R. Wessing
A dance of life; The Seblang of Banyuwangi, Indonesia


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Introduction

The seblang is a trance dance performed once a year in two villages in the Banyuwangi area in East Java, Indonesia, which are home to the Using (also spelled Osing), a Javanese sub-group. These villages, located in the district (kecamatan) of Glagah, are Bakungan, where the ritual covers one day and is performed at night, and Olehsari (also Ulihsari), where the activities go on for seven days during the day. The ritual, in which either a pre-menarcheal girl or a post-menopausal woman – depending on the village – is put into a state of possession.

1 Many thanks are due to Ibu Nahariyah of Jember, Pak Ruslan and Pak Ichwan of Bakungan, and Ibu Sri Hidayati of Olehsari for long conversations and information and for imparting their personal insight into the field data. Thanks are also due to Rens Heringa for bringing the 1935 article by Stutterheim to my attention, to Jos Platenkamp for pointing out Adelaars work, to Ben Arps for his critical comments on both this article and my Javanese, and to my audiences at the 25th Annual Meeting of the Mid-Atlantic Region Association for Asian Studies at Seton Hall University (October 25-27, 1996), at the Institut für Ethnologie at the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität in Münster, and at the meetings of the Indonesië Kring at the University of Leiden, where I presented earlier versions of this paper, for their generous comments.

2 In the literature there is some discussion about the meaning and derivation of the word seblang. Wolbers' informants (see Wolbers 1992:89, 1993:36) derived it from the words for 'silent' and 'always', though such instant etymologies should be approached with great caution. De Stoppelaar (1926:413) links it with the word nyeblangake, denoting the method or process of possession, which does not explain the root seblang either. Ben Arps (personal communication) suggests that the word may be related to cebiлаг-ceblang, 'to walk in a slouching manner or to mumble' (Pigeaud n.d.:576), which is vaguely descriptive of the seblang's movements. Perhaps, as Van der Tuuk (1896:9) suggests, the word seblang only means 'a woman possessed by a deity who performs dances', especially considering that there is no general word for 'dance' in Javanese (Hughes-Freeland 1997:481). Since the dancer is only seblang when possessed (see below), the word would indicate a state of being.

3 In both villages there are some people who claim that theirs is the only seblang performance (see Anonymous n.d.:1). Others acknowledge the existence of seblang in the other village, but disagree about which is the older or the more authentic.

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trance to be possessed by a spirit, is said by the inhabitants of the two villages to be the oldest and most potent ritual in the Banyuwangi area. In the course of the proceedings the villagers establish contact with both ancestral and tutelary spirits in order to promote the welfare of the community, keep the land fertile, and ensure the success of the next crop. This paper, based on field data collected in 1991 and 1993, considers the place of this ritual in the relations between the villagers, the ancestors, and the villages' tutelary spirits (dhanyang).

Older mentions of the ritual occur mainly in the Dutch literature. More recently its ethnomusicological and theatrical aspects have been discussed by Wolbers (1986; 1992; 1993), Sutton (1993), and Murgiyanto and Munardi (n.d.), and I will therefore not discuss these here. These recent treatments, however, do not deal at length with the ritual aspects emphasized here, which necessitates some duplication in the description of the dance between this paper and the previous ones.

The ritual is similar to trance and possession phenomena elsewhere in Indonesia, such as the sanghyang of Bali, the sintren of West Java (Foley 1992), the sintring of Madura (Schrieke 1920) and the Nini Thowong performances that used to be found throughout Java (Hazeu 1901). As Wolbers (1992:165) points out, these performances all have a similar goal, namely promoting individual and community welfare, and use very similar personages and similar techniques for inducing trance, such as the inhalation of smoke, and music and dance (see Pigeaud 1932:271; Wilken 1912:388). The latter two are not restricted to these trance and possession phenomena, however. At the

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4 It should not be assumed that these dances are perceived as fertilizing rituals by the participants, even though Wolbers (1992) says that they are referred to as ritus kesuburan (fertility rite), a term I never heard used but which may have come into local usage due to outside academic interest. Rather, the strengthening or the re-establishment of the connections between the ancestors, the nature spirits, and the community makes the fields fertile. In other words, this is not a ritual through which it is hoped that fertility will somehow come to the village, but rather is the creation or replenishment of fertility (see Wessing 1978:176); the difference between the two lies in the difference between emic (inside) and etic (outside) views of the proceedings (see Brede Kristensen 1962:7-14).

5 Both the similarities and the differences between seblang and these other trance and dance phenomena in Indonesia and beyond that are mentioned in this paper would make an interesting subject for further study, though this is obviously beyond the scope of the present article. I refer to these other phenomena here in the 'ethnographic present', in order to point out their similarity to the seblang at one level or another and to indicate how explanations offered here fit in with or differ from those given for these other phenomena.

6 Foley refers to the sintren she describes as a play (1992:28), perhaps because of the theatrical aspects, such as the music and dance, associated with it. Murgiyanto and Munardi (n.d.) say the same thing about seblang. According to an Olehsari source (Anonymous n.d.), however, seblang should not be seen as an art form (kesenian), but rather as a traditional ritual. I have chosen to use the word 'performance' for this, as this is suitable for both stage art forms and for one of the essential aspects of seblang, the invocation of the various spirits in the community.
Javanese courts, too, specific musical genres are said to protect the realm from disaster and disease (Sutton 1993:126). Also, the tayuban dance, which formerly was very popular at Javanese village celebrations and in which trance was not a factor, was ‘an integral part of village shrine ritual associated with annual bersih desa [the cleansing of the village] festivity’, as well as with the associated veneration of the founder of the village (Hefner 1987:75, 91). The gandrung dance of Banyuwangi, closely related to the seblang, today serves a function similar to that of the tayuban in East Java (see Hefner 1987).

On a more individual level, those who go into a trance are thought to be able to foretell the future and to know the cures for diseases and the like (see Hazeu 1901:49; Schrieke 1920:67). If the seblang dance were not to take place, the village would be sure to suffer; informants readily gave examples of trouble resulting from neglect of the seblang ritual.

People and spirits

In order to understand the ritual, the relation between the villagers and the local spirits should be briefly discussed. In Java, as in much of Southeast Asia, India, Southern China and the Pacific region, the soil is thought to be owned by spirits (Mus 1975:8-10). The most important among these nature spirits, from a human point of view, are those said to be responsible for the fertility of the land and thus, indirectly, for life. In Java they are usually called dhanyang. A village may have several dhanyang, but one among them is primary and during the annual celebrations receives the main offerings brought to the village pundhen or place of worship (from pundhi, ‘to worship’, see Piègeaud n.d.:474), which is often located near a spring or other source of water.

Closely associated with the dhanyang is the founder (cikal bakal) of the village, the person who brought culture into the wilderness. To be able to convert an area of forest into a village, it is believed a person must have considerable spiritual powers, in Anderson’s sense (1972), in order to persuade the spirits to give up their home and move. He (or occasionally she) also forges a relation with one of these spirits, which then becomes a guardian spirit to the village, cooperating with the founder and his or her descendants in watching over the community’s welfare. After the founder’s death, the two may eventually merge, becoming a dhanyang leluhur, or ancestral dhanyang.

7 The word gandrung denotes a dance said to be derived from the seblang and also a dancing girl, not possessed, who performs on formal occasions, when she may dance with the men of the community for a small remuneration.

8 This fusion, as well as considerable local variation in the use of the relevant terms, may occasionally lead to confusion, as when De Stoppelaar (1926:416) calls the dhanyang the spirit of the first settler of the village, that is, cikal bakal.
Ancestors generally, and the spirit of the cikal bakal in particular, watch over the welfare and prosperity of the village; in return, the villagers honour ancestral customs and give these spirits their ritual due.

The two most important spirits in a community, then, are the cikal bakal and the dhanyang. The cooperation between them made the founding of the community possible and their combined efforts guarantee its continued welfare. Not surprisingly, they are also two of the principal spirits involved in the seblang ritual.

Bersih desa

In the two villages in which seblang is found today, the performances take place on the occasion of the annual bersih desa, during which the community is cleansed of the accumulated effects of discord, especially between people and the spirit world. Although nearly all the villagers profess allegiance to Islam (Herowati Poesoko 1992:49), belief in the importance of maintaining proper relations with both tutelary and ancestral spirits remains strong. While the outcome of one's endeavours ultimately depends on God, the goodwill of these spirits is seen as essential to success, either directly or through their intercession with God. During bersih desa, therefore, God, and also the spirits and the ancestors, are thanked for the success of the past harvest and are asked to bless the coming agricultural cycle and the people generally.

In the past the time for these celebrations was around the beginning of the Javanese month Sura, which was the start of the new year. Now, however, they are adapted to the Islamic calendar, the celebration in Olehsari taking place a week after Idul Fitri, the end of the Islamic month of fasting (Ramadhan), and that in Bakungan around Idul Adha, the fifteenth of the month Haji, during which the pilgrimage (hajj) to Mecca is undertaken. This and other Muslim adjustments notwithstanding, the main aim of the performances is to strengthen relations between the villages and the spirit world.

