

Guardians of the Kitchen: The Role of Maranao Women in Preserving Traditional Culinary Knowledge in Marawi City

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ABSTRACT

Traditional culinary hold significant weight within the cultural heritage of a society because food traditions carry learned information, societal values, and daily habits which are handed down across many years. Many researchers believe that the movement of learned information from elderly individuals to the younger generation is growing fragile among the Maranao people of Marawi City. Traditional culinary knowledge shows the cultural identity, the memory of history, and the shared ideas of the group while traditional culinary knowledge is kept safe through spoken words and physical labor. The current study looks at the working position of Maranao women in keeping traditional culinary knowledge safe. This study also investigates the practices that allow traditional culinary knowledge to move between generations. Guided by Foodways Theory and the concept of Culinary Cultural Heritage, the research employed a qualitative case study approach using participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions with Maranao women involved in traditional food preparation. Although these factors offer people difficulties due to the influence of urbanization and altered lifestyle, as well as displacement after conflicts, old-fashioned culinary knowledge remains preserved due to family knowledge, collaboration in communities, and food-related enterprises run by women. The research highlights the necessity of promoting such local projects that preserve, record, and delegate Maranao food heritage by giving them to future generations.

Keywords: Maranao women, traditional culinary knowledge, intangible cultural heritage, foodways, Marawi City

INTRODUCTION

Inside many houses within Marawi City, the preservation of cultural traditions happens quietly every single day. While an elder female relative crushes ginger and chili inside a stone tool, a younger girl observes her from the entrance because the girl learns the methods, the narratives, the amounts, and the holy significance that comes with each food item. Study claims that no cooking instructions are written down by the people. Individuals do not keep records of any measurements. The traditional culinary knowledge is moved from hand to hand and from taste to taste between different age groups through memory. This research analyzes the role of Maranao women as the main guardians of traditional culinary. Maranao women help the group identity, the strength of the people, and the non-physical heritage stay alive through their daily work in the cooking area even though the city changes because of conflict and new developments.

For many hundreds of years, the Maranao, who are called the "people of the lake", stayed in the Lake Lanao basin and formulated a very unique local eating tradition for the Philippines. It has been observed that the Maranao cooking style uses a lot of turmeric (*kalawag*), coconut milk, and the very common condiment *palapa*, which is a slow-cooked mixture constructed from *sakurab* (white scallions), ginger, chili, and sometimes toasted coconut (Ortil, 2020). Different special meals for the Maranao include *piaparan* (chicken or fish simmered in coconut milk with *palapa*), *rendang* (spiced beef or carabao meat slow-cooked in coconut milk), *inaloban a isda* (grilled fish simmered in a rich, spicy, and creamy coconut milk sauce), *kyuning* (turmeric rice), and the complex *mamis* (sweet desserts) that are positioned at the top of important feast events (Gania-Pangandaman, 1990; Minodar & Bangcola, 2025). The Maranao social life is carried out through these food items because these dishes are more than just something to eat. Study claims that the *pagana*, which is a formal ritual for showing welcome

where food is put on brass trays (*tabak*) and served to guests who sit on a high platform (*panggao*), demonstrates the codes of being kind, the social order, and family ties that make the Maranao identity (Unte, n.d.; PhilAIR, 2020). All transitions of life between birth and marriages and after death, between arrival home on the *Hajj* and the two *Eids* are all indicated by the food that bind all the gatherings.

Its unique and precarious nature is due to the fact that the transmission of this culinary knowledge is unique. No written recipes or standardized measures, no thermometers or timers. Mastery is all about embodied learning: the cook can know by the hue of the toasted coconut, the scent of the simmering curry and the touch of the moving spoon against the pot. A daughter does not get the recipe of palapa on a card but during a multiplicity of repetitions standing with her mother until the balance of heatness, sweetness, and earthliness is visually ingrained in the muscles and palate (Gania-Pangandaman, 1990; Magompara, 2016). In their research on the preparation of Meranaw *mamis*, Minodar and Bangcola (2025) established that the preparation techniques “have been transmitted from generation to generation” with only the family apprenticeship procedure without any written record. This dependence on oral and embodied transmission makes women the focus of preserving heritage: they are practitioners, teachers and living archives at the same time.

