. The idea of 'becoming' part of the community aligns with the participatory ethos of rave culture, where active engagement and shared experiences are not only highly valued but represent an essential means through which the culture can be authentically accessed, experienced, and comprehended. These festivities embody a kind of self-sacrifice where no spectators allowed, only a high level of involvement (St John, 2004).

The other type of ethnographic work I engage in is an auto-ethnography. At its core, autoethnography involves consciously or deliberately engaging in identity work to understand or represent phenomena that extend beyond the individual self. It is described as "a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context" (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 9). My auto-ethnographic reflections can be viewed in the form of contemplating on my fieldwork experiences.

Another approach to autoethnography I use in this study is Indigenous ethnography, a form of insider research. This involves conducting an ethnography of one's 'own people'. After joining the scene and becoming a full-time Lebanese Psytrance enthusiast and raver, I underwent both formal and informal socialization into this specific group and their role-types, acquiring specialized knowledge and adopting their way of life. My insider membership may represent a long-term, permanent change, similar to Aghananda Bharati (1970) (born Leopold Fischer), who went to India, became a Hindu monk, and later an Indian scholar and anthropologist. I acknowledge my enduring self-identification with the group and my complete internal membership, as recognized both by myself and the members of the community.

While it was useful to have been part of the community for studying rave culture, this immersion surfaced the inherent challenge of potential "researcher bias" (Vandenberg and Hall, 2011). To navigate this challenge, my research adopts a robust framework of reflexivity. The initial dogmas worth reflexive scrutiny pertain to my intersectional identity. I am a light-skinned, fair-haired, middle class, female, young adult Lebanese raver. My identity can be an asset but demanded continuous scrutiny to uncover and rectify as much as possible how it could've been affecting the research process.

The thesis also transcends a simple recognition of my own identity and its implications for reflexivity within the research framework. In this context, reflexivity throughout my research stood as "a set of continuous, collaborative, and multifaceted practices through which researchers self-consciously critique, appraise, and evaluate how their subjectivity and context influence the research processes" (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023).

For the third kind of ethnographic research, I interviewed Psytrance ravers and key informants using the go-along method, which involves the act of following research participants around a range of various predetermined, familiar settings and interviewing them (Carpiano, 2009; Kusenbach, 2003; Stiegler, 2021). This method allowed for establishing a deeper relationship between the informant, myself (the researcher), and the place of research. The go-along can also add vital contextual elements to the qualitative research (Carpiano, 2009). Last, it offers the opportunity for in-situ co-participation of both the researcher and researched, granting participants more authority in the research process, as well as facilitates identification and entry into otherwise hidden, unknown, and/or unconventional situations and participants for data collections (Moran et al., 2022). Snow-ball sampling was used to recruit potential and useful contacts.

I conducted a total of sixteen go-along interviews with diverse participants, encompassing crowd members and (in)active organizers. These interviews offered a comprehensive exploration of the Lebanese Psytrance scene, capturing insights from individuals of varying ages representing both the established and emerging facets of the community. I engaged in these interviews through a combination of in-person interactions at events and gatherings, as well as online discussions with pertinent members now outside the country, ensuring a thorough representation of perspectives and experiences across time and different platforms and contexts.

The research then employed a thematic analysis as its primary approach, aimed at uncovering recurring themes, patterns, and concepts inherent in the data collected from the go-along interviews. This involved generating codes to label and categorize segments of data that pertain to various elements of the culture. Following the thematic

analysis, interpretation and meaning-making was used to make sense of the identified themes and patterns. Findings were then contextualized within the broader literature of the Psytrance rave culture as well as the local context of the state and region.

In the process of interviewing key informants, I drew ethnographic portraits of key figures in the scene. These portraits were drawn from participants from both the old and newer scenes. The interview process was designed to elicit comprehensive insights into their experiences, perspectives, and roles within the scene.

Throughout my candidature, I gathered personal documents, flyers, pictures, posts, and music employed within local and regional Psytrance assemblages on events I attended and those that pre-date my entrance into the scene. I also access some archives on blogs, including the most widely used among the older scene [trancehits.com](http://trancehits.com) and [goabase.net](http://goabase.net), previously used to market the parties, as well as present day social media pages. Collecting this archive allows for the accurate and collaborative documentation and historization of this space throughout time.

## **B. Ethics**

### ***1. Institutional Review Board Approval***

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout my research. To ensure the highest ethical standards, I sought and received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). I aimed to ensure that the research process and its outcomes would benefit the Lebanese Psytrance community. This included sharing findings with participants and community leaders, facilitating discussions on how the insights could support the scene's growth and sustainability.

## ***2. Informed Consent and Anonymity***

Obtaining informed consent was a foundational element of my research process. Participants were fully informed about the nature of the study, its objectives, and their rights as contributors to the research. Consent was documented, ensuring participants understood their involvement was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without penalty. To safeguard their identities and maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms were used during the discussion and conceptual sections of the thesis (denoted as letters ‘X’ or ‘Y’ during the start of direct quoted conversations between myself and the participants).

## ***3. Data Security and Privacy***

Data was securely stored on a locked USB, accessible only to me and the Principal Investigator, and deleted after a designated period to protect participant confidentiality.

## ***4. The Ethics of An Insider/Outsider Approach***

Although we create numerous rules to navigate the complexities of ethnographic work, these rules are often unsuitable or irrelevant. We comfort ourselves in thinking that satisfactory ethical guidance exist. As both observers but also participants in space and time, ethnographies create raw third worlds that require ‘elsewhere’ rules, which extend beyond passive observation; it includes a co-constructive active engagement with the lives of others. This bred a difficulty based more than simple passive awareness arising from physical proximity. Rather, life in the scene became an animated active involvement and interest in each other’s lives—reshaping power dynamics—notably because of how small the scene was: everyone knew everyone or at

least someone that did. Indeed, my informants were far from passive subjects for the ethnographer's manipulation. Not only did members actively try to assert their authority over how they wanted to be represented, but they also exhibited curiosity and attempts at power over various aspects of who I was. This led many participants to take an interest in every part of my life beyond the research objective. This was particularly true as a female researcher, where many of my efforts to engage with and study participants were misconstrued as advances toward male participants.

The boundaries between desire, authority, disgust, yearning, and duty blurred between me and my participants, who were also my friends. This fundamental ambivalence was heightened by my dependency on them. Despite having held a relatively high status in the education-conscious scene and being a strong woman, I was still a young Psytrancer who needed to be connected with my participants. I was in a socially acknowledgeable relation of dependency, where I was not to be intimidating and complied with but rather protected and aided.

The intricate power dynamics and personal entanglements was present in and out of the physical spaces of the scene and community gatherings. 'Being there' (Geertz, 2004) meant I had to be physically present at Psytrance raves, sitting behind a desk at my friend's house (but who was also a participant in the scene), writing about fieldwork, teaching a class for the Professor I assisted as a graduate student, or talking to someone completely outside the scene. While my vantage point as a native somewhat simplified the complexity of everyday lived experiences within the scene, including its liminalities, circulations, and amalgamations by providing me with some sense of certainty, suddenly, I found the scene crossing into my home in unexpected ways—especially since I was researching my hometown and a space I attended even as an off-

duty ethnographer. Shifting endlessly between identifications (Narayan, 1993) seemed like my only attempt at understanding the blurr between this insider-outsider dichotomy I experienced. I was engulfed by an existential crisis upon realizing that I had glimpsed my own reflection within the immersive world I was studying. The fear of never escaping this intense reality gripped my thoughts and persisted relentlessly.

I found myself continually compelled or constrained to devise unanticipated ways of grappling with research in the moment. Situating these challenges within a global context of the "routinization of notions of crisis" (Hage, 2012, p. 294), Kanafi and Sawaf suggest that these "crisis-ridden" and "overbearing [... ] seemingly unmoving and non-negotiable " circumstances of ethnography are significant indicators of the political and ethical frameworks within which research unfolds (2017, p.4).

The reflexive 'turn' in this context no longer invited me to merely acknowledge the filters shaping my worldview and how others perceive me. Instead, it shifted focus to themes that transcend these traditional tropes. I was now compelled to: critically address the unidirectional and hierarchical objectifications I was witnessing, as well as the conflicts that arose from them; and reflect on *how* I was "doing" fieldwork, not just *what* being on the field was (Kanafani and Sawaf, 2017). These practices were truly wildly discomfoting and unsettling for me with the field's conditions. Fieldwork became an active and deeply emotional endeavor, marked by unique "ecstasies" (Fabian, 2001, p. 31)—frightening, enlightening, and transformative experiences, including epiphanies and dreams. Indeed, this matter of fact was existentially altering, enlightening, but just as equally traumatizing, gut wrenching.

As the perceived boundaries between the different realms of ethnographic work continued to blur and become more permeable, the field increasingly became "co-

extensive with [my] homes, [my mind], and [my] dreams” (Goulet & Miller, 2007, p. 4). In this intertwined space, while we actively engaged in interpreting each other, power-laden interactions—where we both tried to seize, alter, and redefine each other—led to productive insights but were alternately riddled with “fear, suspicion, discomfort, doubt and misanthropy, just as much as friendship, solidarity, affinity, affection and love” as I rapidly shifted “states of being”: researcher, raver, friend, and woman (Kanafi and Sawaf, 2017, pp. 5, 8) . To reconstruct myself as a Psytrance raver now also functioning as an ethnographer, I found it necessary to redefine my identity within the constraints of my profession. *While the Psytrance community offered freedom for individuals to express themselves, I struggled to understand who and where I was allowed to be.*

My personal memories, sensations, and reflections often manifested in ethereal ways and how could they not: I was part of this community and its embodied and emotive reality that subtly left a lasting impact on my subconscious. What if my memories, colored by emotions, failed to accurately recall the situation? Was there even an emotionless reality to recall? What if my feelings of either affection or disdain toward my friends that were simultaneously interviewees influenced my perception of their responses as I wrote away from them? Some spaces just *felt* ‘clean’ while others did not. Some interviewees seemed to me like they were more equipped to give more in-depth answers while others did not; I wondered whether this difference was influenced by my educational privilege and personal backgrounds. I often found myself narrating experiences with my peers as "I approached the situation as Chloe" or "I approached it as a researcher". These were just a few of the many unintentional experiences that exhibit the extent of these “crossing-points” within ethnographies

(Jackson, 2010, p. 47) that connected not only my interactions with others (my interlocutors with myself and our social environment) but also bridged different temporal and spatial contexts, both within and outside the field. My dual role as both an enthusiast and a researcher, navigating between an ambiguous insider and outsider perspectives while maintaining a respectful distance, has heightened the complexities surrounding my identity, ethics, and the integrity of my selfhood.

Other “unsettledness” I also encountered surrounded the complicated relationship with specific epistemologies of my participants, whether rooted in common knowledge or academic theories, posing significant challenges for me as a progressive woman (Kanafi and Sawaf, 2017, p.8). Often, men viewed women as projects of honor, seeking to mold them according to outdated values, even if coercively. Harassment pervaded my surroundings, causing considerable distress. The lack of both formal and informal education among many members influenced their attitudes towards their bodies, substance use, and interpersonal interactions. Consent, for instance, was not a concept many of my participants understood, whether for touch or intimate relations or basic boundaries and respect. I frequently encountered rude, sexist, and aggressive conversations, which I found difficult to adapt to or exist around despite my efforts. Nonetheless, I endeavored to fulfill my duties with patience, offering gentle comments. However, I harbored discontent internally for these behaviours inside. The close-knit community fostered a culture of intrusive involvement in each other's affairs, leading to breaches of privacy and unwelcome scrutiny; members tried to compel me to participate in emotionally taxing gossip and navigate the intricate dynamics of emotional labor within the scene, as well as the dramatized emotional behaviors in Lebanese culture. Participants became privy to personal details about me that I would

have preferred to keep confidential, prioritizing my role as a researcher over my identity as a raver. Despite my reservations, I recognized the sacrifices inherent in ethnographic research and endeavored to comply with regulations, albeit masking my irritation as best as possible.

As I became more involved in these relationships, transitioning from a mere observer to an active participant, it became my responsibility to contribute. Frequently, I found myself crafting their (or our) reality, offering assistance with design, organization, and decision-making, as well as providing input on texts and slogans. This shift marked the first time I felt fully immersed as a participant rather than an observer. I was inundated with requests for help with English texts and invited to participate in numerous social gatherings, reflecting my role within the community. Additionally, I was asked to document underground music events beyond the Psytrance scene, opportunities for which I am very appreciative of. Participation in the scene proved not only essential for understanding but also pivotal in redirecting the focus of my research. However, in the scenarios I outline, it also posed a challenge to my sense of self, one of union, revelation, intrusion, and dissolution of identity. This unique position has led to a nuanced engagement with the project, marked by varying degrees of enthusiasm and resistance.

This participation had also at many times made me fear my own safety in the field. These gatherings, while vibrant and transformative, often operate on the fringes of legality due to stringent laws and cultural taboos surrounding such events. The illegality of these parties poses significant security risks, not only from law enforcement but also from societal disapproval and potential violence from those opposed to these cultural expressions. As a result, attendees, including myself, must navigate a landscape fraught

with dangers. This includes the constant threat of raids, arrests, and confrontations with authorities who view these events with suspicion and hostility. Additionally, the underground nature of these parties can attract unsavory elements, further complicating the safety and security of participants. Therefore, this involvement in these scenes heightened my awareness of these risks and amplified my anxieties, making each encounter a delicate balance between the pursuit of cultural understanding and the need for personal safety.

Regardless of this difficulty, my passion and seriousness as a researcher guided my actions to maintain authentic to what my participants have expressed to me in their experiences, but also to their safety and mine.

While discomfort may instigate a sense of insecurity and uncertainty among ethnographic work, it is this discomfort that is the crucial starting point for addressing how extreme conditions compel ethnographers to find new ways of surviving fieldwork and being epistemologically productive. This endeavor involves facing emotional, visceral, ethical, and material challenges, while developing forms of sensibility, analytical attention, and critical self-awareness necessary for conducting meaningful social science research.

## CHAPTER IV

### A REFUGE IN RHYTHM: THE EVOLUTION<sup>3</sup> OF THE PSYTRANCE SCENE IN LEBANON

#### A. Post-Bomb Beats: Bug System and the Genesis of Psytrance in Lebanon (Late 1990's to Early 2000's)

##### 1. *DVJ Kaa: Laurent Kaa*

“Well here we are now, Lebanon is entering the very exclusive club of the psychedelic scene. After long years of war, the future generation is seeking for freedom, peace, love, unity and respect. Our country has so many beautiful locations that the parties are always a blast in terms of psychedelic experiences.” (Mushroom Magazine, 2006, p. 38)

The Lebanese Psytrance scene kicked off in the late 1990s, hitting its groove around 1995-96 in locations such parking areas, buildings destroyed by war, or beaches. During this time, the parties were exclusively private ones, limited to close friends and acquaintances only in discreet locations. At the time, nightclub options were scarce; only a handful could be attended, such as BO18 and Acid. “We were 16, 17, but I remember most of the time, we spent the party at these nightclubs at the parking”, DJ Laurent Kaa, one of the pioneering founders of the Psytrance scene in the country, explains to me as he swayed his feet shoeless in a pair of socks with a thick French accent while describing his motives for hosting some of the first electronic music underground parties in the country. A tall man, now, in his mid-forties and balding, radiated genuine enthusiasm and energy as I sat to ask him about his story; I had later come to understand where this excitement and readiness from the people within the scene that conversed with me stemmed from: it was quite rare for scholars, or anyone

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<sup>3</sup> Note: The title intentionally uses the word "evolution" to imply a sense of survival and generational learning and environmental awareness, which reflects exactly the spirit of survival despite all odds and adaptation of the Psytrance scene in Lebanon.

external from underground scenes for that matter, to understand the significance, vibrancy, and, as articulated by another inventive artist I had the pleasure of meeting, the "endlessness" of Lebanon's strong and flowing artistic, visionary underground music cultures.

The emergence of the Lebanese Psytrance scene in the late 1990s occurred within the backdrop of Lebanon's complex political history. This period was marked by the aftermath of the civil war, which raged from 1975 to 1990, leaving the country devastated. The legacy of the country's civil war left Lebanon's infrastructure in ruins and urban landscapes scarred, including many potential nightclub spaces that were destroyed or heavily damaged. The slow pace of post-war reconstruction, exacerbated by ongoing political tensions, hindered efforts to restore urban amenities and establish new entertainment venues. The scarcity of traditional nightclub options created opportunities for alternative forms of entertainment. More so, the nightlife shifted to these abandoned, war-torn venues, such as parking areas, bulletted buildings, and beaches, in expression of a post-apocalyptic ambience, blending ecstasy for the termination of the war and despair for having experienced it (Buchakjian, 2015). The proliferation of Psytrance parties in these unconventional places reflected the resourcefulness of Lebanese youth in reclaiming and repurposing spaces in the post-war era.

DJ Gunther, another leading and rather infamous figure within the EDM and Techno scene in the country and region, explained to me as his penthouse pet rooster crowed near unfazed, unbothered sleepy cats, "during the war in Lebanon, people still threw parties, even though schools were closed. For four years, I didn't go to school, but I still managed to pass my exams because my brother helped me with them. Living

underground in bunkers, we didn't have much to do for fun. We had a ping-pong table, but playing all day for four years got boring. So, we found empty, unoccupied places where we could have parties”.

Indeed, the need for alternative forms of entertainment, such as underground Psytrance parties, can be attributed to various factors, including the desire to escape the pervasive sense of confinement and tension resulting from years of conflict and instability. After enduring the traumas of civil war and its aftermath, many Lebanese sought outlets for liberation and release from the stresses of daily life. The immersive and often euphoric atmosphere of Psytrance events offered a sense of freedom and catharsis, enabling participants to momentarily break free from the burdens of the past and the uncertainties of the present.

The communal camaraderie fostered by the underground Psytrance parties was also a response to the deep-seated tensions and divisions that permeated Lebanese society in the aftermath of the civil war. This polarization was further exacerbated by historical grievances, territorial disputes, and competing narratives and national identities of the civil war. The conflict had left a legacy of sectarian strife and political polarization, exacerbating divisions along religious, ethnic, and ideological lines. In such a fragmented and polarized environment, individuals often sought refuge and solidarity within like-minded communities.

Despite all the calamities and insecurities of post-war Lebanon, in 1998, Kaa had decided to take his career as a self-accomplished DJ seriously. The private parties, as well, held at that time had demonstrated to Kaa and his friends that there is “a need, there is a demand”, and they “could provide for it”. This, along with a growing follower base, they thought it was finally the time to create their own organized project. “We

needed, we were striving for something new, with more freedom and fewer limits: I hate rules”. By the 1999’s-2000’s, Kaa and a group of four other Lebanese friends founded Beirut Underground (Bug System) project, promoting the electronic scene: “Eager to start to get into DJing more seriously, we began by organizing private parties, gradually gaining momentum as word spread among friends. What started as intimate gatherings, evolving into a regular group of 50 to 100 people. The contacts started growing from there”. The name was a discreet ploy to refer to the organization’s underground persona: “Originally, we thought of calling it Beirut Underground because I’m into underground music. But ‘underground’ had negative connotations with drugs. So, we tweaked it to ‘B-U-G’, Beirut Underground, Bug System, as a camouflage”.

They had also influenced Naji Gebran, founder of BO18, to allow them to debut Psytrance parties in the club. Gebran had his doubts in the beginning, Kaa informed me: “No, psychedelic, no. Only the hippies come and there will be a lot of drugs”. Kaa and his group assured him that they had it all under control. Quickly, the parties proved successful after they began to gather more and more people whilst maintain a ‘clean’ front.

The labor for the organization of BUG System in its infancy was led by the act of contribution. “A few of my friends... this one used to work in the sound, so he brought us sound, this one used to work in the lighting, so he brought us lighting; it all came together like pieces of a puzzle”. Whilst it was stressful and troublesome at times (usually because of tension or gossip among community or organizing members and coming up short after a rave), their laboring was based on individual, informal, non-monetary trade of imaginary and material commodities, in reward for disaggregated satisfaction and ecstatic experiences.

This period also marked the ambitious post-war reconstruction era from 1993 to 2002, under the leadership of Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, who assumed office in 1992. He pursued a strategy of economic liberalization to attract foreign investment for rebuilding efforts and tax deregulation. A pivotal document outlining these strategies was "Horizon 2000, for Reconstruction and Development," which earmarked substantial funds for various sectoral and regional expenditure programs, amounting to billions of dollars (Daher, 2022). Hariri's economic vision for Lebanon emphasized the liberalization of capital flows and the deregulation of the tax system, aimed at incentivizing foreign investors to participate in the country's economic infrastructure development. This reality encouraged many to return to normal conditions of production and consumption (Daher, 2022).

While Psychedelic trance was played at these parties, the process of introducing this type of music was not a direct, straightforward one; it was an incremental process. With a lowered and more serious pitch, Kaa leaned forward to explain to me, "you have to consider that you're trying to educate people". Because of an evolving Psytrance scene and limited exposure to it within the country, I was made aware that listeners required time to acclimate their auditory sensibilities to the music's distinctive and wide characteristics. Organizers also prioritized Chill-out spaces to relieve listeners from the fast-paced, at times mental, dark, and heavy hum and drum of Psytrance. In 2001, for instance, when Bug System organized a rave at the Galaxy mall, they "made sure to include another Chill-out stage for people to relax. We played Chill-out music, which included different musical elements like Trip Hop, Drum and Bass, and Liquid Drum and Bass, but at a slower pace. It was important to provide a break from the darker Psy sounds for people to rest".

During this same year, Kaa graduated as a multimedia producer from a French graphic design university in 2001. He then launched his Visual Jockey (VJ) project together with his new philosophy that amalgamates visuals with music, by intricately merging the two elements. Being among the first to initialize the concept of a DJ and a VJ together, he coined the term of DVJ—a fully synchronized audiovisual experience.

Psytrance in the late 1990s and early 2000s was transitioning from the Goa Trance style, which had previously taken center stage as the most popular. By the time Kaa and his group entered the scene, the Goa Trance style had started to feel “outdated”. Emerging sounds known as Full-on were gaining traction, offering variations for both morning and night. Despite these shifts, morning sets continued to feature cheerful and melodic tunes. As the spectrum of Psytrance multiplied in both global and the local scene, becoming more and more “democratized” in its production and mixing, the nomenclature of different subgenres also increased despite many of these sounds already existing before being formally labeled.

Bug System managed at one point to garner around 800 people in the BO18 club, even on a Wednesday in the middle of the week, Gunther told me with wide glaring eyes and raised eyebrows, a gesture he continuously used to demonstrate his appreciation and intrigue with my scholarly inquiry into Psytrance. Both Gunther and Kaa agreed with the *vibe* of the community:

“We all almost knew each other. If we saw someone lost in the middle of the dance floor, we went to talk to him. Either he was civilian police, or he was really lost but interested in the music. And since we knew all of us, at least he knew someone I knew; no one was a stranger. You could say this group came because they knew another member of the community. So, we all also built this kind of trust, we were partying safely. We didn't hear any rape, anyone stealing, maybe a few problems going back home because they were drunk. We knew how to take care of each other. And everybody knew who he was, where he was going, how he was doing. No one would get lost or [be uncomfortable].”

After confessing his love for his cats—his “children” for whom he stayed in Lebanon as soon as one of the cats gave birth on his chest whilst he slept one night—Gunther notified me that with the main crew of Bug System including Kaa constantly on the move in and out of Lebanon, the management was unable to sustain itself for too long and grow.

Traveling in and out of Lebanon did not diminish Kaa’s influence; on the contrary, wherever he went, his talent and pride for his national music culture shone brightly. A notable instance occurred on May 21, 2003, when Kaa was invited by Talamasca, a renowned Psytrance artist, to direct the visual presentation for his album release, "Zodiac," at Paris’s Fnac. It was a milestone for Kaa, who was resolute in incorporating "Bug System - Lebanon" alongside his VJ artist name, Visual Suspect. "It was a dream," Kaa expressed proudly, sharing with me a low-resolution video of Talamasca’s live performance alongside his visuals. "I even captured footage of myself strolling down the Champs-Élysées and descending on the escalator".

Kaa came to understand that the purpose of his international music career was to promote his homeland. "Even though I resided in France, I always featured Lebanon alongside my DJ name on flyers to ensure everyone knew I was Lebanese and not a camel rider or terrorist." Kaa took pride in showcasing Lebanon's vibrant Psytrance scene. While Lebanon was marketed for its commercial nightlife and nightclubbing industry, Kaa wanted people to see that we had more than just clubs; “we have culture, an artist scene, an underground thriving scene where tons of people express themselves”. The underground culture in Lebanon provided Kaa with a more appealing sense of ‘Lebaneseness’, one not based on bombs, conflict, and violence, but liberation, kindness, and peace. Emerging from the ravages of war, in a society marked by tension,

historical distortions, conflicting narratives, and internal discord, there was little inclination towards forging a unified Lebanese identity or consensus. Amidst the cacophony of divergent understandings on national and collective identity and affiliations, whether rooted in Arabism, Phoenician heritage, Christianity, or Islam, the Psytrance community served as a unifying haven: in a house of many mansions (Salibi, 1988), the underground scene was a common dining room where no one could be seated at the head of the table, and that was something to be proud about.

### **B. Between Conflict and ‘PsyCult’-ure: The Birth of Psycult Amidst Lebanon’s Political Turmoil (2004 to 2006)**

In the meantime, another influential and founding Psytrance management was in the making: Psycult. In its infancy, Psycult was a talent collective, an entertainment event agency that was hosting talents like juggling and poi. It was initially named LazyDays, which with time, as it started to host psychedelic raves, had switched to Psycult. Bako, the founder of LazyDays, now no longer in the country, recalled to me that he was on the move between Greece and Lebanon at the time. He had become acquainted with Psytrance through his travels: “In Lebanon there was no YouTube and all of that sorts, you had to travel to bring new stuff to Lebanon”. He reminisced fondly about his first experiences listening to Psytrance in the Samothraki Dance Festival in 2002 he attended in Samothraki Island (Greece) and his trips to Thailand. Bako had also met with an Italian DJ named Maurizio, who was knowledgeable about Psytrance around 2003-04. Maurizio had been a raver in Europe but had come to Lebanon on business. Through a friend, he had intersected Bako. They conversed and pondered why there still wasn’t a full-fledged, more frequently organized Psytrance scene in Lebanon. “To tell you the truth, I wanted and could do events. And I was looking for a niche.

Because there was already House and there was trance. And I found my niche: Psychedelic Trance”, Bako confided in me. With his extensive connections and network in Lebanon through his cooperations with Mix FM and Bacardi parties, he could secure the materials necessary for organization parties.

On the hunt for assistants, Bako invited his neighbor, Fadi, a rad-in-the-mind tattoo artist with a long beard adorned with a ring tied at the tip, a sweet but intimidating-looking big man parceled up with black and red tattoos and piercings. After filling him in on Psytrance, “the atmosphere, the history, the spirituality behind it, and the musical part of it”, and showing him some photos, Fadi, with his drawing and design skills, became charged with the organization’s Deco, body painting, and backdrops and designs. The “Psycult family”, did not grow to be a large group.

In 2004, the organization, which, as a Psytrance raves management group, still lacked a formal name, carried out an introduction party to, in a manner similar to Kaa’s group at his time, introduce Psytrance culture softly to the crowds. Shortly after on January 12th, 2005, under the same objective, Psycult, in collaboration with another group, had a workshop called: “Understanding Electronic Music”. They exchanged expertise on areas such as the psychedelic music and Goa trance, DJing and music production. “The people are eager to learn more, and the scene counts [...] new psy-freaks every day” (Mushroom Magazine, 2006, p. 38).

2005-06 ushered difficult times in the country. The assassination of Former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri in 2005 shook the scene. On February the 14th, 2005, Hariri ascended his car after dropping by the Café de l’Etoile. Passing by seafront corniche, a truck equipped with bombs shredded his vehicle. The blast dug a crater in the ground, leaving twenty-one people killed in addition to Hariri near the St. George

Hotel. The aftermath of February 14, 2005, marked another instance of Lebanon's insecure recurring political patterns. However, the implications seemed more significant this time around, with the United Nations Security Council and a Special International Tribunal intervening, and the looming threat of a resurgence of civil war.

As political tensions escalated, however, the country became divided into two blocs: the anti-Syrian March 14 Bloc, led by the Future Movement, and the March 8 pro-Syrian bloc, led by Hezbollah. The assassination of Hariri ignited a mass reaction: it triggered the Cedar Revolution, calling for national unity and for the termination of Syrian intervention. The protests resulted in the resignation of the government and prompted new elections in May 2005, in which the March 14 coalition, led by Hariri's son Saad, secured most seats.

The assassination of Hariri sparked a series of transformations in Lebanon, affecting both political and social realms. Initially, the nation was swept with emotions of excitement and national pride in the aftermath of his death. However, this sentiment quickly turned to fear and uncertainty as subsequent political assassinations occurred, including against Bassel Fleihan, Samir Kassir, and George Hawi in 2005 and Gibran Tueni and Pierre Gemayel in 2006. The aspirations for a reinvigorated and liberated Lebanon began to diminish in the face of escalating violence and instability.

Impacted by the general atmosphere and mood in the country, the underground scene became, quite literally, “safer” (Sehnaoui, 2009, minute 1:07). For this, it wasn't long before the Psytrance spirit was rekindled after a minor standstill.

“So we did that, it went very well because for the 3-4 months that we were active, not many people were doing parties because of the death of Hariri”.

On February 26, 2005, Bako held his first official Psytrance rave as Psycult, entitled 'Namaste'. The party introduced their logo and included local Psycrafts, such as air string art, transient art & fluo body, painting, spiritual trance dance performers, 3d structures, and yogie tea and organic goodies. Psycult continued carrying out Psytrance raves throughout 2005. DJs from Bug System were frequently on the line-up for Psycult raves, with DJ Kaa being one of them. They were located sometimes on the beach, but more frequently in The Art Lounge, Bourj Hammoud, "a nice place where you might meet psyfreaks and party-lovers" (Mushroom Magazine, 2016, p. 38). Art Lounge served as an intriguing venue for them, providing a platform where they could showcase their custom-made 3D decorations used during the raves. These intricate creations remained on display for an extended period, with some even being offered for sale following the Namaste event.

At the beginning, "the mood of the parties was that we didn't want to involve a sponsor, we weren't doing it for the money; we used to get people to sell healthy food. I would use the money from LazyDays performances to fund Psycult. I tried to keep it going". Bako quickly met his statement with another: "I'll tell you honestly though, at the end of the day I was losing a lot of money. I was paying everybody, and the DJs come and go. But it was all on my shoulders and it was already stressful enough". This had encouraged him to get in touch with sponsors, a tobacco firm, to hold some of what would be his last parties "to break even at least".

The raves, for Bako were "small, a maximum of 1000 people". Similar to Kaa, Bako informed me the community all knew each other, they were aware of who was who. Police inspections or raids never occurred while they were raving, despite Psycult lacking the proper licensing and registration. "It was all black, we were not a company

registered; we didn't do anything illegal to bother". Bako suspects "they had some sort of free range so as to encourage tourism" during this uneasy time.

"New Lebanese talents are emerging and we have all the inspiration inside our country to make a perfect psychedelic event, from deco designers to jugglers and fire performances. Very promising new DJs [...like] DJ Gunther [...are...] very active in developing the scene in our country." (Mushroom Magazine, 2006, p. 38)

The underground scene was significant for its enthusiasts, as it performed as a platform for expressing the issues occurring 'above ground.' For instance, a rave organized by Psycult on June 4, 2005, was titled "Trance for Peace," highlighting the community's desire for harmony amidst turmoil. In another initiative, the United Nations became captivated by the scene and collaborated with Psycult on a "Dance mine action" party in November 2005. The aim of this effort was to crowd-source money to aid Lebanon in extracting its 500,000 remaining landmines. Psycult, as well as another group Lebanese Ravers<sup>4</sup>, assisted them in materializing this event.

Remarkably Psycult and their Psyfreaks seized a great win for the Psytrance scene: performing were Psycult on Wednesday, June 21, 2006, in an edition of the Fête de la Musique, organized that year by the French Embassy in Lebanon, the Ministry of Culture, by the Zico House, Solidere, ADG (Zico House, 2006). "Beirut was on its ups at the time. There were parties, it was rising up".