The ritual today conforms to Lessa and Vogt's (1958:410) description of 'a public rite performed for the benefit of the whole village or community', characteristic of 'tightly structured and relatively elaborate food-producing - usually agricultural societies'. It may not always have been this way. Between at least the late 17th and the 19th centuries, war and political turbulence so disturbed the social fabric of what had been the kingdom of Balambangan (in which Banyuwangi is located) that in 1780 its population had been reduced to about 9000 people (Lekkerkerker 1923:1064). It is doubtful, therefore, whether one can speak of a 'tightly structured and relatively elaborate food-
producing' society at that time. There are some indications\(^9\) (Lekkerkerker 1923:1056; Pigeaud 1932:261) that shamanism and spirit possession existed at the Balambangan court. However, with the degree of depopulation mentioned above, a less centralized form, which could have coexisted with that at the court, may have gained prominence. This would have been a contingent rite (Turner 1977:183), similar to the shamanistic practices mentioned by Lessa and Vogt (1958:410) that are usually found in 'loosely structured food-gathering cultures, where the more common ceremonial is a curing rite performed for one or more patients within the context of an extended family group'.

In the late 19th century, a period when reliable data started becoming available, there were professional spirit dancers in the old Balambangan area who could be called upon in case of illness or when one needed to redeem a vow (nadar) (Scholte 1927:149)\(^10\), and who thus fulfilled a role akin to the shamanistic one mentioned above. Such a figure probably also offered his

\(^9\) Beyond these indications, there is no extant record of seblang in East Java from before the 19th century. As to its antecedents, one might look at shamanism in Indonesia generally and, given the previous close relations between Bali and East Java, perhaps especially closely at the sanghyang of Bali.

\(^10\) There is a tradition that the first female seblang appeared in 1895, when the mother of a sick little girl, Semi, promised that 'If you become well, I shall make a seblang dancer of you. If not, then I won't' (Murgiyanto and Munardi n.d.:8). Semi regained her health and her mother sponsored a seblang performance, during which Semi danced and answered questions much like the ones described by Foley (1992) for the sintren of West Java. Later her sisters also began to take part, which eventually led to the development of a distinctive genre, that of the female gandrung, which had previously been a genre for boys (Agustono 1990:114; Murgiyanto and Munardi n.d.:8; Pigeaud 1938:272-8; Scholte 1927:148; Sutton 1993:136). Pigeaud (1932:269) expressed the view that the change from boys to girls led to a severing of the connection of the genre with religious events, now becoming mere entertainment. At present, however, gandrung is performed at the sacrificial feast for Nyai Roro Kidul in Puger, on the south coast of East Java, which makes observations about the decline of the gandrung's religious function (Hefner 1987:86) somewhat premature. According to Scholte (1927:147) the gandrung is a virgin, but this may be due to confusion with the seblang dancer, who is a virgin, and who is often referred to as a gandrung in the literature (see Agustono 1990:114).

Since Semi's mother, Mbah Midah, had been a seblang dancer herself (Agustono 1990:114) and the phenomenon of promising to hold a seblang performance is more widespread than this story would indicate (see De Stoppelaar 1926:414; Surya 1992a:6; see also Martin-Schiller 1983:53), the representation of Semi as the first female seblang is probably erroneous. It is more likely that she stands out because the tradition of the female gandrung is said to have started with her; she is, in fact, often called a gandrung. Furthermore, Murgiyanto and Munardi (n.d.:8) speak of a seblang existing in Bakungan in Semi's time and say that it was only because she could not afford to pay for a professional seblang that Semi's mother made the promise she did. The gandrung tradition that started with Semi now enjoys popularity in its own right and has in turn influenced aspects of especially the Bakungan seblang. Musicians participating in the Bakungan performance are also gandrung musicians, but this is not the case in Olehsari (Wolbers 1993:41). There is also much overlap between the song repertoires of the two – which does nothing to diminish the sacred character of these songs when used during a seblang performance (see Smith 1992:104).
services during the annual celebrations, at least in Bakungan, where this is said to have been a tradition since the foundation of the village.

According to the villagers (see Wolbers 1992:111; Herowati Poesoko 1992:69) the area was a bakung (Crinimum asiaticum) forest at the time of the founders' arrival. In the centre of this forest, where they wanted to build their village hall (balai desa), stood either a large nagasari (Mesua ferea) or banyan (Wolbers 1992:111) tree inhabited by numerous spirits. Because the tree had to be felled, these spirits had to be persuaded to move to avoid difficulties with them. The spirits agreed on condition that each year a seblang performance would be held, during which one of them would possess the dancer.

The tradition of sponsoring a seblang in fulfilment of a promise or to effect a cure seems to have died out now. The only occasions for its performance are the annual ceremonies in Bakungan and Olehsari.

Preparations

In Bakungan, then, the seblang tradition is based on an agreement between the founder and the spirits who used to occupy the area. In Olehsari the spirit of the founder and the local dhanyang are also closely involved. Though this is not immediately obvious in densely populated East Java today, villages are conceived of as centres of culture and order. These are surrounded by a (now largely non-existent) forest, the home of spirits, a wilderness, and a threat because of the fact that spirits have an order that is different from that in the village, so that mistakes are easily made. Clearing the forest, therefore, is also a form of clearing away non-culture and getting rid of apparent non-order\textsuperscript{11}, so that a place in Smith's sense (1992:26, 30) may be established.\textsuperscript{12}

To protect the village and its inhabitants, various taboos are observed (Wessing 1995:201) in individual and communal relations with the spirits and certain precautions must be taken when inviting such touchy, and thus often dangerous figures to participate in the village seblang ritual. In fact, in Olehsari it is the spirits who indicate that the time for the ritual has come. A middle-aged woman named Mbok Sutrinah, who is chosen for this role by the spirit, suddenly becomes possessed by the dhanyang. The news of this possession is conveyed to the village leaders, who then begin the necessary preparations (Herowati Poesoko 1992:51). That same evening an offering is

\textsuperscript{11} Schefold (1989) argues that the non-order of the forest may only be apparent and that it may have an order and rules of its own, making it a dangerous place for human beings who may not be fully aware of these rules.

\textsuperscript{12} Smith (1992:26, 30) suggests that place is brought into being in unordered space through human activity, such as marking.
made at the spring where the spirit of the founder resides, near the women's bathing area. In Bakungan, the *dhukun* (shaman), Pak Ichwan, who mediates between the spirits and the *seblang*, prepares himself by fasting for three days before the day planned for the ritual, in the course of which he is overcome by a feeling that the spirits are arriving (see Wolbers 1992:113; Triadi 1989:7; compare Hazeu 1901:54).

Informants were very consistent in their statements that both the time and the place of the ritual are determined by the spirits. This does not mean that these are not open to change. Both the rituals I attended, one each in Bakungan and Olehsari, were delayed for various reasons. The changes had to be approved by the spirits first (Surya 1992b:9), however, as otherwise they would have been quite cross.\footnote{As was pointed out above, they used to be held in both places around 1 Sura, the beginning of the Javanese new year, but in both the above cases they had been moved to another date on the spirits' instructions. Informants were not able to explain this any further, but presumably the spirits had become Muslim, as elsewhere in East Java (Wessing 1997a).}

The dancer and the singers (*pesindhen*) are also chosen by the spirit. In Bakungan, where currently Mbok Misnah, a woman in her sixties, performs the dance, a new dancer is chosen when the previous one becomes incapacitated or dies. In Olehsari a new dancer is selected every three years, unless the spirit decides otherwise.\footnote{In 1993 there were some problems with the dancer originally chosen by the spirit and after much negotiation the girl of the previous year was picked again, even though she had already served her three-year term (Wessing 1998b). When she intimated her reluctance to accept for another term, the spirit threatened to choke her, after which she consented. Not to have done so would have been to invite misfortune to strike her or her family (see Herowati Poesoko 1992:61).}

In Bakungan the dance takes place in front of the old village hall (*balai desa*), where the tree housing the spirits once stood; the dance, then, is held literally at the spiritual centre of the village. In Olehsari the place is not so precisely determined and over the years has changed to various locations.
although these have always been central to the village. The reason for this is that until about 1930 Olehsari had formed part of the village of Glagah. Herowati Poesoko (1992:51) notes that the seblang belonged to the people of Olehsari, who took the ritual with them when they split off from Glagah.15

In both villages the seblang, accompanied by a male descendant of a previous dancer, on the morning of the day of the ritual visits and makes sacrifices at the graves of her ancestors and at the dhanyang's pundhen, inviting all the spirits to be present. The man accompanying her is called a pengundang, that is, someone who summons (mengundang) the spirits. This person plays no further role in the proceedings, as on their arrival the spirits are received by the dhukun, who mediates between them and the dancer (see Murgiyanto and Munardi n.d. 32-3). According to Murgiyanto and Munardi (n.d.:15-6), furthermore, the villagers and village leaders of Olehsari pay a visit to the pundhen, where they offer a prayer, ritual objects and food. This is not the case in Bakungan, where, as will become clear below, this offering forms part of the communal village meal eaten just prior to the performance.

In the course of the day the various offerings and other items to be used during the performance are prepared, as, for instance, in Olehsari the crown (omprok) the dancer wears (that in Bakungan not being perishable and being saved from year to year). One very important item is the altar (sanggar, also called tarub16, see Murgiyanto and Munardi n.d.:23). This is a bamboo platform, in Bakungan of about 2 x 2.5 or 3 metres and 75 cm off the ground, with a roof about three metres above it (Wolbers 1992:117; Murgiyanto and Munardi n.d. 32-31). According to Beatty (1999:78) reports, on the other hand, that the seblang ritual was moved to Olehsari on the orders of Buyut Cili, a powerful spirit in the neighbouring village of Bayu (pseudonym). Glagah does not now stage a seblang ritual, since its seblang has moved away (see De Stoppelaar 1927:31). A neighbouring village, Kemiren, does not do so, either, but has a barong macan instead. Olehsari likewise has a barong tulang, which is owned by the local spirits. According to informants, the mythical creature by this name is kept under control by the seblang. If the annual ritual does not take place, this barong might bring misfortune.

