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Historiographical transformation of Silat Mandar from West Sulawesi to the Thousand Island

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Abstract: *Silat Mandar is an intangible cultural heritage that records the migration and socio-cultural adaptation of the Mandar people to the Thousand Islands. This study examines the historiographical transformation of Silat Mandar as it migrated from its place of origin in West Sulawesi to the Thousand Islands, Jakarta. Employing a qualitative descriptive method with ethnohistorical and performative approaches, the research traces how oral traditions, mantras, and rhythmic movements of the martial art have been recontextualised in the diaspora setting. The findings show that historiographical transformation occurs through an adjustment of performance function from a magical-communal ritual and ancient maritime identity toward a form of entertainment and a medium for reinforcing diaspora solidarity in an urban space. Although the form has been simplified to meet the demands of modern entertainment, the intrinsic values of Silat Mandar have been sustained as collective memory that affirms the cultural existence of the Mandar ethnic group. The study concludes that this transformation does not represent a mere shallowing of culture, but rather an adaptive strategy for extending tradition across geographical and temporal boundaries.*

Keywords: *performance literature, Silat Mandar, historiographical transformation, thousand Islands, maritime diaspora*

INTRODUCTION

Silat Mandar is one of the intangible cultural heritages of the Mandar people of West Sulawesi. Rooted in a strong maritime tradition, this martial art has historically functioned not only as a form of self-defence but also as a medium for ritual, social cohesion, and the transmission of cultural values (Siti Gomo Attas, 2026). Within the Mandar community, two main styles are commonly recognised: *Pakkottau*, which emphasises combative and duelling aspects, and *Pamaccaq*, which is characterised by softer, more dance-like movements often performed in ceremonial contexts such as weddings and communal feasts (Rahman et al., 2022). Both forms are traditionally accompanied by distinctive drum rhythms and are deeply embedded in the life cycle of Mandar society.

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emphasises combative and duelling aspects, and *Pamaccaq*, which is characterised by softer, more dance-like movements often performed in ceremonial contexts such as weddings and communal feasts (Rahman et al., 2022). Both forms are traditionally accompanied by distinctive drum rhythms and are deeply embedded in the life cycle of Mandar society.

The migration of the Mandar people beyond their homeland has been shaped by major historical events. The Makassar War (1666–1669) and the DI/TII movement (1953–1965) triggered significant waves of displacement from the coastal regions of Mandar. During these periods, many families fled by sea, seeking safety and new livelihoods in Kalimantan, Java, Sumatra, and other islands. One of the destinations that later became an important site of Mandar settlement was the Thousand Islands (Kepulauan Seribu), particularly Pulau Panggang and Pulau Tidung (Attas, Azmin, Marwiah, et al., 2023; Mattiro et al., 2023; Saputra et al., 2024).

Oral histories and local legends in these islands frequently recount the arrival of Mandar figures who possessed martial skills and who assisted local communities in confronting pirates and coastal raiders (Naik, 2025). One of the most prominent of these narratives is the legend of *Darah Putih*, a Mandar warrior believed to have helped the inhabitants of Pulau Panggang defeat pirates; the subsequent burning of the pirates' vessels at a coral reef is said to have given the island its present name (Madduppa et al., 1970).

In their new environment, the practice and meaning of Silat Mandar underwent noticeable transformation. While in its place of origin the art remained closely tied to ritual and communal life, in the Thousand Islands it gradually shifted toward entertainment, education, and the reinforcement of diaspora identity. Practitioners adapted the forms developing hybrid sequences known locally as *prasmen*- and began to collaborate with other performance traditions, notably the Betawi *palang pintu* (Mansur et al., 2022).

At the same time, core elements such as specific techniques, genealogical transmission within Mandar families, and the underlying values of discipline, courage, and cultural pride were deliberately maintained. This process illustrates how an intangible tradition can be recontextualised without losing its function as collective memory for a migrant community (Heru Santosa et al., 2021; Vansina, 1985).

Despite the existence of oral histories and several descriptive studies on Silat Mandar in the Thousand Islands, systematic examination of its historiographical transformation remains limited. Most available accounts focus either on the legendary origins of the practice or on its contemporary performance aspects, without adequately analysing the mechanisms through which ritual, oral, and kinetic elements have been reconfigured in the diaspora setting (Reichl, 2003).