### **C. Psyleb's Psy Session Chronicles: Cementing Lebanon's Psytrance Legacy (2006)**

On that same day, another gem in the making had performed its first Psytrance rave, entitled Psy Session I: the Lebanese Psychedelic Community, Psyleb. It's later

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<sup>4</sup> Lebanese Ravers was a collective of organizers that networked ravers and at times supported in some events.

deserved and gartered fame and success can be ascribed to its founders, the wild and kind trio, two of which I had the fortune of speaking with, Rabih Baaklini and Mido Taha. The trio also decided to launch ‘psyleb.com,’ the first online forum in the Arab world dedicated to Psytrance and the Psy culture during the day of Fête de la Musique. Rabih danced with memories recalling the time creating the forum: “At first, it was a forum. So, I did a website and I remember we sat down, night after night, just working on the website, putting different... Because, while we were building the website, we are also learning about Psytrance. We just started, right? So, posting about these different topics on the forum, the different articles was really helpful for all of us. A friend helped us make it, launched a logo. Back then, you couldn't really promote on Facebook; it was just word-of-mouth”.

### ***1. DJ Cyberdragon: Mido Taha***

Mido, born in 1983 in Beirut, Lebanon, to an Iraqi mother and Lebanese father, was raised in Beirut. He embarked on travels around the world from a young age, immersing himself in clubbing and rave scenes worldwide. At the age of 17, he began his journey as a DJ.

“I was still playing commercial stuff, and learning to play whatever they pay you, whatever they want you to play. But I used to listen to Techno and Trance. And then one time I was looking to buy trance CDs and I bought a CD called the album of ‘Man With No Name’, ‘Earth Moving the Sun’. And that was the first Goa Trance album that I listened to, and I was like: ‘whoa what is this music?’. This is like trance, but it's not really trance. I went and looked it up and I found Goa Trance and then I

found the Psytrance festivals and the Psytrance culture and everything. And I started to download and buy more Goa Trance and Psytrance music.”

He began organizing psychedelic events at local clubs, using the new moniker "Dark Dragon or Dragonpsy," in an effort to revitalize the dwindling Psy scene in Lebanon at the time. “Back in 2003 or 2004, I tried to play in Lebanon and in clubs but not many places wanted this kind of music: They were like, this is too hard, this is too fast, but I managed to play a few places with the support of my friends.”

“But I still hadn't experienced the full Psytrance culture until the Spring of 2006” when ‘Dark Dragon’, in collaboration with DJs from Turkey, Japan, India, Germany, and other countries organized and performed at a pre-festival party for the ‘Soulclipse Festival’ in Turkey, Antalya. It took place on the March 27<sup>th</sup> to April 1<sup>st</sup> of 2006. “A Universal Trance Gathering” the flyer read (Goabase, 2006). “And that was the festival that changed our life. I took with me Rabih, artist name Psychogenesis, and, and our friend DJ Moudy as well. I played in the pre-party for the festival”. Mido declared so thoroughly and in an over the moon pitch: “the world opened up for me at that festival”.

Rabih shared an identical burst of high radiance and ecstasy while reminiscing about Soulclipse.

“There was an eclipse at the time, and they decided to do the festival in one of the best spots to see it, it was *magical*. 40,000 people. It was love at first sight. You know when you've been looking for something your entire life and you don't know what it is, until you find it. You then realize, *this is what I've been looking for*. We had the best week of our life. You know, we got introduced to this whole new culture, this whole new world, Psytrance and beautiful people and colors and dreadlocks and expression that we've never seen in Lebanon”.

This pivot in time and space became a wondrous intersection in the lives of these three young boys. Downhearted and down in blues after their return to Lebanon,

the three boys resisted the notion of a reality without the reverie Psychedelic Trance rite of passage. Experiencing what almost all Psytrance ravers I met can agree on, they understood and sensed as if they had been awakened from a long existential slumber with a sudden flash: “we need that, we need this in our life. We cannot go back now. Now that we have that, we cannot go back”.

Just a month later, on July 12, during the much-anticipated grand opening of the new rooftop Sky Bar nightclub at the Beirut waterfront exhibition center BIEL, a stark shift in the atmosphere had been observed: while guests reveled in the festivities, featuring performances by Ricky Martin and Paul van Dyk, an underlying sense of unease prevailed. Israeli jets circled overhead amidst the backdrop of fireworks illuminating the harbor. The following morning witnessed Israeli airstrikes on Beirut and southern Lebanon, swiftly followed by rocket attacks from Hezbollah targeting northern Israel. The resulting conflict inflicted widespread devastation on southern Lebanon and parts of Beirut, with casualties reported on both sides. Tragically, the toll included fifteen civilians in northern Israel and over 350 Lebanese civilians.

With the upheaval of the 2006 July war, Beirut shot back low” Bako expressed as a historian of his lived experience. “And then I left in 2006. I said: ‘I could no longer stay in Lebanon’”. This sentiment was echoed by many who felt compelled to leave their homeland due to the escalating conflict, seeking safety and stability elsewhere. The war not only disrupted daily life but also led to a significant wave of emigration, making it difficult to jumpstart and kick-off a full-fledged scene properly. This event marked the final rave for Psycult, as it did not last after Bako’s depart. He had passed it on to another fellow Lebanese, but it no longer carried out Psytrance raves.

Concurrently, the techno scene was also in the making in Lebanon, organized primarily by Kaotic Systems (formed in 2003). Koatic Systems pioneered the Techno scene. Kaotic System as a university project in 2003, kickstarted Lebanon's techno scene. Meeting one of the co-founders Mahmoud Hossari, artist name Kapushka, I could directly realize how much his infamous presence in the scene exuded and conveyed a deep awareness of the transformative impact their creation had on the underground music and Techno scene in the country. The collective frequently encouraged a free party culture as in Europe; many had personally encountered the anarchic and anti-authoritarian spirit of these European gatherings. "I found inspiration from Koatic Systems because the parties were free, exceptional, and the community was incredibly cool", Mido told me. Drawing influence from their free raves, Psy Session 1 for Psyleb was also "free for free people".

Meanwhile in Paris, Kaa continued to exhibit just how much Psytrance was used as a conduit for expression on the ordeals of his hometown. On July 13, 2006, he was scheduled to VJ alongside an Israeli Psytrance artist, named Popstream. Kaa used this expressive platform to reflect on the political situation in his home country, highlighting the ongoing conflict between Israel and Lebanon. "I projected some political messaging saying, 'Israel has declared war on Lebanon'," Kaa recalled. "No one told me anything except for the Israeli DJ, who was surprised and asked, 'What are you doing?'" In response, Kaa explained that he was merely reflecting the headlines and news coverage of the time, which were not being censored. Despite the Israeli DJ's objections, Kaa stood firm, expressing his desire for peace and condemning the attacks on Lebanon. "We want peace," he emphasized. "You are attacking us." This also demonstrated that DJs were leaving Lebanon and embarking on significant projects abroad, achieving

great success when given the proper resources and stability (a reality they otherwise lacked in Lebanon) outside the country.

Once things settled down in Lebanon, many psychedelic raves were organized by Psyleb after that, promoted as 'Psy Session xx'. Slowly but surely, more and more attenders started to accumulate, until, at some points they "had 300 or 500 at the parties". The community was notified through three main platforms, lebaneseravers.com, goabase.net and trancehits.com, usually in light and fun competition with each other.

#### **D. Unity in Divided Times: Psyleb's Forestronika Festivals Pulsating Through Lebanon's Turbulence (2008-2011)**

Psyleb saw its vision of organizing true psychedelic festivals "that will unite all psy heads under one sky and above one land beginning to happen" materialize in 2008 on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August with the birth of the Forestronika Festival, the first psychedelic and electronic music festival in Lebanon (Taha, n.d.).

It is indeed surprising (but not favorable) that this bunch could successfully host public festivals at a time where instability in the country was peaking. The outbreak of war exacerbated existing divisions within Lebanon, reaching a climax in May 2008, only three months prior to the festival, with ten days of intense sectarian conflict, the most severe since the Civil War. Anti-government protesters demanded the government's resignation, a call rejected by the Lebanese government, fueling further violence. Conflict culminated in the release of Samir Geagea, leader of the Lebanese Forces, from an 11-year imprisonment, and the return of General Michel Aoun from exile in France. Following the 2006 war, Geagea aligned with the March 14 coalition, while Aoun allied with Hezbollah against the government. The March 14 coalition,

including the Lebanese Forces, Saad Hariri's Future Movement, and leftist movements, supported the government, while the March 8 coalition, dubbed 'the opposition,' comprising Hezbollah, Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement, and others, called for the government's resignation and a reshuffling to achieve a 'national consensus' government. Despite efforts to find a compromise, the opposition initiated a general strike on May 7, resulting in riots, violence, and sectarian strife that persisted for ten days. The conflict was eventually resolved through negotiations brokered by Qatar, leading to the Doha Agreement.

Mido also left Lebanon for Saudi Arabia that same year for these exact reasons in the situation of the country. This voyage, however, did not stop him from excelling outside with the talents he learned and developed in the country. Starting 2009, he became one of a leading and avant-garde figure in the Saudi Arabia Psytrance scene. These raves were especially risky in Saudi Arabia. "In Saudi, it was all really secretive, no flyers, no posters—they were quite illegal. The mere fact that women and men were meeting was illegal, music was illegal, alcohol was illegal. Yeah, it was, but that didn't stop us. I even taught one of my best friends in Saudi to DJ and he became a Psytrance DJ after".

Traveling to Bahrain from Saudi Arabia by car was easy, allowing Mido to export Psytrance to there as well. "I remember, at one festival there, they were playing electronic music that was not Psytrance. And in the end, it was me and another Indian DJ who played Psytrance. And I played quite commercial Full-on Psytrance with remixes of popular tracks. So, the people were like, 'Oh, I know this song'. That was the beginning of the scene in Bahrain. I went on to play this type of music in festivals and alongside rock DJs after".

### **1. DJ Psychogenesis: Rabih Baaklini**

With Mido out of the country, Rabih was left to manage most of the Psyleb events in Lebanon. Rabih, in his response to another user on trancehits, writes on Wednesday, May 27, 2009, on a thread advertising that year's Forestronika Festival: "Psyleb is doing its best for the psychedelic scene in Lebanon! regular psychedelic club parties are being held, every 2 months, and I can say that we're growing, and we've already united a lot of Psyheads in lebanon! [...] Shanti" (Trancehits, 2009).

Rabih's childhood throughout Lebanon in distress was marked by a relentless quest to find his place in the world. From a young age, he sought out "his scene" with unwavering determination. He explored various avenues, leaving no stone unturned in his search. "I tried different music. I tried Hip Hop Rap before I tried. I tried different stuff and nothing clicked. None. I didn't feel anything for anything for them". Yet, despite his efforts, none of these endeavors seemed to resonate with him. Crossing Mido's path in their boyhood at the Lebanese American University, Rabih got "awakened" to Psytrance. "I went to his place once and he was listening to Psytrance. He was listening to Infected Mushrooms, mm-hmm. *The music just clicked in my head.*" Rabih spoke with a cinematic flair, his words enunciated in a slow manner. "What the f\*ck? What *is* that". You know, there wasn't still a *real* Psytrance scene in Lebanon [...] I started researching about it and I started getting to know different genres".

Rabih was always an added and valuable member of the Psyleb journey, quite literarily from the beginning. He was a bartender in the early 2000's. His connections with pubs had bridged the opportunity to play Psytrance music with a space: "we were able to start doing small events in pubs. They were called "House Meets Trance".

Should we have put trance alone, no one would've shown up". As a marketing ploy to garner more crowd members, they played House in the beginning of the night and, after the darker times of the night in the wash of the morning, Psytrance.

"People would come in the beginning for the House music. In our minds, we would play House music just to say '*we played House*'. At eight in the morning, we would play Psytrance. Mido and I started mixing using our virtual DJs; there were no Psytrance DJs in the group. At that time, we were playing what we think today is commercial music: Infected Mushrooms, Astrix...40 people would come once we start, 20 would have remained in the morning, but, then, the 20 who would stay would get their *minds blown*. What the f\*ck; This is how we started our scene, we started with 20, those 20 people brought 20 the next event".

As the community started to take form throughout 2006-7, Mido took a small step back from Psyleb and more into graphic designing before leaving for Saudi Arabia, while Rabih continued to delve deeper "down that rabbit hole". Mido would still come and help-out, however, he was no longer domiciled in Lebanon to be a full-time partner. Every year since then up until 2011, Psyleb would orchestrate their annual Forestronika Fest, where their community would meet once for a 3-4-day journey in nature to share the most precious euphoric moments on a dancefloor under a sky of stars. "We started Forestronika with 200 people, 250, and, then, we never stopped. We kept growing our efforts and the community every year. We had an event with around 2,000 people, from whom grew crews, more members, which is a good thing. We welcomed that that because I was aware it was going to attract more people into the scene and expand it". Rabih had also started playing all over the world. He joined a "big record label, and went nuts", he said with a sinister grin.

“The first electronic music gathering of its kind in the middle past lining-up more than 40 DJs coming from different countries and backgrounds, Psyleb is proud to unite more than 20 genres of electronic music.

The DJ’ representing their record labels will be performing throughout a non-stop-day 3-day journey surrounded by Psyleb’s psychedelic, colorful, handmade decoration in the wild naturel environment of our green forest in the Chouf area at the location of the well-known Eco Village” (Trancehits, 2008)”.

Children giggled and played amidst the towering trees, while the free-spirited adult community members, adorned in their groove couture, vibrant, colorful, relaxed, flowing fabrics, fringe details, and eclectic accessories, delved into workshops and activities aimed at guiding them towards a healthier, more peaceful and sustainable way of life. Topics ranged from self-development and organic nutrition to recycling handcrafts and marine biodiversity. Juggling and fire-spitting shows enchanted audiences with their mesmerizing, sparkling performances. Mamas swayed rhythmically with their infants wrapped against their chests, captivated by the pulsating rhythms reminiscent of the maternal heartbeat. Daily Yoga and Pilates sessions provided a rejuvenating start and end to each day, while meditation and body-cleansing techniques offered moments of inner reflection. Perched in a panoramic view of magical lands and valleys, attendees chanted and swayed to rhythms of traditional/tribal music in diverse workshops, explored healing foods and superfoods through informative talks, and engaged with important environmental talks. If the music, a selection of emerging Psytrance genres, such as Progressive, Hi-Tech, Goa Trance, and Dark Psy, alongside other EDM styles, became tiring, one could unwind to more soothing tunes at the alternative Chill-out stage, featuring Trip Hop, Liquid Dnb, Psychill, Ambient, and so on. To cater to a broader audience, more mainstream and Progressive Psytrance styles were featured, ensuring accessibility and appeal across a diverse crowd.

The festivals came alive with immersive synths on the dancefloor, art exhibitions, flea markets, perked-up dogs chasing shrub and other pets, chai stations, and live painting, offering a feast for the senses and a showcase of local talent. Adventurous souls could embark on ATV guided tours or hiking expeditions, exploring the surrounding landscape. In essence, the Forestronika Festivals were conceived with the intention of being more than mere 3–4-day Psytrance raves—they were an immersive, ethereal spacetime journey that transported and/or vacationed the attentional mind, invigorated the body with sensory delights or frights, and uplifted the soul.

#### **E. Rebirth and Rebranding: Forest Frequencies, the Birthchild of Forestronika (2012-2015)**

The community began to coalesce more effectively around 2012, with a notable milestone being the Baobab Psychedelic Dance Festival in June that year, Mido disclosed to me: “when we did Baobab festival the community was almost like one community”. During this period, Rabih and his partner Nicole at the time, aiding him with his projects, experienced a falling-out. Nicole had taken the decision to register Forestronika under her name and ownership, and she assumed sole management responsibilities. In response, Rabih initiated a new management venture called Forest Frequencies, launching the first event under this banner in August of the same year.

“We've had new energies poured into PSYLEB this year. As we are celebrating our fifth consecutive year we have decided to change the name of our yearly anticipated electronic music festival,

Psyleb Presents:

"Forest Frequencies". The Electronic Music Festival August 23, 24, 25, 26, 2012  
‘Get Low, Mid, & High with us...’ (Lebtivity, n.d.).

## **F. Generational Handover: A Surge in the Scene's New Talent, Collaborations, Leaders, and Managements**

### ***1. DJ and sound engineer Engine Ear: Elie Sakr***

“How would you describe these festivals, using your senses, the vibe, the environment”, I asked DJ and sound engineer Elie Sakr, whose latest artist name, I must admit, is almost as inventive as he is: Engine Ear. “Oversized tattooed gym freaks and 45-year-old barbies”, he, without a thought, relayed to me chuckling. “No but seriously, it was so good back then, more like a camping trip with music, authentic, genuine people. Most of these people had lives, and they would go up on the weekends to these festivals to unload”. Some were doctors, professors. He both raved and played at the Forest Frequencies festivals.

Sakr, a sonic conjurer, sorcerer with long dark brown hair intentionally tied up “in the messiest way possible”, was an exceptional DJ, known for his innovative mixes on the darker spectrum of genres such as Trip Hop, Horror Trance, Breaks, and IDM. His music warped the senses in and off themselves. Despite him being a genuine sweetheart, he lopped in a lamentable lover's *circulus inferni*, where he remained entangled with incompatible partners for many years. Throughout these relationships, he often found his ideas, business, or equipment appropriated by his partners—a pattern he was final able to break.

Caressing one of his three cats, which he had initially fostered but later chose to adopt, Volt (I came to realize he was the loudest/speediest character of the gang)—they were unlike any other cats I have encountered, almost resembling dignified, affluent dogs—, he spoke, “Well, my dad was a DJ, and I grew up in a household with turntables, and I got the hang of them early on. My father played Disco, oldies, Pop music back in the 1900's ”. Recalling his early influences, he continued, “I also used to like collecting

music. We didn't have internet at home, so I used to record my tracks from the radio stations, one track at a time, onto tapes. I couldn't buy them, one track used to cost a lot".

His journey in the music industry flowed in a mixture of luck, boldness, and, later on, clever talent. His initial inflection point was in 2005, however: he still vividly and in amusement recollects: "a girl I liked at school, Saint Jospeh School in Ornit Chehwein, asked me if I was a DJ after I got popular for selling feel-good, real-good mixtapes". He wasn't a DJ but impulsively claimed the title and adopted the name DJ Alpha. After a couple of months of assuming Alpha, his first "gig" came in a birthday party at a place, name Q-Ball, Rabieh. "There was the same Tiesto CD playing over and over again. I don't know what I was thinking, but I approached the owner and asked him to play. 'I'm a DJ don't worry', I assured him". His father's sprung with support to transport Sakr's CD case over to him.

Sakr chuckled whilst speaking humbly about his first gig, where he had to improvise with a makeshift setup: "the guys didn't even have turntables or CDJs. They had a giant mixer, and I had to fade in and fade out. That's all", and yet, somehow, he soon landed his first residency at the location. They "paid me like \$50 at the time. That is a lot of money for a 13-year-old". His father continuously supported him throughout his career. "He helped me out big time, with everything, how to connect speakers, how to troubleshoot speakers, how to handle the mixer properly.

He would then use this capital to invest in rented CDJs for practice. "That's how I got into DJing. I then, I started to discover new styles and genres and make the most of everything. I was self-taught, through a process initially of trial and error on that first mixer—I still have that mixer". Sakr also gradually developed a leading and innovative

sound engineering venture over the years in this investment manner, known as The Network. Through this venture, he offers high-quality sound equipment a engineering and event planning services, establishing himself as a known leader in the field in the country.

Sakr met Mido through an online messaging platform used throughout the early 2000's, Msn Messenger. Mido had ended up as one of his virtual friends, even though they had never met: "Lebanon is very small", he added. Mido exposed Sakr to Psytrance, just as with Rabih, through posts on his feed of different tracks. "Actually, it was 2005," he corrected himself. "So it was then that Mido sent me my first archive. It had Psytrance tracks from Infected Mushrooms, Yahel, and Asterix – these were the commercial artists of the time." Sakr conveyed appreciation for Mido's music sharing, as "Internet connections were nowhere near what they are today, and both uploading and downloading music like this was rare and took ages." These files were a rite of passage: "Mido, in a way, introduced me to a whole new world"; Sakr, pausing conversation to greet a mischievous grin spreading across his face, declared, "he popped my cherry, in a way".

"At the time I was playing at both private and public parties under the name DJ Alpha, but my music of choice was Break Beats, Bomfunk MCs, and some Garage music." In 2006, he also discovered Techno, impacted by a set by previously Bug System artists Gunther and Stamina that he heard on a Mix FM radio station episode called "Underground Session." Elie became "obsessed with the energy and vibe of the Techno music" from that era, describing it as "alive" and distinctly different from contemporary Techno.

He swiftly returned to his roots in old-school Hip Hop, reigniting his obsession with the genre and playing old-school Hip Hop sets regularly. Sakr reminisced about his time as a resident DJ at a popular establishment in Gemmayze called Jukebox. He vividly recalled his residency at the pub/club, spanning from 2008 to 2012, where he performed seven nights a week. During his sets, he curated a diverse mix of old-school Hip Hop, Dubstep, and various other genres, captivating audiences with his eclectic musical selections. Around that time in 2011, his artist name had become Sputnik.

At the core of Sakr's journey was a pivotal realization, encapsulated in his words: "At the end of the day, I hated it so much because the generation that listened to the real Hip Hop, the real old-school Hip Hop, kind of grew out of it." This discontent with the evolving Hip Hop scene spurred his decision to pivot away from it as his primary source of income. As he reflected on this shift, he recalled, "that was when I decided, you know what, f\*ck it, I actually decided to pursue what I like." Sakr's transition into the Psytrance scene was within a couple of months after this epiphany.

Under the spell of his newfound revelation, Sakr saw the opportunity to inquire for a spot on the line-up in one of Psyleb's public Psytrance raves in 2011 when Mido and his team were renting some CDJs from him. He then connected with Nicole. Recounting his first foray into playing at a Psytrance event, he shared, "I played Chill-Out in my first ever Psytrance gig. I used to go parties before that, so... I kind of knew what to expect, but...my first set was...I still didn't have the proper experience to take on the responsibility of such a type of dancefloor at the time, and, yet, my set left an impression". From then on, "it was addictive".

I had later learned from Sakr that private parties weren't a frequent happening while playing at Psyleb raves; most semi-public parties gathered quick a line-up of both

local and international DJ's and required heavy organization. A year after taking on another, still active, artist name, Engine Ear, in 2011, Sakr started to carry out his own Psytrance raves. In the early days, these gatherings lacked a formal identity. Initially, they were nameless, mere gatherings organized by him and his team to gather like-minded individuals seeking a shared experience. However, as the events evolved, they began to coalesce into something more cohesive. Rabih played a significant role. He not only contributed his musical talents but also went above and beyond to enhance the overall experience. For instance, during one memorable event, he drove a considerable distance from Yahshush to Beirut to procure speaker stands for the speakers initially placed on the ground, ensuring optimal audio quality for all attendees. His presence alone drew attention and admiration from the crowd, as he was a prominent figure within the community.

Recognizing his potential, Rabih expressed interest in having Sakr join the Psyleb team, officially commencing his duties with them in 2013. His enthusiasm was infectious, and the prospect of collaboration sparked excitement and anticipation. "It was a dream come true to me, you know? When Rabih suggested I join, I playfully brushed it off like it was nothing. 'Yes sure', I told him calmly". This towering, ominous big man proceeded to regale me with his high-pitched, laugh-packed proclamation: "then I went to my friends squealing on repeat from the top of my lungs: 'I'm going to be part of Psyleb'". That same year, he conjured his first official Psytrance management, eventually the first out of many to fall prey to his loverous affairs: Morning Glory. It blazed the trail for underground Forest Trance, "still a very new and niche genre". Different Psytrance managements had begun to disseminate around this time.

Regardless of having his own management, Sakr remained enthusiastic to help with Psyleb. In a 2014 Forest Frequencies, Sakr camped with the team on the site for a month of preparations. “We would have more fun in preparation than in the festival. There was a deck with a real f\*cking big breakfast, the best food for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. They used to make for the crew fresh juices and healthy food that keep you pumped. These festivals were always professional, neat, well-intentioned, and well-thought of, with hand-made deco everywhere”.

## **G. Satanic Panic Over the Psychedelic Trance Scene**

### ***1. 2015 New Year’s Eve Party by Psylienz***

A year later the scene was forced underground in hiding, even more so than usual. In 2014, one year prior to the incident, MTV issued an article, causing a mass frenzy in reality about Binaural beats. In this video was a boy in super low-resolution taping himself at home listening to a CD with binaural beats in a state of seizure/epilepsy. The claim of this skit was that one could “get high” listening to this music; “these are alpha waves, gamma waves, theta waves, they kind of alter your state of mind, they can induce sleep, they can maybe help with the hangover, but I'm talking like, on a microscopic level, it's not really that profound. It's not going to make you go out of your mind”. The exaggerative and false accusations made in the article and video, produced a mass craze and hysteria over any electronic tunes sounding foreign to popular music in the country.

2015 witnessed another dramatized scare over Yoga. Father Marwan Khoury, in an episode on Noursat, the first Christian television station in Lebanon and the Arab world, instructs in reply to a question over Yoga:

“*Ouaa* (Caution) not to practice it. Yoga is a satanic act par excellence and the practice of calling on spirits. And everyone that is practicing this thing, it is causing cases of indescribable hysteria. I give a special plea to the church to ban experiential meditation and Yoga and the mantra. The church should strictly ban them. These are disasters entering our community and are being practiced in our schools/models. Please be aware of these. And if they want, they can review episodes done on *Telelumnier* on the Yoga and its damages [...]. Let them learn on people that repented from the Yoga and what they say about it” (Pere Marwan Khoury “God is love”, 2015)

Sakr explained to me: “One incident was about the Yoga in Lebanon, where the priests were angry that people are finding peace in ways other than through Jesus, maybe. So there was kind of a crackdown on Yoga parties. They actually once raided a Yoga festival in Yahshush, and that festival had absolutely no alcohol, no cigarettes. People weren't allowed to smoke cigarettes. No drugs, nothing in any way illegal. They like busted the gathering. It wasn't a party, it was a Yoga gathering. Yeah. They didn't even have music, they had like really small speakers, and it was mainly Meditation And Yoga. So yeah, so they went, they took some people into interrogation. It was like the funniest thing ever”.

With the scene kicking off and continuing to bud an even larger bouquet of Psytrance enthusiasts in the country, a terrible plight fell on the shoulders of one management that had made a terrible mistake, igniting a controversy over a Psytrance rave held on the New Years of 2015. The misfortune, which granted could've been avoided, landed on Fadi Fawwaz's 'Psyleins' management. Weirdel, a well-known, respectable artist from Greece, was an artist on the New Year's party's line-up. He was signed with a record label called Digital Drugs, which was written under his name on the flyer as tradition states to write the record label of the artist's name when being advertised. Little above the record label on the flyer was the silhouette of a human face, designed with geometric lines—a rather frequent icon in psychedelic art. Visible on the

forehead, however, was an Egyptian Ankh, resembling a Mormon cross flipped upside-down. The combination of both the record label title, as well as the Ankh sparked outrage among the media and some spokespeople, accusing the Psychedelic trance scene of being devil worshippers. Fawwaz was called on air on to clear allegations.

It is important to note that these incidents of satanic panic, each building upon the other, occurred during a period when the political class needed a significant mass public distraction. The country had been affected by the consequences of the faltering Arab Spring (2011), particularly the Syrian war. Since 2011, legislative activity had largely stagnated, and major public institutions and agencies were nearly intentionally paralyzed. During this time, Lebanon endured two nominal governments with lengthy periods of executive paralysis in between. The legislative elections planned for 2013 were canceled, causing the Parliament elected in 2009 to extend its term multiple times, which severely undermined its legitimacy. Additionally, since the end of Michel Suleiman's presidency in May 2014, the Presidential office had remained vacant.

The issue of the Presidency had been particularly contentious. Both political factions held uncompromising positions, making a resolution elusive. The 8 March coalition only supported Michel Aoun, while the 14 March coalition backed Samir Geagea. The situation unexpectedly shifted in late 2015 when Saad Hariri, the leader of the 14 March coalition, proposed Suleiman Franjeh, a member of the 8 March coalition with strong ties to Hezbollah and the Syrian regime.

Although Hariri's proposal initially seemed hopeful, it led to unforeseen political dynamics. Franjeh's candidacy, being a secondary Christian leader, prompted Aoun and Geagea to unite, resulting in a historic agreement on January 18, 2016, where

Geagea endorsed Aoun for the Presidency, leading to his election at the end of that year on October 31.

In 2015, Lebanon also witnessed massive protests over the government's failure to manage garbage collection, raising serious health and environmental concerns. Legislative boycotts were employed by some parties to block contentious issues like a new electoral law. Lebanon also faced six attacks and numerous targeted assassinations. The most notable attack was executed by the Al-Nusra Front in a Shiite suburb of Beirut on November 12, the day after the Paris attacks, resulting in 43 deaths and hundreds of injuries. The use of mass distractions, such as heightened media coverage on Yoga and Psytrancers intended to dilute the focus on systemic governmental inadequacies and corruption.

“The scene, after this, went totally underground. We never posted anything online, not Facebook events, not even private Facebook events, because we always had doubts that maybe someone could be an informant. I don’t even mean necessarily civilian police, but even just anyone that maybe likes you less: one wrong move can be very chaotic to the scene in general”.  
It became a luxury to host these high-risk parties.

In 2015, the situation was no longer bearable for Rabih. He left the country, taking with him the traditional annual ritual of Forest Frequencies and the livelihood of Psyleb. Forestronika remained under the hands of Nicole till this present day. “I realized it was time to bid farewell to Forest Frequencies. I needed to embark on a new chapter in my life. Here [outside of Lebanon], I continued to pursue my passion for Psytrance in my local Psytrance community members”.

For the past two years, Rabih has been on a sabbatical retreat, lost in the tranquility of *fýri* after, from what I could sense, was a dark, yet well-lived past, with his faithful dog, Floki. Amidst this idyllic serenity, new projects are taking shape—the

Valhalla Project and the Omnia Festivals. The Valhalla endeavor will see the establishment of a gathering for local Psyheads to *freak* out on his land.

## **2. *2016 Hexaplex Festival Mania***

A similar discourse for the same purpose surrounding the scene emerged once again shortly after the New Year's incident of 2015 in 2016 at the Hexaplex Festival, carried out beginning September 16. Hosted by Analog, Hexaplex constituted a 4-day Psytrance 2-stage festival. The festival was hosted within the scenic environs of Chahtoul Camping, providing attendees with an immersive experience at the intersection of nature and music. It featured talented local and international artists from different genres of Psytrance coming together and playing for an audience who usually would have to travel to Europe, Turkey, South/East Asia to enjoy something like this happening, which not everyone may afford. The media, including Noursat and the online blog platform for the Lebanese forces, flooded afterwards with, yet again, allegations of Psytrance attendees being devil worshippers.

## **3. *Satanic Panic Survival Guide, Psychedelic Edition: The Psychedelic Secret Society, Sakr, and the Underground Snares of Resistance***

Quick to strategize in response to the increased gamble, fear, and policing, Sakr founded highly exclusive and secretive underground raves under the initiative *Resistance Sous-Terre* (Underground Resistance) – “When no one knows about the party till after the party”. Recognizing the need for discretion, Sakr and his team relied primarily on direct communication to invite attendees, eschewing digital communication methods that could potentially compromise the events' secrecy and safety. This approach not only ensured a tight-knit community of trusted participants

but also minimized the risk of unwanted attention from law enforcement and conservative segments of society wary of Psytrance culture. “We invited people mainly by word-of-mouth. We used to call people, we didn't even text”.

This secretive approach was crucial in evading unwanted attention and maintaining the safety of participants in an environment fraught with uncertainties, mass frenzy, misunderstanding, and potential legal challenges. By establishing *Resistance Sous-Terre*, Sakr and his collaborators demonstrated resilience and ingenuity, navigating a landscape where artistic expression, ways of living, and freedom often clashed with prevailing social norms and their formal and informal constraints. In retrospect, fast-acting initiatives like *Resistance Sous-Terre* not only safeguarded the Psytrance community during a tumultuous period but also laid the groundwork for its continued growth and evolution in Lebanon.