The Balinese barong is, among other things, a symbolic tiger (Wessing 1986:85). The barong of Glagah and Olehsari are related to the macan bumi (village tiger), described by Martin-Schiller (1983:54), to which offerings are made as part of the bersih desa celebration (see Wessing 1995:198-9) and which might be a spirit created specifically to guard the village (Wessing in press). Rikin (1973:49) wonders, on the other hand, if the Sundanese barongan might be a representation of Sri, the rice goddess.

15 Beatty (1999:78) reports, on the other hand, that the seblang ritual was moved to Olehsari on the orders of Buyut Cili, a powerful spirit in the neighbouring village of Bayu (pseudonym). Glagah does not now stage a seblang ritual, since its seblang has moved away (see De Stoppelaar 1927:31). A neighbouring village, Kemiren, does not do so, either, but has a barong macan instead. Olehsari likewise has a barong tulang, which is owned by the local spirits. According to informants, the mythical creature by this name is kept under control by the seblang. If the annual ritual does not take place, this barong might bring misfortune.

16 A tarub or tarub is primarily a ritual structure. It may take the form of a temporary festival enclosure, which at large celebrations 'provides the place in which hundreds of guests will be received, fed, and entertained [...] (Hefner 1987:77). At weddings it is the place where the men sit (Rens Heringa, personal communication). Rassers (1959:258) connects it with the circumcision ritual. In the context of seblang it is the place where the spirits are received as well as where ritual objects may be placed. The ritual nature of this structure is also evident from the eagerness with which volunteers help the sponsor of the event with its construction (see Markus Apriono 1992:25-6).
nardi n.d.:50). Here offerings, and in Bakungan some props to be used during the dance, are set out. Also, in both villages the dhukun and the seblang and her retinue are seated there in between parts of the dance. In Olehsari the singers accompanying the dance also sit there. The platform further has various plants and fruits placed on it, such as sugarcane, different kinds of ritual bananas and coconuts, root and tree crops, and so on, representing the produce of the villages and the fertility of the land.

In both villages it was important for the sanggar to be constructed to the west of the dancing area and facing east (Wolbers 1992:98; Murgiyanto and Munardi n.d.:50). The west is, of course, the direction in which the ancestors are located, as well as being that of Mecca, towards which Muslim prayers are directed five times daily. The east, on the other hand, is the direction of the sunrise and of new life. This then places the seblang and all the persons and things associated with her in the same place as the ancestors, who face life (that is, the living, human audience) and watch the dance which takes place in the area between them. In Olehsari, a tall pole is erected in the middle of this dancing area, around which the musicians take their seats.

On a mat in the sanggar various offerings (sajen) are placed, which vary slightly between the two villages but which in both include various kinds of food, fruit, and roots, representing the produce of the earth, and an earthen jug (kendhi) filled with water. In both villages, furthermore, a bowl of water (banyu arum) with ritual flowers (mawar, sedap malam, and wangsa), representing the colours red, white and green, was placed on the altar, as well as kembang dirma, flowers sold by the seblang at a particular point in the performance. The combination of mawar, sedap malam and kenanga is also used

17 Unlike Wolbers (1992:116), I do not believe that these props should be reckoned among the offerings. Rather, these objects, which include a farmer's hat, a small plough, a whip, a small kiling (propeller for scaring away birds), a plastic doll, and two keris (Javanese ritual daggers), gain ritual effectiveness by having lain on the altar and having been associated with the powers involved in the ritual.

18 Hazeu (1901:43) notes that Nini Thowong faces east, in the direction of the new moon.

19 Jordaan (1997:306 n. 9) notes that indigenous ideas concerning the location of the land of the dead place it on the sea bed. These notions changed in response to the influence of outside ideas, however, including Muslim ones, as a result of which it is now sometimes located in the west. As Gunawan Tjahjono (1989:232) points out, since ancestors and rulers may be buried on the qibla (western) side of the mosque, prayer in Java is ambivalent, as it may be directed both to the spirits of the ancestors and to God. In Buddhist Thailand, the 'east, where the sun rises, is associated with life [... and the] west, where the sun goes down, is associated with death [...]’ (Terwiel 1976:256).

20 In Olehsari they included gedhang raja (king's bananas), symbolizing the ruler, and a coconut, placed in the curve of the bananas, representing the earth carried on the lap of the ruler (dipangku oleh raja). In both places a complete sirih (betel) set is also included, while in Olehsari I noted a mirror and comb among the offerings, which were for the ruler's wife. A complete list of the offerings can be found in Wolbers (1992:116). See also Herowati Poesoko (1992:53).
Plate 1. The *seblang* of Bakungan

Plate 2. The *seblang* of Olehsari
here, placed on a small bamboo stick. Coming from the seblang, these are believed to contain some of her magical essence and to offer protection in the home or to make the fields fertile.

Finally, there is the omprok, the crown worn by the dancer. In Bakungan this is a helmet-like head-dress, much like that worn by gandrung dancers, though it used to be like the one worn in Olehsari, which is made of banana leaves mixed with young leaves from the pinang (Areca catechu) tree and with mawar, wangsa, gedhang, sedap malam, and other flowers (see Wolbers 1992: 114, 130). De Stoppelaar (1926:414), for instance, speaks of a banana leaf torn into strips covering the face of the seblang. Scholte (1927:149) likewise mentions that the professional seblang (that is, the one involved in curing) from Bekoengan (Bakungan) wore an omprok of banana leaves covering her face. The same was true of early gandrung dancers in Bakungan, like the famous gandrung Mbok Awiyah mentioned in a report in the daily newspaper Kompas of 29 December 1985. The change in Bakungan may have occurred due to the above-mentioned influence of modern gandrung there. The traditional omprok, then, is made of young banana leaves and local flowers (Anonymous n.d.), while Triadi (1989:3) also mentions nangka (Artocarpus integer) leaves, and also includes a small mirror. This crown is blessed, along with the dancer (see below), after which it is placed on her head. Once the Olehsari dancer has it on, her face is hidden from view, unlike the seblang in Bakungan.

While all these preparations are being made, individual households in Bakungan, where the dance takes place in the evening, prepare a slametan (ritual meal), consisting of a tumpeng (rice cone), chicken and pecel (a vegetable dish). This may be more or less elaborate, depending on the financial means of the household.

When the preparations are completed, young men and boys carrying torches, led by three men, including the imam (religious leader) of Bakungan, immediately after the evening prayer (magrib) circle the village along its outer perimeter counter-clockwise (ider bumi), starting at the mosque, chanting istigfar (prayers for forgiveness) for the safety and peace of the village. At roughly each 'corner' of the village they stop, face inward towards the village

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21 This helmet also much resembles that worn by the sangyang dancers of Banyuwangi described by Pigeaud (1938:328-30). It is high and crown-shaped and is made of beaten leather, with large ear ornaments worn behind the ears. Pigeaud, in fact, refers to the sangyang as a kind of male seblang.

22 Informants in Olehsari said that little children like to be present when the omprok is being made, as they are fascinated with the preparations. This means that many equally fascinated spirit children are present as well, they said. On the last day of the ritual, parents are warned to keep their children close to them to prevent their being taken by the spirits, as has reputedly happened in the past.
Plate 3. Ider bumi in Bakungan. Note the waringin (banyan) branch in the imam's hand and utter the call to prayer (azan), led by the imam, who, as the only person not bearing a torch, carries a waringin (banyan) branch, said to be for protection of the crops, as it sweeps away pests.\(^23\)

The *ider bumi*, through the Muslim chants and prayers uttered during its course, places a ritual, Islamic border around the village.\(^24\) In Beatty's

\(^{23}\) Wolbers (1992:119, citing Triadi 1989:5) writes that the tumpeng are carried along on the *ider bumi*. This was not the case when I participated in 1991, and seems rather impractical, in view of the growing darkness, the unevenness of the path, and the fact that almost everyone was holding a torch, which precludes the carrying of tumpeng, for which two hands would be needed.

\(^{24}\) This action, which is similar to the ploughing of a furrow around capital cities at the installation of a new ruler in ancient South and Southeast Asia (Paranavitana 1970), keeps the sustaining powers within the boundary created by it. It also marks the enclosed space as a ritual location (Smith 1992:75). Its repetition, as reported by Pemberton (1994:163) in the case of Surakarta, and as occurs annually in Bakungan, can be seen as a mending of fences, as a strengthening or even renewing of this boundary, especially in the face of calamity or social disorder. Occasional tours of the realm made by Javanese rulers (Niermeyer 1913; Krom 1915) may well have served a similar 'fence mending' function (see also Soelarto 1993:39).
(1996:283) words, it creates a religious *wadhah* (container) for Using truths. This is a powerful boundary through which, it is hoped, ill fortune cannot pass. As such, it is similar to the circumambulations of the Surakarta palace with heirloom weapons, described by Pemberton (1994:163), which had the function of warding off epidemics and famine.

Such an *ider bumi* is not held in connection with the *seblang* ritual in Olehsari. Instead, the *seblang* makes a tour (*kirab*) of the village on the seventh day of the ritual, stopping at the village hall, the graves of the founders of the village, and important intersections (Wolbers 1992:106; Herowati Poesoko 1992:52). In the graveyard ' [...] a small hut stands, its walls are made of bamboo, and its roof consists of palm-leaves. The [...] *seblang* [and her entourage], the *dhukun*, an old man and one of the women of the chorus enter the hut. Here the *seblang* dances for some five minutes [...]. This [hut ...], also called *kramat*, symbolizes the grave of the founder, and guardian spirit, of the village, the *dhanyang desa* (Wolbers 1992:106, 134 n. 16).25 The *ider bumi* and the *kirab* serve the same purpose, however, namely that of demarcating the village as a cosmic entity, the one by bounding it as a whole and the other by empowering (in Anderson's sense, 1972) its most significant centres (see also Rikin 1973:49).

