



# The Musical Structure and Meaning of Go Laba in the Context of People's Life Philosophy in Ngadha Culture, Flores, East Nusa Tenggara

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## Abstract

Art is an integral aspect of culture. Almost all aspects of human life are always wrapped in some form of art. Indonesia is a country that has diverse artistic expressions. Different from Western arts that emphasize the element of aesthetics, traditional arts in various cultures in the Eastern world display elements that are more than just aesthetics. Other intended elements include the values or the life philosophy of the owner community. Traditional music always has two components that can not be separated from one another: textual and contextual aspects. Understanding a musical tradition should cover both aspects in their entirety. This paper aims to expose the contextual aspects of a musical tradition of Ngadha, Flores, NTT called *go laba*. The contextual aspect in question is the values or life philosophy of the community represented through this traditional music.

**Keywords:** Traditional Music; Values; Musical Meaning

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## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country with a variety of art. Almost all aspects of the cultural life of the people in various cultures in Indonesia are always wrapped in art. History has proved that there is no society without art, because art is always present in human life and has a very important role (Prestisa & Susetyo, 2013).

In traditional arts always have 2 (two) aspects that can not be separated from one another, namely the textual and contextual aspects. According to Susetyo (2009), the textual aspect is the elements of art that are enjoyed directly by the audience or the au-

dience during an art presentation. Textual elements are those such as the composition of music embodied in rhythm, melody, harmony, musical structure, lyrics, tempo, dynamics, expression, instruments, and arrangements. Meanwhile, contextual aspects are matters relating to the message or values to be conveyed through the appearance of art such as meaning, function, purpose, essence or the role of art in the life of the community. The contextual aspect relates to the beliefs, ideas, values or life philosophy of a community group that is revealed through the presentation of traditional music.

Unlike the textual aspects that can be

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obtained directly in the moment of an art presentation, it is not so with the contextual aspect. The contextual aspect requires further examination. The presentation of art only displays the symbols to be searched for further meaning. The presentation of traditional music will always trigger a deeper curiosity from the audience. Therefore, appreciating a traditional art should not stop at the textual aspect only. The beauty and meaningfulness of traditional music lie in the combination of both aspects.

Textually, we may find a traditional art similar to different ethnic groups such as the similarity of motion patterns when dancing or the similarity of a musical composition. However, the similarity of textual expression of a readable traditional art cannot be concluded that both have the same contextual meaning. Contextual meanings have a correlation with the beliefs, values held or philosophy that is lived by a limited group of people. The similarity in textual expression of an art entity still has a different meaning. Therefore, the best way to understand or appreciate a traditional art is to place the textual and contextual aspects in the same position.

Textually, *go laba* music is still well known by almost all in the Ngadha community, including children, adolescents and adults. However, the textual knowledge of *go laba* music possessed by Ngadha people is inconsistent with their knowledge of its contextual aspect. This is not only apparent with the younger generation, but the older generation also almost no longer knows what the contextual meanings are contained in the music of *go laba*. One reason for the occurrence of this situation is that the inheritance pattern is not intact. The inheritance of *go laba* music only emphasizes the textual aspect of how to play *go laba* music, but is not accompanied by the inheritance of knowledge about its meaning. Therefore, children and the younger generation in general continue their lives in ignorance about the meaningfulness of *go laba* music in their lives as part of Ngadha tribe.

Departing from the conditions above

, this study of *go laba* music is part of an attempt to reconstruct a written document on *go laba* music in the context of the life philosophy of the Ngadha community that can help to rebuild the understanding of *go laba* music in its entirety. *Go laba*, which is a rich of life values, should be used as a source of learning values for students in school formally. Through learning *go laba* music, students can begin as early as possible to learn to reinforce the local as well as universal values that are represented through the music of *go laba*.

Based on the background research the purposes of this research are to describe the musical structure of *go laba* and the meaning of *go laba* in the context of people's life philosophy in Ngadha culture.

