

## Seblang Between Ritual and Tourism: Cultural Commodification in Banyuwangi (2002-2021)

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### ABSTRACT

*This study aims to analyze the transformation of ritual values in the Seblang art of Olehsari in Banyuwangi from 2002 to 2021, as well as to describe the community's responses to these changes. The focus of this research lies on the impact of cultural commodification resulting from local tourism promotion. The method used is historical research, which involves data collection through interviews with cultural leaders and analysis of related literature. The results indicate that the Seblang art has shifted from its sacred function as a village cleansing ritual to a commercial tourism object, marked by the incorporation of modern elements into the performances. Community responses are varied; some support the changes for boosting the local economy, while others caution against the potential loss of spiritual and traditional values. The conclusion of this research is that the commodification of Seblang has influenced the structure and essence of the ritual, posing challenges for preserving the original culture in Olehsari Village.*

### KEYWORDS

Art  
Seblang Olehsari  
Cultural  
Commodification

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### INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is known for its cultural diversity, where each region has its own unique language, customs, beliefs, and arts that are passed down from generation to generation. In this context, Koentjaraningrat defines culture as a system of ideas, behaviors, and human creations that develop through the learning process within society (Koentjaraningrat, 1996). Culture that is inherited across generations is known as cultural heritage. From this heritage, traditions are formed as cultural products shaped by the emotional and intellectual experiences of a society in navigating life (Widyosiswoyo, 2009). These traditions play a crucial role in society, as they are considered ancestral legacies passed on to future generations (Setiadi, 2012).

One of the most culturally significant traditions in Banyuwangi Regency, East Java, is the Seblang Olehsari ritual, which has been officially included in the national list of Indonesia's intangible cultural heritage by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2014). Banyuwangi itself is characterized by diverse social and anthropological elements, shaped by the intermingling of Javanese, Madurese, and Osing ethnic groups. Among them, the Osing people are recognized as the indigenous inhabitants of the region, having maintained a distinct cultural identity since the Blambangan era (Zackaria et al., 2019). The Seblang Olehsari ritual tradition in Banyuwangi Regency is a living cultural heritage that plays a significant role in enriching Indonesia's cultural identity. The Seblang ritual is held annually in two villages, Olehsari and Bakungan, both located in Glagah District. Although both villages perform the Seblang ritual, there are

differences in its execution. Seblang Olehsari takes place one week after Eid al-Fitr and features a young or virgin female dancer, whereas Seblang Bakungan is held one week after Eid al-Adha, with an elderly female dancer aged around 50 years or older.

The history of the Seblang ritual in Olehsari Village has been documented since 1930 by the assistant to the Wedono of Glagah, although the official archives from that time recorded an outbreak of disease affecting the village rather than the Seblang ritual itself (Singodimajan, 2009). To this day, the Seblang Olehsari tradition continues to be performed annually. The local community believes that this ritual brings fertility to their land and ensures an abundant harvest (Yashi, 2018). Originally, the Seblang ritual served as a means of communication with ancestral spirits and deities to seek blessings and protection from disease outbreaks. The Seblang Olehsari ritual is also classified as a traditional art form, as it is accompanied by gamelan music and the Seblang dance. This art form plays a crucial role in the life of the Olehsari Village community, particularly as part of the village cleansing ceremony and as an expression of gratitude (Alya Rozalla & Idris, 2020). Furthermore, the Seblang ritual strengthens the spirit of mutual cooperation among the local community, as seen in the various preparations carried out before the ritual, including the *selamatan* (communal feast), *genjot* preparation, the making of offerings (*sesaji*), and *omprog* arrangements.

However, with the passage of time and the advent of economic globalization, the sacred values within the Seblang ritual have begun to shift. The Banyuwangi Regency Government recognizes the potential of the Seblang ritual as a tourist attraction that can boost the local economy. As a result, Seblang is no longer known only among the people of Olehsari but has also become an annual tourism event that attracts both local and international visitors. Economic globalization has influenced community culture, including in rural areas. Culture is no longer merely about people's behaviors and mindsets but also contributes to the formation of new identities (Ranjabar, 2006), one of which occurs through the process of commodification (Gumelar, 2019; Pradjnaparamita, 2012; Segara, 2020). Cultural commodification is the process of transforming traditional culture into a marketable commodity, often by diminishing its sacred values to create commercial value (Irianto, 2016). In the case of Seblang Olehsari, this commodification has shifted the ritual's function from a purely traditional ceremony to an entertaining tourist attraction. This transformation echoes what Hobsbawm (1983) theorizes as invented traditions, where new practices are presented as old to serve new purposes—in this case, economic gain and regional branding. Simultaneously, the Seblang ritual becomes part of what Appadurai (1996) calls global cultural flows, where cultural symbols and practices are recontextualized across borders and contribute to emerging hybrid identities.

This study aims to analyze the transformation of ritual values in the Seblang Olehsari performing art in Banyuwangi from 2002 to 2021 and to describe the response of the Olehsari community to these changes. Previous research has examined the transformation of Seblang into a tourist attraction and the changes in its customary system (Pranitisari, 2018; Pranoto, 2019). However, this study offers a new focus on the impact of cultural commodification and its relation to the redefinition of cultural identity in the global era. By applying theoretical frameworks such as Hobsbawm's notion of invented traditions and Appadurai's concept of global cultural flows, this research delves deeper into the changing meanings and functions of the Seblang ritual within the local socio-cultural context, especially after the introduction of modern elements like commercialization and tourism promotion. Thus, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how commodification has influenced both the structure and essence of the Seblang Olehsari ritual

over the past two decades. Employing a historical research method, this study aims to uncover the transformation of ritual values and depict the reactions of the Olehsari community.

## METHOD

This study employs a historical method to examine the transformation of Seblang art from a sacred ritual into a tourism object. The historical method is appropriate for analyzing long-term socio-cultural transformations, as it enables the reconstruction of past events and their contextual interpretation (Sulasman, 2014). The research began by selecting the topic of Seblang in Olehsari Village, chosen due to its unique position as a ritual art form rooted in the spiritual traditions of Banyuwangi. Seblang is not only historically significant but has also undergone a functional shift, becoming a performance for cultural tourism and economic purposes (Yashi, 2018).