This study therefore seeks to address the following questions: (1) How has the historiographical narrative of Silat Mandar been transformed in the process of migration from West Sulawesi to the Thousand Islands?; (2) In what ways have the oral, mantra-based, and rhythmic-movement elements of Silat Mandar been recontextualised in the diaspora?; (3) How have the intrinsic values of Silat Mandar been sustained as a form of collective memory among the Mandar community in an urban island environment?

By examining these questions through an ethnohistorical and performative lens, this study aims to contribute to a better understanding of the adaptive strategies employed by maritime diaspora communities in preserving and reshaping their intangible cultural heritage.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on Silat Mandar have so far been dominated by descriptive approaches that focus on legendary origins, basic techniques, and its ritual and communal functions in its place of origin in West Sulawesi.

Rahman et al. (2022) distinguish two main styles: Pakkottau, which emphasises combative and duelling aspects, and Pamaccaq, which features softer, dance-like movements often performed in ceremonial contexts, both traditionally accompanied by distinctive drum rhythms and mantras believed to carry spiritual power (Rahman, F., Akhmar, A. M., & Lewa, 2023). The migration of Mandar communities to the Thousand Islands triggered by the Makassar War and the DI/TII movement, during which Silat Mandar was carried as part of a maritime identity. Oral narratives such as the legend of Darah Putih on Pulau Panggang illustrate how Mandar martial skills were integrated into local island history. However, most of these accounts remain limited to historical or performative description and do not systematically examine the mechanisms through which oral, mantra-based, and rhythmic-movement elements are recontextualised in the diaspora setting.

This gap becomes clearer when viewed against broader theoretical frameworks of oral tradition and cultural transformation. Vansina (1985) emphasises that oral traditions function as collective history that is continually renegotiated (Attas, Azmin, & Marwiah, 2023), while Reichl (2003) highlights the importance of tracing origins and shifts in meaning within performative practices. Studies on the Betawi palang pintu tradition and on cultural revitalisation through institutional and technological means reveal similar patterns of adaptation among other traditions in the urban space of Jakarta (Mansur et al., 2022). Nevertheless, few studies specifically analyse how Silat Mandar on Pulau Tidung has shifted in function from a magical-communal ritual tied to maritime identity toward entertainment, character education, and the reinforcement of diaspora solidarity, while still preserving its intrinsic values as collective memory (Sarbaitinil et al., 2023).

Existing research tends to separate legendary aspects from contemporary performance, thereby failing to explain the adaptive strategies that allow the tradition to remain viable across geographical and temporal boundaries.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method combined with ethnohistorical and performative approaches (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Zakaria, 2020) . The ethnohistorical approach is used to trace the historical trajectory of Mandar migration and the transformation of Silat Mandar tradition by examining written sources, archival materials, and oral traditions. The performative approach, on the other hand, is applied to analyse Silat Mandar as a living cultural practice that has undergone recontextualisation in its new setting.

Primary data were collected through direct observation of Silat Mandar performances in the Thousand Islands and in-depth interviews with key informants. These informants included Silat Mandar practitioners, most notably Algifari, a seventh-generation practitioner based on Pulau Tidung -as well as community leaders and cultural performers. Secondary data were obtained through a review of previous studies, journal articles, audiovisual documentation, and archival records related to Mandar tradition and the migration of the Mandar people.

Data analysis followed the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. To ensure the validity of the findings, source triangulation was conducted by cross-checking information obtained from multiple informants and documentary sources.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Historical Traces of Silat Mandar Migration to the Thousand Islands

The migration of the Mandar people to the Thousand Islands is closely linked to their identity as a maritime community. Guided by the philosophy *"sekali layar terkembang, pantang surut ke belakang"* (once the sail is unfurled, one never turns back), Mandar groups have long moved across the seas in search of new settlements. In Pulau Tidung, Silat Mandar has been transmitted across generations within families originating from Majene, West Sulawesi.

According to Algifari, a seventh-generation practitioner on Pulau Tidung, the tradition was first developed locally by Masaupi, who learned it directly from his father, H. Abdul Halim, a Mandar descendant from Majene. The art was subsequently passed down and has become a vehicle for younger generations on the island to learn self-defence while strengthening their cultural identity.

Transformation of Performance Function: From Magical-Communal Ritual to Entertainment

In its place of origin in West Sulawesi, Silat Mandar is embedded in communal rituals associated with the life cycle of the community. Both *Pakkottau* and *Pamaccaq* are performed during weddings, feasts, and other customary ceremonies, often accompanied by mantras and movements believed to possess spiritual power.