## METHOD

The research approach used is qualitative. Scott W. Vanderstoep and Deirdre D. Johnston (2009) argue that a qualitative approach focuses on building a narrative on the phenomena based on observations. The data collected is the result of the researchers' observation and interviews. Alwasilah (2000) states that observation is a systematic and planned observation to obtain data with controls for validity and reliability. Meanwhile, according to Esteberg (2002), an interview is a meeting between two people to exchange information and ideas through question and answer so that meaning can be constructed.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Musical Structure of *Go Laba*

*Go laba* is the traditional music of the Ngadha culture; it is often used in traditional ceremonies such as traditional house construction. Aside from being as music for rituals, *go laba* is a traditional Ja'i dance accompaniment. The structure of music is a structural arrangement in the sentence of music in which there are motif and *ujud* (Linggono, 1993). In contrast to the structure of music in general, playing of every musical instrument in a *go laba* ensemble

is a rhythmical exploration. The *go laba* ensemble is comprised of eight instruments: five *go* (gongs) and three *laba* (drums). Each *go* (gong) has its own name. They are *wela/ro'i-ro'i-roi* (gong 1), *uto-uto/ute-ute* (gong 2), *dhere/bheme* (gong 3), and *doa*, which consists of two *go* (gong 4 & 5). Similarly, the three *laba* (drum) is named *laba dera* (1 piece) and *laba wa'i/dawi* (2 pieces). These two types of *laba* are different in size.

an example of a rhythmic beating motive/musical structure of the five *go* (gong).



Figures 1. Go (gong) Instruments

Different from the *go*, the *laba dera* and *laba wa'i/dawi* play more varied rhythmic motifs. For that reason, we have separated the description of the musical structure of *laba dera* and *laba wa'i/dawi*. However this separation does not mean that *laba* is played separately apart from *go*. The separation of the description here only intends to clarify some of the varied rhythmic motives played by *laba*. Types of rhythmic motives played by *laba* are described as follows.

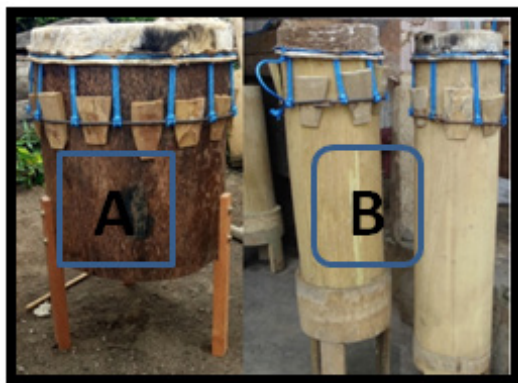
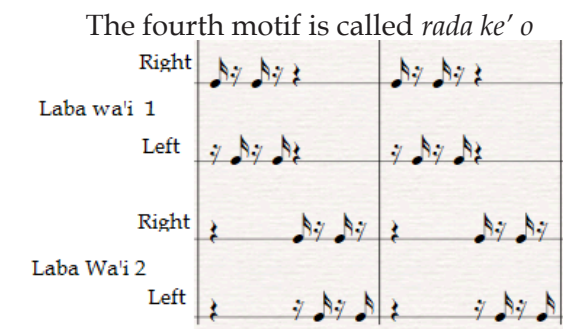
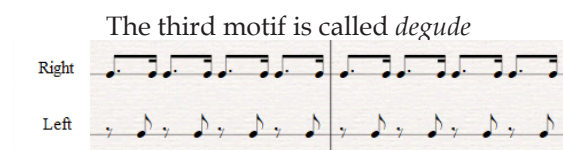
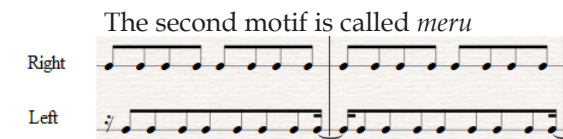
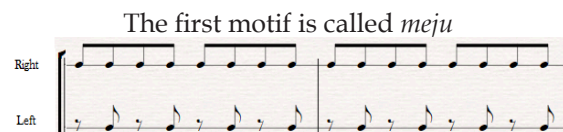
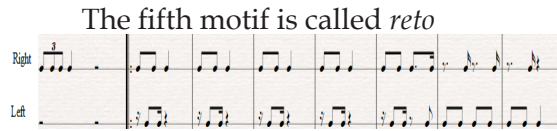


Figure 2. A Laba dera, B Laba wa'i/dawi

Besides being named, each *go* (gong) also has a different tone. The tones of the five *go* are arranged using diatonic scales, ranging from *do* to *sol*. Meanwhile *laba* is a musical instrument that is not pitched.