The heuristic phase involves the collection of primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with five key informants: (1) the traditional leader of Seblang Olehsari, (2) a Seblang dancer, (3) a Seblang ritual shaman (*pawang*), (4) a makeup ritual handler (*pawang rias*), and (5) a gamelan player. Informants were selected using purposive and snowball sampling techniques to ensure relevance and depth of knowledge. The interviews were conducted between November 2022 and April 2023, each lasting between 60 to 100 minutes. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for further analysis. To ensure data validity, triangulation was employed by comparing interview narratives with existing documentation such as books, theses, and scholarly journal articles. These secondary sources helped provide broader historical and theoretical context to enrich the primary data.

The critical stage of *source criticism* was conducted to evaluate the authenticity, credibility, and consistency of both oral and written sources (Sulasman, 2014). This process is crucial for ensuring the reliability of the data that serve as the basis for interpretation. The interpretation process in this study uses a hermeneutic approach, critically engaging with the narratives presented by both the government and indigenous actors. This involves identifying tensions, contradictions, and negotiations within the historical transformation of Seblang, especially in instances where official narratives of tourism development may conflict with the community's ritual logic. The researcher analyzed how traditional meanings are maintained, adapted, or resisted through symbolic acts (e.g., refusal to dance on cement), using triangulated evidence from oral testimonies, observations, and textual sources. Interpretation is not merely descriptive but aims to explore how meaning is constructed and contested across time and space.

The final stage is historiography, in which the findings are composed into a coherent and systematic narrative. The historiographic writing follows a chronological structure to clearly illustrate the trajectory of Seblang's commodification in Olehsari Village between 2002 and 2021. Through this comprehensive historical method—comprising topic selection, source collection, source criticism, hermeneutic interpretation, and historiographic writing—this study aims to reveal the layered socio-cultural transformations and tensions embedded in the shift of Seblang from sacred ritual to tourist performance.

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## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 1. The Historical Roots of Seblang Art

The Seblang art form is an integral part of the ritual traditions of the Osing community in Banyuwangi, primarily preserved in Olehsari and Bakungan villages. It holds deep significance in the social and spiritual life of the community, functioning as a purification ritual to ward off disaster, as well as a form of thanksgiving for agricultural abundance. This ritual reflects the interconnectedness of humans, nature, and unseen forces in Osing cosmology. While Seblang is commonly perceived as a cultural tradition with deep historical roots, its precise origins remain difficult to trace due to the absence of written historical records.

This ambiguity invites us to consider the distinction between history and myth—what Jan Assmann refers to as *mnemohistory*, or history as remembered within cultural consciousness rather than as empirically verified fact (Assmann, 2011). According to local beliefs, Seblang originates from Dhanyang, an ancestral guardian spirit, a figure rooted more in mythic memory than in verifiable historical fact (Singodimajan, 2009). As Paul Connerton argues, such collective memory is preserved and transmitted not only through narratives but also through performative acts, or what he terms incorporating practices—rituals that embody cultural identity across generations (Connerton, 1989).

Local oral tradition situates the emergence of Seblang as far back as 1770, when a woman named Sayu Wiwit is said to have performed the ritual prior to leading resistance against the Dutch East India Company. Similarly, the ritual is linked to the Puputan Bayu War involving the Blambangan Kingdom, where female warriors are believed to have performed Seblang as part of spiritual preparation (Anshori: Ketua adat Desa Olehsari, personal communication, November 9, 2022). While these stories are central to local identity, they blur the line between historical event and mythic narrative. The songs (*gending*) sung during the Seblang procession often carry meanings that symbolically re-enact these stories, serving as forms of cultural remembrance rather than strict historical documentation.

In 1930, the Seblang Olehsari ritual was first officially noted in colonial reports by the assistant Wedono of Glagah. That same year, following a deadly epidemic in Olehsari, the ritual was urgently performed as a spiritual response. Jamilah, a local girl, was chosen as the Seblang dancer under guidance believed to be from ancestral spirits (Singodimajan, 2009). This act reflects what Assmann sees as the anchoring function of cultural memory: the ritual ties the present to a sacred origin, reinforcing communal identity. Initially held on the 1st of Suro, a sacred day in the Javanese calendar, the ritual has been conducted in the month of Syawal since 1965 to align with Islamic customs (Zackaria et al., 2019), a shift that illustrates the ritual's adaptive continuity within the cultural memory of the Osing people.

Belief in ancestral spirits such as Buyut Ketut and Mas Buroto remains deeply embedded in the community's collective memory. These spirits are believed to inhabit the dancer during the Seblang procession, conferring protection and strength (Sunaryo dan Malena: pawang perias Seblang Olehsari, personal communication, November 9, 2022). While historical circumstances around the ritual may have evolved, the Seblang tradition persists as a vital site of collective memory—one that fuses mythic past and cultural identity into a living, performative heritage.

## 2. The Seblang Art Performance Procession

The Seblang art procession in Olehsari Village can be classified into three main stages: pre-procession, procession, and post-procession. Each stage includes a series of rituals and activities that are essential to the overall ceremony.

### *Pre-Procession*

This process begins with a series of preparations by the residents of Olehsari Village before the Seblang ritual takes place. The main preparations involve selecting the dancer and determining the date of the ritual. This process is marked by *kejiman*, in which a villager enters a trance or becomes possessed by an ancestral spirit (Yashi, 2018). While in this possessed state, the ancestral spirit provides guidance on the selection of the dancer and the date of the ritual. *Kejiman* occurs spontaneously, without prior planning, and typically happens during the last week of Ramadan (Suidah: Mantan Penari Seblang Olehsari, personal communication, November 10, 2022).

