



From Gambus to Solo Guitar: Acculturation and Islamic Cultural Identity in Coastal Lampung

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Abstract

Despite extensive studies on Islamization, gambus traditions, and musical modernization in Indonesia, limited attention has been given to the integrated historical and ethnomusicological process through which gambus transformed into the Lampung Pesisir solo guitar within the socio-cultural context of the Lampung Saibatin community. This study addresses this gap by examining the transformation of gambus into Lampung Pesisir solo guitar through the interconnected processes of Islamization, cultural adaptation, and modernization. Using a descriptive qualitative approach grounded in ethnomusicological inquiry, data were collected through literature review, participatory observation, in-depth interviews with seven informants, and documentation conducted between 2018 and 2025 in coastal Lampung. The findings reveal that gambus was introduced through Islamic missionary networks and subsequently localized into gambus lunak before undergoing further transformation into gitar tunggal as a creative response to modernization and weakening intergenerational transmission. Rather than representing cultural decline, the emergence of Lampung solo guitar demonstrates a process of adaptive continuity in which Islamic values, communal ethics, and local identity were sustained through changing musical forms. The novelty of this study lies in integrating historical and ethnomusicological perspectives within a layered transformation model (gambus–gambus lunak–solo guitar), while theoretically contributing to discussions of musical creolization and cultural acculturation by showing that modernization may function not only as disruption but also as a mechanism of cultural revitalization and continuity.

Keywords: Islam; Human Rights; Law; Qur’ān and Sunnah; Obligations

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INTRODUCTION

Traditional music functions not merely as entertainment but also as a medium of social communication, religious expression, and collective identity construction within society (Kartomi, 1990). In many cultural settings, musical traditions preserve memories, values, and social norms that are transmitted across generations. In the Indonesian context, the diversity of traditional music reflects historical encounters between local traditions and external cultural influences, including Hindu-Buddhist, Islamic, and Western civilizations (Becker, 1979; Supanggah, 2003). Such encounters often produce adaptation, reinterpretation, and transformation rather than cultural replacement. Therefore, traditional music can be understood as a dynamic cultural system continuously negotiating historical and social change.

One important example of cultural transformation can be found in Lampung, particularly in the emergence of the Lampung Pesisir solo guitar (*gitar tunggal Lampung Pesisir*), which developed from the gambus musical tradition. Historically, the arrival of Islam in Lampung during the sixteenth century introduced not only religious teachings but also Arab-Malay cultural practices, including gambus music (Azra, 2004; Junaidah, 2008). The gambus functioned as an instrument of *da'wah*, moral communication, and communal expression through poetry and musical performance (Sauri et al., 2022). Through trade routes and missionary networks connected to Banten and coastal Sumatra, this musical tradition became integrated into the daily lives of coastal communities. As a result, gambus music occupied both social and spiritual functions in Lampung society.

Within the Lampung Saibatin community, gambus was not merely adopted but culturally reinterpreted into a localized form known as *gambus lunik*. This smaller instrument was adjusted to local musical preferences, performance contexts, and the expressive needs of the community. Beyond religious settings, *gambus lunik* gradually became part of ceremonies, social gatherings, and traditional celebrations in coastal Lampung. In this process, musical adaptation reflected broader cultural negotiation in which external influences were accepted without eliminating local identity (Shuang & Wu, 2023).

However, significant social transformation occurred during the mid-twentieth century when modernization increasingly influenced cultural life in Indonesia. Since the 1960s, the spread of radio, recorded music, and popular entertainment introduced younger generations to modern instruments such as the conventional guitar (Wallach, 2008). As musical tastes shifted, traditional gambus practices gradually declined because younger performers perceived modern instruments as more flexible and easier to learn. This condition created concern regarding the continuity of local musical traditions. Nevertheless, modernization did not eliminate gambus traditions but instead encouraged new forms of cultural adaptation and reinterpretation (Moscatelli, 2023; Tang & Wu, 2025). In many cases, traditional values survived through modified musical forms that remained meaningful within changing social contexts.

In the Lampung coastal context, this process contributed to the emergence of the Lampung Pesisir solo guitar during the 1970s and 1980s through the efforts of artists such as Hila Hambala and Edi Pulampas. Although performed using a conventional guitar, the musical structure, melodic patterns, poetic lyrics, and moral values remained closely connected to gambus traditions. The guitar was not simply adopted as a Western instrument but culturally transformed into a medium for expressing Lampung identity and Islamic values. Consequently, the transformation from gambus to solo guitar represents not merely instrumental substitution but a broader socio-cultural process involving continuity, adaptation, and innovation.

Despite extensive scholarship on Islamization, gambus music, and musical modernization in Indonesia, previous studies tend to discuss these themes separately. Existing studies commonly examine gambus as an Islamic cultural medium, musical modernization as a factor contributing to the decline of traditional arts, or localization processes within broader

Malay cultural contexts. Consequently, limited scholarly attention has been given to the transitional transformation through which gambus evolved into Lampung Pesisir solo guitar within the socio-cultural setting of the Lampung Saibatin community. More importantly, there remains little integrated historical and ethnomusicological analysis explaining how Islamic traditions, local reinterpretation, and modernization intersect in this musical transformation.