Slowly but surely, despite the initial frenzy against Psytrance, the scene regained traction with tensions also subsiding post-2016. With the passage of time, more Psytrance organizers and community members emerged, contributing to a gradual normalization and acceptance of the genre within the cultural landscape of Lebanon. This period marked a turning point where the perseverance and strategic adaptability paved the way for the agency and resurgence of Psytrance as a vibrant and integral part of Lebanon's landscape.

#### **H. Tear Gas, Tune in, Trance out: Escapism and Opposition as the Psytrance Scene's Response to Lebanon's 2019 Thawra**

Psytrance proved a handy space for “maintain[ing] hope amidst a seemingly hopeless phase” in 2019 during the October 17 Lebanese revolution. Many of the active community-members at the time notified me that they were at the forefront of the

*thawra*; gigs were being intentionally cancelled when appropriate: “we used to cancel parties because we preferred to be supporting the protest down on the streets... we used to focus a lot on *thawra* to give it the importance it demanded. But whenever the protest calmed down or another group was down, we needed to host these raves so that people had a space to breathe outside of the tear-gas for that matter”, Sakr conveyed to me jokingly, unaware of the profoundness of his statement. Since the intention was to provide an outlet for simultaneous socialization during, within, and outside of the realm of political activism, the raves were free-of-charge, at times in secluded locations in nature and other times in closed, in-door locations. “The intention was not to make money; we just needed to see our people, our friends, to re-unite, to just be around these people”.

## **I. From Lockdown to Livestream: Adapting to the Covid-19 Pandemic**

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the beat of the Psytrance scene continued to pulse, undeterred by the challenges of lockdowns and social distancing measures. Despite public venues and nightclubs shutting down, the spirit of the rave persevered, albeit in clandestine gatherings and secluded spaces. "Yeah, they continued," Sakr explained. I was quick to reply: "Do you think that's bad or good?". For many, “Psytrance was not just entertainment—it became a lifeline, a necessity for survival”. In a follow-up statement, Sakr explained that raves were used as a means to "breathe quite literally when they shouldn't have been breathing." A lot of people were stuck in houses during the lockdown with their families, with their siblings...At some point, they needed a breather, even if it was a virus". Most parties were corona friendly, however, recalled many community-members, emphasizing the conscientious efforts to

mitigate risk through measures such as mask-wearing, notifying municipalities, and disinfection protocols.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Sakr and his team launched an online Discord live-streaming server known as The Hive, providing a virtual haven for enthusiasts who couldn't attend in-person raves. This initiative rewarded to beat-junkies with "the right music always playing for any time of the day," offering a welcomed distraction and a sense of excitement and distraction during the monotonous and restrictive times of the pandemic.

“In this server dwells a clan of interesting people with tons of common interests, mostly the love for twisted music.

The Hive is a Discord server the aims on connecting DJs, promoters, musicians, & party goers, so they can exchange & discuss music, create connections, share ideas, express concerns, or talk about any other topic of mutual interest. It also aims on elevating the underground scene, & giving light to the underrated artists that are bringing something fresh to the table. The team behind this server is working on interesting projects that will have a significant impact on the music scene, while rewarding those who actively contributed in building a healthy community.

[...]

#### Rules & Regulations

Let people know who you are & what you do for more credibility in introducing yourself

No swearing, bullying, or disrespecting in chats. You can always voice out your opinion freely but respectfully. There is a rants-and-complaints channel to discuss bad experiences that DJs, promoters, & clubbers face

No advertisement, however, you can tell the community about your services in business

Restrict your topics to the correct channel. There is a channel for posting about your event upcoming-events, & others to promote your music in music-producers and dj-sets

Inviting members to other servers will get you banned

Do not spam the channel, that includes typing separate lines very quickly or posting images multiple times

Never interfere with a moderator's duties

Don't let Discord distract you from work

No creeps.”

Acid Lounge, an active management initiative preferred and awaited by many members of the scene, was born out of The Hive server officially in 2022, as it was the name of Sakr's popular channel within the server. He also founded another more niche and underground Psychedelic management called Metabug after the last (Morning Glory) had been stolen by an ex-intimate partner in 2021. providing some of the most well-organized and safe spaces for authentic underground music. He now also goes by the name Umma after Pink Floyd's Umma Gumma album had given him a sensory trip of a lifetime for events that are not Psychedelic trance, along with Engine Ear for his trippy sets.

#### **J. Cultural Custodians: Crisis, Continuity, and Creation in the Contemporary Psytrance Scene**

Over the years, numerous collectives have dedicated their efforts to promoting Psytrance culture. Despite its continued growth, the scene remains relatively small in numbers. It remains monopolized by a few active sub-communities or what I refer to continuously as 'managements' and their crowds. Older Psytrance management groups once held sway over a much larger community. Nevertheless, despite being small in numbers, community members do not disappoint in their experimental and creative expressions. One exciting and unique example is a collective called Beatretreat, founded on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June, 2024 which brings together lovers of *mashawi* (Lebanese BBQ) and exotic psychedelic music. They hold daytime events that gather exclusive and active Psytrance community members for a day full of love, food, and mixing.

Despite Lebanon's myriad challenges, including prolonged periods of financial collapse saturating post-2019, extreme inflation and currency devaluation, an ongoing presidential vacancy following the expiration of term-limited incumbent Michel Aoun's

mandate on 31 October 20, widespread unemployment, and induced migration intentionally organized by the ruling elite, Psytrance perseveres, *trance*-forming as needed to face the state's ongoing adversity and beating the barricades.

The enduring recurrence of the Psytrance scene and space in Lebanon, despite facing significant state adversities, highlights the extent of disconnect of the state's political reality with the needs of people. In many ways, the underground world allowed them the luxury of creating and living in an alternate reality, a parallel world where they could experience the stability, freedom, connection, and expression they longed for as beings and, more importantly, Lebanese that the broader political and social environment failed to provide. This phenomenon underscores the disillusionment with the political system and the lengths to which individuals would go to carve out and cultivate a lifestyle for its survival across generations, where they could live out their desired reality, free from the constraints and fiascoes of a *state* (read: socio-economic political system and institutions) beyond their control.

The emergence of a Psytrance culture in Lebanon represents the culmination of a multifaceted process characterized by the importation of influences and expertise from international entities, as well as the exportation and exchange of skills, music, cultural preferences, subjective experiences, and talent, all facilitated by concerted community efforts. This phenomenon was kick-started and propelled by the contributions of influential figures, many of whom may not have fully grasped the enduring impact of their actions, most notably during the formative years of the scene. Collectively, they have and continue to establish a cultural legacy that is indelibly woven into the fabric of Lebanese society, ensuring its perpetuation for generations to come.

In an era overshadowed by a continuum of crisis-ridden local social and state *Kali Yuga*, I couldn't help but feel a sense of reverence as I sat among these Lebanese Psytrance *rishis* being a Psytrance raver myself—Kaa, Gunther, Fadi, Mido, Rabih, Sakr—whose intentions for a Psytrance party was, despite external chaos, an alternative collective scape for to sage and re-center our physical, mental, and emotive sensibilities and realities. In the labyrinth of state instability that enveloped us, they crafted a communal mindscape—a sanctuary where expanded individual and collective sensibilities are accessed, converged, nurtured, and revitalized. *To them, I thank.* Now, as Lebanese Psyheads, carry forth this sacred legacy, infusing their unique essence into the age-old fractals of global and local Psytrance culture. Through contemporary rituals and evolved practices, they emerge as custodians of the psychedelic inheritance, *Sadhus* of unfettered expression and creation.

## CHAPTER V

### SPIRITUALITY WITHIN THE LEBANESE PSYTRANCE SCENE: MATERIALITY AND PHENOMENOLOGY

#### A. Probing the Core of Spirituality in the Lebanese Psytrance Scene

Nestled amidst the verdant landscapes of Aley, Lebanon, time seemed to adopt a leisurely pace, allowing moments of profound reflection and connection with nature's tranquility. Here, basking in the gentle warmth of the sun's rays, I found myself in the company of a mystic soul, whose presence exuded an aura of spiritual depth and madness. The lush forestry and ethereal beauty of Aley's surroundings served as a catalyst for introspection, evoking a deep sense of attachment and reverence within me.

A young man by the age of 28, acting out the persona of an almost mythic-sorcerer, expounded repeatedly upon the significance of his throat *chakra* as a medium to demand his intended reality from the universe as we conversed together in Aley's modest grandeur. Our discussions struck me profoundly, as they diverged from the conventional discourse prevalent within Lebanese society, which positioned the sacred within the confines of their by-birth ascribed organized religion. Indeed, an evident overturn in Lebanese culture had manifested over the years where the sect had crept into the shadows of the lives of more segments of society, no longer the at the foreground of one's discourse, identity, and/or lived practices (Crowcroft, 2017; Nagle and Fakhoury, 2021). More and more agnostics, non-church and non-mosque goers, yet, of active faith-belief, atheists, eclectics, and New-agers proliferated the masses, contrary to depictions in Western literature (see Moaddel, Kors, & Gärde, 2012; Baumann, 2016; Cammett, 2015; Henley, 2016; Hoffman, 2020; Caldwell, 2009). Still, Psytrance introduced a scarce and unusual ontological *sapienta* not only significant for

the study of individual and collective (intra)extra-institutional spirituality creation, meaningful action, and sacra-socialization, but also for a deep introspection of diverse social interactions within the Lebanese “holistic milieu” and social context (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005).

In a careful pitch with wide-glaring eyes, he spoke uninterrupted and fast:

“[Psychedelic trance] helped me to understand myself. And to understand stuff that I would hear about but didn’t know their deep meaning, I hadn’t *felt* it yet. In our [Durzi] faith, we believe in unity, *tawhid*. They believe in the all-for-one-and-one-for-all, but they don’t understand it actually. They are so less, it’s hard for them to know the real truth. But some are really close to it. I got to feel it deeply, I activated this space, in this moment, this is unity. To unify the moment with everything, with creation, to be a part of this creation. Because of course there is a creation that I didn’t do, nor do we fully understand the story. But, there is a creation. We are part of it: we are the conscious of it. Created in awareness to create. The thing that knows all other things.

I got to understand becoming, becoming the present, and seeing the art of me, of my humanity, which is as beautiful as the planet—a whole we are part of: ‘*Anatta, you are it*’. This *I want, I want*, this is a need in the future, which does not exist. You are putting distance between what you want and yourself. So just be. *I am*, now in the present whatever I wish. Whatever it *is*”.

The great *I am*. The urge humanity has endured to understand the *I am* (read: self) has existed for centuries. Over the past 74 years, identity has crept its way loud and clear, entering as a core object of study around the 1950’s (Wetherell, 2010). Plenty of efforts have been focused on locating and inquiring into the human urge to acquire what it means to be human from within the self-conscious mind and as a set of material and immaterial qualities procured also in response to externalities outside the subject. Rather than viewing identity as being *part* of the being—internal to us, something we own that is part of us—, it has been conceptualized as a dynamic, mobile, interconnected, performative and realized, emerging, related to mind and the sensing body, and continuative (Rose, 2010).

Indispensable to identifying what it has meant to be human is an exploration of the spiritual, trekking a close walk together. In psychospiritual affective states, the social actor locates motivation, moral orientation, animation, and jubilation that marshal *the self to reach beyond itself, beyond its present reality, an elsewhere*, providing sociologists and anthropologists of spirituality a *raison d'être* for analyzing them through certain sociological categories (sociology and anthropology of religion and/or spirituality). It is this understanding of spirituality that is disseminated within the Lebanese Psytrance assemblage culture, as my immersion with the community lead me to fathom, to sense, to substantiate: by spiritual is meant here “those dimensions of our experience that allow for another way of *relationality, negotiating, perceiving, being* and *acting* in the world” (Sremac and Jindra, 2020, p. 3). What someone deems sacred is not necessarily another reality outside this world that transcends the mundane of everyday life, but rather another orientation (or re-negotiation) toward this reality (Turner, 2016).

Spiritual sites in the psychedelic trance landscape concerned the dialectic amongst absence and presence—the performance, genesis, and perception of a phenomena unobserved and, yet, intensely felt. The spiritual as ‘felt’ by the scene here is not to be taken within the confines of religious experience, but rather as denoting a mix of representative and non-representative registers produced as part and parcel of a distinct social context formative in “produc[ing] actual bodily dispositions, leaving marks in the landscape of existence, and affective memories, or traces within the body” (Dewsbury and Cloke, 2009, p. 697). The sacred perception of these registers materializes through ritualized performances using the engagement of human and nonhuman various other (Holloway, 2012) and architectures of potential. Here,

spirituality unfolds as a dynamic process of self-discovery and expansion and deep relational engagement with the world, profoundly reshaping individuals' identities and their perceptions of themselves, society, and the world they want to live in.

I argue in this chapter that the manifestation of Psytrance and the spirituality within the country allows members that immerse in the scene to experience profound avenues of new modalities and transformations in self-identity and alternative, expanded modes of living read as spiritually profound and, thus, impacts Lebanese “sociality”, “the dynamic matrix of relations through which persons come into being, and which is navigated by an ethically imaginative and affectively receptive human subject” (Long, 2015, p. 854). This section gives voice to the Lebanese psychedelic calling, which, in practicality, must remain silent, audible only to its disciples. Not only does the section, in its effort to unearth the vibrant spiritual, cultural Lebanese Psytrance identity create a space for listening, it also breathes permanence to the characteristics of the spirituality as embodied, perceived, and lived in our local scene.

## **B. Psychedelic Trance Sound Phenomena**

It is true that almost from the beginning of my entry into the scene was welcomed, accepting me both as a Psytrance raver and as a researcher in continuous aid for my research. Attending Psytrance raves from June to August 2023 during my ethnography, I felt all events were not nearly enough beneficial explanations of the more complicated spirituality I had heard members describing and felt, though they armed me with enough preface information about the kinds of questions I had not initially wondered off.

My next move was to set up a series of interviews with exceptionally capable organizers, DJs, and crowd members of all Psytrance raver generations that had a sound knowledge of the *psychedelic journey*. The accumulation of symbols and semantics throughout my observations and interactions with the right insider guidance gave me an insight as well into several features of the local Psytrance scene spiritualism, becoming fully intelligible in a widened scope of values embodied and expressed in the scene.

“It *takes over you*. I always used to say, if you tell me you're into house or you're into techno or you're into rap, I cannot really know what kind of human being you are. But if you're into Psytrance, with 95% accuracy, I can imagine what type of human you are. Because it really came with a culture. Not anyone is into Psytrance. So definitely, the spiritual side was always there, and it was a hook for us. You know, this feeling of belonging to something.”

I was struck with limitations from the beginning of my quest to articulate the ineffable essence of the spiritual and cultural phenomena within the scene. I grappled with the challenge of explaining just what “*it*” is that “*takes over you*” that is seemingly so transformative in the local Psytrance experience; why would they think so; how does one encapsulate the transcendent qualities of such ecstatic encounters without personally sensing its boundlessness; would my representations make sense to the mind and emotion of the non-Psytrance raver? It is one thing to observe people's belief and quite another to reach an adequate understanding of what the registers and semantics of their belief system means to *them*. The aenigmas and potentialities of Psytrance provoked generations into a common agreement on the ascription of values via a qualitative and affective evaluation of the Psytrance sound. The *sound*, thus, came to form the basis of ‘a psychedelic person’, a term used by many within the scene to denote the disciple of psychedelic trance movement or what the previous DJ explains as “what type of human you are” if you listened to Psytrance—exhibiting, as with many, a

widespread “folk-psychological” awareness of the personalized values, attitudes, and character traits formed under the influence of this kind of music (Carr, 2010, p. 143).

The social sciences studying music has related the emergence of forms, constructs, cultures, and styles in music as a resistive and/or affirmative corollary to a given social, artistic, political and/or economic context; however, I propose to also re-orient the pivot of attention to the *musica nostra* as producing in and off itself a phenomenological perception and sociality. I dare say, while we have contextualized the use of music extensively, we have been less courageous in granting ‘sound phenomena’ the acknowledged influence they have at the core of the material and micro/macro-social landscapes they emerge in—capable of also generating their own sensory and rational realities. We must, as ethnographers of multi-disciplinary social sciences, not be afraid of “shutting up, closing our eyes and listening to what the music has to say...*let it take you.*”

This assertion does not aim to dismiss the contextual factors the musicality was birthed out of; rather, it contends to treat the study of sound in sociality and the social sciences as an ongoing, continuous, ever-evolving pulsating Garden of Eden in which reality is co-constructed. Sound, as such, also includes a study of how music serves as both a reactive force and a progenitor of environmental responses. In this way, I suggest asserting the ‘materiality’ of sound in social research as another important land of study with waves of information.

This criticism stems from a difficulty in representation ethnographers face. In my case, I needed to demonstrate *just* how important the sound aspect was for these Psyheads: “It is and should be all about the music”, they ritually repeated to me. “I’ve never seen *music this invasive to someone’s life*”, one comment shook me. I needed to

show just how much. However, the scarcity of literature from social scientists addressing the disruptive or consolidating effects of social systems resulting from the affective manifestations induced by music made the road more difficult.

Despite seeking guidance from my pedagogical and scholarly network, I found myself faced with a challenge. For this reason, I have deliberately chosen to analyze the musical dimension of the spirituality in the psychedelic trance scene first. I have prioritized this approach to cater to the preferences of my fellow Psyhead readers, as well as an effort to apply the method of study I propose social scientist should take more caution of. Seeking to hear the world, akin to experiencing it through smell, touch, taste, and other modalities, serves a dual purpose: it aims to delineate additional foundational aspects of societal lived spaces and to bridge the theoretical and methodological divide within a field of inquiry that often relies solely on primary modes of apprehending the world it seeks to comprehend.

I believe that recognizing these methodologies and multidisciplinary frameworks contributes to advancing critical discussions and fostering creativity. Furthermore, describing Lebanese experiences, which often involve irrational emotions within the complexities of everyday life and existence in a system that feels beyond our control and understanding, in such a manner challenges Western logocentrism and deviates from the customary concepts, truths, and beliefs of Western rationality, textualism, explanatory models, and logic. The approach in this section highlights the diversity of perspectives it advocates for.

Throughout the remaining months of my fieldwork from October 2023 to April of 2024, I discerned more clearly the nature of the nexus between spirituality and music in the scene. I realized the spirituality hinges upon the trance-inducing experience

engendered by the sonic and vibrational elements of Psytrance—rhythm, repetition, frequencies, and structure—coalescing to guide the brain into “a state of coherence, wherein the parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous systems harmonize” and foster a visceral connection to more primal, reptilian instincts and communal bonds. The entrancing and power of the music is enough to re-center ones focus: our day-to-day thoughts is pushed to the very back of the participants mind and perception of the present moment is re-oriented to the music; what is left in that moment is our primal reasoning, our reptilian brain in these “tranc[ed] out” ecstatic states (Reynolds, 1999, p. 203). This process is connotated to be ideal by the DJ should it be an active one. Following the break from and disruption and de-focusing of their routine lives, individuals exhibit increased receptivity to novel experiences.

*A professor of practicing an alternate life as a normie scholar and university Doctor by day and a calm, gentle smiled DJ with dark and twisted Goa trance beats by night explained to me the mechanism behind the profound, affective entrainment of the music:*

“...in a state of coherence, the survival urge in the gut, a pack of nerves, feels the connection to other people, the things they value, the things that drives them, and what binds them to other people in the heart; the logical mind turns off... The more the music is redundant, the longer the phrases in the music are, the more entrainment there is for the brainwaves. This means the audience are entrained on a certain wavelength that is somehow binding. That in itself is a spiritual experience, in allowing our bodies to perceive alternate modes of existence, collectively, and most importantly, a more tribal one”.

In this altered state, individuals are imbued with a profound sense of existential urgency, a visceral tether to their values, aspirations, and interpersonal connections, while the analytical faculties of the mind recede into the background. This process foreshadows Nietzsche’s Dionysian, in which affirmation is granted to the Dionysian “mysterious primordial unity”, “the shattering of the individual and his fusion with

primal being” (Cox, 2006, p.500). As such, music becomes a utility for the “primordial artist of the world” to express the primordial essence of all things (Cox, 2006, p.500).

EDM and IDM, notably as auditorily intense as Psychedelic trance, took a decisive turn from tradition musical. Abandoning traditional sonorities and separated, discrete instruments, along with the instrumental families that generate them, electronic music avowed the univocity of sound, producing complete musical fields from a torrent of electrons released by an oscillator (Cox, 2006). Due to this, it has been repeatedly criticized by non-consumers as “cold”, “impersonal”, “dehumanized”, “abstract (Cox, 2006, p. 508). Again, the infamous “*it takes you*” finds its way in my notes, with repeated use by crowd-members and DJs describing the effect of the music. *It takes you* to beyond the human, the self: in a mesh of non-organic life sounds that precedes any composition or composer, the self is transported into a perceived state of “pre-individual and pre-personal *forces and flows*” (Cox, 2006, p. 508, *emphasis added*).

At its foundational level, the local culture exhibits a spiritual dimension wherein the music evokes a metaphysical longing for a perceived experience of states “that reside beyond the realm of easily detectable materiality”.

“It’s not repetitive as a start in the sense that you barely hear the same collection of sounds twice—unlike Techno, where it's just developing, it's just one additional layer, two additional layers, three additional layers, break down, drop, then all over again with barely anything that is happening. It's just if you have the right loop, a good sounding loop, you've made it in Techno.

Psytrance is different. It's about the development of sounds, it's how sounds respond to one another across time, decorating time. And if you listen to Psytrance closely, it's a conversation. It's questions, answers. It's different sounds responding to each other. That's basically the magic of this music. And any Psytrance that doesn't fall under this category is not as musical to my ears”.

Affect refers to an independent response of the body when encountering a certain perception. In the beginning, this affect lacks value, valorization, and/or

meaning, as it is purely physical, arising from energetic movements within our organic structure (Deleuze and Bacon, 2003). The body experiences direct contact with sounds as sound waves physically touch the eardrum, causing it to vibrate. These sounds not only affect the ear but also resonate throughout the entire body, inducing vibrations within.

“You see, in the end, music is vibration, it's energy. We are vibration, and all this vibration on the dancefloor is going in, through, and out of each other. Any disruptive vibration, originating from any source, disturbs this harmony. While I don't want to judge anyone, any disturbances can impact the collective experience.”

In the case of Psytrance, the impact is particularly profound, bypassing auditory perception and directly engaging the body as a “huge membrane, as a sensible ting” (Cobussen, 2019, p. 384). Voegelin describes this intimate relationship with sound, where it becomes inseparable from one's own body; he writes, “the body of sound has moved so close it *is* my body” (Voegelin, 2010, pp. 47). Listeners find themselves engulfed in its materiality, physically overwhelmed by the assault of sound on the body. The fundamental perception of Psytrance bodies is one of vulnerability, characterized by openness and porosity, making them unable to shield themselves from being ‘touched’ by the music.

At one point, I was seated with one of the veteran DJs. He was demonstrating to me the characteristics of Psytrance. He explained that sound phenomenon does not only include audible frequencies. He played a track and told me to stay silent. With a discerning eye, he directed my attention to the door, responding with audible vibrations and resonant thuds. The door poised as a witness to the unheard frequencies permeating the space and the imperceptible wavelengths coursing through the air. “Look, this is

quite literally the part of the sound you can *only* feel”. Similarly, another well-regarded DJ also explains to me:

“It is about the combination of an absence of lyrics and the insertion and the inclusion of all those frequencies—to name a few, the main four brain frequencies, brain waves, beta, alpha, theta, gamma—all being emitted out of that speaker. Some of them are heard, some others are felt. Those that are felt go somewhere, play a given string, some behavioral, some acts, willingly, because, as we say, *you are what you art.*”

Psytrance penetrates the body directly, evoking sensations that are both felt and audible. It necessitates active bodily engagement, erasing any comfortable distance between the listener and the sound. This form of music negates structured, analytical listening and challenges the confidence of language usually used for critical engagement with music. Listeners are left with no option but to yield to and embrace the visceral impact of the sonic experience.

Can we conceptualize Psytrance spirituality as a phenomenon that can only be felt, experienced by our flesh, rather than contingent on a particular state of mind? Finn’s proposition of a “material spirituality” best encapsulates the experience in the local scene: a material spirituality, bridges esoteric spiritual experiences with concrete incidents of the body and materialities of our experience (1996, p. 153). This type of spirituality rejects a distinction between our spiritual and material being. Psytrance has rendered an ability to its listeners to encounter, through sound, the exegesis of a divinity that does not exist beyond our material world; rather, a sacrality of being apart from (though not entirely) categorical logic, coded and un-coded frameworks, control and intelligibility (Finn, 1996). As such, the music produces, instead, a sacro-encounter with the unordinary among the ordinary, strangeness within the mundane.

## ***1. Trance Phenomena in Relation to the Lebanese Context: The Test of Suggestibility***

It becomes especially interesting when contextualizing this spirituality with the orthodox milieu of the Lebanese state. I distinguish here between sectarianism, an informal and formal system of sect-based power-sharing and social organization within the country, and one's sacra-philosophical convictions to demonstrate a sticky interplay among the two. Sectarianism in societies divided by confessions is not merely the outcome of these convictions, but by socio-economic and political ones. In Lebanon, people use "sectarian" as a synonym for local forms of "being sectarian" or "thinking in sectarian ways" (Deeb, 2020, p. 217). The system is largely based on a distortion of fear-factors that instigate little to no intra-confessional trust, along with a maturity of intolerance for segments of society perceived as different from status confessional lines, values, and attitudes. While less about a commitment to equal representation in a setting of diverse beliefs, elites exploit sectarian power-sharing and social control to strengthen their positions in political representation and risk-management and accumulate material and immaterial resources (Deeb, 2020).

Lebanon's sectarian system, structured to incorporate the dominant sects into political and public institutions, perpetuates values that are not inclusive of many Lebanese citizens, such as patriarchy and homophobia (Nagle and Fakhoury, 2021). This system undermines the agency of ordinary citizens and attempts to widely counter anti-sectarian movements by actively working to assimilate dissenters into the established framework.

"That's why we got into the scene to begin with. It's because it brought us away from all that bullsh\*t that we see in our life between politicians, between different religious groups."

The social and legal fiction of sectarianism has produced realities that are not in congruence with many social experiences in the country. I was made sure of this in one of my conversations with a crowd-member:

“C: So what got you attached to the scene?”

X: We're living in the Middle East. It's can really be an a\*shole sometimes. So, you don't have any clear idea about anything. You're brought up without any understanding about how to live your life, about what is everything. They don't teach you anything, you know. You're just living around. They don't explain knowledge about what happened, they feed it to you. They don't give you anything. Nobody talks about anything serious. There is no conversation.

C: Tell me more about that.

X: I am from a Muslim city. We don't have the happy people there. And we don't have women dancing and having fun. We don't have this culture there and we always understood back then, the youth in our city, in the south, in Beirut they live in another way. The rules are different. You can't do anything about it, you can't talk about it. That was the idea. So, I wanted to experience [Psytrance raves], especially since I was atheist, since I was 13: I didn't waste any time believing in the system placed on us in the country, telling me I can do this I can't do that”.

The exchange reveals an instance of how the sectarian system in Lebanon is maintained, supported, and replicated at multi-modal social organizations, including at the level of the state, civil society, urban space, citizenship, identity, and informal and formal social nodes. Sectarianism becomes a technology for the formation of informal social institutions that reproduce shared discourse and shared understandings about modes of social interactions (Bates, 1983), as well as collective action through the managing of “the flow of information about reputations, facilitating sanctioning, and generating expectations that cooperative overtures to fellow group members will be reciprocated (Humphreys, 2002, p. 2).” The division of society based on the notion that they belong to homogenous dogmas obscures the diversity within; a thread connects and intersects these groups along the boundaries of socioeconomic class, gender, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, and numerous other factors.

Lebanon's sectarian system generates disparities while also providing opportunities for challenge and debate: although identity serves as the cornerstone of Lebanon's sectarian framework, it also reveals vulnerabilities where the structure is exposed to scrutiny and resistance. By displacing the listener from this mundane, Psytrance acts as a form of de-territorialized social protest to this “sectarianization” (Deeb, 2020). Lebanon’s “hidden third”, unrepresented in a system that gives precedence to sect-based fidelity, (Rubin, 2019), provides battle lines where resisting sectarian grammar becomes possible.

Such a topology rests on a discourse centered on inwardness, which sets apart all the ‘insides’ from where the music emerges or takes place—an introspection into the nocturnal, primordial self, through which one could access his/her higher self—as opposed to ‘outsides’ experienced external to the trance sound phenomena. Our dancefloors in trance have engendered a countercultural ecosystem by taking the listener away from his/her ‘outsides’, and, instead, opening the way for new configurations, spaces, and encounters, in the attempt to understand and/or overpower everyday inside/outside divides. One DJ member titled this *the test of suggestibility*:

“As a hypnotist myself, hypnotherapy works on putting the mind in a given state and suggesting. We call this the test of *suggestibility*. We test if the person can taste the lemon that someone else is describing, cutting, squeezing, smelling, and making the other person feel the taste in their mouth and having saliva secreted. This suggestibility, if you want, is an art. You can do this through sound.”

So then some people need to deliver a given message or a vibe the same way a painter paints a given color or aspect or atmosphere to their crowd, the same way does an artist, a composer, a DJ. Not every good composer is a good DJ; but, how you combine and spice-it-up according to whose coming for dinner, albeit some anonymous, shows how much effort you’ve put and your skill as an artist, because it is all about getting to know how to put the mind using the music in this state of *suggestibility*. You’re giving them something to expect, maybe a signature, yet without giving them so much certainty so that it remains suggestible.

They're humans, not patients or anything weird, because they're allowing things to happen. So, through the suggestibility of music, a universal language, we can override reality with another one. The entrainment of Psytrance, its willingly extended, intense, and redundant rhythm, does that really well because it engages the unconscious, sets the person in a *theta*, receptive, and suggestible state”.

This perceived induction of hyper-suggestibility holds particular significance, as it does not entail the deprivation of the subject's agency and reflexivity. In this case, it allows subjects confronted with enormous social pressures to accommodate, instead, the space in time for the suggestibility of an expanded social experience. In this manner, the local psychedelic trance experience is rendered into a “para-social activity, beyond our people, our normal life”.

Indeed, I met an array of “colorful people[s]”, as they described themselves, who truly lived outside ordinary societal and sectarian norms: the gentled soul flower-power boho hippie with long dreads professed in sound healing and breathfulness; a proud Durzi obsessed with cosmic pantheism and Southeastern religious practices, whose on his road to the “ultimate truth”; an always angry and manipulative Christian church-goer that believes dearly in his power to control people with his music; a nihilistic Muslim proud atheist, renumerating on Nietzschean commandments to escape what he believes is the idiotic *malaise* of “ordinary people”; a Professor living alternate lives, whose secret vice is his incredible talent as an underground DJ and Hypnotist; a Palestinian trying to make it in the local industry, tormented that he could not be doing this in his home country; an incredibly talented tragic loverboy metalhead, misunderstood in his teens as a devil worshiper, crafted in his young adulthood by the values and business ethics of veteran ravers; a proud father of a beautiful girl and a newly official EMT response worker; a previous martial fighter, now radiating calmness, peace, and kindness; a pure, yet, fiery and charged-up skill-packed infamous

in the regional music industry and father of sassy kitties and a rooster; and a wonder-like believer in Odin, rocking the Lebanese Psytrance spirit with his dog across seas deep in the forest whom I wish stayed in Lebanon. “In a society where people cannot be what they want to be”, the sanctification of “the Psytrance dancefloor collective” lies in that it is “where we go”, “us Psyhead idiots”, “where we travel to this [other] world where everyone can just *be*; there, they can be *more* on a different level”.

Another DJ encapsulates this ability to *be more* within the scene: “We also became a lot more spiritual. I never practiced my religion; it kind of meant nothing to me but when I discovered this I was a lot more spiritual...Everyone was still like, in their own identity, like Christian, Muslim, Druze or whatever, and also they adopted this spirituality”.