The selected Seblang dancer is usually a virgin girl and a descendant of a previous Seblang dancer. However, virginity is not an absolute requirement but is necessary for the ancestral grave pilgrimage ritual on the first day of Eid al-Fitr (Akuwan: Pawang Seblang Olehsari, personal communication, November 9, 2022). The chosen girls often lack dancing skills, yet they are able to dance with movements guided by ancestral spirits while in a trance (Wahyuni: Mantan Penari Seblang Olehsari, personal communication, November 10, 2022). After the dancer is determined, the *mupu* activity follows, in which voluntary donations are collected from the community to support the Seblang *selametan* (ritual feast). The first *selametan* is held at Buyut Ketut's grave on the first day of Eid al-Fitr as an expression of gratitude and a prayer for the smooth execution of the ritual (Anshori: Ketua adat Desa Olehsari, personal communication, November 9, 2022).

Other preparations include the construction of the *genjot*, a bamboo stage used for the performance of the Seblang ritual. The *genjot* must face east, as this direction is believed to be the dwelling place of ancestral spirits (Slamet Utomo: Penabuh gamelan Seblang Olehsari, personal communication, November 9, 2022). On top of the *genjot*, there is a *payung agung* (grand umbrella) symbolizing protection, along with a small red umbrella representing the supernatural realm. Additionally, offerings *sesaji* are prepared, and the *omprog* (the dancer's crown) is crafted as part of the ritual preparations (Sunaryo dan Malena: pawang perias Seblang Olehsari, personal communication, November 9, 2022).

### *Procession*

The procession stage begins with the performance of the Seblang ritual on a *genjot*. The chosen Seblang dancer will perform in a trance state, accompanied by the melodies of the gamelan and the singing of the sinden. At this stage, the Seblang shaman plays a crucial role in summoning ancestral spirits to possess the dancer, ensuring the dancer's safety, and maintaining the smooth flow of the ritual (Suidah: Mantan Penari Seblang Olehsari, personal communication, November 10, 2022). The Seblang dancer moves in gestures inspired by the ancestral spirits, following the rhythm of traditional music performed by the village ensemble. Each dance movement serves as a form of communication between the possessed dancer and the human world. This ritual lasts for seven consecutive days, during which the dancer wears a new *omprog* each day, crafted by the ceremonial makeup shaman (Sunaryo dan Malena: pawang perias Seblang Olehsari, personal communication, November 9, 2022). Offerings prepared in advance are also placed at the performance site to honor the ancestral



spirits and seek blessings throughout the procession. These offerings consist of various types of food and agricultural produce as prescribed by the guidance of the ancestral spirits.

### ***Post-Procession***

After the series of Seblang processions, which take place over seven consecutive days, is completed, there is a final stage known as *ngelungsuri*, conducted on the eighth day (Wahyuni: Mantan Penari Seblang Olehsari, personal communication, November 10, 2022). At this stage, the people of Olehsari Village hold a *selametan* as an expression of gratitude for the smooth completion of the Seblang ritual. This *selametan* is held at the house of the makeup shaman and is attended by all villagers. Prayers are offered to ward off misfortune and to bless the community. Additionally, all ritual equipment, such as *genjot*, *sesaji* (offerings), and *perapen* (incense holder), is either returned to its original place or cleansed as a sign of respect to ancestral spirits. The entire Seblang procession is overseen by the *pawang Seblang* (Seblang shaman) and specific individuals assigned special roles in the ritual, such as the *pawang pengudang*, who ensures that the dancer continues to move in rhythm (Singodimajan, 2009). In conclusion, the Seblang art procession in Olehsari Village is a fusion of cultural traditions and local beliefs that involve communication between humans and ancestral spirits. This ritual is not merely a form of artistic performance but also holds a strong spiritual dimension for the Using community in Olehsari Village.

### **3. The Symbolic Meaning in Seblang Art**

The symbolic meaning of the Seblang dancer's attire in Olehsari Village reflects profound cultural values, emphasizing not only aesthetic aspects but also the spiritual and social values of the local community. Each element of the attire plays a crucial role in the Seblang ritual, which is believed to connect the human world with the spiritual realm. The following is an explanation of the symbolic meanings of each part of the Seblang dancer's attire.

#### ***Omprog***

The *Omprog* Seblang Olehsari is a light green crown symbolizing purity and sanctity. It is made from natural materials such as sobo banana leaves, areca leaves, and pineapple leaves, and adorned with fresh flowers like hibiscus and frangipani. This *omprog* also carries mystical and sacred elements. A small mirror embedded in the *omprog* serves as a protection against black magic, representing spiritual defense. The name *omprog*, derived from *on proug*, signifies the connection between the dancer and their ancestors, indicating that the dancer is under the guidance and protection of ancestral forces throughout the ceremony (Alya Rozalla & Idris, 2020).

#### ***Kemben***

The *kemben*, a cloth used to secure the *sewek* or *jarik*, represents the dignity and prestige of a woman. In the context of the Seblang dance, the *kemben* embodies the image of a woman who upholds modesty and respects traditional Javanese values, particularly those from the Ancient and Classical Javanese periods (Sunaryo dan Malena: pawang perias Seblang Olehsari, personal communication, November 9, 2022). The *kemben* serves as a symbol of a woman's role in preserving her own honor and that of her family.

### ***Sampur***

The *sampur* holds the meaning of social responsibility. A Seblang dancer who wears the *sampur* is expected to always remember their duty to care for others (Sunaryo dan Malena: pawang perias Seblang Olehsari, personal communication, November 9, 2022). This scarf serves as a symbol of generosity and moral responsibility in sharing and helping others, which is an essential value in the Osing community.

### ***Sabuk***

The belt wrapped around the waist of the Seblang dancer holds a deeper meaning, symbolizing the hardships often experienced by the people of Olehsari, such as hunger. This belt reflects the community's sense of solidarity in shared suffering, reminding them of the importance of unity in overcoming difficulties (Wahyuni: Mantan Penari Seblang Olehsari, personal communication, November 10, 2022).

### ***Pending***

*Pending*, a fabric ornament adorned with beads, symbolizes more than visual elegance in the Seblang ritual—it embodies grandeur, strength, and social honor. As noted by Suidah, a former Seblang dancer, the *pending* enhances the dancer's appearance while reflecting ideals of dignity and elevated status in Osing society (Suidah: Mantan Penari Seblang Olehsari, personal communication, November 10, 2022). Drawing from Victor Turner's theory of ritual symbols, the *pending* functions as a multivocal symbol that condenses cultural meanings of authority, transformation, and sacred presence (Turner, 1967). It marks the dancer as a liminal figure who bridges the realms of the spiritual and the communal.