The field of scholarship of food, gender, and cultural preservation has firmly established that women are the major culinary continuity agents in most of the societies. By using the traditional cooking attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control as an example of the application of the theory of planned behavior to the rural women in Taiwan, Lee, Chen, Tsui, and Chiang (2023) have discovered that the intention to maintain food preparation methods at their new generation is significantly influenced by the attitudes toward traditional cooking, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Fikri, Rahman, and Noh (2021), examining Chetti (Peranakan Indian) community in Melaka, Malaysia, recorded that women-daughter relationship was the main path of traditional food knowledge, but younger generations demonstrated a decreased practical skills despite possessing theoretical knowledge about heritage dishes. In a systematic review of world literature, Ramirez-Santos, Ravera, Rivera-Ferre, and Calvet-Nogues (2023) indicated that women and their knowledge related to food processing, food preservation, and cooking is continued to be marginalized in policy frameworks and that the loss of intangible heritage is rapidly augmented. In the Philippines, Mercado and Zerrudo (2018) came up with a safeguarding methodology that applied the case of lomi in Lipa City to theorize foods heritage, whereas Santarita (2022) suggested a Trinitas framework of ethnicity, environment, and experience to theorize food heritage in Southeast Asia. The most reliably relevant to the given inquiry, research conducted at Mindanao State University has addressed certain aspects of Maranao gastronomic culture: Solaiman (2016) demonstrated that there are four types of food that constitute the identity of their ontology; Magompara (2016) observed that although the technical aspects of cooking remain intact, the ritual beliefs under modernization do not hold up; and Minodar and Bangcola (2025) discovered that *mamis* delicacies are well-known but that the system of oral transmission has its structural threat.

In spite of this supposition, there is still the gap. Current scholarship on food has addressed single dishes or single rituals *palapa*, *mamis*, *pagana* but has not strictly studied how women are the critical agent in the structure of the knowledge of cooking and in socializing that knowledge. What is known is recorded in literature; there is no teaching about how to impart it or about who imparts the knowledge, and it is not told what can destroy the relationship between the teacher and the learner. More importantly, no research has looked at how the 2017 Marawi Siege affected the passing of culinary knowledge. It was a five-month military conflict that displaced more than 350,000 people, burned thousands of houses, and severed the generational traditions, whereby embodied cooking knowledge is taught by elder to younger. However, a post-siege culinary venture Palapalicious (UNHCR Philippines, 2018) and the Brave Women People’s Organization of Malimono (Bangsamoro Development Agency, 2024) that made traditional food production a means to economic recovery and cultural reaffirmation were also launched by women. There is no exploration of the relationship that exists between gender, knowledge on culinary, displacement in conflict or preserving heritage.

Objective of the Study

This study addresses that gap through four objectives:

- (1) to identify the specific mechanisms by which Maranao women in Marawi City transmit traditional culinary knowledge across generations;

- (2) to analyze the cultural, social, and spiritual values encoded in Maranao food practices and the role of women in sustaining these meanings;
- (3) to examine the challenges posed by urbanization, the 2017 siege, and generational change to the continuity of culinary knowledge; and
- (4) to assess the potential of women-led culinary enterprises as sites of heritage preservation and community resilience.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this work is threefold:

- **Theoretical Contribution:** It contributes to the knowledge of women domestic labor as heritage work, which interferes with the dichotomy of productive and reproductive work that has made knowledge in the kitchen mostly invisible in the discourses of heritage.
- **Empirical Contribution:** It reports on the documentation of intangible culinary practices in a Muslim Filipino community in the process of post-conflict reconstruction that adds to the current underdeveloped literature on the knowledge production of food in Mindanao with gendered aspects.
- **Practical Contribution:** The results may be used to inform protection efforts of local government units, the Mindanao State University system, and cultural institutions in the need to provide support to the women who perpetuate the Maranao food traditions.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Theoretical Frameworks: Foodways and Culinary Cultural Heritage

