

Communicating with Spirits: Bridging the Nether World of Spirits and the Real World in Healing Performances

Authors : S. Ishak, M. G. Nasuruddin

Abstract : Traditional Malay performances are carried out for both entertainment and curing purposes. In curing rituals, the men and women serving as shamans, communicates with the spirits and beings from the nether world to facilitate the curing process. The dependency on engaging with these other-worldly beings however, have raised religious issues of being *syirik*, namely practicing in rituals which are religiously forbidden. This study aims to observe how ritual leaders attempt to negotiate the fine balance between what has been religiously forbidden and the psychological and sociological needs of the patient. Two curing rituals, the *main peteri* and the *malibobou* were chosen to exemplify the communication between the physical and spiritual realities. In both rituals, the healers engaged in procedures of curing as they attempted to diagnose sicknesses and proffer cures with the help of the spirits. The *main peteri* was conducted by a male shaman, the *tuk teri* whereas the *malibobou* was conducted by a female ritual specialist, the *bobohizan*. *Main peteri* and the *malibobou* both ended with ritually thanking and sending off the spirits back to their nether, invisible domains. These curing rituals heal not only the sick individual, but by extension, the village community. Therefore, there is a need to reconcile these rituals with religious tenets, beliefs and sociological-political-cultural dimensions.

Keywords : traditional healing, trance, spirits, main peteri, bobohizan

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