After migration to the Thousand Islands, the function of Silat Mandar shifted significantly. While the original tradition emphasised ritual and combative aspects, the practice on Pulau Tidung has increasingly focused on performance and character education. Algifari explained that Silat Mandar has been modified "sedemikian rupa" (in such a way) through the establishment of a cultural studio named *Seribu Ceria*.

This transformation is evident in the development of techniques. Whereas the original tradition consists of 12 *jurus* with 30–35 *isi* and 5 *langkah*, Masaupi created *prasmen*- a combination of steps, techniques, and sequences specifically for attractions and competitions. These innovations were introduced to adapt Silat Mandar to the demands of modern entertainment, particularly in festivals and tourism performances.

Recontextualisation of Oral and Performative Traditions

Recontextualisation also occurred in the oral dimension of Silat Mandar. Mantras that were originally recited before combat or ritual performances have shifted in function to become part of cultural narratives transmitted to younger generations. Algifari noted that there are "tambahan dari batiniahnya" (additional inner or spiritual elements) that must be passed on.

In performance contexts, Silat Mandar on Pulau Tidung is frequently combined with the Betawi tradition of *palang pintu*, which involves pantun exchanges followed by silat demonstrations accompanied by marawis or ketimpring music. This collaboration represents a creative adaptation that enables Silat Mandar to interact with the local cultural environment of the Thousand Islands, which has been influenced by Betawi traditions.

Notably, Algifari emphasised that the core techniques remain "masih asli dari kemurniannya" (still original in their purity) and have been transmitted continuously within Mandar families. This indicates that the transformations have not eroded the essence of the tradition but have instead enhanced its resilience in the face of modernisation.

Intrinsic Values as Collective Memory of the Diaspora

For the community of Pulau Tidung, Silat Mandar is not merely an ancestral heritage to be preserved; it has become integrated into their sense of identity. Algifari stated that the practice provides "**bekal hidup untuk mengolah dan mengembangkan pulau kami sebagai anak-anak Pulo**" (provisions for life to manage and develop our island as children of the island). This statement underscores the role of Silat Mandar as collective memory that affirms the cultural existence of the Mandar people in a migrant setting.

Intrinsic values such as discipline, courage, responsibility, respect for others, and love for local culture remain relevant to the character formation of the younger generation. Recent research by a team from Universitas Negeri Jakarta (2026) further indicates that Silat Mandar in the Thousand Islands contains noble values that can be integrated into culture- and technology-based learning.

Adaptive Strategies in Extending Tradition

The transformation of Silat Mandar from West Sulawesi to the Thousand Islands can be understood as an adaptive strategy for extending tradition across geographical and temporal boundaries. Rather than representing cultural shallowing, the process demonstrates the capacity of the tradition to negotiate with new contexts without losing its core.

Several adaptive strategies were identified: (1) I**nstitutional development**: The establishment of the *Seribu Ceria* studio as a platform for the preservation and

development of Silat Mandar; (2) **Innovation in performance forms**: The creation of *prasmen* and collaboration with *palang pintu* to increase the appeal of performances.; (3) **Use of digital technology**: The development of Virtual Reality-based teaching materials to document and transmit Silat Mandar to digital-native generations; (4) **Integration with tourism**: The utilisation of Silat Mandar as a cultural tourism attraction in the Thousand Islands.

These strategies illustrate how Silat Mandar has been actively reshaped to remain meaningful and viable in an urban island diaspora setting.

Table1. History graphical Transformation of Silat Mandar from West Sulawesi to the Thousand Islands

