

Dialog Bunyi: Reinterpreting Uroh Rapai as a Manifestation of Social Piety in Musical Composition

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to investigate the uroh rapai tradition in North Aceh, focusing on rapai pase, a unique form of Acehnese membranophone that is performed in competitive settings. The study emphasizes the philosophical and social dimensions of uroh rapai by interpreting it as a manifestation of social piety. Employing a practice-led approach, where the creative process itself becomes the core of inquiry, the study integrates three fundamental principles of piety: habluminallah (human relationship with God), habluminannas (human relationship with others), and habluminalalam (human relationship with nature). Data were collected through literature review, direct observation of uroh performances, and in-depth interviews with syeh rapai and players. These insights were then transformed into an experimental musical composition entitled Dialog Bunyi. The result is in a form of composition, structured into three segments; first, natural soundscapes symbolizing ecological harmony, second, instrumental interaction as a metaphor of social solidarity; and third, rapai rhythms and devotional chanting as an expression of spiritual devotion. Its premiere performance demonstrated how traditional art can be recontextualized into contemporary works, rooted in Acehnese identity. The research contributes a new methodological and pedagogical model for tradition-based music studies, offering a way to preserve and creatively reinterpret cultural heritage.

KEYWORDS

Dialog Bunyi
Reinterpreting
Uroh Rapai
Social Piety
Music Composition

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INTRODUCTION

Uroh rapai pase tradition holds an important position in Aceh's cultural landscape because it is performed competitively in an art event, which is a rhythm competition between two large groups playing rapai pase (Karina, 2024; Kartomi, 1982). Each group consists of 25 to 50 people led by a sheikh with an assistant called an apied, while the members are called awak rapai (Karina et al., 2022). Thus, a single uroh can involve up to a hundred people. Uroh rapai pase used to be an incidental tradition event, carried out in the celebration of post-harvest activities. This musical phenomenon is not only an aesthetic attraction, but also a means of strengthening relationships, building social piety, and preserving ecological wisdom through the traditions of the Pase community. Lately, this cultural practice is rarely practiced within the society due to several reasons, mainly the changes in environmental condition which have led to infrequent good harvest, the lack of support from local government (Ediwar, 2016), and the increasing loss of collective awareness among successive generation of players, regarding to the creation of rapai pase as a musical instrument rooted in ecological value, crafted from parts of tree roots without damaging the tree itself (Abdullah, 2023).

Several prior studies have explored rapai primarily from the perspective of its role in preaching, its historical context, and fundamental musical aspects such as rhythm patterns and playing techniques. However, these analyses have been predominantly textual, with limited focus on its reinterpretation as a performative art, as examined in this study. Karina (Karina et al., 2022) highlights the musical structure of rapai pase, Fitriani (2018) examines its presentation and musical form, and Rozak (2024) studies digital discography in the context of uroh performances; all three focus on musical and documentary aspects without touching on the meaning of uroh as a social value. In the realm of creation, Haikal (2025), through the work of Chok Sa, reinterprets the transition of songs in uroh, while Kadri (2022), through the work of Shu Meutaum, explores the accentuation of rapai pase playing. However, neither of them has placed the essential value of uroh at the center of their artistic exploration, specifically on reinterpreting uroh rapai into contemporary musical composition. On the other hand, Rico (2023) has conducted work-based research using a creative approach. He found that the important ideas from his research could be realized in an audio-visual form that could be appreciated by art lovers. In line with Rico, this research also needs to use a creative approach to visualize the three principles of social piety into musical works. There have not been many studies that relate uroh rapai to the concept of social piety, which includes *habluminallah*, *habluminannas*, and *habluminalalam*, let alone reveal how these values can be implemented in the form of new musical works that represent a dialogue of sound. Therefore, this study presents a novelty in the form of integrating spiritual, social, and ecological values into contemporary music compositions based on the rapai pase tradition through a practice-led research approach, where the artistic creation process is at the core of the research. This approach has never been explicitly applied in previous uroh studies, which mainly focused on qualitative literature analysis (Dewi, 1995; Fitriani, 2017; Soeryana, 2005), not involving any manifestation into art creation.