Clifford Geertz's symbolic anthropology further illuminates the *pending* as part of a web of symbols that communicates shared values and collective identity (Geertz, 1973). In this context, grandeur is not merely ornamental; it reinforces the ritual's legitimacy and the dancer's temporary embodiment of spiritual power. The *pending*, therefore, serves a crucial social function—it visually affirms community prestige, upholds tradition, and sustains the spiritual efficacy of the Seblang performance.

### ***Sewek or Jarik***

The *sewek* or *jarik* with the Gajah Oling batik pattern reflects the fertility and prosperity of Banyuwangi's land. This motif illustrates the abundance of plants and vegetation in the region, symbolizing nature as a source of life and sustainability for the local community. The *jarik* also represents the people's deep connection to their natural surroundings and their awareness of the importance of environmental conservation (Alya Rozalla & Idris, 2020). Every element of the Seblang dancer's attire not only serves as part of the ritual but also acts as a medium for conveying moral, social, and spiritual messages. Through these symbols, the Seblang dancer connects with ancestors, nature, and the community, making the Seblang ritual a ceremony rich in meaning and philosophical depth.

## **4. The Commodification of Seblang Olehsari Cultural Art**

The phenomenon of commodification is closely related to social change. The process of social change within society can be divided into three main areas: adaptation to change, the instruments used in the process, and disorganization and reorganization. Disorganization refers to a condition in which established rules and values in society begin to be disregarded due to changes in social structure. Meanwhile, reorganization is the process of reshaping

new norms and values in response to changes occurring in the structure and function of social institutions. This process aims to accommodate these changes by adjusting or redesigning existing social rules so that institutions remain relevant and capable of meeting societal needs in a new context (Soekanto, 1990). Social change is an inevitable phenomenon, as human beings, as social creatures, continuously strive to alter their living conditions to align with their needs and to achieve a better state (Tasmuji, 2011).

In the context of the Seblang Olehsari ritual tradition in Banyuwangi Regency, East Java, the social changes that have occurred since 2002 are part of a process of disorganization and reorganization within the local indigenous social structure. Originally a strictly sacred ritual governed by customary rules, Seblang has undergone changes due to the commodification of this art form by the local government as part of tourism promotion. These changes have not only affected the ritual's implementation but have also influenced the values, attitudes, and behaviors of the Olehsari village community.

Farley defines social change as a process involving transformations in behavioral patterns, social interactions, institutions, and social structures over a specific period (Sztompka, 2011). This concept is relevant to the changes occurring in the Seblang Olehsari performing art, where disorganization becomes evident as traditional rules begin to loosen due to external influences. Meanwhile, reorganization emerges when the community and the government start adapting to new norms that allow Seblang to function both as a customary ritual and a tourist attraction. This transformation illustrates how society adapts to social and economic changes in the modern era while striving to preserve the cultural essence inherited from their ancestors.

The commodification of Seblang Olehsari between 2002 and 2021 reflects a layered transformation in which a once-sacred ritual has been redefined as a tourism product. This process is not neutral; it reconfigures the cultural landscape of the Olehsari community by producing asymmetrical power relations between state authorities, local tourism actors, and indigenous cultural custodians. The local government, positioning culture as an economic asset, benefits from increased visibility and revenue through regional tourism programs. Meanwhile, certain community members—particularly those aligned with tourism promotion—gain social and material capital. However, traditional leaders and ritual practitioners often face marginalization, as sacred values are reframed to accommodate spectacle and market expectations.

This tension reveals deeper questions about authenticity, agency, and ownership. The government's role in mediating cultural presentation often prioritizes curated narratives suitable for consumption, sidelining indigenous voices in decision-making processes. Commodification thus becomes a site of negotiation and contestation: while it offers economic opportunity, it also risks diluting the ritual's spiritual essence and disrupting intergenerational transmission of meaning. In this context, the transformation of Seblang is not merely about adaptation to modernity, but about navigating contested meanings and uneven stakes within broader structures of cultural governance.

This description outlines the journey of Seblang across three periods: from the initial stage of commodification, its integration with tourism, to its peak popularity before the Covid-19 pandemic. Each period reflects the dynamics faced by the community in preserving tradition while responding to economic needs and contemporary challenges. The following is an explanation of the commodification process of the Seblang art in Olehsari Village, divided into three periods.



### **The 2002-2004 Period: The Beginning of Commodification and Tradition Conflict**

In the early 2000s, there was a significant shift in public and local government perspectives on the Seblang art performance in Olehsari Village, Banyuwangi. Previously, Seblang was considered a sacred traditional ritual, performed annually to maintain the balance of nature and the spiritual well-being of the community. However, as awareness grew regarding the economic potential of cultural tourism, the government became interested in promoting Seblang as a tourist attraction. The Banyuwangi Regency Government demonstrated its commitment to developing a tourism sector based on environmental and cultural preservation by issuing Regional Regulation (PERDA) No. 40 of 2002. This regulation outlined strategic measures to design sustainable tourism development while ensuring the conservation of the environment and local cultural heritage. In the same year, Regent Samsul Hadi initiated efforts to introduce Banyuwangi Regency's potential on a national scale, aiming to attract broader attention and stimulate growth in the region's tourism sector (Fahad & Endrayadi, 2017).

In 2002, the Banyuwangi regional government organized various cultural festivals, with Seblang as one of its main icons (Fahad & Endrayadi, 2017). The Seblang Olehsari performance is now under the direct control of the Banyuwangi Regency government, with the indigenous community-previously the primary authority in the Seblang customary system-now operating under government supervision. The local government has established an official organizational structure to manage the Seblang Olehsari art form. Indigenous people appear to be competing to demonstrate their understanding of the Seblang tradition from the past to the present. The management of this cultural performance remains within the internal circles of the indigenous community (Abdullah Fauzi: Dinas Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata Kabupaten Banyuwangi, personal communication, April 17, 2023). For those who uphold traditional values, these changes are seen as a threat to the sacredness of the ritual. They fear that Seblang will lose its essence as a spiritual ceremony and instead become merely a spectacle for tourists. The Seblang ritual, long regarded as sacred and rich in religious meaning, faces the risk of losing its significance if transformed into a cultural commodity.