This study addresses the lack of integrated historical and ethnomusicological analysis by examining the transformation of gambus into Lampung Pesisir solo guitar through interconnected processes of Islamization, cultural adaptation, and musical modernization. Rather than positioning modernization solely as a force of cultural decline, this study argues that modernization may also function as a mechanism of cultural revitalization through local reinterpretation and creative innovation. This perspective enables a more balanced understanding of musical transformation as continuity rather than disappearance. It also highlights how local actors actively negotiate cultural change within specific historical contexts.

The novelty of this study lies in three aspects. First, it integrates historical and ethnomusicological perspectives to explain the transformation of gambus into solo guitar within a single analytical framework. Second, it proposes a layered transformation process (gambus–gambus lunik–solo guitar), demonstrating that musical change occurred gradually through reinterpretation rather than abrupt replacement. Third, this study emphasizes the role of local artists as agents of cultural continuity who preserve Islamic musical identity through adapted musical forms. Through this perspective, the study positions local musicians not only as performers but also as cultural mediators.

Accordingly, this study aims to: (1) explain the historical background of the introduction of gambus through the Islamization process in Lampung; (2) analyze the socio-cultural dynamics underlying the transformation of gambus into Lampung Pesisir solo guitar; and (3) examine the forms of cultural acculturation and Islamic identity represented in Lampung solo guitar traditions.

Theoretically, this study contributes to ethnomusicology and cultural acculturation studies by demonstrating that musical transformation should not necessarily be understood as cultural replacement but may instead represent continuity and revitalization. Furthermore, this study contributes to discussions of Islamization by showing how religious values continue to be transmitted through musical and aesthetic practices embedded in local culture. The findings also strengthen the understanding that modernity and tradition may coexist through adaptive cultural negotiation. In this regard, musical transformation becomes a productive space where identity, spirituality, and local knowledge continue to evolve.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Frameworks and Conceptual Foundations

This study is grounded in three interconnected theoretical perspectives: cultural acculturation, ethnomusicology, and Islamization through musical practice. Cultural acculturation explains how societies negotiate external influences without necessarily abandoning their existing cultural systems. In the context of music, acculturation involves processes of adaptation, reinterpretation, and selective transformation rather than simple imitation. Musical practices frequently function as spaces where cultural values are contested, preserved, and reformulated through social interaction. Therefore, musical transformation should be understood as a dynamic process shaped by historical encounters and local agency.

From the perspective of ethnomusicology, music is not merely an artistic product but a cultural practice embedded in everyday social life. Ethnomusicological approaches position music as a system of meaning connected to identity, belief, memory, and collective values.

Recent interdisciplinary scholarship has reinforced this view, arguing that preserving and understanding musical traditions requires integrated strategies that bridge cultural transmission theory, ethnomusicological inquiry, and community-based practice (Curran & Radhakrishnan, 2021; Miller, 2022). Musical change consequently reflects broader shifts in social structure, cultural orientation, and historical experience. Rather than separating sound from context, ethnomusicology emphasizes the interrelationship between musical performance and the lived experiences of communities. This perspective is particularly relevant for examining the transformation of gambus into Lampung Pesisir solo guitar because the change involves both material instruments and symbolic meanings.

In studies of Islamization, music is often understood as one of the cultural channels through which religious values are communicated and socially embedded. Religious transmission frequently occurs not only through formal institutions but also through cultural performances that make moral and spiritual teachings socially meaningful. Al-Asyhar (2023) demonstrates this dynamic in the Indonesian context, showing that gambus functions not merely as musical performance but as a vehicle for spiritual expression and communal identity formation. Musical practices may function as collective spaces in which ethical values, emotional experiences, and religious identity are negotiated within local traditions. Consequently, Islamic musical practices should not be understood merely as aesthetic performances but also as forms of cultural mediation that connect spirituality with social life. This perspective helps explain how gambus traditions became integrated into coastal Lampung communities.

The concept of musical creolization provides an additional analytical framework for understanding cultural transformation in musical practice. Musical creolization refers to the emergence of new musical forms through encounters between different cultural traditions that generate hybrid systems of performance, sound, and meaning. Scholars have increasingly positioned performance itself as a key concept within creolization theory, arguing that music simultaneously functions as sound and as cultural archive a living record of colonial and postcolonial relationships between communities (Dow, 2020). Rather than viewing cultural change as replacement, this perspective emphasizes recombination, reinterpretation, and creative negotiation between traditions. Bakri and Sabran (2023) extend this argument specifically to gambus, tracing how the instrument evolved from its Arab oud origins into distinctly local Malay musical forms through layered processes of cultural adaptation. In many contexts, new musical forms emerge because communities adapt external cultural influences into familiar local frameworks while maintaining continuity with inherited values. Therefore, musical creolization offers a productive way to interpret the transformation from gambus to solo guitar as a process of continuity through adaptation rather than rupture.

