

Abstract

The thesis is based on a field research carried out on Java primarily in communities gathered around the ritual dance called *jathilan* – an ancient, exorcistic and unique trance dance which operates with a binary opposition of good and bad forces. The aim is to extend the field of knowledge about this ritual and to enrich the existing sources of the insight into the issue of participation in *jathilan* and related factors. Interviews with research participants bring unique testimonies that are set into the context of the Javanese rural community. The central topic of the study is the motivation and the experience of the participants of *jathilan* with emphasis on the central motif of *jathilan* - trance and *kesurupan* (obsession). Great space is also devoted to the religious dimension of the *jathilan* and its reflection by the participants themselves. The thesis approaches this phenomenon from three perspectives: 1) As a way to strengthen local communities, popular culture and regional cultural identity. 2) As a manifestation of religious syncretism on Java and how this syncretism is reflected by the main actors in *Jathilan*. 3) As a dynamic social, artistic and religious phenomenon under transformative conditions. All these perspectives are examined by the optics of *jathilan* participants, analyzed and set in a wider context.