One significant event illustrating this tension occurred in 2004 when a Seblang dancer named Irawati went on strike during the ceremony. In an interview with Wahyuni, a Seblang Olehsari dancer from 2005 to 2007, it was mentioned that Irawati suddenly stopped dancing in the middle of the procession. According to Wahyuni, the incident even led to one of the spectators becoming possessed, which was later associated with the ancestors' dissatisfaction with the newly constructed *genjot* stage. The event was believed to be linked to the renovation of the *genjot* stage, which did not align with the ancestors' wishes. Seblang dancers are traditionally required to perform directly on the ground, whereas the new *genjot* stage built by the district government was made entirely of cement, eliminating any direct contact with the earth (Wahyuni: Mantan Penari Seblang Olehsari, personal communication, November 10, 2022). Following the dancer's strike, modifications were made to the Seblang *genjot* stage in Olehsari. The original structure, which was entirely cement, was altered by adding an area of exposed soil for the dancers to step on. While the outer circle of the *genjot* remained cemented, the central part, where the Seblang dancer performed, was replaced with a soil-based surface, in accordance with traditional requirements (Anshori: Ketua adat Desa Olehsari, personal communication, November 9, 2022).

This moment is particularly significant as it reflects not only a performative resistance to state-led modernization but also illustrates what Richard Schechner refers to as "restored

behavior”—a system of repeated actions passed down through generations but always subject to reinterpretation and disruption when shifted into new contexts. Irawati’s refusal to continue the dance interrupts the expected flow of the ritual, signaling a clash between the spiritual demands of tradition and the pressures of modern performance staging. At the same time, the cement construction of the new *genjot* stage can be interpreted as a symbol of rationalization and standardization within the cultural field—two key principles in what George Ritzer terms the *McDonaldization of Society*. Ritzer argues that cultural expressions, when subjected to the logic of modern tourism or economic systems, risk being reduced to predictable, efficient, and controlled experiences designed for mass consumption (Ritzer, 1993). The ritual of Seblang, once spiritually grounded in physical contact with the earth, was momentarily displaced by this logic of commodification—prompting spiritual and symbolic resistance not only from the dancer but also, as believed, from the ancestral spirits. The subsequent compromise—reintroducing a soil patch into the cemented *genjot*—can be seen as a negotiated attempt to reconcile cultural authenticity with the demands of performative display in the tourism economy.

Another perspective on the phenomenon of the Seblang dancer's strike was put forward by Hasnan Singodimajan in his book. According to him, this event occurred because the district government did not first discuss the renovation of the *genjot* with the indigenous community. The permanent *genjot* built by the government was initially not used in the Seblang performance, forcing the ritual to be temporarily relocated to the northern side of the *genjot*. After the repairs were completed, the indigenous community held a *selamatan* ceremony as a form of prayer and hope that there would be no further obstacles to the Seblang performance in the future and that the ancestral spirits would permit the ritual to be conducted on the new stage (Singodimajan, 2009). The Seblang dancer's strike and the *genjot* renovation, which triggered tensions, reflect a clash between modernization and efforts to preserve traditional values. This event marked a significant turning point in the commodification process of Seblang, where a compromise between economic interests, tourism, and cultural preservation had to be reached to maintain a balance between tradition and modernization.

On the other hand, there were groups within the community who began to accept the idea that Seblang could be developed as a source of income through tourism. They recognized its economic potential to help improve the local community’s standard of living (Saputra, 2014). The conflict between preserving tradition and embracing economic modernization became a central issue during this period. Internal discussions among indigenous communities and the government continued, with differing perspectives on the future of Seblang. At the same time, Seblang started to be held in a more open format for the public, attracting tourists and becoming part of Banyuwangi’s growing tourism promotion. This period was marked by tension between modernization and preservation, creating a dilemma for the people of Olehsari.

### **Period 2005-2015: Strengthening Commodification and Integration with Tourism**

The second period (2005–2015) was a crucial phase in the commodification of Seblang Olehsari in Banyuwangi. After a long process of negotiation, the indigenous community began to compromise with the government to accommodate tourism demands, albeit with various conditions to ensure that traditional values were preserved (Saputra, 2014). Seblang became part of Banyuwangi's annual tourism calendar and was held on significant occasions to attract both local and international tourists. During this period, the Seblang ritual

increasingly came under the influence of government policies, particularly those of the Banyuwangi Regency Tourism Office, resulting in various changes in its execution.

One of the most significant changes in the implementation of the Seblang Olehsari ritual occurred in 2008. That year, the district government began directly determining the date of the Seblang ritual without waiting for signs of spirit possession from the local community, which had traditionally served as an indicator for initiating the ceremony (Anshori: Ketua adat Desa Olehsari, personal communication, November 9, 2022). Akuwan, the Seblang Olehsari shaman, confirmed that this practice has continued to the present day. Although the government's selection of the ritual day is often accurate and aligns with customary regulations, this reflects an external intervention that has gradually shifted the role of the indigenous community in determining the ritual's timing, which is traditionally held on a Monday or Friday, or as close as possible to the fifth day after Eid al-Fitr (Akuwan: Pawang Seblang Olehsari, personal communication, November 9, 2022).

In terms of costume, a significant change occurred in 2010. Previously, the selection of attire for Seblang dancers was determined by the makeup shaman, who had the freedom to choose the motifs. However, in that year, the tourism authorities began providing Seblang dancers with *sewek* and *kemben* featuring the Gajah Oling motif, a distinctive batik pattern of Banyuwangi (Suidah: Mantan Penari Seblang Olehsari, personal communication, November 10, 2022). This change illustrates an effort to promote Banyuwangi's local identity through cultural commodification (Singodimajan, 2009), although it also reflects government intervention in aspects that were previously part of local wisdom.