Each player plays a rhythmic pattern on a single instrument, except the *doa* (2 pieces of gong), which is played by one person. The tool used to play the *go* are called *sora go*, which is a wood with a length of about 30-35 cm and 1-2 cm in diameter. Each instrument is played by beating. The rhythmic pattern that is played on each instrument differs. Different rhythmic patterns of each instrument, both *go* and *laba*, are played together in a *go laba* music ensemble performance. Thus, *go laba* music can be described as polyrhythmic. Below is



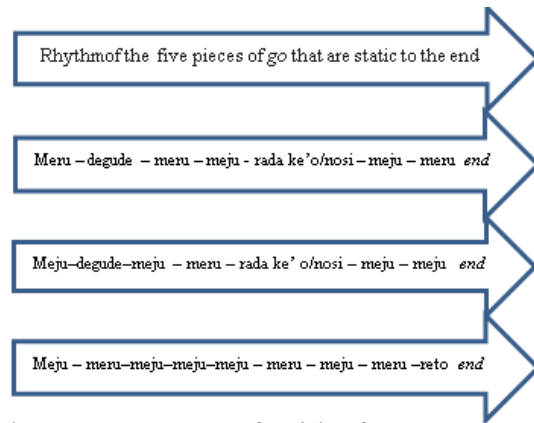


The length or the shortness of a motive played by *laba* depends on the coordination between the two types of *laba*. The sequence of motives played by *laba* during a performance of *go laba* music is displayed in table 1.

**Table 1.** A sequence of Motives Played by *Laba*

Laba wa'i/dawi 1	Laba wa'i/dawi 2	Laba dera
Meru	Meju	Meju
Degude	degude	Meru
Meru	Meju	Meju
Meju	Meru	Meju
Rada Ke'o/nosi	Rada ke'o/nosi	Meju
Meju	Meju	Meru
Meru	Meju	Meju
Degude	degude	Meru
Meru	Meru	Reto

In the table 1, the column number is the order of rhythm played by the *laba*. The column labeled "*laba wa'i 1*" is a sequence of rhythmic motives played by the *laba wa' i/dawi 1* from start to finish. The *laba wa' i/dawi 2* column is the sequence of rhythmic motives played by *laba wa' i/dawi 2*. The *laba dera* column is the sequence of rhythmic motives played by *laba dera* from beginning to end. When *go laba* ensemble music starts to be played, at the first, *laba wa' i/dawi* will play the motive of *meru*, while at the same time *laba wai/dawi 2* and *laba dera* will play the *meju* motif. So on, with the order of 3, 4, and the rest. So the playing of every rhythmic motif by the three pieces instruments of *laba* must run synchronously in accordance with motives sequentially. The playing of *go laba* sequentially from beginning to end can be illustrated as follows.



The music structure of *go laba* above gives a very simple sketch when compared with the understanding of music in general that has many complex components. Therefore, the music must be understood in its cultural context. In the context of traditional music, music must be understood as a part of community life that is preserved because of its benefits for current life (Okpala, 2016). John Blacking, for example, believes that every traditional music should be analyzed in its social and cultural context (Blacking, 1973).

If related to the understanding of modern music, the music structure of *go laba* above only shows some components such as motifs. Sometimes traditional music appears in a form that is difficult to understand based on knowledge of modern music. This is because the purpose of music in the tradition's culture is not intended for aesthetic purposes, but as a medium of cultural inheritance or ritual needs (Okpala, 2016).

**Musical Meaning of *go laba* in context of Life Philosophy of Ngadha Culture**

The presence of traditional music gives meaning to the existence of a culture and the life of the members of the community. The musical traditions have meaning, function and usefulness that vary by type, place, time and need (Supanggih, 1996). Therefore, in the context of cultural understanding, music must be understood as part of the community life which has benefits for current life (Okpala, 2016). Deane L. Root (2005, p. 7) said that music is a mirror of society's events and systems of beliefs,

and that each piece can be a richly packed time capsule from its period. Hidayat (2014) describes that music contains values and norms that are part of the process of cultural enculturation, both informally and informally. This statement reveals that the existence of music has an important meaning as a medium for representing the values, beliefs or ideas about life owned by a person or a group of people. *Go laba* is a reflection of the values, principles of life or life philosophy in Ngadha culture. The life principle or life philosophy of Ngada culture is mainly represented in the role played by each *go* (gong) and also *laba* (drum). The philosophy of Ngadha society's life as reflected in *go laba* music can be described as follows.