On completion of the *ider bumi*, which finishes at the Bakungan village hall (*balai desa*), a communal *slametan* is held. This does not involve a 'sending, redistribution and sharing [...] of food' (Pemberton 1994:243-244), but rather the communal consumption of the food of the individual households. Towards this end, each household places its food on a mat in front of the house, and at the sounding of the village *kenthongan* (slit-drum) together with its invited guests consumes its food, at the same time as and in full view of the neighbouring households. The leaders of the community, along with the invited spirits, including those which moved when their tree had to be felled, eat at the village hall, where the ritual procession ended. Since food is normally consumed inside the household, out of the public view, such public consumption reflects the participation in the ritual by the village as a whole, while the continuous line of eating households, starting at the *balai desa*, constitutes a continuation of the circle just drawn around the village by the *ider bumi*.

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25 Pemberton (1994:261) notes that in a Central Javanese village he studied, this procession began at the well, the seat of the *dhanyang*, circulating through the area in a clockwise direction. In Olehsari, the *dhanyang* is thought to be in attendance at the ritual, so that it is not necessary to go to the place where it is normally found. Hobart (1995:346) writes about a similar procession in Bali, during which Banaspati Raja, a protective spirit, 'moves through the village' with the 'explicit purpose' of patrolling 'the borders of his area [...] and to repel demons [...] as well as unpurified souls [...]', in a similar way to the *ider bumi* in Bakungan. In Olehsari, which has an *ider bumi* in a different context from the *seblang* ritual, this has been performed since about 1990 in the mosque, where previously it started and ended, rather than around the village.
In Olehsari the seblang is given a slametan before and after the week's performance, but this does not involve the community as a whole. The food for this slametan is like that in Bakungan, and is prepared by the girl's parents. The gamelan (percussion orchestra) players also have a small slametan the evening before the performance, to which all the players and the village leaders are invited, but need not necessarily all show up – those who do represent the others. After the close of the ritual, there is also a slametan to send the spirits on their way, which according to Herowati Poesoko (1992:52) is held in the village hall.

The ritual

The various slametan having been consumed, the dance can begin. Prior to this, the dancer is dressed in a special costume, the details of which vary between the two villages (see Wolbers 1992). In Bakungan she is dressed, complete with the omprok, at the dhukun's house. She then waits for the appropriate time in the dhukun's front room, with her retainers, children and onlookers crowding the room. As I recorded in my field notes:

A smoking censer was then brought out and placed in front of the dancer. The dhukun carried two keris, which he held over the smoke. The incense smoke was also brought very close to the dancer's face, who almost instantly went into a trance. She was given a keris to hold in her right hand. Shortly afterward she was led from the house by the dhukun. Another man, a member of the gamelan, carried the censer and had the other keris stuck in his belt. In addition there were her retinue [two pengudang – see below] and a woman sheltering her under an umbrella. The group was preceded by a man with a lantern, even though it was a bright night with a full moon.

Followed by a crowd of onlookers, the seblang and her entourage proceeded to the dance area in front of the village hall, with the sanggar to the right and the gamelan orchestra to the left as one stands facing outward. They seated themselves on the sanggar, in front of the offerings. The village head then made a speech, full of nationalist clichés about development and tourism and other current catchphrases, which placed the proceedings symbolically in a national context. After this the dance started.

In Olehsari, the dancer, after being dressed, proceeds with the singers to the dancing area, with her head covered with a scarf and shaded by an um-

26 This is a very common method of inducing a trance in Indonesia (Wilken 1912:326, 388). According to De Stoppelaar (1926:414 n. 1) this wafting of incense smoke towards her invests the seblang with magical powers.
brella. They carry the *omprok*, offerings and a small winnowing-tray (*nyiru*) and are preceded by the *dhukun* carrying a smoking censer. These items are all placed in the *sanggar*, after which the singers also seat themselves there. The dancer sits on a chair right in front of the *sanggar* (though Wolbers (1992:101) says she sits in the *sanggar*). The *dhukun* envelops the *omprok* in incense smoke, after which he circles the dancing area counter-clockwise three times, carrying the censer, and invites the spirits to participate in the proceedings (see Wolbers 1992:101). The *omprok* is now placed on the dancer’s head. Saying a *du’a* (prayer), the *dhukun* moves the censer close to her, rotating it counter-clockwise before her face and over her head three times. The dancer then stands up, holding the *nyiru*, and as the singers begin the first song (*gendhing*) one of them, Seblang Lakinta, closes the dancer’s eyes with her hands, moving her head gently back and forth. Shortly after that, the dancer goes into a trance, dropping the tray as a sign of this and moving her body in time with the singing. One of the singers then leads the girl, who is now *seblang*, counter-clockwise around the *pentas* (stage), while the musicians are arranged in the centre around the pole.

This is the start of the dance, in which the dancer is accompanied by two persons (*pengudang* – not to be confused with the *pengundang* or summoner of the spirits mentioned above), sometimes described as clowns because of their antics before the audience. The male *pengudang* leads the *seblang* around the circle, where she often stops to touch someone or briefly hold a person’s hand before dancing on. He occasionally gives her instructions and mediates between her and the audience. The female *pengudang* gently guides her from behind.

In both villages the dancing is accompanied by *gamelan* music and the singing of short songs (*gendhing*) by a chorus (*pesindhen*; see Wolbers 1992). The *seblang* signals the start and finish of each song with a movement of her head.

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27 As Schrieke (1920:72) points out, dance is often a symptom of trance, rather than a way of inducing a trance.

28 Informants say that it is not the *seblang* who is the dancer, but the spirit that possesses her. She is *seblang* only while possessed. Similarly in West Java the word *sintren* refers to both the dance and the possessed girl (Foley 1992:24), while in Madura both the spirit and the possessed girl are called *sintring* (Schrieke 1920:66).

29 The male clown dances backward in front of her but, since her eyes are closed in trance, he guides her with his voice and rhythmic shouts (see Wolbers 1992:103). Wolbers (1992:94) derives the word *pengudang* from *ngudang*, ‘to exalt or coax’. Similarly Murgiyanto and Munardi (n.d.:26) say that the word derives from *kudang*, ‘to sweet-talk, to praise’. An anonymous referee of this paper adds that ‘ngudang is what a caregiver […] does when s/he lulls a baby or small child by praising its (future, imagined, hoped-for) good qualities (sexual prowess, honourable character, and so on) or by making it promises. Often ngudang is a kind of chanting. Its wording is formulaic. By extension, ngudang is also used to refer to an amorous address by a man to his lover or spouse.’
hand and likewise indicates her satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the speed, choice of song and the like. Between songs she rests on her chair at the sanggar. About halfway through the proceedings, the above-mentioned flowers on sticks (kembang dirma) are brought out and sold to the public. All the while the dhukun keeps the incense burning and, while he stays near the sanggar, remains in overall charge of the proceedings (see Foley 1992:26).

In Olehsari the end of the performance is signalled by the song Meketut Sare, in which the spirits are asked to retire. The seblang comes out of her trance and goes to the sanggar, where she washes her face with the water from the bowl with banyu arum. In Bakungan, as soon as she has finished doing so, men and boys rush towards the sanggar to try and catch at least a few drops of this water, after which they literally tear the sanggar to pieces, hoping to get some part of it or a flower, as these, even more than the kembang dirma, are believed to contain some of the seblang's power. The water keeps one young, healthy and strong, I was told. With this, the dancer in Bakungan is done, while the one in Olehsari goes home to rest before the following day's performance.

The songs

In theory there are about forty songs from which the seblang may choose (Wolbers 1992:118). In practice, however, about twelve are generally used. As is usual with songs accompanying spirit possession phenomena, their meaning is often obscure (Haezeu 1901:44; Schrieke 1920:73; Foley 1992:45). According to Wolbers (1992:37) the singers themselves barely understand what they are singing, partly because of the archaic language used and partly because the metaphors used have become unclear with time. This also makes them difficult to translate.

The intention of the set of songs as a whole seems fairly clear, however, the obscurity of individual songs notwithstanding (see Rikin 1973:59). The

30 Just as dance may be a symptom of trance, a change in musical cues (that is, a change in rhythm) seems to be able to lift a trance (see De Stoppelaar 1926:414). As Wilken (1912:342) points out, every spirit has its own melody, and thus a change in musical cues may be a sign for the spirit to leave.

31 Foley (1992:45), writing about the sintren in West Java, observes that translations offered by individuals were at times interpretative rather than literal. One popular current interpretation is that the songs are anti-colonial statements, protests against poverty, injustice and oppression, the title of the opening song, Padha Nonton, calling on 'All people [to] bear witness' (Crawford 1980:205). A similar interpretation was given by Foley's (1992:38) informants of the songs sung in West Java. Triadi (1989:14) writes that the songs are a code (sandi) which is not understood by the dancer and the general public (compare pasemon, 'obscure information'). If the songs were indeed meant as a form of anti-colonial protest, this would seem to defeat their purpose. The
songs generally concern fertility by dealing with such aspects of daily village life as love, sex, children, work in the fields, and other agricultural concerns (see Wolbers 1992:277).

The way the songs were sequenced during the performance in 1991 also seems to suggest a progression from earlier pursuits, such as fishing and digging for root crops (which may have been the dominant modes of production during the period of depopulation), to the current methods of growing rice. This change of agricultural modes would have been of interest to the spirits as well, as, while hunters, fishers and gatherers may pass through a forested area (in the same way as swidden agriculturists, though more slowly so), farmers tend to take possession of it, making permanent relations with the local spirits essential.