During this period, the role of the *pawang perias* also underwent a transformation. Previously, the *pawang perias* was not only responsible for applying makeup to the dancers but also participated in rituals and chanted *gending* alongside the *sinden*. However, new regulations set by the organizing committee limited the role of the *pawang* solely to makeup application (Sunaryo dan Malena: pawang perias Seblang Olehsari, personal communication, November 9, 2022). This change led to a clearer distinction between the functions of the *pawang perias* and the *sinden*, marking a shift toward a more structured ritual adapted to the demands of modern tourism. Additionally, the number of *pawang pengudang* increased from three to nine, and for the first time, individuals without *pawang* lineage were allowed to become *pawang pengudang* (Akuwan: Pawang Seblang Olehsari, personal communication, November 9, 2022). This indicates a broader inclusivity, coinciding with the launch of government funding for the Seblang Olehsari ceremony.

In 2012, significant changes occurred in the makeup materials used. The traditional powder known as *atal* (made from yellow-colored stone materials) was replaced with the more modern *kintalan* powder (Sunaryo dan Malena: pawang perias Seblang Olehsari, personal communication, November 9, 2022). This transition coincided with a shift in leadership among the makeup masters, from Sunaryo's parents to Sunaryo and his wife, Malena. Additionally, changes also took place in the Seblang Olehsari *gending* (traditional musical repertoire). The number of *gending*, originally forty-four, was reduced to thirty-one due to the loss of certain pieces and the passing of some predecessors. Since 2012, the *sinden* (female singers) have begun performing the *gending* with the aid of books, differing from the previous practice in which the songs were memorized and sung from memory (Slamet Utomo: Penabuh gamelan Seblang Olehsari, personal communication, November 9, 2022).

During this period, there was a noticeable decline in the sacredness of the Seblang Olehsari ritual. For instance, when Suidah performed the ritual, the tray-a sign of trance-was deliberately dropped, reflecting a shift in the community's perception of the ritual.

Controversy also arose in 2015 when the dancer, Mita, who was chosen based on a dream rather than a trance-induced sign, went on strike during the performance. Mita, who was from outside Olehsari Village, was replaced by Diah following guidance from ancestral spirits (Suidah: Mantan Penari Seblang Olehsari, personal communication, November 10, 2022).

Overall, the period from 2005 to 2015 marked a significant phase of commodification and modernization of the Seblang Olehsari ritual. Government intervention and changes in tourism policies altered various aspects of the ritual, from scheduling to ritual elements such as costumes and makeup materials. This transformation illustrates the dynamic interplay between preserving traditional values and the growing demands of modernization. The local government played an active role in improving infrastructure and promoting Seblang as a cultural icon of Banyuwangi. They improved road access to Olehsari Village, built supporting facilities such as parking areas and accommodations, and organized training programs for the local community on tourism management. These efforts yielded results, as more tourists came to witness Seblang, which is now seen not only as a sacred ritual but also as an engaging cultural attraction (Abdullah Fauzi: Dinas Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata Kabupaten Banyuwangi, personal communication, April 17, 2023).

The local community has begun to experience economic benefits from the integration of Seblang into tourism. Some have started small businesses, such as souvenir stalls, food stalls, and homestays for tourists (Kholil, 2010). Seblang has also been featured in major festivals like the Gandrung Sewu Festival and the Banyuwangi Ethno Carnival, further increasing its national popularity. Nevertheless, the indigenous community continues to strive to preserve the core rituals of Seblang, including the selection of dancers and the execution of processions that must adhere to customary rules. This period marks the strengthening of Seblang's commodification, transforming it into an economic asset for both the community and the government. Although efforts are made to uphold traditional values, the commodification process has led to modifications in certain aspects, such as the duration and timing of Seblang performances, which have been adjusted to accommodate tourism demands.

### **Period 2016–2021: The Peak of Commodification and Pandemic Reflection**

The third period, from 2016 to 2021, marked the peak of the commodification of the Seblang Olehsari ritual, with its growing popularity and integration into major tourism programs. During this period, Seblang Olehsari became one of the tourism icons of Banyuwangi Regency, attracting widespread attention from both domestic and international tourists as well as the mass media. In 2017, the Seblang Olehsari tradition was officially integrated into Banyuwangi Regency's flagship tourism program, known as the Banyuwangi Festival (B-Fest). This program had been launched in 2012 (Abdullah Fauzi: Dinas Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata Kabupaten Banyuwangi, personal communication, April 17, 2023). This step reflects the government's commitment to preserving the traditional Seblang culture. The initiative aims not only to promote Banyuwangi Regency more broadly but also to stimulate local economic growth, particularly for the people of Olehsari Village. The Seblang ritual has become a regular part of major events and national tourism programs, attracting visitors from diverse backgrounds.

In the same year, Seblang Olehsari gained attention from the Minister of Tourism, Arief Yahya. His presence brought positive impacts, including funding, new kendang instruments, and speakers for the Seblang performing arts, which were stored at Slamet Utomo's house



and the Olehsari Village Office (Anshori: Ketua adat Desa Olehsari, personal communication, November 9, 2022). However, other changes also took place, such as a planned alteration to the dancers' route to honor the presence of the Banyuwangi Regent. This change was met with resistance from one of the traditional members, who argued that it violated the rules established by ancestral spirits (Akuwan: Pawang Seblang Olehsari, personal communication, November 9, 2022).

During this period, the Seblang Olehsari ritual faced several controversies and challenges related to the organizing committee's policies. In 2018, the dancer Susi, who is the younger sister of the previous dancer, Wahyuni, had a conflict with the committee's policy of charging entrance fees to journalists and media covering the ritual. Susi went on strike, refusing to dance, as she believed it was against the will of the ancestral spirit that possessed her. This incident highlighted the tension between the ritual's traditional practice and tourism policies (Wahyuni: Mantan Penari Seblang Olehsari, personal communication, November 10, 2022).

Despite numerous customary controversies, the commodification of Seblang has intensified due to massive promotional efforts by the local government. They collaborate with various travel agencies and event organizers to position Seblang as one of the main attractions in Banyuwangi's tourism promotion. As a result, Seblang is increasingly presented in a visually appealing format, with more structured performances and additional modern elements, such as lighting and sound effects that enhance the atmosphere (Abdullah Fauzi: Dinas Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata Kabupaten Banyuwangi, personal communication, April 17, 2023).