Although these theoretical perspectives share a concern for cultural transformation, they often emphasize different dimensions of change. Cultural acculturation tends to explain adaptation at the societal level, ethnomusicology emphasizes lived musical experience and symbolic meaning, while musical creolization focuses on the creation of hybrid forms through cultural interaction. Previous studies often employ these frameworks separately, which limits the ability to explain complex musical transformation processes. This study attempts to place these perspectives in dialogue by understanding gambus transformation simultaneously as historical adaptation, musical practice, and cultural negotiation. Through this approach, musical change is interpreted as a layered socio-cultural process shaped by religion, locality, and modernity.

Empirical Studies on Islamic Music, Gambus, and Musical Transformation

Empirical studies on gambus and Islamic musical traditions have generally focused on cultural identity, localization, and religious performance. Several studies describe gambus as

part of broader Arab-Malay musical traditions that became localized through interaction with regional cultures. Other studies emphasize the role of Islamic music in strengthening moral values, religious identity, and social cohesion in Muslim communities. Abrari and Khairuddin (2022), for instance, demonstrate how gambus music functions as a medium for conveying Islamic moral teachings (da'wah), illustrating that religious content and musical form are deeply intertwined in Malay-Indonesian musical culture. However, these studies often focus on musical performance as an expression of identity rather than a process of long-term cultural transformation. Consequently, limited attention has been given to how musical forms evolve historically through layered adaptation.

Research on traditional musical transformation frequently highlights the relationship between modernization and cultural decline. Many studies argue that mass media, urbanization, and global popular culture contribute to decreasing interest in traditional musical forms among younger generations. Modern instruments are often perceived as more flexible, commercially attractive, and socially relevant within changing cultural environments. Nevertheless, some studies suggest that modernization does not always produce disappearance but may instead stimulate reinterpretation and cultural reinvention. Sosrowijaya (2023) demonstrates this in the Indonesian context, showing how local and traditional musical elements are reincorporated into popular music as acts of cultural resilience rather than decline. In this perspective, local musical actors become central agents who mediate continuity and innovation in changing cultural settings.

Within global ethnomusicological discussions, scholars increasingly emphasize music as a process of cultural negotiation rather than static tradition. Studies of hybrid musical practices show that communities frequently adapt foreign instruments, performance styles, and symbolic meanings into local systems of expression. Rather than replacing traditional forms, external influences may be absorbed and transformed into culturally meaningful practices that maintain continuity with inherited values. This perspective is further supported by recent research in Southeast Asia, where hybrid musical forms have been shown to emerge beyond nationalist historiographies as spaces for social reflection and cultural renegotiation (Moonsarn, 2025). Such findings shift analytical attention from narratives of cultural loss toward processes of cultural resilience and creative adaptation, which are highly relevant for understanding how gambus traditions in Lampung transformed rather than disappeared.

Studies specifically addressing Islamization and local musical adaptation also reveal that Islamic musical forms are often shaped by local languages, poetic structures, and communal traditions. Musical performance becomes a social space through which religious values are communicated in culturally familiar ways. A significant recent contribution is provided by Chanifah et al. (2025), whose study of terebang an Islamic frame-drum tradition in Sundanese ethnicity demonstrates how a local music genre evolved from village Islamic ritual vernacular to the modern urban stage, sustaining both spiritual and communal identity across generations. However, existing studies frequently discuss Islamic music in broader regional settings without examining transitional musical processes in specific local contexts. This creates an important opportunity for deeper investigation into localized transformation processes.

Research concerning Lampung musical traditions has mainly concentrated on cultural preservation, local poetry, or identity representation within traditional performance. Existing studies have documented the presence of gambus and solo guitar traditions as part of regional cultural expression. However, most discussions remain descriptive and insufficiently explore how the transition from gambus to gambus lunik and eventually to Lampung solo guitar occurred historically and culturally. The study of Islamic music and local identity in Sundanese ethnicity further shows that such transitions are not peripheral phenomena but are central to understanding how Muslim communities articulate cultural belonging through musical practice

(Tohari et al., 2024). As a result, the historical and ethnomusicological dimensions of musical transformation remain underexplored.

Critical Dialogue Across Studies

If examined critically, previous studies demonstrate both convergence and inconsistency regarding musical transformation. Studies of modernization tend to emphasize cultural displacement and the weakening of traditional practices, suggesting that external influences threaten local continuity. In contrast, ethnomusicological and cultural adaptation studies frequently show that communities creatively reinterpret external influences into locally meaningful forms. This difference indicates an unresolved debate between perspectives emphasizing cultural decline and those highlighting cultural resilience. Consequently, a more integrated analytical approach is necessary to understand how musical transformation simultaneously involves continuity, adaptation, and innovation.

Similarly, studies of Islamic music often emphasize either religious function or aesthetic performance without sufficiently connecting the two dimensions. Some studies treat Islamic music primarily as spiritual expression, while others focus on cultural identity or entertainment. Gauthier (2023) identifies this tension within the global rise of Islamic popular music, arguing that the commodification of Islamic musical values and the search for religious identity are simultaneously at work in contemporary Muslim music cultures a dynamic directly relevant to understanding gambus transformation in coastal communities. This separation limits understanding of how musical traditions may function simultaneously as moral communication, communal practice, and aesthetic negotiation. Therefore, understanding gambus transformation requires a framework capable of connecting religion, aesthetics, and social change.