In the afterparty of the 2015 Forest Frequencies video, in one of the series of interviews they conducted with the attendees on tape to dialogue about their experience, one of the DJs nonchalantly expresses: “you don't need even to talk the same language, to have the same religion. We are all here for one thing: it is music”. He is followed by a response in similar vein that especially stroke me as significant:

“The reason why we go to [these] festivals and we camp and we pitch a tent and we sleep on rough grounds and we do things we don't normally do in daily life is to find ourselves. You know, shake off the shackles of society and remove a few layers of nonsense that we carry around in our everyday life and we just be who we are. Scream if you want to scream, cry if you want to cry, laugh if you want to laugh, dance for 20 hours if you want to dance. Just be who you are, be who you want to be in that moment. And that's it”. (Psyleb Crew, 2016, 11:06-13:15)

Lebanon, for these people, is now no longer a space of unavoidable age-old divisions and injustice; their hometown becomes a space of celebration and affirmation: “Let me make my own destiny now”, proclaims one DJ, after a life of violence involved in regional conflict. “Make my own heaven in the time I am in now”. More than this, it

becomes an “escapades”, (Ulusoy, 2016) an alternate space within the country crafted to be conducive (read: suggestable) for an open laboratory where each artist can inquire on questions regarding themselves, ontology, metaphysics, giving them liberty to accommodate novel means of motivation, affirmation and, at times, criticism. In a conversation with a crowd-member, I asked:

“C: Do you have any favorite genre in Psytrance?”

X: Goa trance. When you listen to the melodic side they add to it, it's emotional, very emotional. It's not only about dancing, it's about thinking too.

C: What do you tend to think on this music?

X: *It takes me*, yeah. The thinking comes when I'm very... Sometimes I think, sometimes it takes me between and between. It's not like only one state I'm in all the time. It's like in and out, in and out”.

A ‘liminal’ realm relating inside and outside, not here nor there, yet, in chorus, equally here and there, linking and breaking to produce an indeterminate playground for perpetual displacement: the sound phenomena is not meant only to give meaning but, more importantly, to place meaning in jeopardy. In a recollection of his youth, one DJ shows me a picture of his life in Dubai: “I was a businessman in Dubai, in the field of packaging and paper”. He was untouched yet to undergo his conversion to a Psyhead. His hair was short and stood above a well-maintained beard. He was wearing a grey suit with an orange tie. “I was making big money, million-dollar business deals”. He then proceeded to explain to me that he would save the money provided to him by this lifeline to invest in Psytrance party-making in Lebanon. “I was a businessman by day and a f\*cking warehouse [...] Psytrance DJ by night”. He then proceeded to explain to me how he left his job in Dubai to pursue Psytrance in Lebanon, whilst laughing

hysterically and cheerfully: “I slowly murdered my identity”. He used his other life to invest in its own death.

The spectrum and reach of suggestibility blurs thinking and acting within the contours of boxed, dogmatic oppositions, any binary ordering—a *para*-site—, and positions actors as exi(s)ting within movement(s)-in-thought, with novel potentialities of seeing through sound—*para*-sight—, denoting a revolution in mind (Basu and Sarkar, 2022), a liberty of thinking, a material and “metaphysical consolation” in the shape of a *samsara* of birth, death, and re-birth of the self amidst a backdrop of a failed national, collective identity, and social reality and a perceived state of public mindlessness. “I used to describe my life as an intersection. Who I was in my life before Psytrance, my life after Psytrance”.

## **C. The Descent into Darkness: A Perceived Loss of Spirituality**

### ***1. Faster Bases, Emptier Sound***

It was a common agreement that the culture of the music diminished over the years, with its quality becoming “less artistic”, with “no story, no journey”.

“We're here basically for the music. A lot of Psytrance tracks now-a-days, and you'll have raves hosting entirely this type of Psytrance, are noise-based. I do appreciate noise; I love noise. But if I don't hear music, it's not music. If I need substances to enjoy it, it's not music.”

In the past, organizations such as Bug System and Psyleb meticulously curated the musical lineup to ensure a musical gradation and progression of genre/intensity/tempo throughout the duration of the festival, moving with the times of day and night. However, as the scene experienced an influx of participants over time and degrees of commercialization, there emerged a discernible shift.

This sentiment was not only widespread among veteran Psytrance ravers, but newer enthusiasts as well. However, many lacked a direct experience with the ‘old scene’ and therefore did not have a point of reference for comparison of the extent of change throughout the years. For this, while many newer Psyheads may not be entirely satisfied with the current quality of the music, they generally exhibit a greater degree of tolerance and enjoyment compared to veteran ‘old-school ravers’.

“There is no art, there is no art. There's no more talk Chloe, there's no more *finesse*. They think that the faster you go, the stronger and the better you are. No, no, both are good, but you have to strike a good mix of the two. Look, if I'm going to invite you over as a food expert for dinner. You come over and the first thing I do is come up all in your face, screaming: ‘DO YOU WANT DESSERT DO YOU WANT DESSERT!’. You’re going to be very put-off and confused. It’s the same thing with the music selection”.

One veteran explained to me. He clarified this statement to me in a manner that conveyed a sense of insider knowledge, as if imparting wisdom from a higher vantage point, as he has lived to tell.

“It comes in cycles. Look, I've been watching several cycles. I'm 47 today, I'm going to be 48. So, each five, six years, the BPM goes up or the BPM goes down. That you have to know it for sure. I studied music. I'm an expert in production, composition, and DJing. The genre is based on the rhythm and the drums and the kick and where the bass is positioned; the sub-genre, one the other hand, is based on the sounds that you play. If you’re synths are trancy you have psychedelic but today it's confusing and even the people doing the music, I don't like to say it, it's a bit rude, have no idea about music.”

From the 2015 Forest Frequencies festivals after-video, as well as the countless virtual archives I’ve heard and seen of the scene prior to my involvement in 2023, it was clear to my ears that the rhythm and BPM of the music experienced a tremendous tempo increase over the years, with the synths becoming less and less complicated in tonality and more in-organic, almost industrial in sense—metallic quite literally in the

sense (not to refer to the ‘Metal Rock style’, but the actual sounds of the management of the metal material).

“Back then, in the very early ages of the scene, early and mid 2000’s, I was one of the first to play Psycore and Hi-Tech<sup>5</sup>. When I played the track that was 200 BPM, people were like, what is this? I only played this at the end of my set. I would start with one hour and a half maybe of Dark Psy, and towards the end of the set, I started to go up like 170, 180, 190, 200. And the people were like: ‘what the f\*ck is this?’”

Old-school nights would start out with Chill-out, Ambient music. Goa trance was much more frequent throughout the early hours of the beginning and end of the night. Alternatives of darker and faster styles would come in the middle. However, the BPM would not usually exceed 135-40. One member, previously a revered DJ but now no longer in practice in protest and disdain with how conditions have become in the local scene, conveyed:

“Each year, the introduction of subgenres introduces faster BPMs. When the BPM reached 160 -70, some ravers globally were refusing this increase. What the f\*ck is this? Now 190 seems easy. You cannot dance to these unfortunately; you can *move* to them, sense them; you can move to their kill-double, so half of the BPM, say at movement of a BPM of 60 or 90”.

Whereas the BPM used to end at 135-40, in its present day and shape, most Psytrance raves begin now at around this mark (120-40). Genres within these ranges were described as "inviting you to dance, enjoy, and experience happiness," while faster genres like Psycore were depicted as "pushing your ears and head to their limits, reaching a point of overwhelming intensity."

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<sup>5</sup> Psycore, of which Hi-Tech belongs to, is a subgenre of psychedelic trance, with glitchy sound design, morphing synth lines, strange sounds typically evoking futuristic or alien-like atmospheres, and faster tempos than most other forms of Psytrance. Pushes the dark atmospheres to the extreme through the usage of exceptionally high tempos and experimental soundscapes influenced by Dark Ambient and Glitch. BPMs from till 300?

“And yeah, here we are today”, a DJ concluded: in most of the contemporary Psytrance raves, predominant Psychedelic trance preferred styles tend to be a variation of Dark Psy, with elements of Psycore and Hi-Tech also commonly featured. Unlike in the past, where events focused solely on Dark Psy and Psycore might occur once a year, nowadays it's not uncommon to find multiple parties and managements dedicated exclusively to these genres throughout the year. Goa trance is described by many that it is added in a ploy these days just to showcase to ravers a continued sense of belonging to the Goan past of the Psytrance culture, albeit not one of great effort current crowd members complained. Rarely is it present in its authentic form, however; DJs now experiment with more contemporary takes of Goa trance.

Nevertheless, more exclusive, more ‘niche’ contemporary Psytrance raves do often house a diverse mix of experimental Psytrance alongside old-school classics. These events pride themselves on showcasing a wider range of sonic experiences, from cutting-edge, at times live, experimental sounds to the timeless beats of traditional Psytrance.

The manner in which commercial Psytrance raves and more niche, experimental ones are compared lies around a scale of music attaining its goal as something less than music (‘noise’; being more interested in aesthetic qualities and trends) and something more than music (addressing deeper levels of existence and spiritually favorable characteristics and/or exhibiting respect with past styles), respectively. After a tentative observation of “dark sound” with this in mind, I was able to decipher these repeated constructed distinctions: musical tracks relied more on harmonies derived from complex chord changes and warped sound, whereas noise-based tracks emphasized variations in simple tunes, melodic lines.

One organizer of more niche and experimental Psytrance raves clarifies:

“X: When it comes to playing dark music, I believe it's all about creating art. You can play dark music, but not the same music and all the time. For me, the dark music I play and allow to be played in my parties lean heavily on analog techniques. The sounds of warped eerie electricity—full of horror and fright. Take Dark Goa music I play (not the noise-based kind), for instance; it has this uncanny ability to send shivers down your spine and mess with your head, especially when it comes to crafting dark, atmospheric music. But the music others play all sound the same, lacking quality and depth.

C: It is quite literarily scary in that one finds it uncanny and unfamiliar, frightening to move to such sounds, not knowing how to dance to this music.”

At the basic level, this historical progression, denoting stronger and faster beats and tempos signaled to many a turn towards “darkness”, “a loss of light”, and “color”.

“The scene has gotten very dark, very dark. Organizers, they no longer care anymore about the experience after the music became too fast and when Dark Psy became the preferred, popular genre. It became names, only one style, and a play of dominance”.

This emphasis on speedy and loud Dark Psy was characterized as “lowering the quality of the raves” and “going against one of the most important values of Psytrance, of the scene: the journey throughout the whole day and night”.

“... We used to always do that musical progression, not one single and dark kind of music like Dark Psytrance... so this is the true psychedelic journey and anything else is fringe. You know, nowadays, you have these Hi-Tech festivals playing Hi-Tech for five days straight. I like Hi-Tech as much as the as the next guy, but I mean for five days straight... you're really taking the psychedelic journey out of the experience, you're taking the pure energy of it. You have to respect that journey and be honest to it...”

These testimonies reveal their expression of darkness as a reaction to a rupture in the continuity of cultural identity of the old-school scene. The evolution of music led to a shift of many songs targeted at a broad teenage audience, with less complicated sounds that help put the listener in a suggestive state to reach alternate and preferably higher modes of experience.

Additionally, I found that much of the ongoing development in genres in new wave Psytrance repivots the body as the primary source of pleasure, often without engaging the mind; a symbol without substance; a signified without a signifier. The resultant music is one that is strangely de-sensitized and de-attached and yet aggressively energetic and affective. While new wave movements reject or distrust traditional emotions, their efforts to create music independent of these emotional codes paradoxically elicit significant affective responses. Consequently, the perception of dance as a tool for spiritual development, building community, and culture can feel hollow or lacking.

Old schoolers winced at a generation they sensed had plunged into ‘mindless’ hedonistic music consumption. As such, while the traditional form of musical order in Psytrance is often seen as fostering disciplined emotions and refined sensibilities, the lack of melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic complexity in many modern popular songs may lead to the cultivation of raw, chaotic, and unregulated emotions: “bad and dark music is going to make listeners bad and dark”.

I contend this dark sound segmenting music and sound into moral and conceptual margins around frameworks of good and evil plotted across light and dark is used to express the metaphorical moral *darkening* of local Lebanese Psyhead: a perceived loss of spirituality and values because of a rupture in cultural continuity. Such a darkened touch is engendered through a break of tradition resulting from the domination of the musical order of newer generations: a synchronic and paradigmatic perceived *immoral* break in the local chrono-topic practice of the scene’s traditional musical “ritual artifacts” “that facilitate individuals’ ritual role performance” (Rook, 1983, p. 9). A break or compliance with ritualized artifacts effectively evokes or

disrupts in the local Psytrance scene a Dionysian “mood of celebration” (Higgins, 1986, p. 670) —a sentiment I assert to be the *vibe* this ecstatic community ardently seeks to replicate ceremoniously—, essential moments through which Lebanese can affirm and celebrate existence against the backdrop of the ultimately tragic nature of the state. There is somewhat of an authorless authority to maintain the ritualized use of these artifacts, as they lack any formal validity. “Because nobody [in the scene] is putting us in jail or calling us out in magazines. It's only the scene taking care of the scene”.

Further adding depth to this perceived rupture, one DJ explains:

“X: We’ve always had a tendency to go for darkness; but, darkness in my time was more musical, warped, and played with sound. Now, it is just a show at who can pay the loudest, fastest: *bayyi asraa min bayyak* (my dad is faster than your dad)”.

A crowd member shows:

“Tensions have come from this disagreement and debate on the dominance of Dark Psy now; they hate each other. What are you doing? That's why we got into the scene to begin with. We came here to run away from all the fighting and now we're doing it among ourselves within the Psytrance community”.

Given that Psytrance emerges from specific socio-political contexts, should it not be reasonable to expect subsequent generations to exhibit characteristics reflective of their own era, such as speed and minimalism, in response to an unprecedented overcomplicated, rapidly changing, and complex world? Overall, there is a tension between preserving the traditional ethos of Psytrance and adapting to the changing socio-political landscape.

## **2. *Lucas Ferus: ‘I Am the Dark that Holds the Light Within’***

As I came to understand that certain shades of dark sound were embraced while others remained on the fringes, dark sound was believed to have to exist to provide

Lebanese Psyheads with a necessary outlet for expression in their everyday existence. Artists, whether dancers, promoters, deco managers, DJs, or VJs, that have a “need for expression” utilized this favorable metaphysical “darkness”, evil, to fight the damage proceeded by the sociopolitical and economic fall-out of the state, captured by a demonic force: fighting evil with evil. In any case, it's unquestionable that oppression, mortification, and disgrace, as well as abhorrence, resentment, and desolation, are never distant from this musical realm. Indeed, Psytrance members frequently grapple with adverse emotions and the unequal nature of their struggle is often apparent. While some view Psytrance as a channel for expressing the resilient human spirit, for others, it may appear as the scaffold upon which defeated souls, though heroically, find themselves battered.

“C: Why do you think we’ve always had this tendency for dark sounds?”

X: Look at where we live. It's f\*cking chaos, you know? Like, we're used to this. We find comfort in the chaos that we live in as Lebanese people, you know? And...

C: I think at least they're, in a kind of way, you know, at least they're playing with this chaos now, they have control over it.

X: Exactly, they have control over it; darkness is just one form of expression they need to express, you know, like Salvador Dali was dark as hell, you know? It's just a different form of expression, you know? Mozart was dark as hell. Their darkness was musical, just like some artists in our scene that know how to incorporate beautiful musical darkness, not just speed, faster tempos, louder bases, and noise-based music”.

Another member similarly expresses:

“First of all, we are people that are *mish mertehin* (unwell, uncomfortable). We get tired during our days. We are serious, more dark, more depressed.

So this was being reflected in the taste of music being played. People prefer something more serious, more dark, more spooky, creepy, more Foresty. So, this is something I struggled with when I started playing music. For example, I really liked Brazilian Full-on. Brazilian Full-on is super light music. It's dance music, light music, flower power, Goa style, everyone loves each other. So, this didn't fit with the taste of the general crowd”.

Yet should this passing into darkness suggest a “negativized dark nothingness” (Ferrett, 2020, p. 14), it is also the darkness which brings about gestation and the chance at birth, of genesis.

“It doesn’t always have to be so dark, but there should be a set or a couple of sets that are dark. You can’t go through the light without passing through the dark. ‘*Lucas Ferus*’, they used to say the angels. It means Lucifer. People think that the Lucifer, he isn’t good; he is the devil, the darkness, the Satan, or whatever. ‘*Lucas Ferus*’, it means *I am the dark that holds the light within*. Without the dark, there is no light. You know what I mean? So, you must pass through darkness”.

Darkness, in this mythopoetic sense, conjures the image of a timeless void. This darkness represents the pinnacle of potential, as it envisions the occasion before creation, afore temporality and human construction: the darkness of the unimagined, the unspecified, a non-narrativized form existence. In this context, dark sound emerges from this primordial darkness, understood in relation to the significant ideological contrasts between light and darkness. This conception of dark sound articulates a possibility for something else—an indefinite and unstipulated form of being that can be discovered and created through music. As such, darkness guided them not as the North, but Morning Star onto their path to lightness.

#### **D. Askēsis: A Spiritual Test**

Entering the realm of a Psytrance dance floor for the first time, I felt a palpable sense of being pushed almost too much beyond my comfort zone. It was as though my very sense of self was being tested, stretched to accommodate new rules, unfamiliar movements, and unspoken challenges; I was now experiencing avenues and horizons of acceptance for actions I could not carry out external to the scene that I had to accustom myself too with practice over time. Each step felt like a negotiation between my existing identity and the emerging persona I could now become. I was not the only one

that had felt this way. Another Psytrancer, while asking him about his first ever Psytrance rave describes,

“It was an overwhelming experience from Deco to people [...]; it already breaks a lot of boundaries between you and the world you know there is. Looking at the DJ, people dancing ridiculous, music, awesome deco, people, and the freedom that you see there is like you can't find that this anywhere else.”

This transformation wasn't limited to the dance floor; it extended to my interactions with the community. While community members warmly embraced me as a friend and eagerly involved me in their social circles, they often seemed to overlook my identity as a researcher. It was as if I was relegated to that of a mere companion rather than a scholar delving into the depths of their culture. Even on the dancefloor, I was another appendage to its sacred vitality. Witnessing how individuals authentically interacted with one another and navigated themselves was deeply illuminating. This realization also brought me an even worsened sense of unease, as I grappled with the challenge of immersing myself in this unfamiliar world. It wasn't mere timidity; it was the pressure to transcend my own limits to fully integrate into this dynamic space.

It wasn't until a DJ took me aside, offering me some insights that I began to truly understand this stress more clearly. In his words, I found clarity—a realization that the stress I felt should not be conceived as a burden but a catalyst for growth. It was a journey of self-discovery, of shedding inhibitions and embracing the unknown:

“What the scene creates, what the dance floor creates, is a test.

We reach a juncture where we ponder: What draws us back time and again? Despite our grasp of its ins and outs, why do we still return? We keep going back, don't we? It's to seek answers to these questions anew. Much like other spiritual practices in our repertoire, some, including myself, find ourselves drawn to these experiences to put into practice what we've learned. And as we engage, repetition sets in, leading to entrainment, which then molds our behaviors into rituals.

But there's a point where breaking our daily rituals feels off, unsettling even. It's like we've tampered with our daily routine without knowing what's changed.

Why? Because we've built a neural conditioning, setting our minds into a trance-like state. As soon as this trance is disrupted, we sense something's amiss. It's why we often refer to ourselves as creatures of habit. Our actions shape our habits, which in turn form our behaviors, characters, and ultimately, our destinies.

Stress may be expansive for some and constraining for others, but our response to it defines our experience. In these environments, where sensory stimuli are flowing, we catch glimpses of clarity amid the semi-chaos. We observe, without judgment, those around us, recognizing that their journey is their own, much like our thoughts. This acceptance, this letting be, is integral to our spiritual experience”.

The DJ here refers to a process of *askēsis*, asceticism, each member experiences throughout their journey, entailing a practice of spiritual exercises. Askēsis is a concept with deep roots in various traditions, spanning ancient Greece, Christian monasticism, contemporary philosophy, and aesthetic theory, among others (Robbert, 2019).

Theologian Thomas Merton (2017, p. 4) provides a valuable explanation of asceticism to help unpack the DJ's descriptions. He states,

“It [ascetisim] comes from the Greek *askein*: to adorn, to prepare by labor, to make someone adept by exercises. (Homer uses it for ‘making a work of art.’) It was applied to physical culture, moral culture, and finally religious training. It means, in short, training—spiritual training.”

Indeed, participants are *adorned* and *prepared* through a repetitive, ritualistic nature of returning to the scene and dancefloor as a form of spiritual training, where individuals engage in disciplined practices and are challenged to deepen their understanding of themselves and their place in their social environment, in an expanded version of their normalcy. In process of negotiation, trial and error, and training, individuals wrestle with the complexities of assimilating into a new, expansive *elsewhere*, in which they also hold both individual authority of influence and responsibilities.

“By choosing to engage in these practices repeatedly, we step outside the randomness of societal trends, forging our own paths of growth and contribution.

Even amidst the chaotic dance floors and sweaty environments, where individuals release and let go, we find a spiritual resonance. It's akin to meditation; our minds may wander, but we bring them back to center, rekindling our initial purpose, re-centering our GPS. This conscious decision when tested to return, to allow things to pass without attachment, is a testament to our spiritual journey.

Some people respond, some other people react and response involves volition, will-power, decision, creation. Something that happened without our will, without our decision, and we allow it to pass. We return therefore to remember why we are sitting here. The same way, the decision, again, to go back, to say: 'I allow this to pass without getting attached to it'.

Similarly, in those environments, if I simply only keep accepting, I would be a hypocrite. I notice here the law of entrainment at play—where eventually, all pendulums synchronize in pace before coming to a halt despite their initial different movements. This law of physics is being applied. Reflecting on this thought 'can one black sheep make all sheep black?'. For me, it doesn't hold true, but for others, it might, should they choose to believe so. Therefore, the toxicity or stress you speak of serves as a test for many. It's akin to the chaotic or challenging workout; but this is a 'work-in', a journey inward. Being on an Indian dance floor, for example, can evoke bliss or disgust for many. Once again, our internal alignment dictates the ripple effect we create.

If we move through the trance-like state, believing we're completely in the parasympathetic zone or spiritually elevated, without concern, we fail to recognize our true impact. We must acknowledge what must be accepted and what can be changed, but also taking decisions when we must, walking the fine line between these options. These environments, filled with lost souls, [less rules], and individuals present for the wrong reasons, offer unique challenges that each of us must navigate individually”.

Contrary to their day-to-day grapple with Lebanese norms, on the dancefloor they become agents of the creation of their identity and their decisions. These *black sheep citizens* find themselves out of tune with their social environment and are outcasted to the underground. Just as entrainment describes the synchronization of rhythms or movements, individuals within the Psytrance community find themselves now attuned to the unique rhythm of their tribe. They become agents of their identity creation. However, this process of attunement requires an active effort: “a work-in” in the cultivation of experience to allow for *askēsis* “as a self-transformative exercise (Rotlevy, 2022, p. 28).

“The mysticism, the tribal, the letting go, the being, whatever meaning we attach, we associate with that experience, we go there to relax. And it's an experience because, at some point, people go there just to listen, and then listening evolves into feeling, into engagement. Eventually, some may feel overwhelmed, finding the intensity too much to handle. Whether it's due to being new to the scene or simply feeling that the experience is repetitive and doesn't resonate with them, it's okay to step back. However, some individuals are more open and attuned to the experience. They approach it with an open mind, ready to encounter another with different perspectives and behaviors, especially in the face of intense music. As they navigate through their initial reactions and find a sense of peace, the energy of the music elevates, drawing in other energies at this level.

This environment serves as a space for people to express themselves, to shed their inhibitions, and to seek meaning and identity, perhaps even searching for validation. In essence, it fulfills various human needs. The need to be certain about something, the need for certainty, we can find that in there. There is the need for uncertainty, we can find that as well in there. The need for love, we can find that in there. The need for connection, we can find that in there whether real or imagined.

It might seem fake for those who cannot see why people are doing this or they can see fakeness, or they can see try-hards or they can see masks because they are there. But we cannot generalize, because *it's quite engaging as a place where we can find all this, and at the same time we can be disconnected from everything*. Just like those who are trying to sit in a relatively chaotic environment and focus on one thing, be it a candle or the point between their eyebrows, or the music. Meditation is a state of mind. It teaches us how to focus, how to allow things to pass.

While facing these tests we get to create ideas which are not related to the memory that we know and that makes the person live by a new identity, a new reality, and bond with that identity and then be away from treating it the natural way”.

Sitting with this respondent left me in awe. I followed his words with great focus and respect; I could feel first handedly my approach to reality rendered altered. It was indeed divine, especially for a knowledge-junkie like me. In a new journey presented with adverse conditions, challenges, and tests, participants need to take on greater challenges with which ordinarily people could or would not cope with. These challenges offer individuals an opportunity to experience para-social purposes and ways of living. Essentially, embarking on this new journey with effective coping mechanisms

can lead to personal spiritual development, expansion, courage, and a feeling of accomplishment.

For others, however “they perceive the concept of such ritual, if you will, differently. They enter to take something. They would want to eat, feast, hunt, fight, flight, friend, which are also coping mechanisms when you are under stress. Music is meant to do that. Especially young guys who are, who perceive differently than you, and differently than me. They perceive the concept of such ritual, if you will, differently. They enter to take something, and I respect that. It's an exercise for the ego of everyone who attends that. It's an exercise for every actor in this. From the DJ to the organizer to the facilitator on all levels. Some people go there to feed, just like a pond or an ecosystem. They have all sorts of energy, and people go there to see what looks like them and see where they can hunt, where they can feed, where they can friend, everyone has their own intention”.

## **E. ‘Psy’tanic Panic On the Dancefloor**

### ***1. 2015 Psylienz New Year’s Eve Party***

“Group sex, gay group sex with minors, digital and traditional drugs, and the promotion of satanic symbols”: This is how some security personnel and municipal authorities describe the atmosphere of devil worship on New Year’s Eve with the psychedelic party, also known as *Sahrit Al Tekhadir*<sup>6</sup> (numbing party)”. (Al Jadeed, 2016, 0:10-0:30)

This was the headline of a debate episode on Al Jadeed in 2016, addressing accusations that had arisen regarding the scene being devil worshippers. Concerned about the title ‘Numbing Night’ in Arabic translating Psychedelic Trance from English, as well as the invitation flyer spread on social media for a party held by Psylienz

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<sup>6</sup> Psychedelic in arabic is translated as *moukhadir*, meaning a drug, narcotic, a numbing substance used to achieve a state of anesthesia, which is a temporary loss of consciousness.

promoters on the 2015 New Year's Eve, the people and residents of the town of Baysour, which was chosen as the site of the party, Joseph Hawat—the President of the "JAD" Association for Drug Control—took the initiative and contacted the Mayor of Baysour, Walid Al-Aridi, to warn him against holding Psytrance parties in the town. Out of concern for the youth and to limit the spread of this phenomenon after its growth in Lebanon, Mayor Al-Aridi stated that the organizers passed through his town and planned the party there, but he took a decision prohibiting the celebration of this party. He also circulated these allegations to the owner of the venue they were renting, who had given them prior approval.

In a frenzy on the incident, allegations surrounding the group included:

“Engaging in excessive random group sex with minors that do not exceed 16 years and gay practices. Crazy horniness and hysterical dancing after taking cocaine, heroin, and other types of hallucinogens, digital drugs, or Electronic Digital Drugs, also known as numbing music. Using the girls' naked bodies as an altar and their chests as a place for the sacrificial cup” (Al Jadeed, 2016).

Hawat expressed his wish to the security forces "to monitor this phenomenon and these parties, even if they were to turn into prayers in the end". He asked, "Where are the state, security agencies, and religious authorities at such invitations?" and expressed his gratitude to the mayor of Baysour for his decision to ban it. Al-Aridi, in turn, affirmed that "we will not allow the celebration of this party in the town under any circumstances, even if the organizers obtained a license from any security agency", indicating that his powers as mayor and his morals and duty towards the youth of Lebanon led him to make this decision (Al Jadeed, 2016).

One veteran commenting on the incident complains how careless some members of the scene were:

“We used to be so careful; the flyer should not have been like that. Their flyer had the evil face. I'm a graphic designer and I would never let this happen, especially in Lebanon people are open minded, but not this much... We told them, don't get too much money, don't try to make flyers like that as you are in Europe. You are in Lebanon, you have to be careful with your image, with your communication, with where you're doing and with who you're doing. They think it's a birthday party. And they treated their party like a birthday party. And as a promoter, even as partygoer, they were not responsible.

So, yeah, I wasn't there, but everything I heard was bad, and I thought that the people that we left with, they were supposed to take care of the scene. At the end, I can take responsibility for my period, we were, I would say, clean as much as we can.

[...] You feel the heat when the police are coming because they say you're a devil worshipper. But you're not responsible. You have a responsibility also”.

When the organizers moved to another location, Bzhal - Yahshoush, the General Directorate of Internal Security Forces took the initiative this time. They issued a statement confirming the cancellation of what they referred to as a noisy music party, attended by about 300 people believed to be Satan worshippers. The General Directorate of Internal Security - Public Relations Division issued the following statement:

“On 30/12/2015, information was received that a noisy music party would be held with the attendance of about 300 people at one of the venues in Bzhal Yahshoush. As a result, the owner of the park, E.G. (born in 1963, Lebanese), was summoned. He stated that on 28/12/2015, he received a phone call from F.F. requesting to hold a music party for New Year's Eve, then another call on 29/12/2015, in which the reservation was canceled. E.G. pledged not to hold such parties in his park or to host any suspicious individuals.

The investigation into this matter was left pending until 01/01/2016. Based on the two summary judgments, he was arrested and sentenced to imprisonment in addition to a fine. Investigation was carried out in relevant courts.” (Al Jadeed, 2016, 0:52)

Loose interpretations of Lebanon's insult and defamation provisions, as outlined in the Penal Code, presents a concerning avenue through which moral entrepreneurs could criminalized any perceived risky 'other'. Article 474 of the Penal Code specifically penalizes insults against religious rituals, carrying a potential sentence of up

to three years in prison. This provision, along with others such as Article 473 addressing public blasphemy of God and Article 475 addressing obstruction of religious ceremonies and destruction of places of worship, raises alarms regarding the potential misuse of legal frameworks to suppress freedom of expression and religious freedoms in Lebanon (Saghieh et al., 2010).

President of the JAD association, Joseph Hawat, was the first recipient of the news and supported it. He was further supported by many allegations that the party was an act of devil worship. In a heated interview for Al Jadeed (2016) with Fadi Fawaz, one of the promoters of the party, Hawat mentions:

“They created a poster of a devil with a cross on his head [...] and around the title reads “LSD” party, which is the most dangerous type of drug that induces hallucinations”.

Hawat considered that "the content of the party is revealed from its title": "LSD drug is widely used by them as it is a type of drug that causes loss of proper perception and induces hallucinations in its users for several hours" (Zaiter, 2015). He condemned "the insult to Christian sanctities that accompanied the advertisement in a bold and explicit manner, with the cross appearing between the eyebrows of the devil, not to mention wearing shoes and clothes adorned with images of the Virgin and saints in a disgraceful manner that reflects their images and ideas", and revealing "the promotion and sale of heroin and cocaine within these parties, in addition to acts of obscenity and group sex" (Zaiter, 2015) .

Fawaz in the debate on Al Jadeed (2016) had responded to him by denying these false allegations:

“This is something completely not true because [...] The poster does not even mention LSD [...]. In the end, by Psychedelic we mean Psychedelic trance, a genre of music known globally”.

Fawaz had blamed this completely inaccurate comparison of Psytrance with devil worshipping in his interview initially on “corrupt media”: “They circulate information without verifying its accuracy. They don’t even bother or trouble themselves to go on Facebook or to conduct its research”.