Research on the nature and study of traditional culinary knowledge and transmission is conducted at the junction of two theoretical areas of interest that are complementary: the Foodways Theory and the paradigm of Culinary Cultural Heritage. In her articulation of the Foodways Theory, Douglas (1984) describes food as a communication system, where culinary practices represent social hierarchy, structures, and cosmological beliefs coded within the food system. Douglas suggested that a menu, a cook, and eating styles create a kind of a code, which communicates the pattern of inclusiveness and exclusiveness, closeness and hostility, the limits and the dynamics of the social communities and the time cycles of the societal existence. In this context, a meal is not just an assortment of food; it is an assertion of membership, and of sometimes when and how the world is arranged. The contemporary paper applies this prism in elucidating the culinary practice of Maranao, not as the recipes, but rather as a grammar of social relations in which women hold the grammatical centre-stage.

To enrich this premise, Henderson (2009) proposed the framework of Culinary Cultural Heritage, with the food taking on the role of a vibrantly charged vehicle of group memory and ethnic identity. Henderson stressed the constantly changing nature of culinary heritage; it is meant to be continually rethought in practice, without losing a fundamental repertoire of ingredients, methods, and meanings that grounds the sense of identity of a community. This dualism of remaining the same but also changing location transformation by reinvention is especially true in post-conflict areas such as Marawi City where practice routine has been disrupted by displacement, yet in the spaces of new ways of life such as food businesses operated by women, there is a reperformance of heritage. Combined, the frameworks offer the analytical means by which the symbolic content of the Maranao culinary traditions (and the processes by which such traditions are maintained, changed, or modified across generations).

Women as Custodians of Traditional Culinary Knowledge

The accumulating literature on cross-cultural analysis has revealed that women are the main perpetrators of culinary traditions, but such work continues to be systematically depreciated in the heritage discourse. In their global systematic review, Ramirez-Santos, Ravera, Rivera-Ferre, and Calvet-Nogues (2023) established that intangible food processing, preservation, and cooking knowledge of women has always been marginal in policy frameworks, contributing increased destruction on intangible heritage. This sidelining is contradictory: women are simultaneously the main source of and educators of tacit knowledge of food traditions and the most elusive participants in the heritage protection programs.

Using the theory of planned behavior to predict strategies toward rural women in Taiwan, Lee, Chen, Tsui, and Chiang (2023) discovered that attitude towards the methods of traditional cooking, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control are all significant predictors of the intention to maintain the cooking methods across generations, and that the agency of women is a determining factor in the preservation of culinary knowledge. Likewise, Perrey (2017), in an ethnographic account of the Chinantla region in Oaxaca, Mexico, reported the manner in which the traditional culinary knowledge (TCK) and agrobiodiversity in the area is altered by the introduction of industrial foods, the building of highways, and the interventions of nutrition programs and maintained that TCK can serve as the key indicator of food sovereignty and the fair representation of women of food systems.

Mother-daughter dyad becomes the most common transmission route in various contexts across cultures. A study by Fikri, Rahman, and Noh (2021) on the Chetti (Peranakan Indian) community in Melaka, Malaysia, revealed that traditional food knowledge (TFK) is passed on in the mother daughter relationship, where younger individuals retain conceptual idea on the traditional foods, but displaying decreasing practical skills. Considering Indian immigrant women in Southern California, Joseph and Voeks (2021) discovered that herbs and spices information is transmitted vertically through mothers and grandmothers to their daughters, and that it persists even decades of living in the diaspora. Sibulan et al. (2026) recorded in the Philippines that the Palawin people in Brooke's Point, Palawan, that food preparations contribute to perpetrating intergenerational knowledge via observation and oral tradition with women having the focus among the Palawin.

Research by Hazareesingh (2022), who reviewed the UNESCO paradigm of food as intangible cultural heritage, concluded that dominant modes of heritage governance reduce women producers and voices and provided an example of how women colocalize sustainable food systems of millet in the southern Indian context to show why women are so essential in preserving food heritage ecosystem. Examining the representation politics of Zapotec female cooks in Oaxaca, Mexico, Hryciuk (2019), found that female cooks (cocineras) bypass the campaigns by the government to repackage indigenous cuisine to the tourism market, many times at the cost of disowning their own agency in the process. All these research works come in one central finding: the culinary knowledge held by women is the foundation of food heritage, but it has never been institutionally recognized, and it is this lack that the current study fulfills by making the account of the Maranao women about their knowledge and practice itself the center stage.