However, the Covid-19 pandemic, which spread globally since early 2020, has had a significant impact on the tourism sector and various cultural events, including the Seblang ritual. The spread of the virus forced the government to temporarily halt tourism activities, including festivals and the Seblang ritual, which is a major tourist attraction. The Banyuwangi Regency Government imposed restrictions that reduced the duration of the ritual to only two days as a preventive measure (Abdullah Fauzi: Dinas Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata Kabupaten Banyuwangi, personal communication, April 17, 2023). However, the indigenous community, particularly the Seblang shamans, disagreed with this decision, fearing the spiritual consequences from ancestral spirits that might demand a longer ritual. Nevertheless, due to the pandemic, the Seblang dance ritual was temporarily suspended in 2020 and postponed. In 2021, the ritual was only conducted in the form of a village thanksgiving ceremony without the dance performance (Akuwan: Pawang Seblang Olehsari, personal communication, November 9, 2022).

The pandemic provided a moment of reflection for the people of Olehsari to reconsider the meaning of Seblang and the impact of its commodification. Amid these challenging times, some indigenous communities sought to reinforce the spiritual values of Seblang and emphasize the importance of maintaining a balance between tradition and commodification (Anshori: Ketua adat Desa Olehsari, personal communication, November 9, 2022). During the pandemic, the people of Olehsari also began exploring digital platforms as a means to continue promoting Seblang. It was presented online through social media and YouTube channels as an alternative way to sustain this art form despite the limitations on physical activities (Abdullah Fauzi: Dinas Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata Kabupaten Banyuwangi, personal communication, April 17, 2023). The pandemic served as a turning point, reminding the community of the importance of preserving their identity and traditional values, even in the face of modern economic demands and globalization.



The period from 2016 to 2021 marked the peak of the commodification of the Seblang Olehsari ritual, with its full integration into the tourism sector. However, it also revealed significant challenges faced by the ritual in dealing with government policies and global crises such as the pandemic. Changes in the ritual's performance reflect the tension between preserving traditional values and adapting to modern demands and emergency situations.

### **The Seblang Olehsari Art After Commodification**

After undergoing an intense phase of commodification, the Seblang Olehsari ritual has experienced significant transformations in its social, economic, and cultural functions. Originally a sacred ritual for the people of Olehsari Village to ward off misfortune and express gratitude for a bountiful harvest, Seblang has now evolved into a tourist attraction that draws both domestic and international visitors. This commodification has led to major changes in the performance and perception of the Seblang ritual, particularly in how it is integrated into tourism and the local economy. The Seblang ritual, which was previously focused solely as a traditional ceremony with high spiritual value, now has a dual role as part of the government's tourism program. As one of Banyuwangi's main cultural icons, Seblang is no longer just a ritual performed by the people of Olehsari Village for local purposes. Since its official inclusion in the Banyuwangi Festival (B-Fest) in 2017, the ritual has become more accessible to the public and now serves as a medium for promoting local culture on both national and international levels (Abdullah Fauzi: Dinas Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata Kabupaten Banyuwangi, personal communication, April 17, 2023).

However, this commodification also presents challenges to the sacredness of the Seblang ritual. While these changes have had a positive economic impact on the local community, they also pose a dilemma regarding the preservation of spiritual and customary values passed down through generations (Saputra, 2014). For instance, when the government attempted to commercialize Seblang by introducing entrance fees for tourists, it clashed with ancestral traditions still upheld by the indigenous community (Anshori: Ketua adat Desa Olehsari, personal communication, November 9, 2022). The rejection of ancestral spirits possessing the Seblang dancer's body in 2018 reflects an imbalance between commercial interests and the ritual's sacredness, serving as a warning that excessive commodification could erode the core values of the tradition itself.

Seblang, as part of Banyuwangi's tourism, has had a significant economic impact on the people of Olehsari Village. Through the Banyuwangi Festival, this ritual has become not only a cultural event but also a source of income for the local community. Tourists who come to witness the Seblang ritual create new economic opportunities, such as the sale of local products, parking services, and tour guiding (Permatasari & Mahararta, 2019). Additionally, the local government provides financial support in the form of village budgets and equipment assistance to sustain the performance of the Seblang ritual. However, the commodification of Seblang has also led to changes in its execution. For instance, performances outside the original ritual, such as those at Wisma Blambangan and Gesibu Banyuwangi, present Seblang in a more commercialized form that does not fully adhere to traditional customs. The use of different materials, such as raffia rope for making omprog and burning plastic as a substitute for traditional incense, reflects a compromise on sacred elements to meet aesthetic and practical needs in commercial events. Although the Seblang shaman strives to maintain the sacred aspect by invoking ancestral spirits, this version of the ritual is distinctly different from the original, which requires the dancer to perform for seven consecutive days (Akuwan: Pawang Seblang Olehsari, personal communication, November 9, 2022).

Apart from changes in ritual practices, Seblang has also undergone innovations and new creations that reflect its adaptation to the dynamics of the times. For example, Sanggar Omah Kuwung in Banyuwangi introduced a modernized version of the Seblang dance, performed outside its original ritual context, such as at the East Java Dance Festival in 2018. In this creation, the dance movements were expanded and modified to create a more dynamic and engaging performance for contemporary audiences. This phenomenon illustrates how Seblang has evolved from a traditional ritual into a performing art form that can be adapted and reinterpreted to suit the needs of the times.

The commodification of Seblang has had diverse impacts on the continuity of this tradition. On one hand, Seblang has been successfully preserved and introduced to a wider audience, making it not only the heritage of the indigenous Olehsari community but also a part of Indonesia's cultural wealth recognized at both national and international levels. On the other hand, the greatest challenge of commodification lies in maintaining a balance between economic demands and the preservation of traditional values (Pranoto, 2019). The indigenous Olehsari community must continuously adapt to the changes brought about by commodification while ensuring that the sacred values passed down by their ancestors are not lost. Following commodification, Seblang finds itself at a crossroads between tradition and modernity. The changes in this ritual, both in terms of its execution and public perception, reflect a complex cultural dynamic. The ability to maintain a balance between sacred values and economic needs will be key to ensuring the sustainability of the Seblang tradition in the future.