Finally, considering that rituals are performative in Austin's sense (1975)\textsuperscript{32}, in order for them to be effective they are considered in Java to need statements of intent, as well as requiring various prescribed acts (Beatty 1996:275). The songs may therefore be seen minimally as statements about, and perhaps even as being instrumental in achieving, objectives desired by the community, such as fertility as evidenced by abundant crops and offspring.

The first song, Seblang Lakinta, also called the seblang song, seems to be a cue for the trance. It is sung again and again, urging the dancer to forget her concerns and become like one who is asleep, that is, to go into a trance (see Wilken 1912:388).

After that, the first of the songs accompanying the actual dance is sung, during which the seblang does her first dance circling counter-clockwise around the audience. Of this song, Padha Nonton, the version reproduced by Murgiyanto and Munardi (n.d.:38) differs considerably from that given me by Mr. Ilham Triadi, who tends towards the revolutionary interpretation the-

\textsuperscript{32} As Austin points out, certain verbal phrases are simultaneously statements and the performance of particular actions; for example, 'I bet you ten rupiah' is at the same time a statement and the act of making a bet. Ritual is similar to this in that it is at the same time a set of actions and the act of bringing about the intended results of these actions (see Wessing 1978:176).
ory. The former speaks of the young leaves of a particular banana tree (*gedhang gurise*), saying that such a tree is not found in these parts but does grow elsewhere. This may be a reference to the omprok worn by the dancer, which traditionally was, and in Olehsari still is, made of banana leaves. The title of the song, Padha Nonton, means 'everyone, come and watch', urging everyone to witness the event and thereby give it greater social validity (see Beatty 1996:275). The songs sung after that include Mancing-Mancing ('fishing'), during which in Bakungan the seblang uses her scarf like a casting net to fish for boys in the audience, and Kembang Gadhung, which deals with the gathering of an intoxicating variety of yam (*Dioscorea hispida*) and during which the seblang pretends to be intoxicated.

Another song, Ratu Sabrang, is about rice-growing. In Bakungan, the male pengudang wears a farmer's hat during this song and hitches two boys to a model plough, like oxen. He then 'ploughs' the dance area, followed by the seblang and the other pengudang. This is accompanied by a great deal of clowning, the 'oxen' kicking the 'farmer' and goosing him. After that the seblang acts out the planting of rice. These actions are a variation on former ones, which have now disappeared, in which a number of men were put into a trance and then acted like bulls butting each other. Hitched to ploughs, they would plough an area of wet-rice field near the *dhanyang*'s pundhen. This area of land was then further prepared and sown with rice which, when it had grown enough, was divided among the farmers to be replanted in their fields. These seedlings were believed to promote a good harvest (De Stoppelaar 1926:416-7, 1927:31; Wolbers 1992:26-7, 137 n. 43). In Olehsari the seblang dances with young men from the audience during this song. The words again vary considerably between various versions, that offered by Murgiyanto and Munardi (n.d.:44-5) including a reference to the carriage Dewi Sri, the goddess or spirit of rice (Wessing 1998a), is thought to ride in. Ratu Sabrang literally means 'the ruler from the other side of the water or from abroad' and could well refer to the version of the Javanese myth of the origin of rice in which Dewi Sri's potential mate, Sedana, moves to 'sabrang' (Rassers 1959:13). While dancing, the boys would then represent Sedana, to the seblang's Sri.

33 Adelaar (1988:71-2) points out that the Proto-Austronesian word for brother-in-law (*I(N)paR), 'combined the meaning of "brother-in-law" with that of "other side (of the river)"'. Affinal relations with men from overseas seem to have been preferred, especially among nobles (see also De Josselin de Jong 1983). The word *sabrang* of course also means 'other side (of sea, river), [...] overseas' (Zoetmulder and Robson 1982:11:1583). In this connection one should also consider the expression *wuang* or *wuang sabrang* ('person from the other side'), in which *wuang* ('people, human being', see Zoetmulder and Robson 1982:11:2342) derives from a word with the original meaning 'other people' or 'outsider' and 'affine' (see Adelaar 1994:17). *Wuang sabrang*, then, is a reference to an 'affine from the other side', that is, a brother-in-law.
A further part of the dance is accompanied by a song called Emping-Emping, which most likely refers to a stage in the growth of the rice plant (Omar 1985:232). During this segment, a model kiling, a propeller with which to scare away birds, is brought into play. This links up with the next segment, in which the seblang is said to be driving off pests threatening the crop. This is followed two segments later by a song entitled Erang-Erang (war), in which in Bakungan the seblang runs around with two keris (ritual daggers), which according to informants represents the chasing away of pests (Wolbers 1992:278; Herowati Poesoko 1992:67).

Special attention has been given in the above to songs relating to agriculture. Other songs refer to love, marriage, children, and the like. According to one informant in Bakungan, the seblang performance in fact is all about Dewi Sri: 'The seblang is Dewi Sri, who is the rice. The ritual drives away pests like rats and grasshoppers' (see Surya 1991:2). In Olehsari it was pointed out, furthermore, that Sri is present in the tarub and participates in the form of rice. She is also present in the omprok in the form of betel and a small mirror, to which she and other female spirits are partial (Hazeu 1901:90). Moreover, the tarub is also called singgasana ('throne', see Wolbers 1992:117), on which the sirih pinang (betel) offering for the isteri, or wife of the king, symbolized by the pisang raja (the 'king's bananas'), is placed.34

It is no wonder, then, that there is an emphasis on the rice crop. One requirement for this crop is rain, especially in the absence of irrigation. Foley (1992:28-9, 33) observes that in West Java the sintren used to be performed to invoke rain, of which fact the umbrella that shields the dancer there is reminiscent.35 In any case, water is closely associated with fertility, both that of the land and that of people (Wessing 1998a; Sutton 1993:140). Sutton (1993:134), analysing a Yogyakarta court song in which 'in flower and honey metaphors the act of sexual intercourse between Sultan Agung and Ratu Kidul' is suggested, mentions an association between love and kepyar-kepyur, involving clouds and the protection of an umbrella, and notes that kepyar-kepyur can mean, among other things, 'sprinkling with rain'. Similarly the seblang song Kebyar-Kebyur includes a line saying that it is clouding over (Murgiyanto and Munardi n.d.:41). According to Rens Heringa (personal communication), in batik the word kebyar refers both to a pattern of small flowers and to

34 Rice, sugarcane and other crops grew from Dewi Sri's body after her death and can thus be said to participate in her spirit in the same way as children participate in their mother's spirit: they are her symbolic equivalents. In the same way particular activities introduced by her, such as the cleansing of the community prior to her arrival (Rassers 1959:11), are symbolic of her, so that she can be said to be present in their ritual re-enactment. Thus, these various crops and activities participate in her essence, and through their presence Sri is present - actually or symbolically, depending on one's point of view as a participant or an anthropologist.

35 In Bagelen in South Central Java Nini Thowong was used to induce rain (Hazeu 1901:55).
droplets of water. In West Java, such sprinklings or droplets, though not always 'of actual water, symbolize blessing and fertility (Rikin 1973:84-5).

In summary, the songs sung at seblang performances address such areas of concern as love and family life and fertility. These are seen to come together in Sri, the spirit (or symbol) of rice, settled life, and fertility.

The participants

Above, I briefly mentioned as participants the singers and the gamelan players, the dancer, the two pengudang, and in the background, the dhukun. These will now be considered in more detail. No less important, however, are the attending spirits. Mention was also made above of the most important spirits in a Javanese village, that of the founder and the tutelary spirit, who between them guard the welfare of the community. The question that needs to be addressed at this point is by which spirit the dancer is possessed.

The founder may, in fact, be seen as some kind of ancestor (nowadays mostly in a symbolic way) to the whole community. A male or female founder, along with a small following of mostly kinfolk, would open up an area of forest, as we saw in Bakungan, and found a community there. The descendants of these founders then inherited the relationship with the tutelary spirit established by their ancestor. Thus in Bakungan it is incumbent on the villagers as descendants of the founder to fulfil the contractual obligation to stage a seblang each year.

In Olehsari people spoke of 44 spirits inhabiting the village, the most important of whom are Mbah Jalil, a bearded spirit, and Mas Brata, a Muslim jim (Arabic jinn, 'spirit'). Some villagers referred to both of these as dhanyang, reflecting the circumstance that the founder and the dhanyang occasionally merge. Mbah Jalil, however, was explicitly said to be the cikal bakal, and this was supported by the fact that he resided near the women's bathing area, where the cikal bakal is often to be found. It was reportedly important to make a sacrifice to him when celebrating a circumcision or a wedding, as well as during the bersih desa. He is also one of the ancestral spirits that are asked to bless a particular event (see Murgiyanto and Munardi n.d.:55; Herowati Poesoko 1992:65).

Murgiyanto and Munardi (n.d.:41) translate the Using word kemendhung with terkembang ('unfolded'). Kemendhung, however, means 'looking like rain' or 'clouding over' (Jansz 1913:427; see also Brakel 1996:147), which may be an allusion to sexual relations, clouds and rain (or clouds and fog, Chang 1992:57) being a Chinese metaphor for sexual intercourse (Edgerton 1954 I:67, 93, 381, II:11, III:341, IV:108, 133, 344). In these combinations clouds seem to symbolize the feminine, as testified by the clouds in depictions of the vulva in Rawson (1968: figures 165 and 166). Chinese influence at the courts of Java was of long standing, so that the occurrence of this metaphor here is not surprising (De Graaf and Pigeaud 1984; Wessing 1997b).
Although all three of these spirits are involved, together with the village leaders, in setting the date for a performance, Mas Brata’s name was most often mentioned in connection with seblang. He was said on various occasions to have been dissatisfied or to have had special wishes.37

The focus of the offerings of the seblang performance is said to be not the ancestors but the spirits, of whom Mbah Jalil is also said to be one (roh halus), however. It was moreover whispered that an old woman involved in making the omprok and preparing the sajen would become one when she died.