Indigenous Food Systems and Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Philippines

Philippines has a rich and diverse food culture that has become an object of growing scholarly study and analysis in the framework of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) record keeping. The Heritage Documentation Approach applied by Mercado and Andalecio (2020) recorded *101 kinds of pancit* in eight areas on the island of Luzon, exhibiting how a Filipino culinary tradition is formed through regionalism, indigenizing, and cultural meaning. In a bibliometric study of Philippine condiments (sawsawan), Aster et al. (2023) found 56 sources with 58 authors, and 4 countries in the search and it is remarkable how full and yet poorly organized Filipino culinary literature is. In her semiotics, Mangompit (2024) revealed that the food choices are positive contributors as signifiers of family bonding, long life, health, and affection, and manifested family tradition as older generations of the family handed recipes to younger ones.

This is reflected at the level of methodology with Besmonte (2022) conducting a cultural mapping study of Tabaco City, establishing the advanced age of ICH practitioners, the growing disinterest among young people, and foreign cultural influences as a threat to preserving the heritage; he also reported that ICH practitioners maintain their traditions by teaching their native cuisines and traditional crafts to new generations. Mercado and Zerrudo (2018) applied a safeguarding approach to the Philippine culinary heritage by using the *lomi* in Lipa City as a case study, which suggests a documentation model, which can be scaled to other local cuisines. The ethnoscientific approach applied by Tupas (2021) in Ajuy, Iloilo determined nine concepts of science in the local dishes and delicacies since traditional methods of cooking, and preservation practices and ingredient selection were considered systematic indigenous knowledge. In a study examining the inclusion of indigenous cooking in the Philippine secondary school curriculum in the Cordillera region, Baniaga (2026) determined that teachers act as cultural custodians who creatively leverage traditional knowledge to the formal education system despite with little institutional assistance.

Swiderska et al. (2022) in a study involving Indigenous communities in Kenya, India, and China, reported that Indigenous food system supports biodiversity based on cosmovision agroecological practices of Indigenous cultural values and necessitated decolonial action-research to reverse the fast disappearance of food-related biocultural heritage. This international discovery is echoed in the Philippine situation, where Mindanao with its various ethnolinguistic communities and each having a unique food culture is underrepresented in both national and global heritage studies.

Maranao Culinary Heritage: Ingredients, Dishes, and Cultural Meanings

The Maranao have one of the most distinctive local cuisines in the Philippines which is determined by geography as the “people of the lake” and Islamic cultural system that regulates Maranao social life. The basis of this cuisine is the three cosmic ingredients of the Maranao community, including *sakurab* (white scallion), *kalawag* (turmeric), and coconut, which are repeated throughout the Maranao food repertoire. The phytochemical analysis of *Allium ampeloprasum* white variety (sibujing), a used plant as a spice by Marawi City Maranao Muslims revealed the presence of alkaloids, saponins, flavonoids, and steroids (Añides et al., 2020) that have antioxidant and antimicrobial effects showing the convergence of food-and-medicine knowledge between culinary and medicinal application.

Palapa, or *sakurab*, ginger, chili, toasted coconut, slow-cooked condiment; the most iconic Maranao food item that will accompany almost every meal. Ortil was one of the scholars who recorded *palapa* as one of the characteristics of Maranao food, as he observed that this is readily found in the homes of Marawi City 20. Delicacies such as a must have dish in coconut milk that has been slow-cooked known as *piaparan* (chicken/fish) with *palapa*, *rendang* (meat in coconut milk) slow-cooked, *Inaloban a isda* (grilled fish in spicy coconut sauce), *kyuning* (turmeric rice), and elaborate sweet sweets called *mamis*.

In a research that is directly pertinent to the current investigation, Minodar and Bangcola (2025) reviewed how *mamis* delicacies help to preserve Meranaw identity. Based on Foodways Theory (Douglas, 1984) and Culinary Cultural Heritage (Henderson, 2009), their research discovered that *mamis* is part of every major Meranaw event - engagements, merrymaking, *Hajj* homecomings, and the two Eids - and is usually eaten at the authentic *pagana*, the formal hospitality ritual in which food is served on brass trays (*tabak*). More to the point, they verified that preparation techniques of *mamis* “have been passed down since the generations” without any formal system of documentation and preservation, that is, solely by family apprenticeship.