Fawaz had explained the situation as it is:

“[...] you can come and say Lebanon has drugs, but isn’t really my problem. Us as promoters and any organization that want their own well-being and to continue with the thing their doing...in the end we’re not doing it for money, we’re doing it for fun. If you realized from the number of events we’ve only done in 5 years. We’ve barely done 8 events. They’re only 300 participants. In the end no one wants to disseminate anything or put themselves in any situation.”

While Hawat had accused the promoters of threatening him with murder, Fawaz explained that he had come to be introduced to Hawat only a day before the interview when the security forces called him in. In speculation around his actions, Fawaz alleges that Hawat had done this as “a campaign for spotlight on himself on people who have nothing to do in devil worshipping not in any closely related or distantly related way, not in allegations of intercourse with minors, not in criticizing or condemning sacred Christian practices. These are allegation Black Mass”. Alleged instances of devil worship are referred to in Lebanon as *Kodas Al Aswad* (Black Mass).

Haitham Zaiter (2015) writing for the Lebanese Forces on a commentary, entitled “‘Devil worshippers’: 8000 people celebrate New Year's Eve with a wild and public party!’ on this incident explains “‘Black Mass’ [is where] where Satan and evil spirits are invoked, and sorcery and their specific rituals are practiced, as well as human sacrifices are offered and rituals involving bloodshed or animal slaughter, using their blood to the tune of “Black Metal”, “Heavy Metal”, and “Death Metal” music are performed—not to mention drug abuse and engaging in group sex with minors and other deviant and unethical acts”. The irony in the situation is that while he directly

acknowledges it is a Psychedelic trance New Year party, the music is wrongly identified as being Heavy Metal and Rock.

The reporter could not but question Fawaz why he thought Hawat was able to persuade municipal leaders and people (Al Jadeed, 2016). Fawaz retorted with a metaphor:

“Let’s say I went to Africa in a civilized area. There, they’re going to know that that’s a lighter. But if I go inside a bit in the safari where there are lions, and I see some tribe and I show them a lighter, they’re going to say magic. When we go to places in nature, we mean to go to *nature* and we mean to get away from people not because we have anything to hide but our music stays on for 24 hours: a lot of genres in Psytrance have many subgenres and they need 24 hours to pass through them. People in the villages are not tolerating the sound. They are thinking something is happening and they are coming”.

Adamant on his stance, Hawat stresses that it is his responsibility to alert parents where their kids are going to party, “from Wiz Khalifa, who is one of the biggest drug dealers, to the Hard Rock”. He emphasizes on the fact that he does not believe they are as innocent as they are trying to portray themselves; instead, Hawat finds that “the cross on the devil’s head insults one of the recognized religions and shows contempt for certain religious symbols and is punishable by law. In fact, he further stresses that it shouldn’t have been his responsibility to call out these aggressors, but the job of clergy men and religious authorities. Hawat goes on to add that the poster promises participants “weird things” in a misunderstanding of artist name Weirdel. This already satirical allegation is followed by another humorous response by Hawat: “I don’t think they are promising participants *bonbon* (candy) or Liqueur for New Year’s”.

To further probe where Hawat had gotten this information about, Fawaz pushed Hawat to reveal the content of the complaints against the group. Hawat alleges:

“I have a letter from the Municipality of Yahshoush between me hands that says ‘after receiving complaints from the village folk, we have decided to restrict the party from happening, based on witnesses around the organization of this party’.

Yahshoush is 500 meters above the ocean and you guys are calling people to party in open air on New Year's Eve in freezing temperature”

In reality however, the party was to happen in a custom-built woodshed that would fit 200 people with heaters, costing the promoters around \$ 3,000 so that “people could party in the middle of the storm, looking at nature, warm”.

To conclude, Fawaz clarifies the typical process involved in the flyer-making: usually, he handles the posters because it falls within his specialty. However, due to being overwhelmed with work this time, he delegated the task to a designer, who happens to be a friend. He provided him with a brief specifying that we wanted a tribal theme. "The usual process is that they receive the image and overlay it with typography. He chose the wide cover picture, but there was an excess of text above it, obscuring any discernible features." In any case, Fawaz re-emphasizes that his “events are public [...] We're not engaging in extreme activities like sacrificing animals or allowing minors and breaking on them the sacrificial cup. Where could I even acquire sacrificial cups if I wanted to? It's absurd to even suggest that”.

Hawat's son, in between breaks, ambushed Fawwaz, an alleged “devil worshipper”, outside the news station, threatening him with a gun. After returning for the second half of the episode recording, Joe Maalouf, a television reporter, DJ, club owner, and an all-time raver, discussed the incident, siding with the scene: his experience in underground music culture, as well as being a news reporter, made it clear to him the preposterous reactions of the Lebanese religious, political, influential, and security authorities when it comes to subcultures different from their own.

## ***2. Moral Panic and the Demonization of the 'Other'***

Moral panic through the process of demonization has served as a consistent leitmotif by the state, repeatedly utilized as a tool of social control. Non-conforming groups are subject every now and then to periods of moral panic in Lebanon. They emerge as a perceived threat to societal values and interests, often portrayed in a stylized and stereotypical manner by the mass media. It is devised to capture exaggerated and anxious reactions in which marginalized groups, in this case Psytrancers, are portrayed as “folk devils” and a “risk society” in their danger to societal norms and values (Walsh, 2020; Beck, 1983; Ungar, 2001). The primary significance of this concept lies in redirecting and placing the focus away from the actual occurrence of deviance towards the role of “right-thinking” actors, moral entrepreneurs, such as editors, bishops, and politicians in: identifying social issues; fostering anxiety; garnering support for the status quo; and magnifying the very groups they target for condemnation and crusade (Cohen 2011; Thompson 2005). Accredited experts weigh in with their diagnoses and proposed solutions, while coping mechanisms are devised or utilized. Satanic panic contributes further to the marginalization of “folk devils”, which position them even more on the fringes of society and criminality.

Furthermore, such moral entrepreneurs provide "inventories" of the perceived threat, disseminating exaggerated portrayals of which include the promotion of satanic symbols, the conjuring of demonic spirits and sorcery, the act of engaging in group sex, sex with minors, and animal sacrificing that are stylized, stereotypical, and "much sharper than reality" (Cohen, 2011, pp. 40). This sensationalized reporting, often melodramatic in nature, through its focus on generating outrage, defining community boundaries, and making situations morally clear, triggers expanding levels of concern.

Consequently, it sparks escalating levels of alarm, solidifies public sentiment, and ultimately leads to an "increased exercise of control" (Hall et al., 1978, p. 178; Garland, 2008).

Especially noteworthy among the different accusations were the repeatedly cited actions and behaviors of perceived abnormal sexuality and gender, such as "group sex", obscenity, as well as "gay practices". Discourses on precarious sexuality, sexual deviance, unrestrained reproduction, a seeming susceptibility of the body to sexual influence, and an anxiety of individual rebellion to conventional social and familial conduct emerge and circulate to counteract, pathologize, and demonize non-normative, sometimes queer bodies and desires and socially un-productive sex. This moral panic on Psytrance had also been repeatedly gendered, as it consistently portrayed women's bodies as instruments used to violate societal norms, such as in the symbolic breaking of the sacrificial cup on their "naked bodies". At the core of these dynamics lay the gendered construct of the female body, which, paradoxically, dictates both passive self-sacrifice and acts of immorality and aggression (Cossins, 2015).

Through the unrestrained use of terms such as 'devil,' 'murder,' and 'threats,' as well as the uncritical employment of diagnostic labels like 'gay' and 'minor offenders,' the media constructed a vivid stereotype of the folk devil as inherently malevolent. This portrayal extended to depicting the implicated youth as straying from familial values, thereby positioning them not only as deserving of sympathy and support but also in need of rescue and protection through a return to nuclear Lebanese family structures. Consequently, their reporting served a dual function as both narrative and meta-narrative, simultaneously recounting events, providing explanations, and drawing moral conclusions and solutions (De Young, 2008).

Often allegations of drug use in the scene sound more official and authoritative than the mytho-religious arguments used elsewhere in the elitists argument and have an added credibility; however, drug-use is rampant throughout the state and is neither limited nor necessary for the Psytrance scene. One veteran promoter and organizer notes:

“I knew [blaming us with drugs] would happen. We gathered everyone and from day one we were against at least people in the crew to give or take drugs from anyone or anything like that. So that at least from our part we came through. Although the temptation is there because everybody's coming and asking you, right? But you can't do that. You need to have a good head on your shoulder. And also, we really took it as a responsibility also because we're getting all these people, all these people are trusting us. People are trusting us, we cannot also be dealing drugs and putting them in danger.

Because then you know we're going to have a lot of eyes on us. So from that side we were always clean. Everyone in the crew, we never dealt drugs [...]. It was never a drug culture for us; we were all together just chilling the crew, the family. We never took drugs, you know. [...] No one had problems with it; it wasn't a lifestyle for us [...]. It definitely wasn't a lifestyle.

I think this is what really put us apart at that point. Also, when we got really big for the festival, I actually went to the cops in Hbeish, and I actually went to them before they came to me, because I knew we were on the radar. So I called, asked for a meeting. And I went to them. And I remember when I entered, the guy, the main guy looked at me, he said, *Ahla w Sahla* [the name of the speaker]. They know. So I sat down, I explained what we're doing. Yeah. I told, you know, I told him that I'm sure that he knows about me and he knows about us, but I'm sure that he knows that we are also clean, otherwise we would have got caught by now.

And I said, you know, we are not any different than Mix FM doing these big parties for 20,000 people and everybody's on drugs. So this is what we're doing, just a bit smaller and a bit different on the fringe. But you're welcome to come and check everything out. Because in their head, they don't know. They think that it's this shady, dark thing, not well organized, you know, like cultists.

We organized [...] workshops and you really felt surrounded, and you had a family. So I invited them to go up and they came; they said we're going to go in undercover. We said no problem and I waited for them at the door, we had them come in. You know, I had them come and check out the festival. So this is how we dealt with them, to be open and tell them, come in and do your thing, we have nothing to hide. And if you catch drug dealers at the festival, so be it.

Catch them, no problem. I want you to catch drug dealers, I don't want people dealing at the festival. So that's how we built it. And because we're clean, they could never come after us”.

Some festivals, such as Away Festival, provided drug harm reduction areas. The event announcement and information were headed as follows:

“[...] EMERGENCY CARE: Please visit our Red Cross tent for medical needs. We also have holistic remedies available at the Holistic Temple. Drug harm reduction area provided by SKOUN [...].

-ILLEGAL SUBSTANCES: Are strictly forbidden on festival grounds and organizers take no responsibility for the possession or consumption thereof.

-MOST IMPORTANT: Take good care of yourself and look out for everyone in the festival. Drink plenty of water, rest, swim carefully”. (Away, 2018)

One attendee notes SKOUN used to set up tents at old festivals to assist people in case of emergencies. They would advise attendees not to use drugs, but if they chose to engage in recreational drug use, they provided information about substances that could be deadly when mixed or consumed. He went one to explain, now in his organizer voice, that:

“Of course, if you want to host a party you have to make sure that everyone at this party is safe no matter what happens. We need to be legal especially that we're hosting kind of edgy parties, and the music is not as accessible: you know if a neighbor passes by and hears such intense music, they're not going to perceive the music the same way we do. So, they're going to like listen to the sounds and the screams and they're going to just think, ok, this is *shaawazeh* (blasphemous) music. You know. So, in order to have ourselves protected, first of all, the organizers must be awake the whole time, they must be clean, and yeah, and they must have all the legal documents available at all times.

You have to market it as drug-free and you have to make sure that your dance floor is drug-free at all times. No matter what. I'm not going to follow every attendee to the bathroom to see what he's doing. I'm not going to strip search any person that comes. But at the same time, I trust that the people that [he is allowing to] com[e] to these parties are responsible adults and they're aware of everything that's happening”.

The Lebanese media's association of Psytrance music with drug use and devil worship, along with the marginalization of the Psytrance scene, serves as a notable

example within the broader social, religious, political, "moral" regulation in Lebanon, used as a form of maintaining the prevalent social order. By making such connections, Psytrance and the typically innocuous exploratory actions of ordinary young people are positioned beyond the realm of normalcy and into the realm of the unfamiliar. This categorization not only establishes certain behaviors as unacceptable for young individuals but also casts them as a peculiar and alarming social 'other' existing outside established boundaries.

Once initiated, moral panics tend to escalate in intensity over time. Moral concerns, unjust labeling, and aggressive policing converge to escalate deviance, resulting in a cyclic "process of psychic adjustment and self-fulfilling social action" (Garland, 2008, p. 19; Becker, 1963). As groups are stigmatized as deviant, they face persecution and marginalization, leading to increased polarization and reinforcement of deviant identities, affiliations, and actions. This was evident in yet another satanic panic only a couple of months after the New Year's Eve incident around the 2016 Hexplex Festival.

### **3. *2016 Hexaplex Festival***

"Hexaplex? No... Our children are not yours" read the title of commentary article by a writer otherwise despised in the scene Joumana Nasr for the Lebanese Forces. Already from the introduction of the article, the discourse used resonates with Thomas Johansson's note on moral panics existing primarily to uphold "boundaries between various groups of people and maintaining moral conceptions" (2000, p. 24):

"[...] after these kinds of camps have turned into a public concern, it is our right, and the right of anyone shocked by the images and scenes of the parties held over three days and nights at the "Hexaplex Festival" camp, which was held in one of the mountainous areas in the Keserwan region [...] to ask: 'Who allowed the entry

of these phenomena and innovations that have no relevance to our culture, upbringing, and ethics? Who said that questioning and objecting to the infiltration of similar camps in our communities means suppressing the freedom of our youth? And when did freedom become slavery to all manifestations of escapism and entering the world of delusion? *Why did the organizers of similar parties and camps choose to plant them exclusively in Christian areas? Where is the responsibility of those in charge of granting permits to establish camps and organize artistic events?'*" (Nasr, 2016 emphasis added)

When the integrity of collective identities faces perceived threats from hidden dangers or external evil entities, it often triggers a frenzy, prompting the necessity to safeguard the endangered boundary (Stang et al., 2021). These boundaries habitually distinguish between Christians and Muslims, good and evil, authority and subordination, and normative and non-normative behavior.

Sociologists often highlight those moral panics stem from social anxiety triggered by rapid social, technological, and ideological changes. The premise is that these changes are not only unsettling but also pose a threat to the established legitimacy of institutions and challenge comforting ideologies and deeply held values. Consequently, the heightened social vigilance and control associated with moral panics aim not only to protect, preserve, and reaffirm these familiar structures of authority and values but also to mitigate the increased sense of risk that emerges when moral boundaries undergo shifts (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994). The transformative potential of Psytrance in exposing individuals to alternative realities and moral frameworks, as well as blur boundaries between existing social dogmas, notably sectarian ones, positions it as a likely target for perceived threats. The outcry to a possible threat to established institutions is evidenced in the subsequent statements within the article:

“So what if it threatens an entire society and eliminates what remains of its values and ethics? And more importantly, where is the role of the family and having them ensure the well-being of the children's journey through life?”

Did you say "Hexaplex Festival"? The invitation has been received, and our response is: "You have your nights, your culture, and your music, and we have ours, our values, our Dabkeh, and our camps. So, leave our youth alone!"

Often in Lebanon the process of demonizing non-conforming expressions and lifestyles is conflated with any other alternative lifestyles like homosexuality. My ethnographic research has uncovered that the Psytrance community, despite common perceptions, does not include a notable queer demographic within its membership, and this absence is not attributable to discriminatory behavior; this is just how the community's composition existed during my time. Noursat station in Lebanon, commented in a short article:

“Many articles were written, strong analysis and criticisms were issued and are still being issued, several awareness campaigns were organized, and nothing was done...

Bloody wars were waged against the "evil" who continues to experience our youth through many means, the latest of which was the phenomenon of the "Hexaplex Festival Music" in the village of Chahtoul - Kesrouan, which controls their minds and transports them from the world of reality to the world of homosexuals hidden under the mask of temporary happiness that soon disappears. They appear until they disappear, leaving the place to regret and despair; When will the rumble of these wars be heard?

The Church wields the weapon of the word in the face of the evil spreading within our societies that refuse to respond to this cry, societies that have forgotten the true meaning of the family, which in the past was the main reference for the children, the nurturing caretaker, the listening ear, and the warm embrace. Today, it has lost these qualities in light of all the fragmentation that destroys it and pushes its members away. They search for a destructive alternative.

The Church's battle is directed against the deadly evil that is tampering with the minds of our lost and weak youth. The responsibility of protecting it from temptations falls on everyone responsible for it, including parents, teachers, and leaders who are called today to support the Church in combating all heresies.

Our church is not accustomed to lowering its voice in the face of evil, nor surrendering to homosexuals. It is the one that stands steadfast in the face of the gates of hell. Today it calls on those concerned to unite in the face of deviant phenomena such as the “Hexaplex Festival Music.” May the call be heard so that the saying “Don’t cry out...there is no one” does not come true. !” (Noursat, 2016)

The portrayal of Psytrance enthusiasts is geared towards establishing an "us-versus-them" dichotomy, thus delineating imaginary margins between normalcy and risk. Characteristics associated with the folk devil, as mentioned earlier, contribute to this process of alienation, including the perceived Western and Indian origins of the menaces and the non-conformity of Psytrance culture, its style, and purported "ritualistic reproductions" (Kidd-Hewitt and Osborne, 1995, p. 2). The language used to depict members of subcultures and alleged Satan worshippers employs symbolism and visualizations designed to instill phobia of this 'other.' These individuals are depicted as lacking religious and moral values, devoid of goodness and respectability, and showing no regard for authority; they are not only devoid of these virtues but actively challenge them: they are people different from "us", the observers, and these people are threatening. The article mechanizes a contradictory and inflated grammar to confuse the audience even further. For instance:

"Eight years ago, the psychedelic trance festivals started in Lebanon, organized by private companies and mostly relying on electronic music, culminating in the "Hexaplex Festival". But it is certain that these movements, previously found on the shores of Goa as an outlet for their lifestyle, were not welcomed except in Christian areas.

[...] The "psychedelic trance" style relies on dancing in the embrace of nature over several consecutive days and nights to the rhythm of "techno" and "trance" music performed by a group of DJs without fatigue or boredom. The festival includes artistic workshops and seminars on nature and the future of humanity. Its participants express their presence by choosing strange clothes, while others turn to meditation in nature to eventually return to life with energy liberated from the slavery entrenched by modern societies," according to their description.

Someone might ask, "Where does the devil lie? What are the strange conditions or rituals that strike our culture and social values in this type of parties, or the words that only affect weak souls?" Where is the danger in listening to "psychedelic trance" music over three days and three nights, especially since this type was specifically used in the past as a psychological treatment for individuals who refuse to heal with drugs and medications due to its positive effect on the nerves? The answer is provided by a musicology [...who explains...] there is

undoubtedly a close connection between this music and drugs. "It is impossible for anyone to remain for 3 days and 3 nights listening to it without using some form of drugs or excessive alcohol consumption," noting that this type of music doubles the heart rate to match its rhythm, thus enabling the listener to absorb it, sway to its tunes, and delve into its depths.

In the camp, there were about 1500 people of all age groups, and there were even families. It is true that they spent 4 days and nights dancing and swaying to rock, techno, and trance music, but there is no truth to the presence of drugs or drug use. While there were personnel responsible for inspecting the campers' bags at the entrance on the first day, who was responsible about the rest of the days, and who confirms the absence of drug use or promotion, especially inside the tents?... No answer”.

Depictions reworking ancient and religious myths, as well as conflated

visualizations once again rampaged the media, causing an irresistible disposition for

“extravagant irrationality” (De Young, 2008, pp. 1729). The article writes:

“Are you excited? Up to this point, nothing suggests doubt. But just reading one of the posts published on one of the pages dedicated to this type of festival held in one of the Lebanese regions, we realize that the devil is in the details. We read: "The light fades away, individuals transformed by gods into creatures resembling wolves hovering around their prey, freedom. Ultraviolet lights change faces into creatures emerging from the underworld, attracted by wooden masks belonging to jungle tribes, adorned with magical drawings reflecting a different life with every turn... Voices and vibrations may call you from a nearby spot known as "Chill Out," so your feet, which have chosen a different path from your brain's will, take you to walk in the dense fog until you come across a mandala drawing talking to you with its bright colors, so you take random colors and join a coloring session, akin to hypnotism. The voice calls you again from a nearby place, so you stop and continue your way to stumble upon people practicing yoga and meditation”

Another Psytrance member explains to me:

“X: There's this famous DJ, Merkaba. Yeah. He came to the festival with his wife, Kalya. She's like a dancer. She's like a performer, actually. She was performing during his set. [The media] thought she was, because she was wearing blue, just a nice shade of blue, they said on TV that she was like trying to imitate Mariam (Mary). And like, there's like nothing religious about that in any way. It's just like a performance.

C: They had her performance on the TV?

X: Yeah”.

An attendee further unpacks the incident in outrage: "She came, she looked so beautiful. She had a halo on. They likened her to the Mother Mary, they made her seem like she was making fun of Mary".

One Psytrance responder in the article is cited:

"Who said that campers don't sleep, shower, eat, and drink? In the camp, there were 15 kiosks, a mini-market, and a professional artist because we taught participants how to draw mandalas, which is a type of yoga [...]. We are a group of art enthusiasts and we help young people recharge themselves with positive energy through workshops, art professionals, and seminars held on the sidelines of the camp." [...] "Where is the mistake? This is a global art, but apparently, this country does not understand such civilized manifestations. And I am considering returning to pack my bag and return to Canada."

In Lebanon, the act of "othering" is predominantly accomplished through a socio-religious, sectarian, and moral lens. Evident is so through the following sections of the article:

"Basically, I never thought of going to areas with Islamic characteristics because I don't want a headache, and I know in advance that they won't allow us to drink, and they won't accept our lifestyle," one says. From this, we understand that the alternative was in the communities of Christian areas with the aim of distorting their image and changing their identity and culture? "Absolutely not," the party organizer replies, "there is a legal license signed by the governor of Mount Lebanon that we obtain, and according to it, we hold the parties in the camp on the land we rent from after informing the owners the nature of the camp, and the mayor, the village headman, and even the priests are aware of that." Are details of the type of parties deposited with official circles before obtaining the license and permits? "Everyone is aware of the nature of our parties, and basically what's wrong with them? Dancing and drinking alcohol? That's not wrong. And whoever accuses us of conducting satanic rituals is welcome to join us at the camp and prove it.

After an attempt to frame the party as a peril to Christian culture, the article proclaims:

"There may be none of these aspects that have stirred public opinion, and perhaps there are. We will not judge anyone. But neither the appearance nor the lifestyle adopted inside these camps resemble our culture, identity, or heritage. [...] It is true that some reactions were random, but we need to understand the position of the locals," says the priest of the Keserwan town, adding: "Ultimately, I am against this type of festivals and camps that strike at communities at the core and

conflict with the line of the parish. Weeks ago, we illuminated our town for 3 days and nights with the crafts and heritage festival, and we introduced visitors to our intellectual and heritage treasures, and the youth sang and danced the Dabke to the tune of *Dalouna* as well as modern music. But everything was in line with us and resembled the atmosphere of the Lebanese family. What did they do to us today with this camp? And why did the governor of Mount Lebanon allow its establishment under a legal license? Even the owner of the land rented from the endowment is responsible, and I confronted him about it. We inquire: "There is information about the possibility of campers using drugs. The priest replies: "I haven't seen anything, and I can't accuse anyone. But I want to ask how it is possible for a person to spend 3 days and nights drinking and dancing without using any kind of stimulants?"

One notable aspect in the article is a commentary by a Priest on matters of Lebanese culture, particularly in domains like music and family life. By invoking Lebanese culture through the lens of religious morality, the priest reinforces the idea that deviating from certain behaviors and forms of expressions are inherently a deviation to a citizen's identity, naturalized through semantics like "our culture, identity, or heritage", "strike our communities", "we introduced visitors to our intellectual and heritage treasures". "The new regimes of bodily discipline and regulation characteristic of the panoptic projects of modernity were evidently predicated on the linking of the individual body and the social body and thus on the perceived centrality of conceptions of morality to "good citizenship," "public order"" (Grieverson, 2004, p. 20). His rejection of festivals and camps that diverge from the parish's line reflects a long line of clerical desire to maintain control over cultural expression and safeguard against perceived threats to communal values in the state.

At the same time, the priest's commentary raises questions about the evolving nature of Lebanese identity and the tensions between tradition and Arab modernity. More troublingly, it reasserts the power of the elite to arbitrate social questions and produce a reality that, in this instance, universalizes a selective tolerance to some shapes of modernity (i.e. to traditional "Dabkeh as well as modern music") or acceptance of a

certain representation of “Lebanessness” (i.e. “everything was in line with us and resembled the atmosphere of the Lebanese family”) and a demonization of others trying to wage

“war that targets the youth” and “undermine our communities under the guise of music, and later strike deep through innovations and practices outside our culture, injecting poison into our youths' bodies and introducing them to the world of hallucination, emptiness, and crime” (Nasr, 2016).

While he emphasizes tolerance importance of preserving cultural heritage, his rejection of certain contemporary expressions, such as modern music or non-sectarian festivals, highlights the *raison d'être* behind the reaction of these moral entrepreneurs in navigating cultural change in a rapidly evolving liberal society. Liberalism, which seeks to limit government intervention to allow individuals and groups the freedom to pursue “disparate visions of the good, is not threatened by the withdrawal of small numbers of citizens from the day-to-day political, social, and cultural life of the nation” (McConnell, 2010, p. 45). As long as separatist movements like Psytrancers remain limited in scope and refrain from viewing their disengagement with the status quo as a prelude to wielding state power, i.e., as long as they maintain a consistent detachment from political involvement, their actions and beliefs should be of little concern to the broader public. However, if these separatist factions grow in size as made visible by the festival gathering, then they can be seen as manifestations of civic irresponsibility and sabotage.

In Lebanese society, believers enjoy political freedom to exercise their faith, but pervasive sectarian tensions often force them into a defensive position, where they must contend against the cultural, economic, scientific, and political advancements of contemporary society. Faced with these significant social pressures over the past few centuries, numerous communities have opted to adapt to the modern era by embracing

differing levels of spiritual and social openness. However, there are also groups that have taken a contrasting path, actively resisting modernity in favor of upholding theological orthodoxy. Feeling deeply endangered by this societal landscape, subsets such as the Psytrance community perceive radical disassociation from mainstream society as their sole means of survival. “Indeed, for many, the battle against those who do not hold their beliefs now contributes as much to their identities as the beliefs themselves” (McConnell, 2010, p. 33). The priest continues:

"Everyone is responsible, from the state and those concerned with it, passing through the parents and reaching the church. Yes, the church is negligent, so we will take on the responsibility of dealing positively with this innovation from a pastoral perspective, to educate our youth about the new war sweeping through our communities under the guise of openness and liberation from the slavery of reality into the world of addiction to innovations, customs, and drugs.

They have their music, and we have ours. They have Rock, beats, and trance, and we also have this type of music but for minutes and maybe a few hours. [...] They have their innovations, culture, symbols, and "stars," and we have our culture, upbringing, and Lebanese authenticity that we will not be ashamed of as long as it has proven its worth in the world and its creativity in all fields".

A key technology in moral and cultural policing was the conceptualization of “indecent” as an injury and injustice to the Christian sect.

“But what is not debatable is that it is a new innovation that strikes deep into Lebanese society, especially the Christian community, especially since it is only held in Christian areas, knowing that campers come from all sects. Father Dr. Youssef Monseigneur insisted at first on defining that "Psychedelic" music was used as an alternative treatment to traditional drugs, but over time it turned into toxins that eat away at the bodies of our children and youth and threaten our society with collapse”.

The article stresses the deceptive and provocative claim of the organizers after renting an endowed land; he repeats the word monastery six times, insisting “they may not have delved into the details, and this ignorance is a worse excuse than the offense, especially since the first signature bore the stamp of the Governor of Mount Lebanon”.

The article in such a manner calls for its audience to open their eyes to who is being allowed to use these spaces. “But aren't the majority of parties held on lands belonging to Christian endowments?”, the article asks. In response:

“True, but they are rented out by ordinary people. This does not mean that the church is not responsible for monitoring the manner of land use. Hence, it is incumbent to have the church specify in the conditions the method of using the endowed land, and in the event of a breach, legal measures will be taken against the tenant or the contract will be terminated”

The argument explicitly advocates for the exclusion of certain segments of society from accessing these locations, locations sacred to “us.”

Similar to the 2015 New Year’s Eve incident, a security-oriented vocabulary to advocate for curtailing this moral other was heavily adopted.

“[It] should be the responsibility of the morals police and the anti-narcotics bureau [for those] living in tents in the embrace of nature and attracting the youth under the guise of liberation from the slavery of reality and life pressures. [...A] new war is at our doorstep, and confrontation has become inevitable, and its soldiers are distributed among the parents first, then the security and official apparatuses of the state, and the church first and last.

[...]

O Allah, we have conveyed the message”.

Similar to every instance of moral panic, this phenomenon diverted focus and resources away from the genuine underlying stressors—economic, social, political, familial, and ideological instability—that serve as its root causes. The discourse and claims-making of these moral crusaders on Psytrance attracted numerous members of the general public, professionals, the media, and policymakers into a fabricated realm characterized by notions of devil worship, pedophilia, lust, and drug abuse, diverting attention from the genuine challenges of evolving family structures and escalating state insecurity. These elite-engineered technologies displace the “political crisis of the state...onto softer targets” [Cohen, 2011, 2002, p. xxxvi; Hall et al. 1978), creating a

scapegoat for injustices and mass organized distraction from social inequity. The article addresses this by valuating the harassment and offenses of Psytrance on “our youth” with the same level of intensity, if not more intense, of the social ills underlying their emergence:

“There are those who will whisper: "The country is on the verge of collapse. A presidential vacuum, state institutions are paralyzed, most of them have reached the point of paralysis, the economic situation is on the verge of explosion, and you are raising the issue of the "Hexaplex Festival"? These words are valid in an era where the state is riddled with a presidential vacuum and corruption in its institutions. But [...] this kind of summer festival [...] reminds us of words engraved in memory, and we thought we were immune to them: "If you want to destroy a society, all you have to do is eliminate the element of youth in it." You surely remember it, and what is certain is that we are no longer immune to it.

[...]

But the Lebanese family still maintains its traditions, so I do not deny that I fear this innovation that has begun to spread in our Lebanese society in general and the Christian community in particular, but I am reassured when I see that against these groups there is the scene of thousands of believers marching every morning of the 22nd of each month to the Monastery of Saint Charbel in Annaya”.

The priest concludes by an expression of the success of their “awareness” campaign measured through the public reaction it garnered: "I am not afraid for the Christian family because the reaction that emerged in the aftermath of a camp held in one of the Keserwan areas confirms that we are still children of values and the church. [...] Today they are waging against us the worst and most dangerous war: the war of drugs and sex. But Mar Charbel, Rifka, and the saints are with our youth. The important thing is to leave our children alone”.

As a control culture intensified with the panic, law enforcement scrutiny and crackdowns escalated, heightening both actual and perceived instances of wrongdoing (Cohen, 2011). The organizers of Hexaplex Festival were arrested, forcing them to flee the country. Similar to but more intensely in the Heavy Metal and Rock scene

throughout history in the state<sup>7</sup>, these accusations were followed by a "witch hunt" atmosphere, a dearth in physical evidence, problematic methods of interrogation of Psytrance enthusiasts, and the capsizing of numerous of the initial convictions. Psytrance parties after these allegations experienced an increase in police raids and hid further underground.

“It was that scary at that time, maybe, to, you know, be caught hosting psychedelic trance parties because you weren't only just dealing with drug enforcements, you were dealing with the church—a much bigger offense”.

Another crowd member recalls: “Half of my friends were wanted and left the country forever. Some were from the Hexaplex organizers, some were my close friends.”

A select group of scholars have recently shifted their focus towards highlighting the agency and motivations of deviants, seeking to understand and account for their actions (Walsh, 2020; McRobbie, 1994; Osgerby, 2004; Yar, 2012). Rejecting the notion that deviance and criminality are merely reactionary phenomena, cultural criminologists have endeavored to uncover the meanings, creative impulses, and subversive desires that drive transgressive behavior. They emphasize the sensory pleasures and forbidden thrills associated with crossing boundaries and challenging norms, interpreting norm-breaking and legal transgression as part of a 'carnavalesque' endeavor to find existential meaning and excitement in the highly regulated yet precarious landscape of contemporary society (Presdee, 2003). In this manner folk devils are treated as subject, not objects. ‘Underground Resistance’ served as a prime case for showcasing the resilient agency of the scene.