Since Mbah Jalil is identified as the cikal bakal, it is safe to assume that Mas Brata plays the role of dhanyang, especially in view of his involvement with the seblang performance. The possessing spirit in both villages was said to be a dhanyang, in Bakungan one of the spirits that had moved (see Herowati Poesoko 1992:56-7; Hughes-Freeland 1997:479). In Olehsari, Siti Sundari, a grandchild of Mas Brata, was often mentioned as the possessing spirit. This parallels Foley’s (1992:24) findings in Sunda, where a widadari (non-ancestral spirit) is said to possess the sintren. In Tengger, furthermore, dancers at the village shrine ‘dance before ancestral spirits’ and a ‘dance procession [...] greets] the descending family spirits’ (Hefner 1987:88). In other words, these dances take place in the presence of the ancestral spirits.38

Thus the ancestors, and especially the cikal bakal, who are ultimately responsible for the proper execution of the performance, are invited first. Wolbers (1992:166) speaks in this connection of ‘honoring the founders of the community’. Then the nature spirits arrive, to be received by the assembled ancestral spirits and their living descendants. Murgiyanto and Munardi (n.d.:14) speak of this in terms of asking the ancestors for assistance, which, although it is an important factor, cannot account for the prominent role of the other spirits.

The dancer

In both villages the dancer was said to need no previous experience (Herowati Poesoko 1992:62) – just as this was said with reference to Semi in 1895. As was mentioned above, the dancer is either a post-menopausal woman (Bakungan) or a pre-menarcheal girl (Olehsari). Although both categories are

37 Curiously, in Olehsari these spirits pay visits during the daytime, which is an unusual time for spirits to be abroad, the night-time, when boundaries seem to fade, being much more to their liking (see Gerboth 1996:44; Rikin 1973:46).
38 Nini Thowong, however, may be possessed at least some of the time by an ancestral spirit, considering her alternative name Nini Buyut (buyut = ‘ancestor’; see Hazeu 1901:79). Marschall (1995:105) also notes that it is ancestral spirits who may be invited to possess a dancer in Central Java.
often involved in spirit possession phenomena, the latter seems to be the more common (see Foley 1992:24; Schrieke 1920). In Bakungan it is said that the dancer must be pure (bersih, suci), which is interpreted in the sense that her menses must have stopped. She must also be without a male partner and be either divorced or widowed. In Olehsari the dancer is generally said to be a virgin (see Wolbers 1992:92, 113). De Stoppelaar (1926:416) similarly reports that the female gandrung used to have to be either a virgin or a widow, that is, a sexually non-active female.39

Pigeaud (1938:329-30) emphatically states that seblang usually are not yet of marriageable age, which leads one to wonder about the post-menopausal dancer in Bakungan, although this could be a result of changes in the Bakungan tradition.40 In this respect the Olehsari seblang would represent the more authentic tradition, as seems to be indicated by the form of the omprok as well. Coster-Wijsman (1933:143), on the other hand, mentions the figure of an old woman guarding the gateway to a supernatural realm. She is a figure on the borderline between life and death, the intermediary between the dead and the spirits on the one side and the living on the other, and has the power of raising the dead. By her age, the old woman is close to the spirits and is able to form part of both domains. In extension of Jordaan’s argument (1985:155), however, the same can be said of the pre-menarcheal girl.41 The difference between them is that they each stand at a different end of a spectrum, the centre of which is occupied by sexually active adults. Symbolically, this may be why the young girl dances in the morning and the old woman dances at night.

The rule about virginity is not strictly observed in Olehsari. According to Anonymous (n.d.), either a virgin or a janda (Using randha, ‘widow or divorcee’) may be chosen for this. According to one of my informants, in 1984 the spirit chose a randha, though this was still a very young girl who had borne no children. Likewise the pre-menarcheal rule is not always observed,

39 Hazeu (1901:40) specifies that the woman who helps with the performance of Nini Tho-wong should preferably be an old maid.
40 In this connection the influence of the gandrung on the seblang of Bakungan should be noted, as well as the similarity between the omprok of this seblang and that worn by the, usually male, sangyang dancers and the gandrung dancers of Banyuwangi.
41 Jordaan (1985:155) says with reference to the Madurese that there is a transitional period before and after both birth and death, during which one is still tied to one’s previous existence – not fully integrated in this life in the one case and not fully departed from it in the other. Koentjaraningrat (1989:458) describes the ability of elderly Javanese persons to bring on kuwalat, a form of natural punishment, which may point to an increasingly strong affinity with nature and spiritual powers as one grows older. It could well be that integration constitutes a continu-al progress into adulthood, after which one’s spiritual qualities begin to grow stronger again as one ages. In this context it should be noted that in West Java, too, life is seen as a process of becoming (Wessing 1976).
as in 1993 the spirit picked a 21-year-old single girl of small stature, and when she was not able to take part, a 16- or 17-year-old girl. A pre-menarcheal virgin is preferred, however.

In Indonesia, as elsewhere in Southeast Asia, spirit possession and shamanism seem in the past to have been primarily women's concerns (Hazeu 1901:83; Lekkerkerker 1902:282; Wilken 1912: passim; Yap Beng Liang 1985:89); when men acted as shamans, they often dressed in women's clothes (Wilken 1912:352, 355, 358-9). Dancers, who are believed originally to have been shamans (De Stoppelaar 1926:413), would thus tend to be female as well, even though in the past boys also seem to have danced dressed in girls' clothes, though perhaps not as seblang.42

The question now arises why the emphasis is on pre-menarcheal girls, and what these have in common with post-menopausal women and transvestites. The most obvious answer is that in a sense, from the point of view of 'normal' sexuality, all these are non-sexual beings: the virgin is pre-sexual, the old woman is post-sexual, and the transvestite, being neither fully male nor fully female, is a-sexual. In other words, from a 'normal' perspective, virgins, divorcees, widows, and transvestites are all sexually inactive in the usual ways. Sexuality is, however, an aspect of normal adults, who are not regarded as full members of society until they have married (De Josselin de Jong 1983:5). A non-sexual or sexually inactive person, therefore, lacks something, and it may be this lack that is exploited in the seblang ritual. The dancer, like the doll possessed by Nini Thowong, is in fact no more than an auxiliary to the possessing spirit. The emptiness of the doll is indicated by the fact that when it is thought to be possessed, it is perceived to have become heavier (Hazeu 1901:85, 88).

One might object that the dancer's infertility is in conflict with the purpose of the ritual as outlined above. This is not the case, however, since what is relevant here is not the dancer's personal fertility or infertility, but the temporary lodging she provides for the nature spirit's fertility - the possessed dancers in both Olehsari and Bakungan are auxiliary bodies in the sense meant by Hazeu.

Aside from sexual inactivity, there is another requirement the dancer must fulfil, namely that she be a member of the same descent line as previous seblang. While this is interpreted today as descent from a previous seblang, it

42 As was noted above, gandrung dancers used to be boys. These male gandrung were transvestites, however (Pigeaud 1932:273). Similarly, as Schrieke (1920:65) notes, the Madurese sintring could be a sexually immature boy, who prior to dancing would purify himself, in the same way as a girl dancer. Scholte (1927:149) furthermore writes that the Banyuwangi sangyang could be boys in girls' clothes (see Wolbers 1986:81; Murgiyanto and Munardi n.d.:9; Pigeaud 1938:329). Alkema and Bezemer (1927:434) observe the same with respect to the bedhaya dancers at the court of Yogyakarta.
could arguably in the past, before the influx of outsiders into the villages, have meant descent from the village founder, thus placing the dancer in the *golongan cikal bakal* (Soelarto 1993:33), the founder’s group or house. As was mentioned above, villages used to be founded by small kin groups commonly practising uxorilocal marriage, whereby men marry out and women stay in the village, resulting in a de facto local matrilineage, which had close relations with the local *dhanyang* and would therefore logically supply the dancer.\(^{43}\)

As Murgiyanto and Munardi (n.d.:19) point out, women predominate in the *seblang* performance, from the dancer to the singers (see also Foley 1992:28). The reason for this is the special position of women in the descent system. While it would take us too far afield to explain this in detail here, we may argue that females are the source of a descent group’s vitality; from especially the wife givers of a descent line come life and the spiritual essence that keeps the descent line healthy and prosperous and which in turn are passed on to a couple’s children through the mother. Thus, women can be viewed as the channel through which a descent line’s spiritual essence and vitality (that is, fertility) are passed on.\(^{44}\) Being natural channels of fertility, their suitability as temporary loci for the (spirit of) fertility inherent in the *dhanyang* is obvious. In short, the dancer is possessed by the *dhanyang*’s fertility, which dances through her.\(^{45}\)

The dancers, then, belong to a select female line. For Bakungan the data on this are rather unclear. Informants told me that the first *seblang* here was a woman named Suwitri. Wolbers (1992:111), however, writes that when the spirits moved out of Bakungan, Mbah Ganda went into a trance and became the first dancer (see Triadi 1989:10, 13). Agustono (1990:12), on the other hand, mentions a virgin named Fitri as the first dancer, to go on to say that subsequent dancers must be descended from her.