In a research study conducted at the Mindanao State University, Solaiman (2016) discovered four different categories of foods that constitute the Meranaw ontological identity, proving that the Maranao food is not merely taxonomically defined, but it is based on rather more profound cosmological categories. Magompara (2016) recorded that although technical cooking activities within the Maranao continue to spans generations, related ritual beliefs, as the spiritual meanings and taboos that attended the preparation of food have worn out as they succumbed to modernization pressures, a trend of technical continuation and ritual disaggregation that are characteristic of numerous indigenous food systems experiencing thwarted social change. One of the first systematic descriptions of Maranao culinary traditions was provided by Gania-Pangandaman (1990), according to which the centrality of embodied learning where daughters acquire the knowledge via observation and repetitive learning, as opposed to written instruction, was described.

Special theoretical interest should be given to the *pagana* ritual. This impressed hospitality custom, whereby food is offered on the brass trays and the food offered to those guests sitting on a raised platform (*panggao*) refers to the crux of Maranao values of generosity (*maratabat*), deference, and kinship. The *pagana* is not merely the meal, it is a display of the social order, where the table setting, the order of delivery (what is served first, then second, last), and even the food content and quality convey the social status of the host family, as well as the honor granted to the guest. In a cultural-linguistic study of Meranaw folktales, Acmed-Ismael (2021) noted that the cultural conceptualization of Meranaw thought revolves around event schema of courtship, marriage, thanksgiving (*kakhandori*) and seasonal festivals (*kalilang/kariyala*), where food is the material medium of these schemas.

Mechanisms and Challenges of Intergenerational Knowledge Transmission

It is not only unique but also vulnerable, due to the mode, in which the Maranao culinary knowledge is passed, solely by word, not by the means of written recipes or systematic measurements. The knowledge hinges on what could be called sensorily embedded knowledge: the cook knows that the dish is ready when the coconut turns brown, when the curry smells and when the stirring spoon bangs against the pot. This type of knowledge transfer is the same as Fikri et al. (2021) defined in the Chetti case: a process where information is transmitted orally and through demonstration and that does not have a written account of its transmission.

The instability of oral systems of transmissions is a well-known situation in various cultures. In a review of climate-related natural disasters and food-related ICH, Dembedza et al. (2022) found six food domains as intangible cultural heritage namely food traditions and practices, food production and processing, food culture, eating and social activities, cooking methods, and geographical labels, and proposed that disturbances in any of them would impact the whole knowledge system, and that such disruption was difficult to undo when the chain of intergenerational transmission was broken. Researching on the erosion of the Mediterranean diet in Apulia, Italy, by Bottalico et al. (2016) pointed out as primary factors that influenced culinary heritage degradation urbanization, additionally, the role of women, and the organisation of work, finding that with increasing incomes and urbanization, food habits were more and more westernised with strong cultural specifics peculiar to the Mediterranean region 25. Such conclusions are in line with the strains on the Maranao diasporic culinary practices, where urbanization, industrialization of food and the reorganization of household structure in the wake of deportation are all influencing the conditions of the transmission of embodied knowledge between old and new generations.

Ramirez-Santos et al. (2023) also showed that knowledge women have about food is always relegated in policy-making frameworks, such that despite women being assigned the major role of passing this knowledge, they are not supported in such efforts. This policy area has particular implications in areas where transmission solely occurs orally- since there is no documentation, a break in the line of transmission results in the loss of the knowledge.

Conflict, Displacement, and Culinary Heritage: The Marawi Siege Context

A five-month war between Philippine security forces and ISIS-linked militants in the 2017 Marawi Siege, displaced more than 350,000 of the population, left thousands of houses in ruins and systematically destroyed the cultural center of the city. The effects on the Maranao food systems, household arrangement and intergenerational practices are yet to be realised.