The concept of musical creolization becomes particularly useful in addressing these limitations because it explains how communities generate new cultural forms through interaction and reinterpretation. Instead of understanding solo guitar as a replacement for gambus, this perspective enables analysis of continuity within transformation. The emergence of Lampung solo guitar can thus be interpreted as a hybrid cultural form that preserves inherited values while adapting to changing musical preferences and technological realities. Sulaiman et al. (2024) reinforce this interpretation through their sociolinguistic study of gambus in Belitung, demonstrating that local language and identity remain embedded within musical instruments even as their performance contexts evolve. Through this lens, modernization becomes not merely a force of disruption but also a context for creative cultural negotiation.

Research Gaps and Justification of the Present Study

Despite growing scholarship on Islamic music, ethnomusicology, and cultural transformation, important gaps remain unresolved. First, studies of Islamization and traditional music are often discussed separately, limiting understanding of how religious transmission and musical transformation intersect historically. Second, previous studies rarely examine layered transitional processes from gambus to gambus lunik and subsequently to Lampung solo guitar within one analytical framework. Third, limited attention has been given to the role of local cultural actors in sustaining continuity amid modernization. Finally, studies on Islamic music rarely explain how local traditions adapt modern instruments without abandoning religious and cultural identity.

This study addresses these limitations by integrating cultural acculturation, ethnomusicology, Islamization, and musical creolization into a single analytical framework. Rather than understanding modernization exclusively as cultural decline, this study interprets musical transformation as a process of continuity, reinterpretation, and revitalization. The present research also contributes by situating local artists as active cultural mediators who

negotiate tradition and modernity through musical practice. In doing so, it responds to the call for more locally grounded ethnomusicological studies capable of connecting religious, aesthetic, and socio-cultural dimensions of musical change (Curran & Radhakrishnan, 2021; Chanifah et al., 2025). Accordingly, this study offers a more integrated understanding of how Islamic musical traditions survive and evolve through changing historical and socio-cultural contexts.

METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach grounded in an interpretive paradigm, aimed at developing a deep understanding of the meaning, process, and socio-cultural context underlying the transformation of gambus into the Lampung Pesisir solo guitar. This approach was selected because the study does not seek to test hypotheses but rather to interpret cultural phenomena through participants' perspectives and historical context (Creswell, 2013). Within the field of ethnomusicology, this research positions music as cultural practice what Merriam (1964) terms "music as culture" which foregrounds the reciprocal relationship between musical forms and the social life of their supporting communities. The researcher functions as the primary instrument throughout the research process, responsible for observing, collecting, and interpreting musical phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Fieldwork was conducted across three locations in coastal Lampung: Tanggamus, Pesawaran, and Kalianda, South Lampung. These sites were selected purposively because they constitute the historical and contemporary center of the Saibatin community and represent the primary geographical base for the development of the Lampung Pesisir solo guitar tradition. All three locations retain active traditional arts communities that continue to sustain local musical practices, making them appropriate and information-rich research environments (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The research was conducted in three phases between 2018 and 2025. The first phase (2018–2020) focused on historical data collection and systematic literature review. The second phase (2021–2023) concentrated on in-depth interviews and direct observation of musical practices in the field. The third phase (2024–2025) was dedicated to data validation, thematic analysis, and the preparation of findings for academic publication.

A total of seven informants participated in this study, selected through purposive sampling to ensure that participants possessed direct knowledge of and experience with the Lampung Pesisir solo guitar tradition (Patton, 2002). The primary criterion for inclusion was demonstrable involvement in the tradition either as a practitioner, cultural figure, or active community member. Key informants included Hila Hambala and Edi Pulampas, recognized pioneers in the development of the Lampung Pesisir solo guitar. Additional informants comprised traditional community leaders and young Lampung musicians actively engaged in preserving this musical tradition at the community level. Secondary data were obtained from books, peer-reviewed journal articles, research reports, local archival documents, and audio-visual materials related to the history of Lampung music, Islamization of the archipelago, and ethnomusicological scholarship.

Three primary data collection techniques were employed. First, in-depth interviews were conducted to explore participants' views, experiences, and personal narratives regarding the history, transformation, and cultural meaning of the Lampung solo guitar (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Second, participatory observation was carried out across performances, rehearsals, and socio-cultural activities involving the Lampung solo guitar, enabling the researcher to understand its performative and social context from within the community (Spradley, 1980). Third, documentation study involved the systematic analysis of audio-visual recordings, field notes, and written sources related to the transformation of traditional musical

instruments in Indonesia. To strengthen the validity and credibility of the data, triangulation was applied by cross-referencing findings from interviews, observations, and documentary sources (Miles et al, 2014).