Herowati Poesoko (1992:60) shows two lines that supply dancers, one starting with Mbah Kantok and descending via Mbah Dewi to Ibu Misnah, and another starting with Mbah Suwitri and descending via Mbah Anjani to

\(^{43}\) There are exceptions to this. So Rens Heringa (personal communication) reports that in Tuban, on the north coast of East Java, the large landowner elite practises patrilocal residence after marriage, as well as marriage with as close a cousin as permissible to prevent the land being continually subdivided and wealth being lost. Ordinary people there settle uxorilocally, however. Moreover, this preference is based on custom rather than on a prescriptive rule, which does not exist (Koentjaraningrat 1989:133). Among the Using, indeed, a prospective son-in-law moves, or used to move, into the house of his in-laws some time before the wedding (De Stoppelaar 1927:52; Atmosoedirdjo 1952:65).

\(^{44}\) It is probable that this fertile essence is strongest in sexually active women, in whom it is fully activated by interaction with the male essence.

\(^{45}\) This is probably why the nubile *gandrung* dancers do not become possessed, as in them the fertile essence is fully present.
The line of dancers of Olehsari (source: Herowati Poesoko 1992:59)

Key
1. Milah 1930-1933
2. Yuli 1934-1936
3. Marwiyah 1937-1939
4. Tinah 1940-1942
5. Enah 1957-1959
6a. Tanil 1963-1965
8. Tuyah 1966-1968
10. Suniah 1972-1974
14. Tatik 1984-1986
15. Ariyah 1987-1989

Note: In 1960 Sanipah (6) was chosen by the spirit, but was prevented from dancing and was replaced by Tanil (6a). In 1993 a new girl was to have danced, but she did not do so due to family pressure. After much debate between the spirit and the villagers, and after considerable protest from the spirit, it was decided that Salwati (16) would dance again, even though she had already done so three times (Wessing 1998b). Five of the six dancers since 1972 (10, 11, 13, 14 and 15) were related to the first seblang through at least one male link, which may indicate a change in post-marital residence patterns.
Ibu Sukyati. Triadi (1989:13) mentions the additional name Mariasih, but does not make clear to which descent line she belongs. The last two descendants, according to Herowati Poesoko, dance in alternate years. We can posit that both Mbah Kantok and Mbah Suwitri were descended from the first dancer and that the tradition of two parallel lines of descent developed later.

In Olehsari the matter is much clearer. Here Mak Milah was the first seblang (Anonymous n.d.;1; Herowati Poesoko 1992:57-9) and all the dancers since her have been her descendants, mostly in the female line (see chart). There are some exceptions, however, five of the Olehsari dancers appearing in Herowati Poesoko’s chart (1992:59) being descended from the first seblang via a male link. This could be because the localized matrilineal descent line mentioned earlier was a de facto line, resulting from a residence rule, and not one structurally established by a descent rule (see Firth 1959:144). Thus, if for some reason the residence rule was ignored and descendants via male links became locally available, the spirit could choose them as well.

In brief, the dancers in both villages tend to be descendants of a line of women that ideally goes back to the village founders. The dancer is the current terminus of the founder’s vitality and spiritual power that are so essential to the welfare and prosperity of the village. At the same time, she is a receptacle for the spirit of fertility, an alien force that temporarily takes pos-

Diagrammatic representation of the various elements and forces in Bakungan
session of her body and mind. It is, in fact, the two spirits, ancestral and nature, that dance together in the dancing area.

The data from Bakungan are unclear on this point as well. In Olehsari, even though Mas Brata was said to be the dhanyang, the name of his granddaughter Siti Sundari was often mentioned as that of the spirit possessing the seblang. Here this female nature spirit, then, is seen to dance with the male spirit of the founder, Mbah Jalil. The dancer herself may be sexually negated, but the interaction of these forces within her, between the male and the female spirit, is what sets the processes of fertility in motion. In other words, the dancer is the channel through which fertility flows into the village. This is also indicated by the umbrella sheltering her on her way to the dancing area in both villages, even in dry weather. The symbolism of the umbrella is multivocal, because, aside from protecting one from the rain or sun, it is also an indicator of high or sacred status. While that used in Bakungan was just a plain black umbrella, the one in Olehsari was an ornamental payung (parasol). This would confirm Rikin’s (1973:85) observation that the umbrella, as a badge of honour of a higher being, marks the person sheltered by it as a source of blessing and fertility.

While nature spirits may be well-intentioned, they are known to be unpredictable, touchy about their prerogatives and easily upset. Thus, although the ancestral spirit that has come down to the dancer is benign, the same cannot be said of the visiting spirit. For this reason, the visit must be mediated by the dhukun, who is an expert in such matters.

The dhukun

Like the dancer, the dhukun is also descended from the first seblang in each village (Anonymous n.d.:1; Agustono 1990:114; Surya 1991:2). This man, though not himself in trance (see Firth 1959:141), puts the dancer into a trance and, during the pauses between songs, continually wafts incense around her to keep this up. Although he remains in the background, he orchestrates the entire event. Being able to communicate with the spirits, it is he who, using magic formulas, invites them to descend (after being invited earlier to attend) and asks for one of them to take possession of the dancer. At the completion of the dance, it is again the dhukun who invites the spirits to leave (Herowati 46). The picture to which this gives rise, therefore, is of the involvement of both male and female elements in fertility and reproduction. I stress this point in view of some interpretations of the myth of the origin of rice, such as that reported by Keeler (1983), according to which rice and other crops grew spontaneously from the body of the rice or fertility spirit, Dewi Sri. In other versions of this myth, however, the rice spirit is clearly violated (though not married), which results in her death and subsequent transformation into the said crops.
Structurally, then, the dhukun can be said to encompass the interaction between the realms of the spirits and of human beings, being responsible for their joining as well as for their separation at the end of the dance. During the time the spirits are in attendance, the dance area, and especially the dancer, is, of course, liminal, being the locus where the two realms overlap. These are then the time and the place where the transfer of fertility is both possible and achieved.

While the dhukun’s role is apparently not prominent, Foley considers it to be the most important one in the whole proceedings. She characterizes the dhukun alternatively (Foley 1992:24, 26) as a dhalang (puppet master) and a pawang, (controller of spirits). It is his skill in mediating between the community and the spirit world that reduces the danger posed by contact between these domains and allows the power of the spirit world to flow safely into the community. While this is true, the figures to be discussed next, the pengudang, may well be regarded as his virtual counterparts.

The pengudang

Mediating between the dancer, charged with dangerous, unpredictable powers, and the community are the two pengudang (clowns). As was described earlier, these persons, a man and a woman, who also have kinship ties with the seblang line, guide the dancer around the circle of onlookers amid jokes and antics. While Foley (1992:27) argues that this clowning makes the proceedings more accessible to the audience (Wolbers (1992:94) in fact calls them a bridge), I feel that the more important effect of the pengudang’s behaviour is to release the tension between the dancer and the community resulting from the potency of the dancer and the touchiness of the spirit (see Hidding 1948:39). The dancer quite often stops in mid-dance to caution the audience to be quieter, and may at times be rather rough in her treatment of them. It is this that needs to be controlled and kept within "the approved parameters of what "should" happen [...]" (Foley 1992:27).

In the person of the seblang two spiritual forces meet, that of her ancestors and that of fertility in the form of the nature spirits whose land was cleared so that the village might be built. The entry of the latter force is mediated by a ritual expert, the dhukun, through whose efforts the spirits are kept happy and contented and the dancer is kept from harm. The pengudang actually do the same thing for the seblang and the community that the dhukun does for the dancer and the spirit world. They mediate between the two, and in so doing prevent a possible release of dangerous forces.

The clown’s role can be interpreted as making the forces of fertility acces-
sible. As explained above, a major presence in this ritual is Dewi Sri, the rice spirit, who according to one informant is embodied in the *seblang*. Rice, as Gerboth (1996:50) points out, is 'wild' and immature (like the Olehsari dancers) when harvested and becomes progressively socialized through various ritual actions involving women. Such socialization, both of rice and of young women, leads to their eventually being able to *dipangan*, which may mean both 'be eaten' and 'be enjoyed sexually'.\(^{47}\) Not all the rice is destined to be cooked and eaten, however, some of it being returned to the earth unhulled to serve as seed for the new crop. As Rikin (1973:129), referring to the rice myth, puts it, the rice (Dewi Sri) is returned to the earth as a virgin, to die and be born anew and be married.

The *seblang*, then, embodies the wild, unsocialized fertility of sexually inactive women (generally women without husbands) in whom fertility is out of place and, for that reason, dangerous. This danger not only must be neutralized but, to be beneficial, must be converted through the dance into a socially useful force. This is where the clown, a figure which in Java is traditionally involved in inversions (see Peacock 1968:156-63), comes in.\(^{48}\)

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\(^{47}\) This may be a common association in Southeast Asia (see Tambiah 1969:425-6).

\(^{48}\) The time of the *bersih desa*, as Rikin (1973:29) points out, can be seen as a time of temporary chaos, a liminal time, during which order, as well as the agricultural cycle, has to be re-established. For this reason, activities that are normally forbidden (for example, cockfights) may be permitted during this time.
Wolbers (1992:94) connects this clown with the quintessentially Javanese clown, Semar, who, though originally a god, was led by his penchant for crude jokes to leave the realm of the gods and take up residence on earth. Here his physical unattractiveness belies the regard in which he is held by the deities (see Stange 1977:115; for an alternative origin story see Maurenbrecher 1939).