This study seeks to expand upon existing research by offering a novel perspective on uroh rapai as a manifestation of social piety. The specific scientific objectives of this study are to reinterpret uroh rapai pase as a manifestation of social piety (Aziz, 2020), as it is condensed into the work creation, to formulate and create a musical composition in the form of a work named *Dialog Bunyi* that reflects the principles of *habluminallah*, *habluminannas*, and *habluminalalam* as reflected in the art of uroh rapai pase. In addition, this study also aims to document the creative work and its process of practice-led research-based creation, develop musical exploration methods based on local traditions, and produce works of art that are not only aesthetically valuable but also strengthen understanding of the ecological values, social cohesion, and transcendental relations of rapai pase art in the context of today's North Aceh society.

METHOD

The unit of analysis on this study is the phenomenon of uroh rapai in the Pase region of Aceh, which is viewed as both an artistic practice and a manifestation of social piety. The focus of this research is to examine the uroh rapai pase tradition which remains as an active cultural practice in the community, using it as the main source of inspiration for the creation of new musical works. The research design is a qualitative case study, as it explores cultural phenomena in depth and then processes them into a basis for creating musical composition.

This study uses an artistic research method based on the premise that practice is research, practitioners are researchers, and works of art are the results (Guntur, 2016). Artistic research was conducted through following stages; 1) artistic creation; 2) reflection; 3) documentation and 4) critical analysis. This method was chosen because it aligns with

the research objectives, which aim not only to describe phenomena but also to actualize them through the creation of musical composition. Thus, this allows researchers to present new perspectives through the reinterpretation of traditional art in the form of contemporary experimental works.

The artistic process in this study were carried out through four steps: first, formulate the work concept by conducting field research. Field research was carried out in three stages: a) a desk review was used to identify research issues from existing literature and archives, resulting written data in the form of reflective journal; b) field observations were conducted in North Aceh to obtain empirical data related to uroh rapai practices, resulting field observations notes; c) interviews with syeh rapai were then transcribed to confirm and deepen the findings from the literature study and observation. The results of the data collection were then transformed into musical ideas through a reinterpretation approach resulting the work entitled Dialog Bunyi. Second, determine the work concept by segmenting the work into three segmenrs of reinterpretation, namely *habluminalam*, *habluminannas*, and *habluminallah*. Third, compose the conceptual composition using work theory (Guntur, 2016) resulting into music transcriptions. Fourth, presenting the composition in musical composition performance event.

The analysis stage uses the garap approach, focusing on how to work creation (Supanggah, 2009), which consists of garap material, garap guidance, garap tools, garap instruments, garap determinants, and garap considerations. The garap material of this work is divided into three parts. First, exploration of the soundscape of birdsong, wind, synthesizer, and whistling. Second, the processing of harmonious music with Arabic minor scale melodies and rhythms from the rapai pase pattern. Third, sholawat poetry accompanied by dzikir through vocals, enriched with visual material in the form of graphic videos on the backdrop showing green forests, forest fires, community cooperation, and the universe in accordance with the musical structure. The performers are lecturers and students of Karawitan Art at ISBI Aceh. The tools used include DAW for soundscape, string instruments for harmony, and rapai for rhythm. The main tools are tutti and call and response as a reflection of interaction in uroh. The determining factors and considerations are based on the empirical experience of researchers who are familiar with Acehnese traditions, so that the work remains rich in Acehnese identity. The final stage is a performance of the artwork as a presentation of the research results as well as an artistic contribution to the development of knowledge of the arts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

These three principles of social piety became the main spirit manifested in the practice of uroh and then processed into a musical composition entitled Dialog Bunyi. This work is not merely a musical reconstruction, but an attempt to reinterpret the rapai pase tradition, actualized in the language of contemporary music. The premiere of Dialog Bunyi was held on September 15, 2025, presenting an aesthetic experience that builds connections between spiritual, social, and ecological aspects. The structure of the work is divided into three parts, each representing the principles of *habluminalam*, *habluminannas*, and *habluminallah*, as originally mentioned by Syekh rapai (Abdullah, 2025), “this is not merely an entertainment ‘tontonan’ but more to guidance ‘tuntunan’ towards nature connection, collective understanding and sacred connection to God.”

The first part, *habluminalam*, presents an exploration of natural sounds (soundscape) that affirms the relationship between humans and their environment; the second part highlights the harmony between instruments as a symbol of togetherness and social

solidarity; while the third part focuses on the rhythm of rapai and the chanting of sholawat and dzikir as a form of devotion to Allah. The visual graphics depicting forests, community activities, and representations of the cosmos further reinforce the philosophical meaning of each segment in Dialog Bunyi as a musical composition event.