Data analysis followed the interactive qualitative model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), proceeding through three iterative stages. The first stage was data condensation, involving the systematic selection, simplification, and organization of raw data from interviews and fieldwork. The second stage was data display, in which condensed data were arranged into descriptive narratives to illuminate the processes of musical change and their socio-cultural contexts. The third stage was conclusion drawing and verification, involving the interpretive construction of meaning from the patterns identified across data sources.

Thematic analysis was applied to identify recurring patterns across participants' accounts, guided by an initial coding framework derived from the study's theoretical perspectives cultural acculturation, ethnomusicology, Islamization, and musical creolization (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initial open codes were generated from interview transcripts and field notes, subsequently grouped into focused codes and organized into overarching themes. This process was conducted iteratively and reflexively, with constant attention to the historical and social contexts shaping participants' musical practices.

Data validity was ensured through four trustworthiness criteria as formulated by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Credibility was established through source triangulation and member checking, whereby key informants reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of interpretations derived from their accounts. Transferability was supported through rich contextual description of the socio-cultural background of coastal Lampung society. Dependability was maintained through systematic documentation of all phases of the research process. Confirmability was achieved by retaining field notes, interview transcripts, and supporting documentation as traceable empirical evidence.

As a researcher working within the cultural context under study, the researcher acknowledges the potential influence of prior familiarity with Lampung musical traditions on the processes of data collection and interpretation. Reflexive awareness was maintained throughout the fieldwork and analysis phases by keeping a reflective journal, subjecting emerging interpretations to peer discussion, and maintaining transparency regarding the researcher's positionality in relation to the research community (Finlay, 2002). This reflexive stance was considered essential to ensuring that interpretations remained grounded in participants' perspectives rather than being unduly shaped by the researcher's own assumptions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

This study reveals that the transformation from gambus to the Lampung Pesisir solo guitar (gitar tunggal Lampung Pesisir) is not a linear replacement of musical instruments but a complex cultural process involving historical transmission, local adaptation, and creative innovation. The findings are presented thematically as follows.

Gambus as an Instrument of Cultural Islamization

Field interviews conducted with Hila Hambala and Edi Pulampas (October 2–9, 2019) revealed that the gambus was introduced to the Lampung coastal region through Islamic missionary networks as early as the 16th century. Hila Hambala recounted:

"Pada abad ke-16, bangsa Arab datang ke Lampung melalui Kerajaan Banten bersamaan dengan penyebaran agama Islam. Tokoh yang menyebarkan agama Islam tersebut membawa dan menggunakan alat musik gambus untuk kepentingan dakwah."

(Hila Hambala, personal communication, October 2–9, 2019; translated by the researcher: "In the 16th century, Arab traders arrived in Lampung through the Banten Kingdom alongside the spread of Islam. The figures who disseminated the Islamic faith brought and used the gambus as an instrument of religious preaching.")

Participatory observation further confirmed that references to the gambus as a medium of religious transmission remain embedded in the collective memory of Saibatin communities in Tanggamus and Pesawaran, where elderly members recalled oral histories in which gambus performances were inseparable from communal Islamic rituals. The gambus brought by Arab missionaries was notably larger than the forms that subsequently developed locally a distinction consistently emphasized by informants as culturally significant. These findings indicate that the gambus functioned not as a secular musical import but as a vehicle for aesthetic dakwah, a form of religious communication operating through musical performance rather than formal doctrinal instruction. This supports Azra's (2004) argument that Islamization across the Indonesian archipelago proceeded through cultural and artistic channels, while extending it by demonstrating that in the Lampung coastal context, the gambus was deployed strategically as a locally accessible medium of moral and spiritual transmission a process more dialogical than top-down, as the instrument gained meaning precisely through its integration into familiar communal life rather than through institutional imposition.

Emergence of Gambus Lunik as Local Adaptation

The Lampung Saibatin community did not passively receive the gambus but actively transformed it into a smaller, locally named version. Hila Hambala described this process:

"Masyarakat Lampung, khususnya masyarakat yang beradat Saibatin masyarakat berdialek Api sejak saat itu membuat alat musik serupa dengan ukuran yang lebih kecil, yang dalam bahasa Lampung disebut gambus lunik."

(Hila Hambala, personal communication, October 2–9, 2019; translated by the researcher: "The Lampung community, particularly the Saibatin customary community speakers of the Api dialect subsequently crafted a similar instrument of smaller size, which in the Lampung language is called gambus lunik.")

Observation of gambus lunik instruments held by local cultural practitioners in Pesawaran confirmed the physical modifications described by informants, including differences in size, string arrangement, and playing posture adapted to local performance traditions. The term gambus lunik literally "small gambus" in the Lampung language is itself analytically significant: by naming the instrument in their own language, the community performed an act of cultural ownership over an externally introduced form. This process of active reinterpretation aligns with Koentjaraningrat's (2009) framework of acculturation while moving beyond it, as the Saibatin community did not merely absorb an external element but reshaped it to fit local symbolic, linguistic, and social systems. Unlike the original gambus, which remained closely associated with religious contexts, gambus lunik gradually expanded into ceremonial and everyday social events a diversification of function that reflects the community's capacity to negotiate between inherited tradition and evolving local needs (Bakri & Sabran, 2023).