“We posted like around 10 episodes of that. And the main idea was basically no one knows about the party until after the party after the crackdown on the

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<sup>7</sup> For more, see Crowcroft, O. (2017). *Rock in a hard place: Music and mayhem in the Middle East*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Psychedelic scene, they made it to be like some kind of devil worshipping parties.”

Members all cracked a smile when I had finally given them a chance to reply to this moral panic as the devil’s advocate. Their answers had me smirking as well:

“Wow. I mean you guys blew up the f\*cking port. What the f\*ck man? You live in utter sh\*t, you know? *Ya’ni* this is... Get out of the stone age; there’s a lot that you don’t know that you don’t know. This is just a distraction man from the real evil that’s happening out there”.

The same replier had asked me to publish his comment about the author Joumana Nasr: “She used to say that these people, they eat cats, and they eat dogs. If she only came to a psychedelic party and she saw the connection between people and their dogs and their cats, you know?”

He was not wrong. Members of the underground scene treated their cats better than most caretakers. In a fiery outburst, another fervent enthusiast exclaims a line of slurs to my question: “If you could reply to them, what would you say?”. She goes on to say:

“They are so immature, and without culture. Why is Techno considered a good thing? Because there is money, because you are benefiting from it, because you are renting shops, just because we are doing it in nature then you have a problem with this.

One, two, because the music is a little bit stranger than your music, is this, do you call this mature? That you do this? Because our look is a little bit colored; you are wearing black and white, and you are talking about security, that you are trying to target people that are only there to dance and leave, and you are making up stories about them. If you are so sure of what you are doing, show me a proof. Show me a f\*cking proof of what we are doing wrong. But this doesn’t exist anymore, no one has time for us”.

She was right in the sense that with time, the emotional fervor of that panic has died down; nevertheless, the reputation of the Psytrance community remains tainted and risky. In, however, notable cases, responses to perceived deviance and associated identities are not merely dichotomous but interdependent: deviance serves not only to

repel but also to attract precisely because it is taboo. Many enthusiasts have associated more strongly with the scene often as a result of the possible provocation of their existence. To my surprise, whereas my usual experience was that members hated the cops and their interference or presence, one member conveys almost out of breath from laughter:

“Honestly, I feel that this is my perspective. I enjoy this. I get this dopamine rush. I feel like an outlaw. You can be registered and be perfectly legal but you’re going to still feel like you’re doing something wrong, like an outlaw. I love this edge; I live on this edge.

I love it when I’m playing music and I see the blue and red lights. Once I was playing and I saw them, I hit a button when I saw them, and the track went *wiiiiyyyyyhhh*.

I started thinking of strategies. I thought maybe why not put Arabic music on the USB and when I suspect cops, I shift to it quick”.

The casual Psytrance Lebanese consumers find content in celebrating softer values within these taboo groups as it allows them to vicariously partake in deviance's hedonistic pleasures without directly engaging in rule-breaking (Walsh, 2020).

## CHAPTER VI

### SENSORIALITY: ALTERNATIVE STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

#### **A. Alternative Ways of Knowing: Sensorial Gnosis in the Psy-scene**

Psytrance raves have emerged as potent environments for alternative ways of knowing and modes of cognition. The sensory overload inherent in these gatherings plays a pivotal role in shaping the spiritual encounters and the test of suggestibility of participants. The scene intentionally offers dynamic sites where sensory induced out-of-mundane experiences provide out-of-mundane sensations. Sensory models of cultural interaction (Classen, 1990; Howes, 2006) are enacted and where “sensational knowledge” (Hahn, 2007) is cultivated through immersive experiences. These events offer a unique opportunity to explore the complexities of knowledge-production outside the primacy of Western textualism in a collective and transformative spacetime.

In the vibrant world of Psytrance gatherings in Lebanon, sensory experiences abound, weaving together a web of sensations. From the gentle act of petting the local Psydogs known and beloved by the crowd, a simple yet profound gesture that fosters connection and warmth, to the unique greetings exchanged with hugs that speak volumes without words, every sensual interaction is imbued with meaning and intention.

As the pulsating beats fill the air and your chest, the UV lights cast a spellbinding glow over hand-made stage designs, illuminating and mapping trippy visuals that melt before your eyes. The psychedelic decorations adorning every corner create a phantasmagoria of colors, evoking a sense of bohemian whimsy and creative expression: red, orange, and yellow lamps illuminate the spaces where the main stage

lights beam. Amidst the music and dancing, the aroma of chai and hot coffee wafts through the air, mingling with the tantalizing scent of organic homemade food, *mnekish*, and fruit being prepared and tended to with love and care.

The mesmerizing lightshows and poi performances add to the sensory spectacle, captivating the senses and anchoring participants in an otherworld. Watching the circus performances, ravers sync with their entire environment. From the vast open muddy forest lands to the intimate bushy or concrete nooks, each corner holds its own allure, inviting exploration and discovery. The heat on a sunny day subtly shapes the acoustics of the music in the summer. In the winter, the crackling of a burning fire leaves the roofed dancefloor with a smokey smell before leaving back outside to the forest to listen to the laughs, libel, and lighters of the crowd in conjunction with the music.

The palpable energy of ecstatic bodies moving in unison, fueled by the heat of the moment and the collective euphoria permeates the atmosphere. Surrounded by the beauty of nature, with the stars overhead and the earth beneath their feet, participants find themselves immersed in a world of wonder and possibility rendered conceivable through profound sensory richness. A DJ in our discussion on the sensationality of the Psytrance experience, ironically while we were being fried under the heat of the sun in a café with large glass windows, recalls a quote by Jim Morrison: “I believe in a long, prolonged, derangement of the senses in order to obtain the unknown”. He proceeds his statement with: “You can name it what you want. So, it is something that can be very exciting, but it can be very taming, and it can be also entrapping”. Such immersive bodily sensations in the art of Psytrance are rendered “knotted” with the audience’s focus so much so that the subject matter of music becomes intertwined with its expression in an “optimal experience” of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Howes, 2006).

The sensory experience, in a process of “synaesthesia” or the “joining of the senses” (Sullivan, 1986), is essential for comprehending not just what, but also how a sound phenomenon is being heard and sensed as a "spatio-acoustic mosaic", another form of sociality (Feld, 1982, p. 86).

“I give you the environment, the stimulus, the stressor. I recalibrate its potency with sound, with other tools that, when intensified and multiplied, become seen and felt to the mind or to the senses. And this makes the situation even more hypnotic, more hypnotizing. The more the music is redundant, the more the... you're a raver so you know...the longer the phrases in the music are, the more entrainment there is for the brainwaves. And not entertainment, entrainment. So, the audience is on a certain wavelength that is somehow binding.

The sensory environment: the visual, the auditory, the kinesthetic, the gustatory, and the olfactory. You have incense, smell. You have the senses, you touch things, you feel them. The sensory brain is activated with all that sensory stimulation. They enjoy what's there. The brain is flooding with all those chemicals and the body with all those emotions and feelings and sensations. And yet again, you approach those people, and without seeing their faces you can tell, to a certain extent, who's where. You can get lost in there. You can get lost in looking who's where and who's doing what. *You can get lost in watching your senses.*”

Here sensory knowledge acts as both a “physical body and a sensory environment”, proposing the idea of "transmateriality"—the notion that ephemeral phenomena leave material traces that connect past, present, and future events (Schneider and Wright 2020, p. 16). In essence, it posits that there is a material residue from ephemeral occurrences that hints at a continuity of experience across time. In the pursuit of enhancing aesthetic encounters, various Psytrance artists aim to highlight alternative forms of bodily understanding. Each artifact used encapsulates a unique combination of sensory elements, evident in its creation process (i.e. the sensory dexterities and values that went into its production), the sensory characteristics it embodies, and its reception by individuals who interpret its meaning based on the sensory norms of the culture (Howes, 2006).

“Spatial dramaturgy” and the deliberate “morphopoiesis” (Magowan, 2022, p. 4) of space was essential for the appreciation of the psychedelic journey. Psytrance enthusiasts approach space not as a stagnant backdrop for events, but as a dynamic, ever-changing environment pivotal to the experience. Its expansiveness varies based on factors like landscape, climate, seclusion, scent, deco, lights, sound systems, local wildlife, and more.

This foregrounds the significant contributions of individuals in shaping atmospheres through various means, which adds an element of the unintended: designers rely on their understanding of an atmosphere's vibe yet cannot guarantee that a crowd will not infuse it with unintended or unforeseen nuances or fulfill the envisioned roles. Similarly, specific circumstances such as a motor power outage, sudden downpour on the sound systems, or breaking news that could completely alter an atmosphere, cannot be predicted. Yet this partial improvisation opens the ways in which premeditated atmospheres close down or encourage meanings and performances of contention, interaction, improvisation, creativity, and experimentation.

This embodied sociality acquired through alternative modes of perception does not only involve the time and place of the events: this sociality forged exists before the event itself and extends far beyond its physical location. Even the process of ‘going there’ and ‘reaching there’ has evolved into sensual events in their own right, a characteristic also intrinsic in spiritual rituals as pilgrimage. Meyer (2006, p. 8) elucidates that this sensation “has a double meaning: feeling and the inducement of a particular kind of excitement”. In preparation for the rave, for instance, each garment and piece of jewelry is carefully selected in excitement to reflect personal style, artistic expression, and sometimes even spiritual beliefs. The process often involves

considering not only aesthetic appeal but also practicality for dancing and comfort for long hours of movement in nature. With an understanding of the expectations of the energized crowd at the rave, it is now time to explore the space itself and observe how this sensation fulfills its promises. Additionally, the experience extends beyond the rave event itself. When ravers turn off the music and remain for a couple of hours or minutes after the music, returning to normal speed, the raver retains an "afterglow" of the heightened perception from the segments of sensorial saturation. The "afters" also extend beyond the rave, often continuing as attendees gather at someone's house afterward or another party, reflecting on whether the promise of the experience was satisfied.

The scene also encourages employing sensory knowledge to acquire experiential knowledge for assessing others based on it. For instance, in more contemporary dance floors, there's less emphasis on preserving historical material past of the scene. Instead, there's a preference for playing Progressive, commercial music without any sonic diversity or much attention to creating an immersive atmosphere. Such venues, lacking in decor, activities, or climate control, are often described as hosting crowd members emitting 'heavy odors,' sweating profusely, "looking like zombies", with limited light and rest areas.

Claims regarding the distribution of affect across various configurations of objects, technologies, and both human and non-human entities, leading to diverse capacities and experiences of relationality, are instrumental in highlighting how these entities are enlisted into "affective fields" that generate "temporary configurations of energy and feeling" (Conradson and Latham, 2007, p. 238). Although seemingly intangible to those suddenly encountering them, Böhme (2008, p. 4) demonstrates how

designers establish "the conditions in which the atmosphere appears," crafting spaces that are "tuned" with specific tones, hues, and shapes, all which aid or distract Psyheads in their journey into and away from the self. To fully grasp the materiality of an object, it's imperative to take into account sensory attributes that can't be captured in photographs—such as its texture, sensations, emotions, weight, scent, and sound.

In the throbbing heart of the Psychedelic trance experience, a wild, Dionysian orgiastic sensuality blooms in a symphony of heightened physical and emotional sensations. Here, sensuality unfolds like a lush, fragrant garden, inviting each participant to become intimate in an orgasmic flow of immersive experiences, where every sense is a doorway to the divine. Psytrance culture celebrates sensory diversity as a pathway to spiritual exploration, collective euphoria, and knowledge-production.

## **B. The Psychedelic Body**

The body serves as more than just a canvas for clothing; for many enthusiasts, the body resides as a space for more permanent sensate décor in ways that further the exteriorization of the Psytrance sensory and aesthetic order. Body modification encompasses a range of practices aimed at altering the body in various ways. These techniques include tattooing, body piercing, branding, scarification. Participants often consider or neglect sensate-led practices in their modification process, as well as how this modification will be perceived by other observers. For many enthusiasts, this involves adorning themselves with symbols and motifs that hold deep significance within the psychedelic community. Popular choices for tattoos include symbols associated with psychedelic art, such as sacred geometry, mandalas, the Ohm symbol, and visionary artwork. Additionally, tattoos of iconic symbols like aliens, the third eye,

and cosmic imagery are prevalent, representing themes of exploration, otherworldliness, and spiritual awakening.

The body also allows the self a platform for expression through the use, comprehension, and trial of multiple sensory modes within the Psytrance community. This was evident, first, through the manner in which the crowd danced that I both observed and engaged in. One member I conversed with over a large can of beer she pulled out of her tiny backpack, known for her agile and graceful moves on the dancefloor especially with Goa trance music, was quick to let me know in our interview on the steps of Mar Mikheil street:

“And one thing that I can relate to, you know, when I'm in a party, I dance like f\*cking crazy. I really like to go around the people from time to time to pull them up, to plant positivity... no f\*ck the word positive, but you know... smile! It's music man! I feel this is very important and you can help like 100 people in this way. If this is always the case, I'd stay there all my life. What more do I need!

This is how life should be, like a Psy event.”

A closer look at the content of her answer reveals the idea of “dance as a way of being in the world” and the dance event as a particular format of “tuning” people's states of consciousness (see Verrips, 2005, p. 32). Beyond being a sensation with distinct biological pathways, kinaesthesia necessitates simultaneous perception across various sensory modalities, such as warmth and haptic. Kinaesthesia and the manner in which members comprehended their senses manifested as a phenomenological system that fosters a unified, bodily-rooted perception of the Psytrance cultural identity (Potter, 2008).

While dancers and circus performers had the freedom to explore diverse movement styles, certain movements were restricted due to cultural moral standards. For instance, prolonged body contact during dancing or overtly sexual dance moves

were not tolerated. Instead, dancers were expected to synchronize their movements with the music, ranging from subtle swaying to vigorous stomping, and incorporate improvised hand gestures. Alternative dance forms were considered unconventional and on the periphery of acceptability.

Individuals were anticipated to embody gracefulness, moving with poise and reverence both individually and within the collective dance space. Some dancers even opted to cover their heads with cloth, immersing themselves solely in the music while depriving themselves from other sensate atmospheres. Engaging in loud or excessive conversation near the dance floor was considered unconventional. Arak, a favored beverage, was often consumed during dancing, providing both a physical prop and a taste sensation to complement and hydrate rhythmic movements.

A fellow member in a laid-back hang-out shared his journey of personal growth on the dance floor over the years as a raver. He shared a video showcasing his previous dance moves and interactions, expressing feelings of embarrassment and shame when comparing them to his current self. Reflecting on his transformation, he remarked, “imagine if someone saw me outside the dance floor after seeing me move like that”. Geurts (2002) reveals how this sense of motion represents not only a material state of being (e.g., dance moves, posture, stealth), but exhibits elements of an individual’s character and moral sensibilities, part of which I contend, are socialized by the scene. Observing more veteran dancers, for instance, I realized they danced to both the synths as well as the base and drum lines, while younger Psytrance ravers prioritized bouncing only to the beat. Curious about this I approached one member, whose dance moves felt goofy to me.

“This is how I understand Psytrance: the bass carries a distinctly masculine energy; there is an interplay between male and female. The feminine essence on the other hand can be heard in the vocals [the synths], rhythmically swaying to the bass”.

In essence, this gendered understanding of the music, with the bass providing a masculine foundational, grounding force, and the overall musical composition creating a more feminine expressive, fluid atmosphere, was his guide for moving his body.

### **C. Sport and Body Ecology**

Activities were also used throughout the events to (dis)engage members from certain atmospheres and immerse them in others. In the 2018 Aywa Festival, the list of activities included:

“ACTIVITIES:  
YOGA, MARTIAL ARTS, GUIDED MEDITATIONS, DANCE, MUSIC, HOLISTIC MEDICINE, SOUND JOURNEYS, TAO, MASSAGES, NATURE IMMERSIONS, ONE TO ONE SESSIONS, TALKS, WORKSHOPS, DIVINATORY READINGS, ART INSTALLATIONS, SOUND THERAPY, KIDS AREA, SWEAT LODGE, CACAO CEREMONY, ECO-SOLUTIONS, OFF-GRID WORKSHOPS, COMPOSTING, RECYCLING” (Aywa, 2018).

Not-too-silent “silent zones” where participants took a break from the music of the DJ, play a central role in several contemplative practices. These mind-body practices allow participants to engage in mindfulness surrounding the sensations of their bodies (Gibson, 2019), which includes an awareness of momentary sensation in nexus with conceptual thought. Recurrently, this conceptual thought pertains to a heightened awareness of the surrounding ecology. In the 2015 Forest Frequencies after video, one attendee describes:

“You're basically trying to detach, to find your own space, your own balance, find yourself in life. It's like a bit of an escape. You come here, you listen to good music, you dance, you meet wonderful people, you eat, you drink and all that stuff. When you come to a festival, when you come camping, you're looking after

yourself. And then when you add yoga into the equation, you are basically looking after your body and your mind. (Psyleb Crew, 2016, 5:30-5:58)

Another attendee also explains

“You connect with mother earth, with nature. You know, like when you do yoga, you're sort of like this, you're balanced, you know, and it's sort of like nature. It's nice for people to take that time out during like the partying and everything and just like really realize what it's like to be here, like have this beautiful connection. And then go back and you go back happier”. (Psyleb Crew, 2016, 6:28-6:45)

Sport ecology (Andrieu and Loland, 2017), body ecology, and similar concepts all denote an approach to utilizing bodily practices immersed in natural environments and the resultant effects on one's physical state through heightened awareness (Zimmermann and Andrieu, 2021). The embodied and interpretation of such corporeal activities engender novel bodily sensations induced by immersion in nature: "emersion is the activation of what is living in the body" (Andrieu and Loland 2017, p.1).

A promoter noted:

“It was very rare to have a party where it was just music, it was just a dance floor, you know? There were always things to do on the site, you know, yoga sections, healing sections, two, three Chai stations [...]. People love to wander. There, like, there was always these times where in the morning as soon as, at the break of dawn, half the rave decided, ok let's go on a hike, we just went for an hour or two-hour hike and then came back to the dance floor all refreshed again. These things were pretty common back then.”

The sensation of being connected with nature can be described as a heightened self-awareness that harmonizes with the elements and others in the surroundings. This “enable us to map the world beyond human space and to glimpse an image of time, inhabited by multiple nonhuman worlds, sensations and durations”, again forwarding the culture of spirituality of moving beyond oneself (Ignatov, 2011).

## CHAPTER VII

### COMMUNITY-BUILDING IN THE LOCAL SCENE

#### **A. The Tribal Characteristic of the Scene Explained**

Psytrance in most cases is not just an activity; it involves entering and immersing oneself in a community and progressively assuming an authoritative role as both a creator and an exegetist of the culture and lifestyle, delineating those who comprehend the group's cultural code from those who don't—essentially establishing who is part of the community and who isn't or is badly informed of it. This “community of practice” functions in shaping forms of sociality and inclusion/exclusion dynamics, without resorting to economic, religious, or political violence (Wenger, 1998). It serves as a gatekeeper, defining and reinforcing group boundaries, and setting criteria for membership within the Psytrance community (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992; Lave and Wenger, 1991).

These “heterotopias” (St John, 2020) serve to separate insiders from outsiders, positioning the 'mainstream' society in a derogatory light compared to the 'underground' ethos. Concepts like authenticity versus inauthenticity and underground versus mainstream are significant assertions of authority, fostering a sense of community by delineating an 'us' versus 'them' binary (Thornton, 1996, p. 111). The underground Psytrance scene operates as an autonomous grassroots community composed of dedicated artists and enthusiasts who cherish Psytrance and uphold respect to its codes of sociality. With the increasing popularity of Psytrance, these distinctions and boundary-setting practices gain significance, as scene members strive to preserve a

shared identity and a shared world and exert control over the definition and representation of Psytrance within Lebanon.

Similar to global Psytrance communities, the local scene also exhibits a neo-tribal characteristic. In an exercise of suggestibility and inclusive sociality, the community borrows prehistoric forms of social orders, relationships, and responsibilities. This new societal model was deemed necessary in a country gone off the tracks, resulting in disconnected and marginalized people, misfits, and sinners. Looking to the past serves as a means for envisioning how future societies should be structured. It wasn't just about adopting a fresh model of social organization but also about forging strong ties to the past, to a prehistoric era deeply intertwined with the natural world and (non)human company. "Men women and children all of whom together hope to follow the timeless path of love and wisdom, in affectionate company with the sky. Winds, clouds, trees, water, animals and grasses — this is the tribe" (Snyder, 1968, p.1).

The tribe allows every member of the group more freedom to engage in activities of life, thereby learning the capabilities of both body and mind. In Lebanon, the conventional nuclear family model and the socio-political/economic elite were perceived as constraining the potential for cultivating more profound and diverse interpersonal relationships with each other and the self. Unlike nuclear families, these extended kinship networks in the Psytrance community do not solely rely on blood ties, sect, class, or political association, allowing individuals the autonomy to select suitable spouses, siblings, and other kin without taboo in a more intimate and humane way in a face-to-face fundamental human unit, living in a more natural state. The "tribal base" of cooperating members fosters a profound sense of belonging among its members, with

friendships characterized by expanded fluidity and openness than in their everyday lives.

## **B. Gender and Sexuality: Are We Still Tribes Now?**

In such a manner, the overarching anthropological understanding of tribes aligns closely with the concepts of tribes expressed by countercultural movements. However, when delving into the practical realities of human roles and statuses within the scene, the countercultural notions of tribe often appear idealistic and overly romanticized. Engaging in fieldwork within so-called tribal-like Psytrance societies quickly revealed to me the significance of predetermined roles and the presence of crippling inequality and power dynamics. It is these dynamics that challenge certain countercultural beliefs regarding personal equality and the extent of individual expression and self-liberation within small-scale communities.

One example of such disparity concerns the balance of gender and sexuality composition within the scene. We know from feminist thought that countries are imbued with gender projects (Lawford-Smith, 2022). Their societies integrate gendered identities, desires, and behaviors into day-to-day animation. As illustrated by Lebanese writers, gender and sexuality are wielded as tools of inequality within the state, often regulated by patriarchal national influences (Moughalian and Ammar, 2019; Kaedbey and Naber, 2019; Zaatari, 2022; Margossian, 2019). Lebanese societal and formal norms establish subtle connections between national identity, conventional sexual norms, and idealized forms of masculinity, femininity, male and female bodies, and sexuality. Within these semi-public Psytrance spaces, there exists a complex interplay

of dissent and compliance regarding sexuality and gender equality, simultaneously ‘do’ing and ‘undo’ing contemporary Lebanese subjectivities.

Drawing from my experience as a woman, an academic, and a Lebanese, I could understand the cultural interpretations of their interactions. This fusion with my professional expertise and knowledge on gender studies and enabled me to put in words more clearly their behaviors on the matter. Typically, the organizers are men who initially began as DJs. Their girlfriends often played supportive roles, assisting in more informal ways of the organization process, music preparation process, or engaging in promotional activities such as distributing flyers. Women DJs were trained by male DJs, many times at a ploy to get to know them more intimately; they were rarely trained by another fellow women DJ. It was clear that while women were equated with “nature” in much of their descriptions and described as demanding utmost respect, the Psytrance community mirrored traditional gendered division of labor, a phenomenon prevalent not only in the mainstream music industry but also across various employment sectors in the country. These informal methods of assistance perpetuate this pattern.

Male DJs were typically the awaited DJs and dominated the scene, leading to a conspicuous overrepresentation of men compared to women. This gender disparity did not begin in the nightlife environment but originates from the home. Young girls are often dissuaded from staying out late into the night or attending such distant venues due to perceived safety risks, while their male counterparts enjoyed greater autonomy in such pursuits. This gendered discrepancy in freedom of movement, mobility, access to nocturnal spaces contributes to the unequal representation of women in the DJ profession and the broader underground electronic music industry in Lebanon.

Despite a more open and liberal-looking environment, behind the curtains women were viewed through the lens of male honor and ownership and subjected to a form of informal social control within the DJ community. This was exemplified by the perceived notion that a DJ's girlfriend, his *groupie*, symbolized his honor and possession. Consequently, interpersonal dynamics within this milieu occasionally manifested in subtle acts of sabotage, with some individuals resorting to tactics such as flirting with or attempting to entice away the partners of rival DJs. In this context, women were not regarded as autonomous individuals but were often viewed as belonging to their male partners, reinforcing traditional gender roles and power dynamics. Such behaviors perpetuated a culture where women were objectified and instrumentalized as tools for asserting dominance and undermining professional rivals within the male-dominated realm of electronic music in Lebanon. One group member, in a rant, inadvertently comments on the topic in his comment:

“I won't call it a group, they keep hitting on each other's girls. From before if someone hits on my friend's girlfriend, he would exit the group, and even other groups, they won't let him come”.

The lexicon and cusses employed to describe women often carried connotations of moral condemnation, with terms such as "Ahbeh" (idiot, simple-minded) or "Ch\*rmouta" (female prostitute), "Habla" (stupid), even gigolo, and many times because of a refusal to engage in flirtatious or sexual activity with a man. Such discriminatory attitudes not only hindered the advancement of female DJs but also reinforced systemic barriers to their full participation and recognition within the field.

In the realm of DJing in Lebanon, female practitioners faced heightened scrutiny and harsher criticism compared to their male counterparts. The gendered double standard imposed upon female DJs was palpable, as any misstep or error committed by

a woman in this profession was magnified exponentially in its repercussions, echoing broader societal biases.

In the scene, heterosexuality asserted itself as the prevalent sexual orientation, shaping social dynamics and perceptions within the community. I came across only a single management run and specialized for queer identities that, at times, hosted Psytrance music within the underground rave scene. Homosexuality, particularly among men, was often met with discomfort and disdain, leading to feelings of being ostracized or marginalized. Often, they "weirded out" or "disgusted" certain members loudly in more commercial, more public Psytrance sub-groups.

Conversely, homosexual women faced a different set of attitudes, characterized by sexual objectification and fetishization. Within the scene, lesbianism was sometimes romanticized or reduced to a source of entertainment for the male gaze, perpetuating stereotypes and exoticizing same-sex relationships between women. This dynamic underscored the unequal power dynamics and gendered expectations and stigmas against non-heteronormative, queer sexualities present within the community.

Furthermore, women who deviated from conventional standards of femininity or exhibited traits considered unconventional and non-normative, such as body hair, often encountered harsh judgment and ridicule. Their appearances were subjected to scrutiny and criticism, with derogatory labels such as "Chewbacca" being used to dehumanize and degrade them. These attitudes reflected entrenched beauty standards and patriarchal norms that policed and enforced conformity to narrow ideals of femininity and body types. Tattoos, piercings, dreads, and wilder, edgier looks on the other hand were praised.

As such, one might even contend that while in theory they are close to a tribe in the sense of connecting more humanely, in practically they are closer to a microcosmic gathering of the overall Lebanese community, grappling with only some and very limited forms of self-liberation, empathy to their community other, as well as alternative forms of connectedness.

For organizers in more niche Psytrance raves that make it a point “to filter who comes in”, these microcosmic behaviors were understood to be corrupting the integrity of artistic production and scene. For these fans, their passion focused more on a commitment to the music, as well as heavily maintaining original PLUR ethos of the counterculture. Any disrespectful or ‘backwards’ behavior resulted in the ‘blacklisting’ of folks. It was shameful to be shameful in these spaces. They exhibited respect for men and women equally, refraining from unjust comments and giving both genders an equal space on their stage to play music. One organizer of these niche Psytrance raves explained:

“We host free parties sometimes for people. We invite people and place just a donation box. Whoever wants to donate, they can donate, but the main idea is just for us to meet, to reconnect, to provide a platform for the DJs to play their music, you know, because unfortunately, sometimes, in some ways, the Psy scene is a bit frowned upon. The platform for artists or DJs or musicians to express isn't always... It's not always accessible. So sometimes you have to host these free parties”.

There was a strong sense of kinship among everyone. In tents, a woman was everyone’s sister. When men encountered acquaintances from past festivals, they often greeted them warmly with brotherly hugs. Women's liberation introduces a certain detached asexuality; it was fringe to objectify others. Thus, while liberal behaviors were common at these raves, it was expected to be treated casually. Making sexual advances

towards others was considered uncool, particularly if they were not already in established partnerships.

These sub-groups were, within their own spaces, anti-structural because they lack differentiation, promote equality, directness, and operate outside conventional rationality (Turner, 2018). While structure serves to separate individuals, delineate differences, and impose limitations, these niche sub-group “communitas” associated with true spontaneity and liberty (Turner, 2018). Nevertheless, these sub-groups represented a small portion the overall community, as more commercial spaces exhibited the most compliance and least dissent with overarching societal norms.

Nevertheless, within the community as a whole, despite the presence of taboos and instances of micro-aggressions, individuals were still afforded a certain degree of freedom to express themselves as they pleased, provided they were willing to face the heat. Inside, unlike outside, no one ran the risk of being jailed for who they were. The environment allowed for the adoption of bold, showy, and flamboyant attire, enabling individuals to transcend conventional sartorial boundaries. This included the acceptance of traditionally marginalized hairstyles such as dreadlocks and long hair for men, which, in mainstream society, often carried negative devilish connotations but were embraced within these communities. Furthermore, the communal nature of facilities like tents, chalets, and toilets, diverged from the segregated norms prevalent in many other spaces in Lebanon, fostering a sense of inclusivity and shared experience. Additionally, displays of affection, including same-sex kissing, were tolerated within these environments while being a series legal and punishable offense outside the scene.

Despite these strides towards inclusivity, it is important to acknowledge that these communities still face significant challenges and have yet to fully realize their

potential. However, they can be viewed as experimental grounds for reimagining the concept of their national identity and community, offering alternative paradigms that defy traditional social constructs. Through ongoing development and exploration of alternative modes of existence, these communities contribute to the broader discourse on societal norms and cultural acceptance.

### **C. Socialization Among Lebanese Psytrance Enthusiasts**

A culture composed of both global and local semantics tampers down the Psytrance community. In the course of contemplating and immersing with the music, the object, the subject may assimilate with the sounds heard and, for some time, become identified with it, so much so that the music is rendered indistinguishable from the subject (Cobussen, 2017). Indeed, the psychedelic trance encounter frequently serves as a substantial confirmation of various aspects of local cosmological, etiological, and esoteric wisdom for participants. The relationship among the music and its participants is not linear, nevertheless; community participants also actively contributed to shaping the contextualization of the music, embedding it within its own social milieu and configurations. I term this co-constructive process of embedding as the "socialization of Psytrance", highlighting how discourse and social dynamics and teachings that envelop the music, the community, and the local belief system regulate intention, action, expectation, and interpretation. A socialization of Psytrance music is perceived by the local community as being required to elevate the environment where suggestibility can occur in the most "conducive" manner.

More importantly and less evident to the members is that this socialization is required for the general continuity of the Psytrance local culture. It ritualizes values and

actions that maintain the movement's cultural livelihood. Socialization denotes both the informal and formal learning, along with the subtle, unconscious impact of the collective community's influence. It does not merely include the transferal from a group to another within a stationary social structure; rather, it is also the "the active creation of a new identity through a personal definition of the situation" (Bouij, 2004, p. 2).

In a metaphorical return to a Habermasian "life world" (1987), which "*everyone knows*", "*remembers*", and has "*inside*", Psytrance allows community-members to be re-socialized into another context (the local Psytrance culture), in which they can establish their own collectivity (the local Psytrance community) and individuality ('Psyheads'), in turn, "remak[ing] their agenda" (Bouij, 2004, p. 4). This re-socialization is premised on a broader conception of ritualized moral experience (Joblin, 2009) practiced and preserved through a responsibility ethics, as, at the heart of the Psytrance experience lies the assumption of primordialism: that people are with agency and self-determining. Virtues and ego become paramount in that they function as ethical technologies to closer or delineate one from "the kinds of strengths that are [perceived as] essential for both moral and nonmoral virtue" in community development and cultural preservation (Fowler, 1999 p. 15) in the local scene belief system.