The performance of Dialog Bunyi has effectively provoked collective reflection, as evidenced by the performers testimonials and audience responses. One of the players, a flutist involved in the performance, reflects on the profound emotional and intellectual engagement the piece elicited. He stated, "I felt a deep sense of unease while performing, and the composition made me contemplate the intricate relationship between humanity, nature, and the divine." This sentiment underscores the work's capacity to engage performers on a personal level, fostering reflection on the thematic elements inherent in the composition, which explore the interconnectedness of human beings, their environment, and spiritual realms.

Similarly, another rapai pase player, offers an account of the spiritual immersion he experienced during the performance. He described being completely absorbed during the third segment, "kalam Allah" in *habluminallah* stating, "I became so absorbed in my prayers and the music that I lost all sense of my surroundings. The experience was transcendent and deeply moving." His personal testimony highlights how the composition facilitated a state of spiritual engagement, which aligns with the work's broader intention of fostering reflection and spiritual connection.

Further reinforcing the reflective nature of the work, the main composer elaborated on the critical function of Dialog Bunyi in challenging traditional understandings of uroh. He noted, "This piece is not just a musical composition but a critique and a call for the continuation and evolution of Uroh. It moved beyond the traditional form, incorporating new insights that address current social and environmental concerns." His assertion illustrated the work's conceptual framework, which invites audiences and performers alike to rethink traditional practices within the context of modern ecological and social issues.

The performance's impact extends beyond the performers to the audience, with the integration of digital platforms for live streaming and audience interaction. The engagement through these channels facilitated a dynamic exchange of ideas, enabling the audience to reflect collectively on the themes of social piety, ecological responsibility, and spiritual devotion. Comments from the audience, alongside the performers' experiences, tend to give highlights that the work succeeded in fostering not only an aesthetic experience but also a broader reflection on the values it sought to address. Thus, through those personal reflections of the performers and the interactive nature of the audience's engagement, Dialog Bunyi serves as a catalyst for collective reflection on pressing socio-ecological and spiritual issues, transcending the boundaries of a traditional musical performance to engage deeply with contemporary societal concerns.

To observe comprehensively into technical work, composition liner notes are created. The first part of the piece begins with DAW playing background strings with a fade-in effect. Moments later, it is followed by the sound of a bang from VST Action Strike. This material is presented in a looping format. After several repetitions, the keyboard instrument plays an exploration of notes with a bird chirping sound, which is accompanied by VST Soundscape playing the sound of wind. The synth, through a MIDI controller, explores using augmented notes. Other musicians also explore using flutes, thin plastic pipes that are blown to produce sounds similar to birdsong, whistles, and others. The composition in this initial segment represents the tranquility and beauty of nature that is well preserved.



Figure 1. Natural Beauty Segment

After a few minutes, DAW changed the music with a fast-paced Action Strike and tight rhythm. This represented the changes in nature that were beginning to be disrupted by deforestation. The keyboard immediately changed to an arpeggio in D diminished, while the other musicians explored their respective instruments. This segment ended with a cadence played by a MIDI controller.



Figure 2. Forest Deforestation Segments

The musical material continues with a unison piece played by fast-tempo rhythmic instruments. After a while, all instruments play tutti and end with a long note on D. The music pauses for a moment. The large rapai (pase) continues the material by playing a developed rhythm from the “lagu sa” uroh rapai pase. While this material is being played, the MIDI controller plays the sound of seated instruments. This material continues with tutti by all melodic and rhythmic instruments. This tutti material is presented quite long using a dynamic rhythm, meaning it uses a fairly fast tempo with clear beat playing.

After the tutti material is presented, the mandolin plays a solo improvisation using the Arabic minor scale, while the keyboard and MIDI controller provide the background. There are no restrictions on the mandolin melody; the duration of this segment is determined by the mandolin player. The material in this segment ends with a mandolin tremolo.



Figure 3. Habluminannas segment

All rhythmic instruments, such as the rapai sedang and rapai pase, continue the material by repeatedly playing the characteristic hadroh rhythm pattern. This rhythm pattern is also commonly found in Middle Eastern music. The pattern can be seen in the following image:



Figure 4. Hadroh Rhythm Notation

After the rhythmic instruments play four repetitions, all melodic instruments build on the rhythmic material. The keyboard instruments play short melodic phrases, while the bass, MIDI controller, and mandolin function as chord accompaniment, and the flute plays the main melody. The piece ends with a tutti section involving all instruments. The next piece is a question and answer game between the medium rapai and the large rapai (pase). This question and answer game is followed by tutti mixed meter with melody as the main material. The melody is as follows:



Figure 5. Mixed Meter Notation

The end of the melody is followed by a flute melody played with rubato. While the flute plays, the other musicians chant “hu Allah” repeatedly. This rubato melody is played four times, accompanied by a single cycle of rhythmic patterns from the rapai instruments. The performance continues with vocals accompanied by all instruments.