Decline of Traditional Music and the Crisis of the 1960s

Informants identified the 1960s as a period of critical disruption in Lampung musical culture. Edi Pulampas described the situation as follows:

"Setelah berkembangnya alat musik gambus lunik, sampai sekitar tahun 1960-an alat musik gambus ini mulai ditinggalkan karena masuknya alat musik baru di Lampung, yakni gitar

konvensional. Gitar konvensional dianggap lebih menarik minat anak muda."

(Edi Pulampas, personal communication, October 2–9, 2019; translated by the researcher: "After the gambus lunak had developed, around the 1960s the instrument began to be abandoned due to the entry of a new instrument into Lampung the conventional guitar. The conventional guitar was considered more attractive to young people.")

This testimony was corroborated by the near-complete absence of active gambus lunak practitioners observed during fieldwork, and by interviews with older community members in Pesawaran who confirmed that by the late 1970s, gambus lunak performances had become rare. This decline is consistent with broader patterns documented by Weintraub (2010) and Wallach (2008) regarding the displacement of traditional Indonesian musical forms under the influence of radio broadcasting, recorded music, and global popular culture. Critically, however, informants did not frame this period primarily as cultural loss but as a crisis of intergenerational transmission a failure to sustain the interest of the generation expected to carry the tradition forward. This distinction is analytically important, as it reframes modernization not as a terminal force but as a transitional pressure that ultimately generated creative response (Sosrowijaya, 2023).

Emergence of Gitar Tunggal Lampung Pesisir as Cultural Synthesis

The emergence of gitar tunggal Lampung Pesisir in the early 1980s was directly attributed by informants to a deliberate creative response to the crisis of the preceding decades. Hila Hambala described its origins:

"Gitar tunggal Lampung ini tercipta karena kegundahan para seniman Lampung saat itu, dikarenakan musik tradisional Lampung gambus tunggal sudah kurang diminati oleh anak-anak muda, dan anak muda saat itu lebih memilih alat musik gitar konvensional dibandingkan gambus tunggal. Hal inilah yang menjadi pemicu munculnya gitar tunggal di Lampung."

(Hila Hambala, personal communication, October 2–9, 2019; translated by the researcher: "The Lampung solo guitar was born out of the anxiety felt by Lampung artists at that time, because the traditional music of Lampung gambus tunggal had lost the interest of young people, who preferred the conventional guitar. This was the trigger for the emergence of the solo guitar in Lampung.")

The term kegundahan meaning anxiety or disquiet frames the creation of gitar tunggal as a purposeful cultural act rather than spontaneous innovation. The community reception of the new form was described by Edi Pulampas:

"Awal munculnya gitar tunggal Lampung ini diterima dengan sangat luar biasa oleh masyarakat Lampung, dikarenakan musik gitar tunggal Lampung ini dianggap berbeda dan menarik, serta memberikan warna baru di dunia permusikan daerah Lampung saat itu."

(Edi Pulampas, personal communication, October 2–9, 2019; translated by the researcher: "When the Lampung solo guitar first appeared, it was received extraordinarily well by the Lampung community, because it was considered different and appealing, offering a new color to the regional music scene at that time.")

Observation of gitar tunggal performances in Tanggamus confirmed that practitioners do not replicate conventional Western guitar technique but instead employ melodic phrasing, ornamentation, and microtonal inflections closely paralleling gambus lunak performance practice. This synthesis involved three distinct cultural layers: Arab-Islamic musical heritage transmitted through the gambus, Lampung Saibatin local aesthetics, and Western instrumental technology in the form of the guitar. The resulting form exemplifies what Ballengee (2020) describes as musical creolization new hybrid forms emerging not from cultural confusion but

from deliberate intercultural negotiation while demonstrating that the creative agency driving this process resided with local artists rather than with external cultural forces.

Continuity of Islamic Values Through Instrumental Transformation

Analysis of gitar tunggal lyrical content drawn from audio-visual documentation collected during fieldwork reveals consistent thematic continuity with gambus traditions. Recurring themes include spirituality (*hubungan manusia dengan Tuhan*), moral reflection (*perenungan hidup*), and the impermanence of worldly existence (*kefanaan dunia*) all structurally embedded through poetic conventions shared with older gambus repertoire. Interviews with community members in Kalianda, South Lampung, confirmed that audiences perceive gitar tunggal performances as carrying religious and moral weight beyond mere entertainment. One community elder observed that listening to gitar tunggal evokes the same reflective state as attending a religious gathering testimony that speaks to the depth of continuity between the two forms. These findings challenge the assumption that instrumental transformation entails value erosion. As demonstrated by Al-Asyhar (2023) in his analysis of spiritual dimensions within contemporary Indonesian musical genres, cultural values possess a degree of independence from the material forms through which they are expressed. In the Lampung case, Islamic values were not displaced by the shift to guitar but transposed into a new expressive medium, retaining their moral authority within the community. Continuity in gitar tunggal thus resides not in the instrument but in the values, aesthetics, and social functions the music carries a finding with significant implications for how cultural resilience is understood and theorized.