### Go 1 (Wela/Ro'i-ro'i)

That *wela* has a higher tone than the other *go* has several meanings. First, *wela* is an opening or a greeting. A greeting with a high tone is a form of hospitality in the context of Ngada culture. An exciting greeting will make the one greeted feel invited, accepted, acknowledged and confirmed. The use of *go laba* to greet guests in non-*adat* ceremonies can be presumed based on this understanding of *wela*. When the *go laba* ensemble is played to greet the guest, then indirectly the guest has been accepted, acclaimed and confirmed in the community that is being visited by the guest. Second, *wela* is a symbol of honesty, truth and sincerity. This is revealed in a special term "*wela ghoa*" which means to do what it is or say as it should be said. Saying something must be expressed vividly. There is also an old adage: "*ghoa moe alu koda, netu moe alu beru.*" This proverb is an affirmation of honesty that is symbolized by a plain bamboo segment without content. What is said in a closed place should be the same as what is said in an open place. Honesty, truth, and sincerity must be voiced in the loudest tone so that everyone can distinguish right and wrong. Truth can not be hidden only for oneself, but must belong to everyone. These three virtues must always be upheld and held firm. Third, *wela* is also a symbol

of passion and perseverance to do something for achieving what is aspired. When the *wela* begins to sound, everyone should rush against all laziness to get to work immediately. *Wela* is a personal symbol of the spirit and ready to reach the ideals.

### Go 2 (Uto-uto/ute-ute)

*Uto-uto/ute-ute* has a lower tone than *wela*. In later *go laba* ensemble packages, *uto-uto/ute-ute* is set up in such a way as to produce the tone "*fa*." *Uto-uto/ute-ute* starts playing following the *wela* with a different rhythmic motive. Second, *go (uto-uto)* must always be understood in relation to the first *go (wela)*. According to interviewees, *uto-uto* is referred to as "*go gani wela*," which means a friend or *wela* (first gong). In the context of life, *uto-uto* is associated with a supportive friend. The importance of friends who support us in life is expressed in the traditional adage "*ngai bodha nee gani, pio bodha nee go sipo, go wela bodha nee uto.*" This phrase has the meaning that this life must have friends, just like *wela* must be with *uto-uto*. If associating with *wela* (first gong), *uto-uto* becomes the symbol of a faithful friend of *wela* to jointly voice truth, honesty, or justice. As long as we live in the world, we can not walk alone. We need others as friends or friends in order to create a harmonious life. Even if we are strong, it will not last long if it is not supported by others. Even if we are great, our greatness does not produce many benefits if we do not include others. Therefore, involving others in any endeavor or struggle to achieve the ideal is not proof that we are weak, but it is a part of being human nature for the harmony of the world.

### Go 3 (Dhere/bheme)

*Dhere/bheme* has a lower tone than *uto-uto/ute-ute*. In today's *go laba* ensemble, the *dhere/bheme* is arranged in such a way as to produce the sound of *mi* in the sense of diatonic scale. In the context of *go laba* as an ensemble, *dhere/bheme* is the controller. In cultural terminology, *dhere/bheme* is called *go mima*, which means balancing the move-

ment of *wela* and *uto-uto* rhythms. Slightly different from the *wela* and *uto-uto* that are hit with strong or hard pressure, a typical *dhere/bheme* is played with slightly weak or soft pressure. Although sound with a soft dynamic, *dhere/bheme* has a very important role as a regulator of the tempo of *go laba* ensemble playing. Therefore, every player of each instrument must always pay attention to the tempo of the *dhere/bheme*. The performance of *go laba* will not sound harmonious if *dhere/bheme* is not played well.

All people who live in Ngadha culture consider the *dhere/bheme* as a personal symbol of a mediator, giver of advice, or controller of the life rhythm and the rhythm of our work. An arbitrator is a wise man and a solution giver in every problem for everyone for living in harmony with others. Therefore *dhere/bheme* is often associated in cultural understanding as the *mosa kisa*. *Mosa kisa* is a person who always stands neutral for human, a person who is an example to all about how to living well while still in the world. *Mosa kisa* is the source of virtue and wisdom. Thus, everyone will always want to hear him. The wise person (*mosa kisa*) is a person who always gives advice with soft language, and not with harsh words .

Why act as a controller but be beaten with soft pressure? In the belief of the Ngadha people, a wise man does not appear in a strong and powerful figure over others. An arbitrator is manifested in humble and selfless personalities. Their presence is sometimes not taken into account, but their words are always heard. Providing wise counsel to others should not be conveyed in loud tones, but should be expressed and conveyed in soft language. It is expressed in the adat adage of Ngadha "*bodha le soro ho nee mazi mawe.*" This adage has the meaning that peace over a dispute can only be achieved through a soft discussion. In other words, advising others must be conveyed in soft language. A gentle conversation will cool the heart and clear the mind to find solutions easily. Therefore, the sound of the *dhere/bheme*

heard in a soft sound is actually the sound of "*denge, denge, denge ... etc ...*". Meaning listen! listen! listen! Listen to me (*dhere/bheme*) so that the steps you have taken, the plan you have designed, the spirit that you have started, is still on the right track.