### **5. The Response of the Olehsari Community to the Commodification of Seblang**

The commodification of Seblang Olehsari art has sparked various reactions among the community, particularly from traditional leaders and artists directly involved in the ritual. These responses reflect a significant shift in the system governing Seblang art since its inclusion in tourism agendas and festivals organized by the Banyuwangi Regency Government. Anshori, the customary leader of Seblang Olehsari, welcomes the government's involvement in organizing the Seblang art performance. For him, the funding provided by the government is a form of appreciation for the efforts of the indigenous community, who have carried out this ritual for years without compensation. The presence of additional funds is seen as a gesture of respect for tradition while also recognizing the contributions of customary practitioners directly involved in the ritual's execution. This support is also considered crucial in ensuring the continuity of the ritual, which requires dedication and meticulous preparation (Anshori: Ketua adat Desa Olehsari, personal communication, November 9, 2022).

Akuwan, one of the Seblang Olehsari shamans, responded with a neutral stance. For him, government involvement is acceptable as long as it provides the necessary support for the indigenous community. In this context, the government's role is seen as that of a facilitator, assisting in meeting the technical and logistical needs required to carry out the Seblang ritual (Akuwan: Pawang Seblang Olehsari, personal communication, November 9, 2022). This response reflects the pragmatic attitude of some indigenous communities, who view government involvement as beneficial as long as it does not interfere with the essence and long-standing customs of the tradition.

Not all traditional figures responded positively to the commodification of Seblang. Sunaryo and Malena, the *pawang omprog* or Seblang makeup artists, expressed their disapproval of government involvement. They believe that Seblang is the cultural heritage

of the Olehsari indigenous community and that only the indigenous people should have full authority over its implementation and management. Their main concern is the potential disruption of the long-standing customary system due to the introduction of commercial elements and external funding (Sunaryo dan Malena: pawang perias Seblang Olehsari, personal communication, November 9, 2022). Money is seen as a factor that could alter traditional values and undermine the sacredness of the Seblang ritual, which was previously conducted purely without economic motives.

On the other hand, Seblang dancers such as Wahyuni and Suidah, who have participated in this ritual, responded positively. They view government involvement as an opportunity to promote their village and ensure that this tradition remains alive and well-known to a wider audience, even on an international scale. For them, the commodification of Seblang brings benefits to the community by increasing awareness and pride in their local cultural heritage. Moreover, government participation is seen as a guarantee that any changes will still preserve the essence of the original Seblang ritual while adhering to the existing customary guidelines (Suidah: Mantan Penari Seblang Olehsari, personal communication, November 10, 2022; Wahyuni: Mantan Penari Seblang Olehsari, personal communication, November 10, 2022).

A similar sentiment was expressed by Slamet Utomo, a *yogo* or Seblang Olehsari gamelan musician. He is pleased that government support not only provides additional funding but also supplies new gamelan instruments for Seblang performances (Slamet Utomo: Penabuh gamelan Seblang Olehsari, personal communication, November 9, 2022). For Slamet, this assistance demonstrates the government's commitment to maintaining the quality of Seblang performances while ensuring that the ritual can still be carried out properly, even as it becomes part of a larger cultural festival.

## CONCLUSIONS

The commodification of Seblang art in Olehsari Village, Banyuwangi Regency, marks a significant cultural transformation that reshapes both the structure and meaning of this sacred ritual. Originally, Seblang functioned as a spiritual practice deeply embedded in the cosmology and customary life of the Osing indigenous community. Its performance was guided by ancestral mandates and community-based ritual protocols, functioning as a village cleansing ceremony to ensure harmony between the natural and supernatural realms. However, over the past two decades, the ritual has undergone a substantial metamorphosis due to increasing governmental involvement and its integration into tourism development agendas.

This transformation can be categorized into three chronological stages. In the first phase, Seblang was practiced in its original form—adhering strictly to local traditions and spiritual prescriptions. The second phase began in 2002 when the Banyuwangi Regency Government began promoting Seblang as part of its cultural tourism initiative, notably through the Banyuwangi Festival. Government regulations, such as PERDA No. 40 of 2002, facilitated a more institutionalized framework for cultural events, including Seblang. In the third and most recent phase, Seblang has become a flagship of regional tourism and has gained international visibility, appearing in national festivals and digital platforms, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The impact of this commodification is deeply ambivalent. On the positive side, it has generated tangible economic benefits for the local population. Tourism has created new livelihood opportunities through the development of homestays, local crafts, culinary stalls, and job creation in event organization. Moreover, the financial and infrastructural support

provided by the government has helped ensure the continuity of Seblang performances. This includes the provision of new instruments, stage renovations, and promotional materials. For many dancers, musicians, and younger generations, commodification is seen as a means to keep the tradition alive and to raise global awareness of Osing cultural heritage.

However, these developments also introduce significant cultural dilemmas. Commodification, by nature, tends to prioritize spectacle, aesthetic uniformity, and audience expectations, often at the expense of ritual authenticity and sacredness. The imposition of fixed schedules, alterations in ritual symbols, inclusion of non-ritual participants, and government-imposed modifications—such as costume standardization and shortened durations—have raised concerns among traditional leaders and ritual custodians. For them, these changes risk reducing Seblang to a mere tourist performance, severed from its ancestral roots and spiritual resonance.

Furthermore, conflicts between ritual functionaries and the government—as illustrated by dancer strikes and resistance to unauthorized changes—demonstrate the ongoing tension between maintaining sacred traditions and accommodating tourism demands. The ritual's reliance on state funding and promotion also exposes it to the vulnerabilities of policy shifts and commercial logic, potentially weakening its communal authority and sacred integrity.

In light of these complexities, it is essential to seek a dynamic and respectful balance. Preserving Seblang's traditional values must go hand in hand with navigating economic realities. A participatory approach involving ritual elders, community leaders, and government stakeholders is crucial to maintaining the ritual's spiritual core while adapting to contemporary contexts. Ultimately, the future of Seblang lies in its ability to remain a living tradition—sacred in meaning, yet open to dialogical negotiation with modernity.

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