Gitar Tunggal as Medium of Identity and Cultural Resistance

The final finding concerns the social function of gitar tunggal as a medium of cultural identity and intergenerational transmission. Hila Hambala stated:

"Musik klasik gitar tunggal Lampung hingga sekarang dianggap sebagai salah satu musik tradisional Lampung, dikarenakan sebagian besar anak muda Lampung, khususnya Lampung Pesisir, suka bermain klasik gitar tunggal Lampung ini."

(Hila Hambala, personal communication, October 2–9, 2019; translated by the researcher: "Lampung solo guitar classical music is still regarded to this day as one of Lampung's traditional music forms, because the majority of young Lampung people particularly those from the coastal region enjoy playing this classical solo guitar style.")

This observation represents a direct inversion of the crisis of the 1960s. Observation of community music activities in Pesawaran confirmed the active participation of young practitioners in gitar tunggal, including informal learning settings in which older musicians transmitted both technical skills and cultural knowledge. The attraction of younger generations to gitar tunggal demonstrates that the instrument change was not a cultural compromise but a culturally intelligent solution to the problem of intergenerational transmission that the gambus tradition could not resolve. This supports Hall's (1996) view of cultural identity as a dynamic and continuously negotiated process, and aligns with Sulaiman et al.'s (2024) finding that local language and identity remain embedded within musical instruments even as their performance contexts evolve. More broadly, gitar tunggal represents a form of resistance to cultural homogenization that operates not through rejection of modernity but through its strategic appropriation adopting a globally familiar instrument while preserving distinctively local and Islamic musical values, a strategy that may offer wider lessons for understanding how minority musical traditions sustain themselves under conditions of global cultural pressure.

Discussions

The findings of this study confirm that the transformation from gambus to the Lampung Pesisir solo guitar cannot be understood as a simple process of instrument replacement. Rather, it reflects a long and layered cultural negotiation involving Islamic missionary history, local creative agency, and the pressures of modernization. This discussion addresses the three research objectives in turn, interpreting the findings in relation to established theoretical frameworks and prior empirical studies.

The Historical Role of Gambus in the Islamization of Lampung

The introduction of gambus into the Lampung coastal region in the 16th century through Arab-Islamic networks operating via the Banten Sultanate was not incidental to the spread of Islam it was integral to it. As confirmed through ethnographic interviews with Hila Hambala and Edi Pulampas (October 2019), the preachers who arrived in Lampung did not rely solely on formal religious instruction but used gambus music as a medium of aesthetic dakwah, embedding Islamic moral and spiritual teachings within musical performance and poetry. This approach to Islamization through cultural channels is consistent with what Lombard (1996) and Azra (2004) have documented across the broader archipelago, where Islam spread not by displacing local culture but by working through it. What is distinctive in the Lampung case, however, is how deeply the gambus became integrated into the communal ritual life of the Saibatin community not as an imported foreign object but as a shared spiritual medium that belonged equally to religious transmission and to local social experience. This confirms Abrari and Khairuddin's (2022) argument that gambus functions as an inseparable unity of religious content and musical form, while demonstrating that this unity was historically forged through a specific process of cultural encounter along the maritime routes connecting Arabia, Banten, and the Lampung coast.

Socio-Cultural Dynamics of Transformation

The transformation from gambus to gitar tunggal unfolded across three distinct phases, each driven by the active cultural response of the Lampung community rather than by passive reception of external influence. In the first phase, the Saibatin community transformed the Arab gambus into the gambus lunik smaller in size, named in the Lampung language, and gradually expanded in social function from strictly religious to broader ceremonial and everyday contexts. This process reflects what this study identifies as resemantization: not mere adaptation in the sense described by Koentjaraningrat (2009), but the active assignment of new cultural meaning to an externally introduced form, guided by local aesthetic values, linguistic identity, and social needs. Bakri and Sabran (2023) have documented similar evolutionary processes in gambus traditions across the Malay world, but the Lampung case is distinctive in the explicitness with which local naming and modification marked cultural ownership over the instrument.

The second phase the crisis of the 1960s saw gambus lunik nearly disappear as younger generations turned toward the conventional guitar, drawn by the influence of radio, recorded music, and the broader currents of post-independence modernization. This pattern has been widely documented in studies of traditional Indonesian music (Weintraub, 2010; Wallach, 2008), but the Lampung experience adds an important nuance: what the community experienced was not primarily the loss of a musical form but the breakdown of intergenerational transmission a distinction that reframes the crisis not as cultural death but as a problem demanding creative solution. It was precisely this sense of cultural anxiety, articulated by Hila Hambala as *kegundahan*, that motivated the creation of gitar tunggal in the 1980s. Rather than abandoning the tradition or preserving it in a museum sense, local artists found a third path: adopting the modern instrument that had displaced the gambus and remaking it as a Lampung instrument through technique, melody, and lyrical content rooted in the gambus tradition.