### Go 5 (Doa/Ridhu)

*Doa/ridhu* consists of 2 gongs. *Go doa* 2 has a lower tone than *dhere/bheme*, and *go doa* 1 has a lower tone than *go doa* 2. In today's *go laba* ensemble, *doa* 2 is arranged in such a way as to produce the tone *re*, while *doa* 1 produces the tone *do*.

In Ngadha culture, *doa/ridhu* is a meaningful symbol. First, it symbolizes the need for interaction with others in a harmonious rhythm. In the adat proverb, *doa/ridhu* is called "*go dai wa'i dhepo logo.*" This statement means that we need others to share our experiences or to share our joys and sorrows. The habit of sharing experiences will strengthen unity and inseparable unity. The atmosphere of unity is expected to be revealed in the adat adage "*ili wi ma'e tiki, woe ma mae boe.*" This means, "what you have and what I love, let us have together.

The second meaning of *doa/ridhu* is a call to equate perception or a positive understanding. So the principle of life symbolized through the *doa/ridhu* is about the need for communication or dialogue. In life together we need to share positive thoughts to build and keep alive and in order to always be good. Communication of good ideas will open up new horizons for everyone to grow and develop to be useful people for others. The causes of distress and difficulty of life are sometimes not caused by economic factors, but also because people do not want to share thoughts with others.

### Labu (gendang) in General

The variation of the beat motive played by *labu*, both *labu dera* and *labu wa' i/dawi*, is the symbol or the tempo of life. The *meru* motif illustrates that in this life we need to live life with a very fast tempo. For various reasons, at certain moments we are

required to do everything quickly. The *degude* motif is a symbol of the rhythm of life that we live with a moderate tempo. There are times in this life where we need to live with a moderate rhythm. No need to hurry too much. The *meju* motif is a rhythm in *laba* playing that describes the rhythm of life as quite relaxed. Life needs to be enjoyed in ease. Enjoying the fun can also be understood as an opportunity to gather new energy for when we must change our rhythm of life to a moderate or fast tempo.

***Rada ke'o* motif symbolizes a joke. Jokes are needed to live life in a relaxed way.**

Actually, the *reto* motive is more a pure musical motif; it functions as a sign that the *go laba* performance will soon be completed. Hence the *reto* motive is placed near the end of a *go laba* music performance. *Laba dera* is a symbol of a *mosa meze* who has the power and the authority to regulate others. The *Mosa meze* is represented through the heads of villages or *woe*.

**Why must the three types of *laba* play different motifs at the same time?**

Because this way of playing is the symbol of a complementary lifestyle. In a community that always lives together, the life rhythm of every community member should not be homogeneous. If there are members of the community who are living life with a very fast rhythm, other members are expected to live with a more relaxed rhythm. Such arrangements are intended to keep the rhythm of life in general running normally with a steady rhythm. If at any given moment all are forced to move quickly, then when the energy is exhausted, the rhythm of life can stop running. Therefore the rhythm of life must be complementary.

**Conclusions And Recommendations For Value Education**

From the discussion above, there are some values of life that can be used as the basis for character educating: First, the value of honesty, firmness. Through the

playing music of *go laba*, students can learn how to be honest and assertive as symbolized through *go 1 (wela)*. Second, the value of loyalty for being a faithful friend symbolized through *go 2 (uto-uto/ute-ute)*. Third, the value of wisdom. Being a wise man should not be a strong person and power, but always low-day and gentle in every speech as displayed by *dhere/bheme*. Fourth, the value of openness. The harmonization of life requires the attitude of mutual openness in order to occur. Fifth, work ethic. Students are invited to help each other's rhythm of life in order to keep this life going well. Another important value is the responsibility for each task that is given. When it comes to moving fast, we are required to follow it by moving slower, and vice versa.

**CONCLUSION**

Traditional music is one of the cultural elements which has a very big role in people's lives. In contrast to Western music that emphasizes the aesthetic aspect of art, traditional music is always present as a symbolic entity to express the important values to human life and humanity's relationships with its creator, the universe, neighbors and oneself. Traditional music is a reflection of the soul system, the social situation of a society, the way of thinking, the philosophy of life or belief. In the context of education, traditional music should be used as a medium to reinvent the noble values of the culture that are abandoned by the younger generation. Perseverance to explore the virtues in every cultural element, including traditional music, must begin to be done by various stakeholder to restore a civilized and cultured identity. Not all values of the tradition are ancient, since the ancestors have proven themselves to live in harmony on the basis of those values. Therefore there is no reason to ignore these values, for throughout human life the values of goodwill remain useful for human life.

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