### ***1. Between Madness and Melody: A Psychedelic Musical Journey***

An initial evident instance of this indoctrination came to me while defending my Master's proposal in the topic's infancy. My board advisor, Dr. Saleh, directed my attention to the etymology of the nomenclature *rave* in comparison to a related word, *rabid*. I could not but recall this interaction in this section.

“The word "rave" the Old French verb "*raver*," which meant "to show signs of madness"... This term was a variant of "*resver*," which conveyed the notions behaving wildly or madly or exhibiting signs of madness.

Derived from the Latin verb *rabere*, "be mad, rave", a rabid a person is one in a state of extreme feeling, often associated with uncontrolled aggression. While both terms have roots in the concept of madness or intense emotion, "rabid" tends to connote *unrestrained* madness, whereas raving denotes behaviors that exhibit signs of *checked* madness, not completely rabid”

A rave, as such, is controlled chaos. This “wild” behavior, as one interviewee mentions in the 2015 Forest Frequencies after-video, that “we bond over” (Psyleb Crew, 2016, 7:01-7:05) is not entirely anarchic, but rather tampered down by this socialization, as, one DJ notes, “it can be a harbor for destruction”. A collection of behaviors thread between madness and ethical freedom in the scene. This socialization assures a technique and order and not chaos is followed when dealing with the music. Each set must be, at its core, “a musical story, a journey”, and, in practicality, denotes a ritualized journeying or movement through time and space. This movement consisted of a ritualized musical variation throughout the night, morning, and day: softer beats played at sunset with genres like Progressive and Psychill; the intensity of the music then gets stronger with the night, boosting variations of Forest Trance, Dark Psy, High-Tech, and so on. Twilight Psytrance colors the dark blue greys of the hour. Last, morning Goa trance steals the winner as the most prized morning sound. In raves with two-stages, Chill-out Psy would be playing on the second as a haven for rest from the more intense sounds of the second stage, with genres like Breaks, Psybient, Chill-Out, Liquid Dnb, Psychill, Trip Hop, etc...

This “journey” takes month of preparations to ensure it is up to quality for the dancefloor, the crowd. In my off-the-dancefloor site visits observing the organization

process of one of the Psytrance raves I attended during my ethnography<sup>9</sup>, one of the exchanges with an organizer and DJ went as follows:

“C: Most of the Psytrance DJs I’ve sat with are very senseless in the way they prepare their sets. They put plenty of effort in constructing the perfect storyline for the crowd so that they have a satisfactory experience.

X: Because it’s all about the crowd. What really matters is the dance floor, what really matters is the crowd. We’re here to serve the crowd. We’re here to make sure that the crowd has a pleasant and enjoyable psychedelic journey and party...to deliver the music in the best way possible. And the Psytrance dancefloor is the most sensitive and difficult dancefloor to play for”.

It is the job of a DJ to make sure their set matches the ritualized un-written stated intensity and tempo of his/her set-time appropriately, while also keeping in mind the identity of the organization hosting him/her, as well as in a manner agreeable with the global Psytrance culture. It becomes an ethics of responsibility to serve the crowd and community, and since the sound phenomena was regarded as the pivot of the assemblage, umbrellaed and united under it, DJs had a tough responsibility to carry. “The parliament can be very similar to a musical lineup” in the care and scrutiny to how its positions are filled, where DJs provide a “public service” and “servitude”, based on a partial and implicit negotiation between their selves and the dancefloor collective.

On the other end of the spectrum, less desirable DJs were ones who usurp their “higher position” as a “tool of control” to enforce their own agendas on the community, notably to gain popularity: “It’s new, because it’s the new generation. It’s not easy, they just want to be cool. It’s the f\*cking ego and thinking that if I break or make others break the hardest on the dancefloor, I’m cool. This kills me inside”. Through what is understood as ego development and strength, the individual tries to orchestrate a balance between the music, the collective, and individual identity in the most spiritually

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<sup>9</sup> For the sake of confidentiality and risk-management, the names of the present active management won’t be stated.

desirable way. Ying yang, the ego represented both a beautiful goodness and/or the supreme sin of Satan. One crowd member noted: “I understood it in a very beautiful way throughout my involvement in the scene: the Ego is part of me, it's creative, it's beautiful, it just needs *adab* (mannerism)”. Whereas another member points out the other side of the story: “Psytrance can be also an anchor to the sensation of being behind an altar at an elevated stage, preaching, lecturing, and being at the top of the higher position: ‘I want this, and I want to enforce that on the others so I can be significant’. And that by itself can be a trap for many artists by fusing their ego”.

The key point here is that the achievement of any genuine spiritual development and social standing within the community would have to be entirely free from the lust of self-assertion, provided it is harmful to the traditions of the overall culture—not to be mistaken with edgy or experimental styles— (a characteristic otherwise associated with the ruling class in Lebanon). Encouraged self-salience, “the relative importance of the self versus the collective in social relations” is in itself a spiritual experience in the process of losing oneself to the other (Rosenfield, 2005, p. 323). The diverse manifestations of self-salience encompass states of mindfulness, collective and connected flow, selflessness, positive emotions like love, care for the other, no judgement, no gossip, peak experiences, and what are commonly described as "mystical" encounters.

Organizers, on the other hand, faced some of the most challenging expectations. They were tasked with the responsibility of ensuring that the safety of their members. In an emotionally charged conversation on the process of organizing Psytrance raves, I was told: “You can be a DJ or a promoter—you have to choose. Don't play at your parties, play at other people's parties. At your party, you should be focused on

organizing and work as a promoter. You can't be both. You also can't be the raver and the promoter. You have responsibilities. And if you're going to face the police or face the neighbors, you must be the good image of us. Before controlling anyone, you should control yourself, *aayb* (shameful). Let's start with that. You should not be afraid also to call out. The problem is nowadays, promoters don't feel responsible. If you care about your scene, your talent, what you're doing is wrong". This responsibility extends beyond mere event coordination to embodying a positive and exemplary image for the community. The conversation highlights the multifaceted nature of these responsibilities, emphasizing the need for organizers to prioritize their roles over personal interests and to uphold standards of professionalism and accountability.

In an identical comment, another DJ repeats consistently: "you have a responsibility. Organizing an event for people, people are trusting you and this is what's lacking I feel today, that these people who are doing the events they don't understand the responsibility on their shoulders. They don't understand that they need to give something nice to these people; if someone comes in and he sees you as an organizer [behaving] out of your mind, if the organizer is [doing something wrong] on the dance floor, people will think it would be okay for them to do what they want".

Curious to understand more about this sense of responsibility, I inquired more with my respondent. Replying, he clarified: "if you want to host a party you have to make sure that everyone at this party is safe no matter what happens. We need to be legal, especially that we're hosting kind of edgy parties yeah and the music is not as accessible. You know, if a neighbor passes by and hears such intense music, they're not going to perceive the music the same way we do. They're going to think they hear screams and they're going to just think, ok, this is *shaawazeh* (diabolical) music. So, in

order to have ourselves protected, first of all, the organizers must be awake the whole time, they must be clean, and yeah, and they must have, if they have any, all the legal documents available at all times”.

It became conspicuously apparent that seasoned Psytrance organizers exhibited a greater familiarity with this ethics of responsibility, whereas this principle seemed to receive comparatively less emphasis among newer organizers. In my off-the-dancefloor observations of the organization process amidst newer promoters, the latter appeared more inclined towards facilitating “wilder” raves rather than prioritizing the establishment of a secure environment.

The subsequent juxtaposition underscored this contrast. On one hand, an experienced raver articulated:

“From day one, I gathered everyone in the crew when our crowd started getting bigger and we prohibited anyone in the crew to be doing or dealing with drugs or anything like that [...]. You need to have a good head on your shoulder. We really took it as a responsibility also because we're getting all these people trusting us we cannot also be dealing drugs and putting them in danger. We're going to have a lot of eyes on us so from that end, and we were always clean everyone in the crew and the family”.

Conversely, when queried about their organizational approach, emerging promoters omitted any emphasis on fostering a secure environment for attendees. Frequently, their attention was solely directed towards logistical aspects such as assembling a lineup, securing a venue, and arranging decorations. A new promoter told me:

“First, the organizers the management sit, and they plan the lineup that helps bring people from different crowds, of different sounds. The next step is to see the location and the sound system. Then the social media and flyers”.

This negligence for the care and responsibility to uphold value has led to discontent among veteran ravers in the scene. One DJ tells me with emotional charge his experience as a promoter:

“You need to have experience; not anyone can just contact a few DJ’s rent speakers, rent a space, and just host a party. Anyone can do this, but in order to succeed, you need to be good in business, you need to be good socially, you need to know your music, you need to be from the scene, and you need to respect the well-being of the scene. You have to always keep in mind that it's not a hit and run case. Anyone can hit and run and wreak havoc and just be leaving the rest of the scene in a bad situation. So for all the promoters that actually care about the scene on the long run, you know, I would respect. I was able to get my own bar, I was able to recruit my own DJs you know, like we became 10, 20 people working for one cause and it became easy to actually make profit out of it, while still maintaining the ethics and the values and the authenticity that we have”.

This culture of care, preservation, and respect stands in stark contrast to the notion of exploiting the scene for short-term gains, emphasizing the importance of long-term sustainability and collective integrity. In this context, the valued sanctuary provided by this scene is paramount, carving a nurturing spacetime distinct from the prevailing context in Lebanon, where individuals often encounter the constant threat of incarceration. This further emphasizes the scene as a potential resource for “everyday resistance” (Bayat, 2013).

“Our main message is basically delivering this sound and delivering this culture in the best way possible. The trick is actually just letting the right people in, not just letting people in to make money. And that's the trick. Promoters should not be into making fast money, you know, just making one, two, three parties, getting as much people as possible without any filtration in any way.

*Make a journey.*

Like let's let's face it, not everyone has the same intention. So it's allowing and nurturing beautiful people; to be able to gather well-intentioned people and develop it into a lot more than that. But the *vibe* and the energy should not be tainted. I think people should find their way to psychedelic parties, more than actually seeing it as an Instagram add.

Promoters can give it the right kind of media, as long as they don't jeopardize the safety of the scene. If bad promoters let bad people, others can be introduced to

the culture in a bad way, and these bad people will eventually find their way into the other parties. And one mistake, one nasty mistake that one bad management can do, can actually taint the reputation of the Psychedelic trance community just the way it's tainted. Because of a few promoters that used to sell maybe hard drugs at parties, from a few promoters that maybe advertised it in the really wrong way, put the wrong image on the culture, you know? Because of that, the good parties had to stop happening. Because the light was shut on the general Psychedelic trance scene.

No one's going to say: 'this crowd is *wazawiz* (low-class people)<sup>10</sup> or this crowd isn't low-class'. People outside the scene are not going to understand; they will just all the Psychedelic crowd are low-class. And I do get this a lot, whenever I say that I'm a Psychedelic DJ, most often from people from other scenes. I get *the face*. And then I have to explain that, no, it's not the Psychedelic that you know, it's a different Psychedelic.

Psyheads are usually more colorful than people in any other scene. Usually, if you go to a Techno party and you see the garbage on the floor, and you go to a Psytrance party and you see beautiful people. You see how most people actually put cigarette buds in their pockets, you know, so that they don't drop on them ground. But a lot of people don't see that, you know. But I do get it, because, of course, there are a lot of people that ruin things just on their way to the scene, but no".

His report underscores the morality of preserving the integrity and safety of the Psychedelic trance scene amidst the pressures of commercialization and misrepresentation. It emphasizes the responsibility of promoters to prioritize quality over quantity, ensuring that events are curated for the right audience rather than solely driven by self-serving motives. Responsibility ethics is once again highlighted in his descriptions of the potential in irresponsible promoters sully the reputation of the entire scene, potentially leading to the shutdown of otherwise legitimate and valuable safe spaces.

The crowd, on the other hand, experience a call for the "refinement of moral reflection", a "cultivation of the affective core of virtuous character [and] moral

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<sup>10</sup> Explain this doesn't actually mean just class

ordering and shaping of the emotions and sensibilities that underpin the growth of such self- and other” (Carr, 2006, p. 112).

It should be noted that moral orders in the scene are premised on a ritualized *para-culture* of “extra-musical objects, events, or states of affairs”; nonetheless, it is the sound phenomena of Psytrance that they perceive delivers modes of affective access to these states of affairs, otherwise epistemically unavailable. Therefore, it represents a potential space where Lebanese Psytrance subjects can relax into in an Winnicottian “unintegrated” state, characterized by neither complete integration with reality nor a feeling of disintegration. In this 'unintegrated' state, fantasy, dreams, “phantasmagoria” (Kyriakopoulos, 2019), and reality intersect, allowing individuals to comprehend the nature and interconnectedness of inner and outer worlds, or as one enthusiast describes as “inner and outer forests”, and objects. “You have to go through your forest. Everyone has to go through their forest and their cave. This is the trip. You must go through your inner forest to reach your outer one, and when you go through it, you find very beautiful, nice things.”

One DJ explains why this alternative moral education within the scene is paramount:

“A conducive space for the suggestibility of the music requires respecting the holy tenants that make such a para-culture, an alternative reality, possible: tolerance, acceptance, and unity, and other resembling values. This is what I'm talking about. Everyone knows these values, remembers them, because everyone has these codes inside. *People go there to remember who they are...* Because that's how we learned the code. *We made the predictable code that we cannot connect and value bonds, friendship, food, pleasant experiences in life, meaningful experiences in life, when we are threatened*”.

These values, deeply ingrained and upheld almost religiously, serve as the bedrock of the local Psytrance para-culture, offering a stark contrast to the uncertainties, threats, and moral impositions they face in their daily lives. In this regard, such values

are necessary for refuge and a sense of security in an otherwise insecure social reality. In contrast to the felt immoral values of separation and injustice they encounter in their everyday lives, the culture within the Psytrance scene is built to offer the opportunity for individuals to encounter the other and their selves on a deeper level, not based on foreclosed identities, such as class and religion, but, instead, rediscover primal virtues that bind them together more humanely, regardless of their background or beliefs.

“Our institutions that tells them what to do, when to do it, how to do it, social values, how they are installed through fear and control. They don’t want these things, but they don’t know how to rebel. They want it but they don’t know how to do it, and such gatherings, Psytrance, is a hub for all those people who are *seeking a culture of more*”.

“Because everybody in this festival, every single one of them is crazier than the other. Crazier as in like free, you know, everybody is just who they are”. Within such a state, *sui generis*, the thirst for tolerated pluralism finds oasis in the transformation rendered possible by encounters in the scene with the suggestibility of the sound phenomena and the divination and education of the *homo-moralis* and commandments of inclusivity and toleration, denying the legitimacy of any single faiths or groups to organize the whole of social life. In the Psytrance world, “we realize we are the creators”, each an artist in his/her own way. Both the creators and their creation, their means of expressions, become ciphers of the divine, *Kunstreligion*: “No one blesses me, I bless myself”.

“I learned, you can only judge yourself, you can't judge anyone. I learned, if there is something called *karma*, I believe that you can only create your own *karma*. Like if something makes you mad or something is harming you, it's not about the something, it's about you yourself: you are harmful yourself, you know what I mean? If you are blessed, you make yourself blessed. There is no one to bless you.

There is no one to make you miserable. It's you yourself. You make yourself miserable, through yourself. So I believe that this is the best thing I have learned. I can become it. Whatever it is. I can make it”.

This para-culture was partially imported from international dancefloors. One member of the early scene describes:

“At the Soulclipse Festival [...], we experienced this culture. Like it was almost the equivalent of Woodstock for me, you know, it was like I'm in a Woodstock type of scene. When we came back to Lebanon, we started to look more into Psytrance culture. PLUR<sup>11</sup>: those were the base of the culture, like peace, love, unity and respect. We wanted PLUR to also be one of the values of Psyleb”.

To the extent that a cultural framework based on virtue aims to reposition moral evaluation and responsibility within the specific and immediate contexts of the *individual* character and among communal relationships, the virtues it emphasizes differ from the principles of obligation and utility of the *citizen* by emphasizing emotional growth.

“Yes, you get some culture. Even if it's the first time you get it, it's a weird thing for me. Once you get to see it more often, you'll be more accepting. Then you just try it. So, with time, this becomes part of it, part of the experience. Like the first time you experience it its weird, but the more you experience it, the more it becomes normal. So, with time it *becomes part of you, part of your experience*”.

Undeniably this culture has an influential tole not only in their presence in the scene; rather, it becomes part in parcel with their social reality:

“I live in a country of war, war with Isreal, especially in the South. There isn't much love in the society. My house is not a very successful house. My parents have been divorced for a long time. My mom doesn't know how to make a lot of jokes at home or a nice atmosphere and joyful atmosphere at home. So, I learned from there. I learned: how to have fun; how to make a joke out of nothing; how to connect to people; how to give a f\*ck about people; how to feel about someone; and how to not fall in the trick of the mind. I mean not to answer my thoughts or my feelings, even more so, my feelings. My feelings aren't always right. It's not real what you feel; it's real of course for you, but it's not objective”.

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<sup>11</sup> PLUR, an acronym standing for Peace, Love, Unity, and Respect, is a core philosophy embraced by many in rave culture. It encapsulates the values of harmony, compassion, inclusivity, and mutual regard that participants strive to uphold during raving events.

#### **D. Exemplification as Cultural Preservation and Education**

An essential strategy for the socialization of members and cultural preservation includes the process of exemplification: educators in virtue progress beyond imparting abstract moral concepts to nurture moral qualities like honesty, self-discipline, bravery, and fairness without fear or control through “leading by example”.

In the first Psytrance rave I attended on June 24, 2023, I noticed a visible difference on the dancefloor; I couldn't help but sense a serene ambiance enveloping towards the margins of the dancefloor where the seasoned Psytrance enthusiasts congregated. Their demeanor exuded a sense of calm and poise, dressed in vibrant and eccentric attire that added to the kaleidoscopic atmosphere. Engaging in thoughtful and composed listening, dancing, and conversing, they seemed to embody a sense of wisdom acquired through their years of experience in the scene.

What caught my eye were the meticulously crafted campsites they had set up, adorned with colorful fabrics and intricate decorations, creating small sanctuaries without littering the space they set up on. Amidst this serene backdrop, one could hardly find any disruptions caused by unruly behavior. The older ravers seemed to set the tone for the gathering, radiating virtue and an aura of respect and composure that permeated the space.

In stark contrast, some of the subsequent Psytrance raves I attended lacked this presence. The absence of leaders' calming influence was palpable as disorder reigned supreme. The dancefloor was strewn with litter, a stark reminder of the disregard for the environment in the absence of their stewardship. Voices screaming competed with the music, creating a cacophony that drowned out any semblance of harmony. Instances of verbal and sexual harassment seemed more brazen, unchecked by any guiding

influence. Moreover, the sense of mutual support that characterized the gatherings led by the seasoned individuals was noticeably absent. Those in need of assistance seemed to fend for themselves in the absence of the nurturing environment fostered by the presence the elder ravers.

“Psytrance ravers from before were more mindful and mature than now. They used to do good things, energy wise, in the rave; there was no bad rave. All the people were happy. Even if someone new came, they were happy. Even the old ones. That was the vibe. Now it's gone. After COVID, things changed. People who were 16 had turned 18 and could now enter the scene, and when they did enter, there were none of these old mature people to guide these newcomers—many of the older generation traveled or stopped attending. And the people who are our age, I don't think anyone held this responsibility properly yet for the younger people. By this I mean, lead by example. Not more than that. No one's going to tell you what to do, just guide you through your actions so you and others be happy in your [experience]”

Through actions, mannerisms, and speech depicting both virtuous and flawed characters (and the outcomes they typically face), young people can glean insights into virtuous and morally just conduct. Young individuals are unlikely to internalize the traits necessary for developing into morally upright individuals without the guidance of positive role models, who bear the responsibility of providing moral exemplars. While such a perspective may initially appear to place significant demands on specific individuals serving as role models, such exemplification is seen as beneficial for all ravers for encouraging highly spiritually desirable and sacred moral traits.

Immigration had played a significant role in diminishing the dissemination of these divine characteristics of a *psychedelic person*. “It was part of the trend where everyone immigrated from Lebanon”, a member tells me. He then goes on to explain that “the high-quality people all left Lebanon. You saw this happen in the hospitals, in the universities, in the parties, in the Psy scene”. Similarly, another crowd member explains that “first, for people to be responsible for leading new generations, they

actually need to attend the parties. So many people don't come anymore, however. I still attend because of my love for music, but I'm getting more and more disgusted”.

In another conversation with one DJ on the topic, he gives a more expanded description of his experience over time:

“When I entered the scene, there were people around me who had children. It was already more like a true Psytrance rave experiences, [...] more than just going to parties. They were people that wanted it to be this vibe. Because these people were older, they had more experience in life. They didn't come to the party to get drunk or freak out on the dancefloor. It was a part of their life, he/she was *a psychedelic person*. I'm not someone who has the right to categorize people, with ego and all, but this is what I think. Anyone has the right to say anything about anyone as long as they're not hurting them. Someone might say I'm not a psychedelic person; you're going to be a bad person in someone's story sometime. Yes, there's a lot of people who are not psychedelic. There are people that go up to these parties that are not psychedelic, there are a lot of people that play music in these parties and are not psychedelic.

Now, here, you see people [lost], bothered, no one even tries to help or look at him. This is something I feel is my responsibility, both mine and all the other artists of the scene: to give these people such a safe experience, especially because most of the Psytrance ravers got to live this experience...If there's no opportunity to be spiritual, a lot of people won't get there, even after being involved for a long time”.

Only a few of the active participants I sat with felt the responsibility of taking on the duty to lead newer generations into becoming fitted "psychedelic people". For instance, in a rant over how the scene has progressed, one member describes how she no longer felt welcome to be a missionary and exemplary of the psychedelic values in the present-day scene:

“If you say good stuff and talk about goodness and positivity about the scene nobody wants to listen to you. If you talk about peace, two seconds later they would turn behind your back and gossip about you. I understand teenagers want to be cool, mixing up with their crowd, but we need mature people. It's hard, man. And I will still forever go and spread whatever I want to spread. But it's not easy. No one wants to listen. Really. A lot of people left...People want to judge, there's no longer the spirit of the psychedelic.

It's like they gave you a book finished, and you read it in one night. It's true. It's not like [learning these things] at home. There's music and the collective. I just

wish that people would see what they can do with these values, how they can develop them, how they can grow the values to create something for them and for the people”.

It emphasizes the importance of recognizing the power of imparting shared values in shaping a shared world, suggesting that individuals have the capacity to integrate and spread new moral orientations and cultivate these values for the sake of channeling them towards spiritual, personal, and collective growth. There is a potential to create meaningful and impactful outcomes that benefit both individuals and society as a whole. She goes on to add:

“Festivals outside, it’s like another life. It's like you traveled for two years to like I don't know where, you know, and you make the best friends in your life. And it used to be like this here, so it’s not far away. I ask from you the new generation; we are done we are loose change. It’s in your hands. You can be an influence on your friends, your friends to others. So, it's your turn to spread the light”.

When I asked what challenges promoters faced when trying to spread these values, one veteran DJ clued me in on the that they took their advice like ‘*aam tetzeka aaleyeh*’ (‘you’re trying to be a smart-ass’): as usual, the Lebanese way. I don't have ego, I want the good of the scene, I don't want the good of me, I'm already doing good myself, I want Lebanon to thrive”. The delicacy in balancing between individual ambition and collective well-being is embedded within the ritualized culture of practice, whether balanced properly or tipped off-scale. A mission towards the greater good guides the “virtuous” forward in the flow.

### **E. Ties Within the Scene**

The Psytrance culture stands as a locus of cognitive, mnemonic, and emotional experience of alternates. A culture anchored in the curvature of potentialities through suggestibility that eventually becomes embedded in their ordinary practices of everyday life. This means that through everyday relations, members have been refining their

musical poetic ‘role-identities’ amongst each other, synonymous to claiming they have socialized one another, which is vital to their Psychedelic trance experience. Smith (2022) introducing the notion of a ‘role-identity’ as a concept refers to an individual's self-perception within a culture, outlining their sense of belonging and identification with the group.

Members are aware that consecrated role-identities are good/bad ravers, promoters, music, and musicianship; what they are rarely mindful about is that what defines good and bad constitutes a factor of negotiation. Explaining this further, Smith (2022, p. 14) states role-identities are a

“socially determined, idiosyncratically interpreted [set] of expectations, perceptions, and actions attached to social roles ... If the individual successfully meets (or negotiates) social expectations for that role, they receive an emotional reward that reinforces group membership and increases a role’s salience and/or prominence”.

In an indirect expression of this negotiation, a DJ zoomed into the conversation describes:

“My intention sometimes was to be in balance, to have the wisdom to find how much to give and how much to receive in such environments. Because there is: the lost; the broken; the consuming; the hyperactive; the mentally deranged; the loner; the reader; the rejected; those seeking for meaning; and those who look to belong (I am this) and belonging gives a false sense of self, gives them identity. This gives them a reason to go another time, *and that's okay, because without that I don't know where they would be*”.

In this negotiation, participants employ various approaches in identity-role playing to maintain a cultural heritage, repeated enough to produce complex and, yet unexpected social actors. Freely strategizing in this culture, and through communicative modes, Psytrance succeeds to re-calibrate subjects, or contrariwise strengthen the collective, ethical, and subjective arrangements that affect their everyday sociality. The *topoi* it evokes constantly fluctuate between sensations of excitement and intrigue,

discomfort and enjoyment, captivation and aversion. The themes are simultaneously heavenly and sinister, evoking both apprehension and enjoyment, desire and aversion, ego and non-self, morality and immorality, virtue and blasphemy.

Smith additionally elucidates that role-identities are “ranked [ in a top-down] hierarchically, by probability of enactment (salience) and/or by the individual’s investment of time and resources in the role-identity (prominence)” (2022, p. 14).

Smith’s framework allowed me to recognize that if a member retains the Psychedelic trance spirit similar to those of the original Hippies and Freaks in Goa, provided it is relatable to their localized Psytrance experience in Lebanon, they fall higher on the hierarchy of role-identities because they possess more authentic Psytrance experiences. In my interview with one organizer, he was also able to observe this moral hierarchy.

“X: It’s not competition, It’s just toxicity at some points. You know, at some point when you first enter, you feel like you’re enlightened, you’re conscious. But, after a while, it becomes: ‘okay, I’m more enlightened than you. I’m more conscious than you.’

C: You put it in the best way, it’s insane. I’ve never heard anyone put it in words like that.

X: It’s so common. Like very common, you know. The most beautiful phase is the beginning, when you begin exploring your conscious side and all that. But over time, when it becomes more saturated, something really weird happens, you know? But also not generalizing. Like, I’ve been friends with some people from the scene for like more than 10 years, and they’re still pretty tight”.

One prominent example of the manifestation of this hierarchy pertains to ecology: "thinking ecologically" I mean (Ignatov, 2011). Ecological thinking here refers to the development of a sensitivity towards recognizing the profound interconnectedness among living and non-living entities on Earth, and to become more attuned to how human bodies interact with and are influenced by a combination of other entities and forces. It involves perceiving the coexistence of various durations and styles

of temporality, acknowledging multiple levels of agency and creativity spanning human, earthly, and other nonhuman forces. Furthermore, it entails nurturing an ability to adapt to a world characterized by constant change and transformation. To engage in ecological thinking is not merely to contemplate abstract or mythical narratives, but also to establish horizontal and empathetic connections with other bodies. Often one will find organizers pressuring members to maintain this respect eco-role and grow/develop these themes in their flyer posts. At Away (2018) for instance, the online flyer information post read:

“VISION:

Through AYWA Festivals we aim to empower land and set a new example of what living in harmony with each other and nature can be.

[...] Each day will be represented by an element & medicine wheel direction:

- Thursday: EARTH / NORTH (grounding people within the environment and space)
- Friday: WIND / EAST (helping people connect and communicate)
- Saturday: FIRE / SOUTH (purging and letting go)
- Sunday: WATER / WEST (floating away fully energized)

[...]

GUIDELINES:

-CAMPING: Please respect nature and avoid camping outside designated areas, if you need help kindly seek assistance from our crew & volunteers. For safety and comfort NO fires, generators, our sound systems.

-RESPECT MOTHER NATURE! LEAVE NO TRACE!

At the entrance you will receive two trash bags- one black and one blue. Please put all your recyclable waste in the blue bag and organic waste in the black bag. As you leave the festival area you can drop your bags in the garbage area across the river. Please do not through your cigarette buds on the ground, please use a portable ashtray or bottle [...].”

Another more interesting instance I picked up on that set members higher on the rhetorical podium of identities were those that could visit or play in the movement’s birth land, Goa, India. Almost most of the Psytrance enthusiasts I had met had traveled there and continue to save annually to visit.

“Traveling for Psytrance, whether attending a festival or playing at a festival or going to a party, allowed me to expand my horizons and get out of the box that Lebanon puts you in. Because I'm Lebanese, I was born and raised in Lebanon, and I had a little bit of the cultural thing that all Lebanese people have. And it really allowed me to see other cultures and learn from them and become less rigid in my thinking and become way more open-minded and accepting of others, you know, and less critical, less judgmental. And all of that comes in from traveling and experiencing the world, experiencing other people and talking to people from all over the world and connecting. And this really is the biggest value I've gotten from that. That's a lesson.

And I saw also the really bad side. I lived in India for a few years and I was in Goa all the time. And at first it was all beautiful and parties but then once you stay there and you see the back end of things and how dark it is and how it's run by the mafia and the drugs and the drug dealers and people addicted to drugs and stuck in that cycle. It's not all good, right? But you need to be able, if you have a good head on your shoulders, you could dissect it and just take the good things from it and leave the bad things out and not have them go into your life. So for me, it definitely made me grow up as a human being, as a person”.

On one hand, individuals within these subcultures act out favorable role-identities driven by a desire to establish themselves and attain recognition, navigating internal hierarchies to secure emotional rewards associated with elevated status. Others within these communities may engage in role-identities that are frowned upon, such as those associated with the consumption of ‘bad music’ or involvement with illicit drugs, encapsulated by the understanding in the scene ‘bad people, bad drugs, bad music’. Nevertheless, despite the stigma attached to these ‘bad’ roles within the Psytrance movements, I realized individuals may still seek their validation and acceptance moong Psytrance micro-crowds considered ‘bad’, which exhibits the potential dangers behind these spaces. Thus, the pursuit of recognition within subcultures encompasses a diverse range of behaviors, roles, and identities, each influenced by the unique norms and values of the culture.

## F. Generational Cultural Continuity

“Now in Lebanon your growing, and it's becoming like it was for us during the war. But we were not *feltinin* (uninhabited, loose), our parents still curbed us. It's too much extreme now. The crisis is extreme.”

The affective politics of Psytrance are heavily influenced by its specific temporal context. Originating during a period of war in the 1990's, Psytrance served as both an escape and a form of expression amidst the violence of snipers, bullets, and bombshells. Over the years, the circumstances in which Psytrance resonates with new generations have evolved in tandem with the country's changing socio-political landscape.

Following the 2019 October revolution, the state plunged into a rabbit hole of more overt subsequent crises, previously less evident to and severe on the public (Dandashly, 2024). The illusion of a booming economy prior to 2019 gave way to the stark reality of an ongoing, worsening recession, shrouded by the influx of American dollars in the economy after the recent Lebanese economic crisis. The once hopeful prospect of political change has been overshadowed by the pervasive and seemingly insurmountable intentional/controlled political deadlock. The ruling elites, which systematically depleted state resources, leaving citizens without access to essential needs such as social welfare, healthcare, electricity, water, proper infrastructure, and waste management, continue to adopt a 'wait and see' approach; however, this modus of doing politics has exasperated the state of living after the crises to a point of difficult return, avoiding any resolution of the crisis and distracting the public with issues like the rising cost of living and sectarian conflicts to ensure the survival of political elites. These elites, despite their differences, are united by a desire for self-preservation, fearing that the fall of any one of them could trigger a domino effect. This delay in

implementing structural reforms and addressing corruption has resulted in the deterioration of public services, increasing reliance on privileged private services. Additionally, Lebanon's judiciary faces significant challenges in maintaining impartiality due to pervasive politicization. This context has contributed significantly to the prolonged economic downturn, leaving citizens in a state of uncertainty and despair, adopting more survival strategies and further deepening a range of interconnected crises. While years of civil strife and war in Lebanon had its own set of difficulties, contemporary challenges in the state have shifted more from the battleground and onto the everyday lives and efforts of citizens.