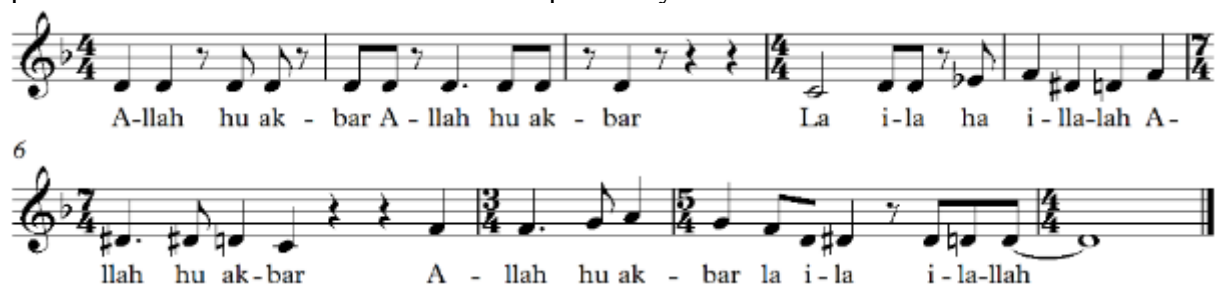


Figure 6. Dzikir Vocals



Figure 7. Habluminallah segment

The vocal material above is played twice. This material is followed by the sholawat ummy vocals, which are played in accelerando. These vocals are accompanied by a keyboard instrument with the following melody:

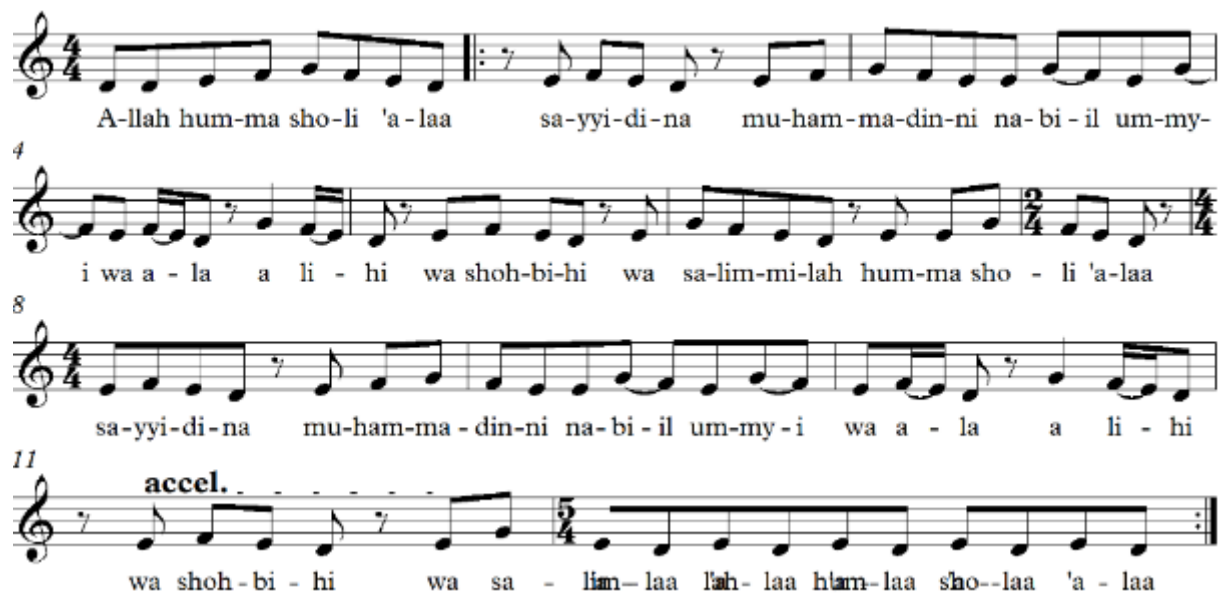


Figure 8. Notation of Sholawat Ummi

The final part of this piece is the chanting of “La ilaha ilaallah” played with a constant beat. This chant is also played in accelerando eight times with four tempo changes. The tempo changes are accompanied by dynamics that also become louder until the music stops when the chanting is finished. The vocal melody can be seen in the following image:

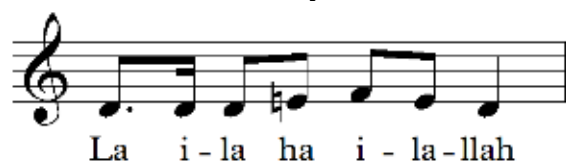


Figure 9. Dzikir notation

To understand beyond the technical work, the composition liner notes also contain values represented in the work. The composition Dialog Bunyi encapsulates three core

philosophical values by the terms *habluminallalam*, *habluminannas*, and *habluminallah*, each reflecting the interconnectedness of humanity with nature, society, and the divine. The first part of the composition embodies *habluminallalam* (the relationship between humans and nature). This segment begins by capturing the peaceful sounds of nature through soundscapes such as bird chirping and wind, with instruments like flutes and synthesizers enhancing the auditory imagery. The composer's intention was to illustrate the harmony of nature, which is gradually disrupted by the destructive forces of deforestation, symbolized by rapid rhythms and harsh environmental sounds. The transition from the tranquil to the disrupted serves as a poignant critique of environmental degradation, urging the audience to reflect on the human role in preserving the natural world.

The second section represents *habluminannas* (the relationship between humans and society), highlighting the importance of social harmony and collective solidarity. This part draws inspiration from the communal agricultural practices of the Acehnese people, particularly the Khanduri Blang, a communal ritual of gratitude that follows the harvest season. Through the rhythms of the rapai and the harmonious interplay of instruments, this segment evokes the unity and collective effort that underpin the social fabric of the community. The music reflects the values of *meusaboh* (togetherness) and *meutalowareh* (solidarity), emphasizing the significance of mutual support and shared experiences within the societal context.

Finally, Dialog Bunyi explores *habluminallah* (the relationship between humans and god) in its concluding section. This part delves into the spiritual connection between humanity and the divine, marked by the inclusion of dzikir (remembrance of God), salawat (blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad), and the chanting of "La ilaha illa Allah" (there is no god but Allah). The music gradually accelerates, intensifying the spiritual atmosphere and inviting the audience to reflect on their personal connection with the divine. The use of vocals and instruments transcends mere musical expression, aiming to evoke a higher spiritual consciousness and offering a commentary on the sacred within the contemporary context. As articulated by the composer, the work reinterprets traditional practices like uroh rapai, transforming them into a new composition that bridges sacred and modern themes.

Dialog Bunyi transcends traditional musical boundaries by addressing the relationships between humans, nature, society, and the divine. The composition not only facilitates a deep exploration of these values but also encourages collective reflection. Through the innovative fusion of traditional instruments, contemporary sounds, and spiritual motifs, Dialog Bunyi serves as both an artistic expression and a critique of modern societal values, urging a re-evaluation of how these values are represented and lived in contemporary society. This work offers a compelling model for explorations of the intersections between music, culture, and the environment.

CONCLUSIONS

The research highlights the potential for Dialog Bunyi to serve as a pedagogical model for arts education, advocating for a practice-led research approach that blends musical, spiritual, social, and ecological elements. By doing so, it opens new avenues for teaching and learning in musical composition within tradition-based arts education, offering innovative methodologies that encourage both artistic expression and social engagement. Ultimately, this work demonstrates how art can transcend its aesthetic value to become a meaningful response to the socio-ecological issues of our time, providing a framework for future research and development in the performing arts that integrates local traditions with contemporary concerns. Through the composition, uroh is not only re-understood as an

aesthetic practice but also as a vehicle for addressing pressing socio-ecological issues, particularly the environmental degradation caused by deforestation, which has led to a scarcity of rapai pase materials. However, more auto-ethnographic introspection is required, which inherently centers towards composer's subjectivity, and the data scope limited to the specific material conditions of *rapai pase*. Consequently, future studies possibly broaden this inquiry to diverse regional contexts to determine whether this intersection of ecological consciousness, digitalization and sustainable performative piety constitutes a systemic shift of rapai pase as traditional art forms. This re-conceptualization presents a critical shift, suggesting that traditional art forms, such as uroh, can evolve to respond to contemporary challenges while remaining firmly rooted in cultural identity.

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