Sosrowijaya (2023) has observed similar dynamics in Indonesian popular music, where traditional elements are reincorporated as acts of cultural resilience rather than decline the Lampung case extends this observation by showing how resilience can also be the product of deliberate artistic crisis response.

Cultural Acculturation and the Persistence of Islamic Identity

The third research objective concerns the forms of cultural acculturation and Islamic identity visible in the gitar tunggal tradition. The findings reveal that gitar tunggal represents a three-layered synthesis Arab-Islamic musical heritage, Lampung Saibatin local aesthetics, and Western instrumental technology in which the guitar's physical form was adopted while its musical language remained grounded in the gambus tradition. The playing technique, melodic phrasing, microtonal ornamentation, and free rhythmic structure of gitar tunggal all derive from gambus *lunik* practice, not from Western guitar convention. More significantly, the lyrical content of gitar tunggal sustains Islamic themes of spirituality, moral reflection, and awareness of worldly transience that have characterized Lampung musical culture since the earliest period of Islamization. This demonstrates that cultural values particularly those with deep religious foundations possess a resilience that transcends changes in material form. Al-Asyhar (2023) has made a similar argument in relation to contemporary Indonesian musical genres, and the Lampung case provides strong ethnographic support for that position.

This three-layered synthesis can be understood through Ballengee's (2020) concept of musical creolization, in which hybrid forms emerge from deliberate intercultural negotiation rather than from cultural confusion or loss. However, the Lampung case contributes something to this theoretical framework that existing creolization studies tend to overlook: the synthesis was not driven by aesthetic ambition alone but by a specific social necessity — the need to sustain cultural transmission across generations in the face of modernization. The success of gitar tunggal was measured not simply by its artistic novelty but by its capacity to re-engage young Lampung people with the values and identity their community had carried through the gambus tradition for centuries. This functional dimension of cultural hybridity in the service of continuity points toward what this study proposes as the concept of adaptive continuity: a process in which communities strategically transform the material expressions of their culture while preserving the values, social functions, and identity claims those expressions carry. Across four centuries of Lampung musical history, what changed was the instrument; what remained was the music's role as a medium of Islamic moral transmission, communal belonging, and intergenerational cultural reproduction. This concept may offer broader analytical utility for understanding how communities with deeply rooted religious and local identities navigate the pressures of modernization without sacrificing what matters most to them.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the transformation from gambus to Lampung Pesisir solo guitar should not be understood as a process of cultural replacement or the disappearance of tradition, but rather as a form of adaptive continuity shaped by historical negotiation, local creativity, and Islamic cultural persistence. The findings reveal that the transformation unfolded through a layered process in which Arab-Islamic musical heritage was localized into gambus *lunik* and later reformulated into gitar tunggal in response to modernization and the weakening of intergenerational transmission. Rather than functioning as evidence of cultural decline, modernization in the Lampung context stimulated creative reinterpretation, enabling local artists to preserve inherited values through new musical forms. The persistence of Islamic themes, communal ethics, and moral reflection within gitar tunggal further indicates that

religious and cultural identities may endure even when material forms undergo significant transformation. In this sense, the Lampung experience illustrates that continuity in cultural values does not necessarily depend on continuity in instruments or performance media.

Theoretically, this study contributes to ethnomusicology, cultural acculturation, and Islamization studies by proposing the concept of adaptive continuity as an analytical lens for understanding how communities negotiate cultural transformation under conditions of modernization. Existing discussions on musical transformation often emphasize either cultural decline or hybridity as aesthetic innovation. However, this study argues that hybrid musical forms may also emerge as deliberate strategies of cultural continuity, particularly when communities seek to preserve moral values, religious identity, and intergenerational belonging. The findings therefore extend the discussion of musical creolization by demonstrating that cultural hybridity may function not only as a creative aesthetic process but also as a socially purposeful mechanism for sustaining communal identity and religious transmission.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the research is geographically limited to selected coastal areas of Lampung associated with the Saibatin community, which may not fully represent broader variations of gambus transformation across different regions or indigenous cultural groups. Second, the study primarily focuses on historical narratives, ethnographic interviews, and socio-cultural interpretation, while offering limited organological and musical analysis regarding tonal structure, rhythm, and compositional change. Third, although the study highlights the perspectives of cultural actors such as Hila Hambala and Edi Pulampas, younger generations' reception and contemporary digital adaptation of gitar tunggal remain insufficiently explored.

Future research may therefore expand this discussion through comparative studies of gambus transformation across different regions in Indonesia or the broader Malay world in order to examine similarities and differences in musical adaptation under Islamic cultural influence. Further studies may also investigate how younger generations reinterpret gitar tunggal within digital platforms, changing performance spaces, and contemporary cultural economies. In addition, future ethnomusicological research may benefit from combining socio-cultural interpretation with detailed musical and organological analysis to better understand how continuity and transformation are encoded within sound, performance technique, and musical structure. Ultimately, understanding how local musical traditions negotiate continuity amidst modernization may provide broader insight into the resilience of religious and cultural identity in rapidly changing societies.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author conducted the research independently, and the study received no external funding.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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