As the social conditions in which Psytrance is embedded in has varied over the years, Psytrance has come to exist at a particular cusp between the rise of youth and its problematizations. This divergence is constituted by three competing vectors. First, contemporary music takes on more commercial (MOR)<sup>12</sup> forms, which simply replicates the surface structures of existing styles, despite their diminished affective power. Second, the new wave Psytrance community aims to reaffirm pleasure and maintain its underground identity as a form of resistance but struggles with its own desire for commercial and popular success, thereby becoming complicit with the dominant culture. Third, emerging youth communities articulate a sense of pleasure and boundaries no longer aligned with the original Psytrance culture.

These elements have led to a heritage discourse on Psytrance, denoting how the aging Psytrance audience reevaluates the contemporary Psytrance community according to a shared consciousness on their generational identity. This heritagization has placed

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<sup>12</sup> In this context, "MOR" stands for "Middle of the Road." It refers to music that is mainstream, commercial, and designed to have broad appeal, often characterized by its safe, predictable, and unchallenging nature. This type of music tends to replicate familiar styles without pushing creative boundaries, aiming to maintain widespread acceptance and popularity.

Psytrance in open debate regarding the historical legacy of the Psytrance community and its influence on the 'dialectic of generations' (Cohen, 2018). Discourses on this heritage culture has been guided by a "hauntological" (Roberts, 2014, p.264) and fetishized reading of the musical legacy and creative practices of the community.

Instead of forcing a rigid interpretive meaning onto practice, cultural heritage should be viewed as a dynamic process, where its meanings and uses are enacted socially, spatially, and temporally, and are continually being reshaped and negotiated (Smith, 2006). Therefore, "cultural heritage" serves as a discursive tool that highlights, on one hand, how the cultural forms and practices of Psytrance within local communities are being reframed and reworked through heritage discourses. On the other hand, it emphasizes how concepts of heritage, nostalgia, and memory are themselves manifestations of precarious social and cultural practices, imbued with the meanings, values, and positionalities of individual and collective habits. In this way, the dialectic dialogue and debate between different generations of activists within the Psytrance community, which idolizes the fleeting present, not only comments on the community's historiography but also shapes and limits the sociological imagination of an alternative future that is in constant amendment. Harrison emphasizes that "we must recognize that "heritage" has very little to do with the past but actually involves practices which are fundamentally concerned with assembling and designing the future—heritage involves working with the tangible and intangible traces of the past to both materially and discursively remake both ourselves and the world in the present, in anticipation of an outcome that will help constitute a specific (social, economic, or ecological) resource in and for the future" (2015, p. 35).

The notion of heritage arose during my conversation with members in widespread critiques on the celebration of the old-time “authentic” sense of community and its “entropic decline”, most notably in the sense of comradeship among members and enthusiast (Wright, 2009).

“Back when we had the parties, a small like a few members of Psyleb...even if maybe Psytrance was not their music, but they liked the Psychill or Chill-out music...have started to form this community, this peace and love community. [This community] only started to grow when we started having the festivals (Forestronika and later on Forest Frequencies).

Because of those values we encouraged in the community people were helping each other more, they were meeting and chilling together and sitting together and helping each other with businesses or helping each other find work and open a new place and all kinds of stuff. We had a good connection between us all”.

When dialoguing with ‘old-timers’, I frequently encountered narratives that retrospectively depicted a more closely-knit, connected community.

“The first Psytrance festival I attended in Lebanon, basically it was Forestronika. It was in 2010. We hosted it in Beqaa. So, yeah, it was something else. We were still experiencing what raves are; what it means to be a *conscious raver*. It was beautiful back then. You know, there was a sense of community. You know, everyone looked after each other. Everyone loved each other. Everyone, like, you came to the rave, you knew no one, and you leave with like a hundred, two hundred new friends.

And that's actually beautiful. That's what kept me coming. I hadn't seen this kind of spirit or energy in any other musical community or musical collective”

As previously noted, friendship and comradeship occupy a central role in the social dynamics of Psytrance culture of community practice and is considered the utmost significant personal relationship within the scene: while kinship and romantic partnerships are also present among members, acquaintance and friendship are the prevalent forms of relationships. It must be acknowledged that anthropology has historically overlooked friendship, prioritizing economic, political, and kinship relations

instead (Bell and Coleman, 2020; Blieszner and Adams, 1992). Although interest in the topic has grown recently, the anthropological literature on friendship remains limited.

Friendship in the scene is an acquiescent category manifesting in various forms. The Lebanese Psytrance scene exists as a rich field of diverse approaches to friendship, influenced by factors such as age, gender, social class, and cultural context. I discovered that friendship within the Psytrance culture of Lebanon is uniquely shaped by both the priorities of Lebanese society and the global dimensions of the scene. At the starting point, friendship in the Psytrance scene surpasses dyadic relationships, with members showing a commitment to other participants regardless of previous personal interaction and acquaintance. Local and global scenes intersect, and values and ideas from global discourses are incorporated into the Lebanese scene, in which members share common ideas, attitudes regardless of their social and cultural backgrounds, fostering notions of equality, selflessness, trust, love, unity, and friendship that underpin the global communitarian sensation and self-image. Thus, in this context, members begin with a generalized friendship bounded merely by their participation in the culture of the global music collective. Nevertheless, the group's cohesion and the establishment of generalized friendship are not merely the result of individual identification with or voluntary association to the scene; instead, sustaining group cohesion" necessitates considerable effort and various practice to maintain a "collective intimacy" and keep the scene alive (Kaplan, 2007, p. 241). One DJ, commenting on this direct and proportional relationship between maintaining communal intimacy and friendship and Psytrance rave attendees, explains:

"X: That's why the scene decreased from 1,500 people showing up to only around 100 now for raves. 100 is the most. Not too long ago, let's say 2016 or 2015 or whatever, we used to host a party, one night party with maybe one international DJ, and with barely any marketing, like 500-600 people would show up, and this

was the norm. You know, private parties were like 200 people, 260 people; it was a beautiful community, it was a tight community, and we didn't need any advertisement. It was basically word of mouth, and people just showed up, you know. Parties usually went on for days at that time, and the crowd was young and kind of carefree in a way.

C: There used to be more old people in the scene, it wasn't just teenagers, right?

X: Yeah, people up until 50-60 years old would come to these parties."

Another participant tells me:

“Back then, it was much, much bigger and there were more experienced people, more serious people, more... There were some people who were adults and when you looked at them, you know this guy is responsible, he can help. You know, this guy can help when something happens, from the way they move from the way they talk. I am this person now actually, but back then it was much more, a lot of them. Because if you have a hundred people, and you have adults, man, you have people from all over the world, from Cyprus, from I don't know where, everyone comes and plays music. This was one of the most awesome; one of the most awesome things to witness in Lebanon. So many professional people, so much professionalism, so much beauty. Maybe I'm nostalgic about it”.

In another interview, I received an more deeply felt response:

“C: Exactly. Can you tell me a bit about the community back then?

“X: Mmm.. I'll cry now! It's definitely not here anymore. It's f\*cked up now. Back then, man, if you want to go to a wise place and listen to music with wise people with no judgment, it was this scene, you know. People there were between the age of 18 to 50. There are all ages. Like, the people that took me up were 40, 50 years old, you know. So, it was very helpful for me to enter the scene and fall in love. You can get naked, you know. You can be you. And there is a lot of support. The music and the people...they all changed now. This for me was sacred. People would go up for a journey. It starts with progressive, Psy, goes up to forest, dark, high tech, whatever, and then it goes to Goa trance-you'd be dancing in the sun. This is no longer existent. There was also Chill-out. This for me is very important. So, it's a journey. A quarter of the people stopped going out, but before they used to go for the journey. So, this vision that people had, it stopped existing. And it was there back then, and we all shared the same vision. And again, the support. If someone was bothered, you'd directly find someone by your side. There's no gossip.

[...]

And before, of course, it was more than now, because everybody was so full of love and colorful. Now, everyone is wearing black. *I cannot lie and deny that my first experience of love and euphoria and ultimate love and unconditional love*

*was in this Psy scene* [...]; the world of love and beauty, the beautiful people. In the end, we are [...] *farqaa* (sparkling) to the music, on vibrations. So if our vibrations go much higher, there is oneness, and this oneness is everything. What else in this life? It's a community-based, it's love, you know? So, this is the most important thing in life. And for sure, it started then.

I think that half of the people in my life that love me they are from the scene, this isn't by mistake, it is intentionally”.

The passage presents a vivid contrast between two perspectives on the Psytrance community, illustrating both the enduring bonds formed within the scene and the nostalgic lament for its perceived decline. Respondents reminisce about a time when the scene was characterized by a diverse, supportive, and non-judgmental environment, where individuals of all ages bonded and gathered for shared experiences and a journey through different music styles. The sense of sacredness, personal freedom, and unconditional love that once defined the scene is now seen as diminished.

Old-timers emphasize the need for the scene to function as a space of belonging, of love and acceptance, and of caring. Most importantly, it ought to be a place of friendship. Friendship unites affection with respect. Contrary to the boxed and predisposed social configurations and paralleled strife in society, in the scene members experience social connectedness based mainly for who they are, for what they are, respected, and accepted in freedom. Friendship, as a social bond, within the scene is rooted in voluntarism, diverging from mainstream society, in its aspiration to form a social structure where the principles of comradeship underpin social cooperation. Within the context of this community, members respect and accept people as people and as individual personalities to a large extent. Friendship here is not a socio-political/economic matter: friendship is the ordeal of the heart. As such, the community becomes a conduit for reclaiming family, friendship, and social connectedness.

Respondents also explained some of the impacts of this loss of connection:

“X: Now it was much smaller. That's why now, because of being so small, their competition became much higher between them. Back then it was more broad, big audience.

C: Why do you think this happened in scene?

X: Because the professional organizers left. And everyone just left improvising”.

Another old-timer expressed similarly expressed:

“Things started to get toxic when the new generation came. I mean, us, we were comfortable, I don't know, there wasn't anyone else. When Forestronika started, the problem started. When the scene started to grow a few different satellites.

We kind of gave the keys to those people, even for Psycult, we used to play for them and not anymore organized. It was a bit of a hassle, you need to be here all the time, etc. But Psycult, Forestronika: those people, when they started to grow, you had more toxicity because you had more people involved, and more hate... It was still okay thought in terms of competition. The problem is later on. The group that went to Goa came, then everything let loose. It let loose because it was already spread too much. That's the problem. On the ground, it gets too... It's like a *mooda* (trend): ‘Okay, let's do it’. So a lot of people came from grounds they were not supposed to.

[...] Also it's because we are in a depressed state. Not easy. People have problems in their lives, but they shouldn't bring them to the party. The problem is that you come here to escape, not to continue to do the same”.

These quotes highlight the transformation of the Psytrance scene from a larger, well-organized community to a smaller, more competitive, and fragmented one. Long-time members attribute this shift to the departure of professional organizers and the influx of a new, smaller in size generation, which brought increased toxicity and competition. The scene, originally an escape from personal struggles, has been affected by various broader crises of historical, political, and economic nature issues, leading to a more challenging and less cohesive environment.

Their responses also exhibit the central issue in community-building is not the differences arising from social categories, but the fact that *communitas* can be

understood as precarious and an unregulated condition. The scene, however, requires certain boundaries to distinguish its members. Since there are no strictly defined rules or norms governing inclusion or exclusion, the question of authenticity becomes a central issue within the semi-commercialization and expansion of the scene. Various responses and examples demonstrate that serious conflicts can arise over issues of authenticity when generational identities clash.

“Now, it will always be the case where the dancefloor would be waiting for the DJ to come out, and this. But I don't know, I don't think there was a downfall, but when the organizers increased, I think competitions bread and these monopolies, if you will, and these cliques, they started talking about each other.

This is what ruins the scene.

As the organize increase, the DJ's also increase. And no problem let them increase, but they start to only do events to show who is the best. And if this DJ is cliqued with these guys, we don't let them play for us. It's this drama. But there wasn't a downfall. It changes with the crowd scene, and their generation, and their age, what they have, what they brought with them from different backgrounds. If now 'the in' is fast music, it changes the vibe.

Every generation has their own challenges in the scene. They have their own trips. It depends which era they were in, the messes of their time. Back then, maybe we were considered the menaces and devils. So I'm not talking about this. I'm talking about the age. There is no longer anymore from my generation, much more young people. Sure, there is a few, when I go, I meet I say hi to; they are still hardcore much more than me. I enjoy raves more when I travel.”

As a community rooted in the desire to be unique, the Psytrance scene was inherently erratic. When the definition of Psytrance became too rigid, members noticed within their own community the same conformity they despised in mainstream society. This prompted a need for change, as reflected in many reactions against mainstream values like gossip and judgment, or the tendency to adhere strictly to one trendy, fast, dark genre of music.

“X: And especially the Psy scene in Lebanon, they're all 100 people. I don't know why there are a couple of collectives fighting over these 100 people. We've tried several times before hosting parties with collective managements working together and it always ended up in a disaster.

C: Like when?

X: Like a festival I tried hosting in 2015, The Spiritual Ritual Festival. The main intention of this festival was a promo party for Nepal, the whole proceedings were supposed to go to earthquake relief for the Nepal survivors. We tried contributing with all other managements in Lebanon to host one big party and one big festival and break all the boundaries that were in the managements before. At first everyone agreed, everyone loved the idea. Later on, every DJ wanted to be the star of the night; every management wanted to have their names first on the flyer; and the list goes on: just really weird stuff that just went against all the all the values.”

Nostalgia gains importance as a cultural practice as culture becomes increasingly diffuse, evolving into more of a "structure of feeling" (Williams, 1977, p. 328). This distancing effect flattens distinctions, blurs genres, and makes social practices appear natural (Barthes, 1957). Nostalgia paints a watchful effort to frame the cultural present in relation to an "other" world, transforming the present into a cultural object that can be witnessed, appropriated, resisted, interrupted, or crafted into something worthwhile. In practicality, the past may have not been as glamorized as was depicted; one respondent notes:

“X: No but everyone who talks about the past is always good. That's a trap. So, nobody will talk about the bullying that used to happen also.

C: So that used to happen?

X: Of course it used to happen, because there's 300 people, who's going to control everyone? Who's going to know this one is a very decent person? The organizers, they were professionals, they were beautiful, they hated drugs. Still, there are people who are drunk, no one understands them. There are people who are lost, looking for Fatima. Weird sh\*t used to happen. I really saw weird sh\*t.

I was very young. I didn't lose it. I never lost it. You keep it in mind. No, because I know from books that humans are very weird. We are not expecting anything else. I mean, come on. Obviously, we are weird. Everyone who tries to learn anything about human beings, from the beginning, we will get a starting lesson,

and we are very good. But this is the mentality I went with, and I didn't get shocked, but sometimes I got disgusted, sometimes it was euphoric, sometimes it was... all kinds of experiences. Sometimes I didn't know how to deal with them [...]. I met all kinds of weird sh\*ts. I met all kinds of stupid people. I met all kinds of teenagers, all kinds of stupid f\*cks.”

Many of the old-timer enthusiasts go a step further by engaging in a certain type of heritage work known as “DIY preservationism” (Bennett, 2009). That involves documenting the historical roots and maintaining offshooting characteristics of the community for themselves and for others. Suggestions include adding vibrant deco, respecting artists and performers by paying them, taking care of attendees and each other, and so on. Granted however, the COVID-19 pandemic, along with the 4th of August, 2020, Beirut port explosion and deepened economic crisis have made it harder for enthusiast to maintain with the material past of the scene. Groups involved in this heritage work increasingly describe themselves as trying to “rebirth the scene”. The examples demonstrate so:

“X: You can play only dark styles, for example, 3 times a year maximum, not more than that. The rest should stick to psychedelic music to develop a better community. There are new people, now they are working on rebirthing for the future. New faces, and good music.”

“Y: I don't know how you can fix that maybe make better parties with [...] more types of music and more decoration.”

It may require considerable time for many within the community to acknowledge new community practices as legitimate, especially among the ‘old timers’ who cling to their familiar and trusted standards for evaluation. For them, embracing the new paradigm as a replacement for the old necessitates a fundamental shift in perspective. While this revolution is invigorating for proponents of change, it poses an existential crisis for those still wedded to the old paradigm.

These old-timers view the historical progression of the community as one riddled with discontinuity, fragmentation, and disruption. For these practitioners, the problem is not in practice, but in theory. Some withdraw from the field completely. These parallels across generations stem from the unavoidable interconnectedness between different age groups. However, if a movement is inherently tied to a specific generation, shaped by particular historical and structural factors within society, its sustainability relies on those conditions remaining static. Yet, the argument at the essence of their gateway community is to potentially alter and move away from the very circumstances that gave rise to it. This calls into question the fluidity of heritage and that extent to which these members are willing to accept what they preach: not everyone will have a singular cultural identity.

### **G. Communal Politics**

This section examines how individuals navigate and experience the micropolitics within their local Psytrance community. The Psy scene forms a networked community marked by pluri-centric complexity and nodes of power. Its network strategies facilitate extensive systems of ideological and material exchanges, linking members in networks of mutual support and competition. These intensely personal and highly fluid relationships are concretized through informal interpersonal politics and material wealth objects. Intra-political power dynamics define, motivate, and energize a heretical movement within subcultural participation. This movement has the potential to not only fundamentally change the 'rules' of the 'game' but also boldly reorganize the distribution of subcultural capital (Thornton, 1996) and space.

Micropolitical performances embedded within the community's social spaces involve consciously influencing and regulating moods, emotions, desires, and aesthetic inclinations. These reflections inherently encapsulate the emotional dynamics of conformity versus individuality, exuberance versus reservation, sincerity versus pretense, and spontaneous versus rehearsed conduct. Respondents mentioned without even a hint from my end:

“X: Plus, the scene as spiritual as it sounds, Psychedelic trance scene, it's the most political scene ever”.

“Y: The thing I learned from the scene was dealing with unnecessary politics. You have to learn it, you have to. Because here, they are all groups, and they are not on very good terms. Maybe they try to be, but there is always someone who is bothered by someone else because he played during his slot, or because he got with his girlfriend. They are in all groups. So, behind all of this, there's more information than you need.

You have to please everyone to have a party, by playing, by doing this and that. Why should we be doing this?

C: But don't you think that's the case with most music scenes?

Y: It's Psy, this isn't how it works. Just come, be happy, listen, love each other. Why does it need to be anything more than that”.

“Z: We can, we have artists, we have everything. But as usual, we take politics and put it even in the music. When we let politics get into the music, that's when it gets f\*cked. We always say we don't like our leaders, and now we do the same last time”.

This includes employing diverse connotative discursive frameworks, which, in this instance, aim to subtly guide individuals to align themselves with a specific storyline or narrative framework. For instance, in the discourse on the historical decline and de-sanctification of the quality of local Psytrance culture and music, stereotypes, including “*wazawiz*”, “low-class”, “bad artistic direction”, “junkies”, “meth-heads”, are utilized as a means to problematize, disempower, and delegitimize, this new form of subcultural "otherness" in neo-Psytrance in which artists and actors are perceived as

posing a threat to the established culture's exclusivity and the integrity of traditional conventions used to determine authenticity. This includes individuals involved in both the production of restricted “noise-based music” and “low-quality Psytrance raves” within the subculture and the broader culture industry. Such individuals are viewed as threats due to the subcultural positions they implicitly endorse and the perceived inauthenticity of the audiences they attract.

Neo-Psytrance posed a threat either by potentially changing how subcultural capital was determined and spread, or by potentially diminishing the subcultural capital of established subculturalists, thus reducing their distinction and influence within the community. This not only affected a specific group of emerging subculturalists but also encompassed a variety of illegitimate subcultural practices that gained popularity through unauthenticated artistic producers and mainstream cultural influences. These practices became popularized at a time when certain factions of underground artistic producers were seen as being the next major responsible potential successors.

Power dynamics can also manifest in the production and distribution of knowledge, and the influence that these processes of knowledge construction confer upon those who oversee them. In the production of knowledge about Psytrance culture in Lebanon, individuals with expertise in music production, event organization, or cultural analysis wield considerable influence. Each DJ comes to have his/her “sound” to which their crowd perceive as authorities on the genre and wield them often the power to shape narratives, define norms, and influence on community discussions involving, for example, line-ups, music selection, decisions on who comes before and after them, BPM speed, and DJ timeslots. Artists that stagnate in style despite gaining experience but not knowledge often explain their cultural disadvantage as “ill-informed

decisions”, “forced choice”, “taking a break” and “lost time” to avoid social murder. One member for instance repeated to me that he had lost his fame within the scene because of his association with another DJ and because of his falsely perceived dark style of music.

Knowledge and expertise gained through experience can indeed bestow social praise or capital upon artists, DJs, and other participants. Established artists who have honed their craft over time, developed unique styles, and built strong reputations within the community, often enjoying recognition, respect, and opportunities for advancement. Their deep understanding of the music genre, production techniques, and audience preferences allows them to command higher fees for performances, secure coveted slots at events, and attract a dedicated fan base.

However, for newcomers and aspiring artists, breaking into the scene can be challenging, as they may face barriers to recognition and support. Despite their talent and enthusiasm, novice producers or DJs without much experience and expertise still may encounter skepticism or dismissiveness from organizers and established figures in the community. This can be due to a variety of factors, including subjective judgments of the quality of their music, biases against newcomers, or concerns about maintaining the scene's perceived standards of excellence.

Unfortunately, this lack of support for new talent can perpetuate inequalities within the scene, making it difficult for emerging artists to gain visibility and opportunities for growth. Without access to performance opportunities, mentorship, or resources, beginner artists may struggle to develop their skills, build connections, and establish themselves as legitimate contributors to the scene.

It could be argued that, when endeavoring to apply their expertise in crafting a comprehensive understanding of the Psytrance pseudo-genres and they're associated culture, niche Psytrance organizers were partially motivated by an awareness of the fact that power dynamics and hierarchical structures place niche knowledge higher on the ladder.

The small size of the scene also creates monopoly that instigate a power imbalance. For instance, some organizers have tried to pressure DJs to change their style to conform to dominant norms or preferences, with some DJs feeling pressured to do so just to get a spot to play. This duality represents a "sonic warfare" (Goodman, 2012). A restricted number of organizers uphold and reinforce their authority by seeking to control entry to social events, as well as discourage participation by limiting choice for attenders. The delineation of scene boundaries vividly illustrates the strategic use of music to shape the landscape of inclusion and exclusion, while also employing political maneuvering to advance their own agendas. These monopolies also control information dissemination, limiting party details to elective affinities based on similarities in taste and gatekeeping the scene from fellow community members for other preferred enthusiast.

Reputation damage and public outing mechanisms, while not as common in the contemporary scene, are often technologies used to exile bad apples.

"If you're a predator, for whichever reason, you might be tempted to hunt, in comparison to if you're self-sufficient and you're at peace, organized, structured inside, you know how to build your boundaries. If you dance on an Indian dance floor, everyone will want to take from you. Because if you're happy and you over show it, people will want to abuse you. The dance floor experience in India, I don't know if you've been there. Gives you an experience that also is raw, harsh, tribal, can get very cheesy, if you want to see it so. It can get very intense and deranging and flat."

Negotiating space in such environments requires individuals to navigate complex social dynamics while preserving their integrity and well-being. This is viewed as a test of one's ability to assert their agency and negotiate power relations within the community.

“But there are those who do not eat, who do not consume, they just be. And it's a given level, and for me right now, I still resort to food, I still resort to energy. The same way you do and everyone else. But there are those who go there also to a certain extent, to just be in such an environment that is not controlled, but yet very controlled. They can challenge their flexibility, and that by itself, my friend, is a spiritual experience. Music goes with this idea of putting a subject under stress and in a given rhythm for such reasons”.

These forms of hierarchical relationships are typical of societies with structured ranks, but they assume a more competitive nature in open, networked societies. This is because the community provides greater opportunities for forging new alliances, given that power is more widely decentralized rather than concentrated in a few central locations or elites. This depiction illustrates a departure from the conventional paradigms of societal institutionalization, instead emphasizing immersion within a system of rules and political dynamics that can be occupied and expanded upon: to be actively engaged, involved, and visible within this milieu necessitates a hands-on approach, entailing a continuous vigilance in the exercise of asserted powers and privileges.

## **H. Neo-nomadic Politics**

Psytrance remains a taboo and risky genre to publicly claim participation in and community membership, due to societal and legal stigmas. Members of this community have developed a technique I term as ‘neo-nomadic politics,’ which is defined by its unsettled and unsettling nature, slipping in and out of the system's cracks in which they

must remain registered and maneuvering within. This can be seen as a form of deterritorialization, where individuals and groups exist in liminal spaces that are simultaneously within and obscured from the state's oversight.

Neo-nomad politics involves a strategic and fluid approach to evading restrictive societal norms and legal frameworks used in Lebanon in most underground music scenes. Members of the Psytrance community engage in practices that allow them to move between visibility and invisibility, adapting their behavior to minimize risk. For example, they may ally with already registered managements with permits when necessary, thus avoiding unwanted attention from authorities. This involves registering events and complying with regulations just enough to organize their raves, while simultaneously employing evasive tactics to avoid detection. Another strategy is deliberately choosing secluded land as venues by members from the community or by landowners that have political connections.

In practice, this can also mean interacting with security forces in a calculated manner, such as having organizers sacrifice remaining 'clean' and 'lawful' for the duration of the organization process to deal with on-site raids head-on so that their crowd members can enjoy more freedom. Other examples include meticulously planning events that coincide with periods of low surveillance or choosing locations that are difficult for authorities to monitor. One management has a list of 'blacklisted' people that have exhibited behavior that might put the party at risk, such as drug involvement. Most managements run their own crowd-sourced background checks on participants attending to ensure no one has a possible arrest warrant on their backs, which would allow security forces to raid the party and take participants in for investigation. Participants that have still not attended the rave are directly notified of

police visits or intrusions within events by other fellow Psyheads already up at the event.

Moreover, the Psytrance community often utilizes temporary and movable infrastructures, such as mobile sound systems and pop-up venues, which can be quickly assembled and disassembled. This nomadic lifestyle allows them to evade permanent fixtures that could attract legal scrutiny.

The concept of neo-nomad politics also extends to the personal conduct of members. Many participants maintain a low profile in their daily lives, avoiding any actions that could link them to the Psytrance scene. This includes abstaining from public discussions about their involvement and avoiding social media posts that could be traced back to them. In essence, they adopt a dual identity, seamlessly navigating between their public persona and their participation in the underground scene. Neo-nomadic politics reflects the Psytrance community's innovative and adaptive strategies for surviving and thriving in a country that is simultaneously regulated and unregulated.

## CHAPTER VIII

### LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSION

#### **A. Limitations**

While my ethnographic study provided valuable insights into the Lebanese psytrance scene, several limitations must be acknowledged to understand the scope and constraints of the research. A longer period of immersion would have provided more comprehensive insights into the evolving dynamics of the scene. However, more time would have been beyond the scope of my graduate master's program.

My study did not delve deeply into the economic aspects or class-based distinctions within the community. Although the 'guest list' system allows friends to attend events for free, potentially fostering a sense of mutual support, economic factors in the scene can also act as a gatekeeping mechanism, carving out a space of privilege (however modest) and a gated community. Additionally, the high transportation costs to reach these often-secluded events further exacerbate this exclusion. A thorough political economy analysis is crucial for future research to understand these dynamics better.

I was also unable to interview a significant number of female participants due to the male-dominated nature of the scene. This limitation suggests that the gender dynamics within the psytrance community warrant further investigation. Future studies should focus on understanding the roles, experiences, and challenges faced by women in underground, informal political space to provide a more balanced perspective. This aspect was not thoroughly examined in my study but is an important factor that influences accessibility and inclusivity within the community. An overall study of the demographics is more needed.

Last, because the Psytrance scene is so small, many people are enemies of each other. This proved challenging for me when I was interviewing people, as it limited me from sitting with some individuals to avoid losing connections to larger networked people, as well as comrades.

## **B. Conclusion**

In conclusion, the exploration of the Lebanese Psytrance scene reveals a multifaceted cultural phenomenon deeply intertwined with spiritual, sensorial, and communal exploration and broader societal shifts. Through spiritual development, sensory immersion, communal rituals, and ideological exchanges and ruptures, participants engage in a transformative journey of self-expansion, accessing alternate realities, self-discovery and collective euphoria and belonging. However, this vibrant culture is not immune to challenges of the broader public, including commercialization, gender disparities, and socio-political pressures.

The spiritual dimension of the Lebanese Psytrance scene represents a fundamental aspect of its cultural expression and transformative potential. The Lebanese psytrance scene demonstrates that the immersive experience of the music and the sound phenomena induces a heightened state of suggestibility. This state allows members to explore newer versions of themselves beyond societal confines, enabling access to alternative realities and fostering a sense of spirituality. This spiritual exploration is unique in that it does not require individuals to abandon traditional identities such as being Christian, heterosexual, or atheist; rather, it allows them to expand on these identities and reach a new level of self-awareness.

'Dark' moments of rupture occur as newer scenes evolve due to shifts in commercialization, the influx of newer members, changing trends, and outside socio-

political conditions. These factors contribute to the continuous transformation and complexity of the Lebanese psytrance community.

Moreover, the moral panic and regulatory challenges underscore the broader societal dynamics at play, as alternative lifestyles confront mainstream norms and values.

Sensory immersion experienced in Psytrance raves also emerged as another central theme, offering participants a gateway to heightened states of consciousness and communal connection. By engaging the senses in novel, unconventional ways and encouraging sensational ways of knowing, Psytrance raves facilitate a departure from conventional modes of perception, opening doors to transcendent states of being and expanded awareness, reinforcing the transformative potential of Psytrance culture.

Moreover, the community-building mechanisms within the Psytrance culture highlights its role beyond mere activity but as a platform for forging strong social bonds and progressive, more dynamic authority structures. The scene functions as a neo-tribal entity in Lebanon, drawing from prehistoric, more humane social organization to create alternative communal structures not based on state demarcations. This tribal foundation fosters a deep sense of belonging and intimacy among members, promoting fluid and open neighborly friendships.

However, this sense of community is not devoid of challenges. Gender and sexuality disparities persist, with men predominantly occupying organizational roles and women often relegated to supportive tasks or objectified as honor objects for being in their groupie. Despite efforts to promote equality and inclusivity, some spaces often adhere to societal norms, posing ongoing challenges in reimagining identity within the scene.

Furthermore, the Lebanese psytrance community fosters a generational exchange of morals, ethics of responsibility, and values, maintaining connections with the historical roots and global ethos of psytrance culture. This exchange facilitates a more fluid collective para-socialization, diverging from the rigid socio-political configurations imposed by the state.

Micropolitical dynamics within the community reveal a complex network of power nodes and fluid relationships. Ideological exchanges and material wealth objects shape support and competition among members, with power struggles manifesting in event organization, knowledge production, and access to resources.

As the scene navigates these complexities, it faces a critical juncture in preserving its traditional ethos while adapting to evolving cultural landscapes. The tension between old and new, inclusion and exclusion, highlights the need for ongoing dialogue and reflection within the community. Despite regulatory challenges and moral panics, the Psytrance community in Lebanon embodies a resilient spirit of resistance through their neo-nomadic type politics, creativity, and communal solidarity. Through continued engagement and critical inquiry, it can continue to evolve while staying true to its foundational principles of unity, diversity, and self-discovery.

As participants negotiate their identities and navigate societal constraints, they continue to carve out spaces of authenticity and belonging, challenging dominant narratives and fostering alternative forms of social organization and cultural expression. Ultimately, the Lebanese Psytrance scene represents more than just a musical genre; it is the embodied spirit of resilience, celebration, ingenuity, and longing for communal solidarity and collective evolution of many Lebanese. To all the Psyheads out there, don't forget to press and play: let it take over.

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