Sulawesi	Diaspora Context (Thousand Islands)	Form of Transformation and Adaptive Strategy	Meaning
Primary Function	Magical-communal ritual and maritime identity marker (performed in life-cycle ceremonies such as weddings and communal feasts)	Entertainment, character education, and reinforcement of diaspora solidarity	Shift from ritual function toward performative and educational functions
Movement Forms	Pakkottau (combative/duelling style) and Pamaccaq (softer, dance-like style); traditionally 12 jurus, 30–35 isi, and 5 langkah	Development of prasmen (hybrid sequences combining steps, techniques, and movements) designed for attractions and competitions	Innovation of forms to meet the demands of modern entertainment, festivals, and tourism
Oral Elements & Mantras	Mantras recited before combat or ritual performances, believed to possess spiritual power	Mantras recontextualised as cultural narratives transmitted to younger generations ("tambahan dari batiniahnya")	Recontextualisation from magical function to educational and collective-memory function
Musical Accompaniment	Distinctive Mandar drum rhythms	Collaboration with Betawi marawis or ketimpring music, especially in palang pintu performances	Intercultural negotiation with local Betawi performance traditions
Transmiss-ion	Family- and community-based transmission within Mandar society (Majene)	Continued within Mandar families on Pulau Tidung (Masaupi → Algifari, seventh generation), supported by the Seribu Ceria cultural studio	Institutionalisation through a dedicated studio while preserving the purity of core techniques
Intrinsic Values	Discipline, courage, and strong maritime identity	Discipline, courage, responsibility, respect, and love for local culture, described as "provisions for life" for "anak-anak Pulo"	Values sustained as collective memory and a resource for dual identity (Mandar descendant + islander)
Media & Context	Communal performances embedded in customary rituals	Festivals, tourism attractions, palang pintu collaborations, and Virtual Reality-based teaching materials	Integration with tourism and digital technology

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the transformation of Silat Mandar in the Thousand Islands is not a process of cultural erosion but a deliberate form of adaptive historiography. In its original context in West Sulawesi, Silat Mandar operates within a relatively stable ritual and communal framework. In the diaspora setting of Pulau Tidung, however, the tradition has been reconfigured to respond to new social, spatial, and economic conditions (Rahman et al., 2022; Attas et al., 2025).

This reconfiguration aligns with broader patterns observed in maritime diaspora communities, where cultural practices are selectively maintained, modified, and re-signified to sustain group identity across generations (Mahira et al., 2023). The shift in performance function, from magical-communal ritual toward entertainment and character education, reflects the practical constraints and opportunities of an island urban environment. The creation of *prasmen* and the collaboration with Betawi *palang pintu* demonstrate how Silat Mandar has been opened to intercultural negotiation without fully relinquishing its genealogical authority (Reza et al., 2024).

Practitioners such as Algifari and Masaupi continue to emphasise the purity of core techniques and the importance of family-based transmission. This dual movement innovation in form alongside insistence on authenticity-suggests that the community is actively managing the boundary between change and continuity.

Equally significant is the role of Silat Mandar as collective memory. Rather than functioning solely as a martial or ritual practice, it has become a medium through which younger generations articulate their belonging both as Mandar descendants and as "anak-anak Pulo." This dual identification illustrates how intangible cultural heritage can serve as a resource for place-making in a migrant context. The intrinsic values of discipline, courage, and cultural pride are not merely preserved; they are reactivated to address contemporary concerns of island development, youth identity, and cultural visibility (Alexander et al., 2013).

The adaptive strategies identified in this study institutionalisation through the *Seribu Ceria* studio, performance innovation, digital documentation via Virtual Reality, and integration with tourism further highlight the agency of the diaspora community (Attas, 2019). These strategies indicate that the transformation of Silat Mandar is not passive or externally imposed. Instead, it is shaped by local actors who selectively draw on both ancestral knowledge and modern tools to ensure the tradition remains relevant (Bukenya T., 2025; Heru Santosa et al., 2021).

Overall, the case of Silat Mandar in the Thousand Islands contributes to a more nuanced understanding of historiographical transformation in intangible cultural heritage. It shows that migration does not necessarily lead to the dilution of tradition. On the contrary, when communities retain control over transmission and meaning-making, migration can become a condition for the creative extension of cultural practice across time and space.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the historiographical transformation of Silat Mandar from West Sulawesi to the Thousand Islands constitutes a complex and ongoing process of cultural adaptation. The transformation is primarily manifested through a

shift in the function of performance from a magical-communal ritual tied to maritime identity toward a form of entertainment and a medium for reinforcing diaspora solidarity in an urban island setting.

Although certain aspects of the practice have been simplified to meet the demands of modern performance and tourism, the intrinsic values of Silat Mandar have been sustained as collective memory. These values continue to affirm the cultural existence of the Mandar community in their new environment. Far from representing a shallowing of tradition, the changes observed reflect deliberate adaptive strategies that enable the practice to cross geographical and temporal boundaries while retaining its core meaning.

The study recommends systematic efforts to document and safeguard Silat Mandar in the Thousand Islands, particularly through the development of culture- and technology-based teaching materials. Further research is also needed to trace the migration pathways and transformations of Silat Mandar in other diaspora locations beyond the Thousand Islands.

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