There is another clown figure that may also have served as a model for the pengudang, however, namely the canthang balung or, more properly, the abdi dalem badhut ('court jester', see Ras 1992:98) of the Surakarta court. According to Stutterheim (1935:186-8), the movements and actions of this figure, such as rhythmic clapping and vocal cues, accompany the dance of the court serimpi dancers, in much the same way as those of the pengudang in the case of the seblang. This abdi dalem badhut was also in charge of the public dancing women and singers, the taledhek and the pasindhen, who often doubled as prostitutes, from which he derived part of his income (Ras 1992:98-9; Stutterheim 1935:193). In the past, furthermore, the abdi dalem badhut used to have a seal of office, which was oval in shape and had a decorated rim and in its centre had a picture of a phallus placed inside a heart-shaped vulva, all of it surrounded by the name of the functionary, the date, and the words abdi dalem lurah badhut (Stutterheim 1935:190; Ras 1992:980). According to Stutterheim, the picture of the phallus in the seal was a reference to the abdi dalem's income from public women. He considered the heart shape of the vulva curious (Stutterheim 1935:190 n. 1), however, noting that it is a stylized form of a vulva. As Gravel (1995:91-100, 113-5) argues, both the oval shape (of the seal) and the heart shape are symbolic of the vulva, making the abdi dalem's seal a reference to sexuality and fertility, rather than simply a badge of an official, court-sanctioned keeper of public women.

Ras (1992:99) further connects the abdi dalem badhut with Semar, who according to the Manikmaya story is a personification of hidden, and therefore dangerous and unpredictable, powers. Semar's jokes, as well as the jokes of his sons, who regularly accompany him, are clearly erotic, while his image as projected on the wayang (shadow play) screen was occasionally phallic (Ras 1992:97). Semar, then, combined in his person cosmic powers, fertility, as well as human sexuality, which are in turn related to agriculture.

Semar is, after all, an ancient god of vegetation (Ras 1992:101; Maurenbrecher 1939), who first introduced vegetation on earth, 'irrigating and planting [...] until it was green everywhere' (Epskamp 1976:52). He has

49 Similar jester figures, though with different titles, are described for the court of Yogyakarta (Stutterheim 1935:191-2).
50 For a further discussion of the connection between human sexual activity and fertility see Wessing 1997b.
the power to ensure 'an abundant rice harvest' and, generally speaking, is the spirit (or deity) of fertility (Epskamp 1976:52, 50). What better figure, then, than the clown (pengudang), who as Semar mediates between order and chaos, culture and nature, potency (fertility) and impotence (infertility) (see Epskamp 1976:58), to guide the wild fertility embodied in the seblang through its metamorphosis into a socially useful force.

As I mentioned earlier, both the dhukun and the pengudang mediate the force of fertility, albeit in different ways. The dhukun remains in the background, almost unnoticed, while the pengudang is very much in evidence. In fact, they could well represent two sides of the same coin. As Epskamp (1976:65) observes, the dhalang (puppet master), here the dhukun (Foley 1992:24, 26), is identical to Semar, although in the seblang ritual he shows his more serious side as mediator between humans and the gods or spirits within the liminal time and space created in the dance area.

Through the efforts of the pengudang, then, the two forces remain concentrated in the seblang while she dances in the ritual centre of the village, in Bakungan the place where the nagasari tree of the spirits once stood and in Olehsari the point where a ritual pole is erected. There she dances in a counter-clockwise direction—a movement that gives access to the chthonic forces that promote fertility (Danasasmita et al. 1977:1:405; Wessing 1979, 1988:180). While some informants variously called the ritual pole Mt. Meru or a linga, it need not necessarily be regarded as an axis mundi, connecting the underworld, the earth and the sky. The tree and the pole only mark the spot where the ritual is carried out, a ritual which, through the combined efforts of the women, the pengudang, and the dhukun, and through the offerings on the altar, which represent the community (Wessing 1997a), causes fertility to be tamed and to flow into the ritual area and thereby into the village.

The singers

The dance is performed to the accompaniment of music made by a small ensemble and of special songs (gendhing) sung by a group of women (pesindhen). The actual songs are picked by the seblang, who communicates her choice through the pengudang (Wolbers 1992).

The singers are chosen by the spirit, who is the only figure who may change the arrangements. Wolbers (1992:103) describes how in Olehsari the seblang stopped dancing in front of a group of girls, indicating that she wanted one of them, a former seblang, to move to the tarub to sit among the

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51 Pigeaud (1938:330) notes that formerly the songs were sung by the audience rather than by special pesindhen.
singers. The musicians and singers can be seen to represent the community in general and, since at least some of them may be former seblang, the founder's line in particular. With them we have reached the level of the community members who are the potential beneficiaries of the ritual. They sing and actualize the story of their concerns (Beatty 1996:278), and in so doing help the dhukun tap the cosmic powers that are vital to the continued existence of the community. Cosmic power, entering at the ritual centre, imbues the village as defined by the symbolic centre. In Bakungan it is contained in the wadhah created by the ider bumi, and in Olehsari it is spread throughout the village, to all the sacred places in the community, through the kirab procession.

The sanggar in the dancing area, where this funnelling of power takes place, and the ritual attributes on the altar are, of course, also filled with this power, which adheres to the flowers, the food, and the omprok. By having been part of the ritual, these otherwise ordinary items become 'charged' (see Smith 1992:106) and thereby highly desirable; they are afterwards taken to the fields, where their power benefits the crops and wards off disease. The kembang dirma and the flowers in the omprok protect the house and guard it against sorcery (Anonymous n.d.; Murgiyanto and Munardi n.d.:73; Wolbers 1992:109, 162, 1993:39). The banyu arum with which the seblang washes her face is said to bestow youth and beauty, in the same way as, in Olehsari, the water in which the omprok of the past week have been soaked. Water of this latter kind is used to bathe the seblang, along with the other members of the group, after she has finished dancing. People then attempt to obtain pieces of the omprok to protect their rice crop, placing it at the spot where irrigation water enters their field. Murgiyanto and Munardi (n.d.:73) speak of the omprok being direbut (‘fought over’), as is certainly the case with the contents of the sanggar in Bakungan, which is completely stripped within seconds after the seblang has washed her face. As Pemberton writes, "To rebut is to ngalap berkah, to "swoop down and capture" (ngalap) [...] "blessings", which is an important reason for attending slametan (ritual meals) and other highly 'charged' events (Pemberton 1994:256, 245-6; see also Beatty 1996).

**Stability and change**

Even though villagers in both Bakungan and Olehsari claim that theirs is the oldest living seblang tradition in the Banyuwangi area and that this tradition may not be changed, the fact that the spirits have the final say in how the ritual should be staged and who should be chosen to perform it gives it all a certain degree of flexibility. This flexibility has made for adaptation of the tradition to Islamic practices. While the beliefs and practices described in this
article stem from the Using's pre-Islamic past, nowadays they are cast in an Islamic context (as is evident from such elements as the call to prayer during the *ider bumi* and the changes of the dates of the performance) and receive the blessing of the religious leaders of the communities (Herowati Poesoko 1992:36). The addition of such Islamic elements is nothing to be wondered at. After all, the Using have been at least nominally Muslims for a number of generations, so that it is logical that their ancestral and other spirits should have become integrated into this religion as well, as has happened elsewhere in Java (Wessing 1997a).

In spite of these changes and additions, the basic concerns addressed by the ritual have not changed, and the ancestors and the *dhanyang* continue to be asked for their blessing. While these practices derive their authority from the past by way of the prescriptions of the ancestors, this past governs the present flexibly rather than rigidly. As Bateson (1937:305) observed, the authority of the past governs present practice, even if the past must occasionally be reinterpreted.

Religions in general are able to absorb large portions of local culture in the process of becoming localized versions of a larger tradition (see Woodward 1989). Where Pemberton writes (1994:240-1) that in Central Java the *dhanyang* become marginalized in deference to God (or the modern state apparatus), the *seblang* seems rather to incorporate them all, and the ancestors, *dhanyang*, Dewi Sri, and even God merge to become a single source of the people's vitality. The dance, then, revitalizes not only relations with the spirit world, but the whole of the spiritual life of these villages. As was shown by Dominikus Rato (1992:69, 76), in the end these diverse sources may form a single source, anyway.52

Thus, rather than having become 'secular entertainment' (Holt 1967:104), these dances continue to celebrate life and commemorate the spiritual connections between people, their ancestors and the supernatural powers that govern their universe. As the villagers point out, disaster would befall them if they were to neglect this.

Conclusion

The dance of the *seblang* has been analysed here as a dance of life, sustaining the village and its inhabitants through time and change. This is of course only one of several possible approaches to the wealth of information implicit in the performance. Other analyses might emphasize how the relevant beliefs

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52 As Pemberton (1994:239, 242) suggests, rituals conducted on Islamic occasions are often imagined as *bersih desa* events.
support the privileges enjoyed by the descendants of the founders, or stress the economic role of the ritual, especially since there is increasing outside pressure to open it up to the 'tourist gaze' (Wessing 1998b). Within the analytical framework used here, however, we saw how at every stage of the ritual, from its preparation to its final execution, the success of the performance was believed to depend on the cooperation between the line of the founder and the tutelary spirit. In the founder's line, women were depicted as channels for the descent of the fertility of the ancestral couple, ending in the inchoate fertility of the pre-menarcheal dancer or the emptiness left by the departure of fertility in the post-menopausal one. In both cases, this left room in the dancer for the forces of fertility embodied in the possessing nature spirit. That it is fertility that is important here is also clear from the songs that are sung, the actions of the dancer in Bakungan, the omprok in Olehsari, and the symbolism of the rice and other crops that are part of the altars. These as well as the ritual personnel are a representation of the community and its concerns and of the supernatural world it perceives itself to be involved with. Since the dance forms part of the attempt by the village community to maintain the integration of these various elements, it is indeed a dance of life and as such is spiritually vital to its continuance.

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