In a gender-based needs assessment of Maranao IDPs in Iligan City carried out in March-July 2019, Ponce and Estrada (2026) noted that within the scope of displaced families, extreme poverty, decreased food consumption, and separation of children and their families were documented. The authors discovered that the IDPs, irrespective of their gender and age, typically require shelter, livelihood support, food, and health care to recover and, therefore, that sustainable, culture-sensitive intervention strategies are required. Based on the intensive interviews and focus group discussions with survivors and duty-bearers, Veloso (2022) acknowledged the increased risks of gender-based violence in women and girls in displacement and analyzed the connection between the equality of racial, ethnic, and gender and social class inequality and vulnerability of IDP. Dimaampao found that most of the internally displaced individuals of the Marawi Siege are women, are married, unemployed, have low socioeconomic classes, and have an average monthly income of PHP 4,500 28 (2025). In a study on psychosocial status of transitional shelters IDPs in Sagonsohan, Lontua et al. (2026) identified that 68% of the participants were female with 56% engaging in household incomes of less than PHP 5,000, an additional manifestation of the gendered economic vulnerability of the displaced Maranao populations 29.

The domestic spaces upon culinary knowledge transmission were broken by the siege. As grandmothers and mothers lost children in evacuation, as kitchens were destroyed, and as day-to-day routines of cooking, and eating were supplanted by the need to rely on relief food, the inscribed learning cycle, watch, repeat, master, was disrupted. However, the aftermath of the siege was also characterized by the surfacing of women-owned food companies, which did not only make traditional food production a means of economic restoration and

reestablishment, but also by reaffirming cultural identities. With the help of UNHCR Philippines (2018), the Palapalicious project helped displaced Maranao women to make and sell palapa as a means of livelihood, transforming a household condiment into a source of economic life and heritage. In the same way, Brave Women People's Organization of Malimono reported by Bangsamoro Development Agency (2024) had organized women as a food production cooperative which used traditional Maranao recipes as its focus. Those businesses symbolize a twofold trend: to commodify the culinary heritage as an economic activity and, at the same time, to identity with the cultural theory that the food practice brings.

Synthesis and Identification of the Research Gap

With the literature examined above come some firm ground foundations of the present study. Foodways Theory (Douglas, 1984) and Culinary Cultural Heritage (Henderson, 2009) offer solid analytical tools that can be used to study food as social meaning system and medium of collective identity. It is always found that women are the mainstay bearers of traditional culinary knowledge in many societies regardless of geography, and that women-to-daughter is the main channel of transmission. Philippine culinary heritage studies have elaborated methodological means of documentation (Mercado & Andalecio, 2020; Besmonte, 2022), and have started to consider the study of particular regional cuisines. The anthropology of the Maranao food culture has recorded major ingredients and dishes (Ortil, 2020), cosmological types of Maranao food (Solaiman, 2016), meaning of rituals in food practices (Magompara, 2016), and significance of particular delicacies such as *mamis* to uphold identity (Minodar & Bangcola, 2025). The issue of humanitarian and gendered effects of displacement has been properly studied within the context of the Marawi Siege (Ponce & Estrada, 2026; Veloso, 2022; Dimaampao, 2025).

In spite of such contributions, there exists a huge gap at the intersection of such literatures. The literature has concentrated on single meals or single ceremonies —*palapa*, *mamis*, *pagana* —but there has been an absence of a systematic study of women as the major vehicle by which the culinary knowledge is possessed and passed on. What is known is written down in the literature; no one knows the way it is transmitted, how it is imparted to or how danger to the teacher-learner relationship ensues. More importantly, the effect of the 2017 Marawi Siege on the continuation of culinary knowledge as one of the cultural processes has not been yet studied. The displacement studies put an emphasis on the shelter, livelihood, food security and gender-based violence but none of them investigated how the intergenerational routine rupture, the separation between grandmothers and granddaughters, the dismantling of kitchen, and the disruption of daily cooking, has influenced the transfer of embodied cooking knowledge. The meeting of gender, cooking knowledge, displacement of conflict and cultural heritage is a terra incognita. The current research fills this gap by focusing on the independent descriptions of the culinary knowledge by Maranao women, how they pass it on, obstacles they encounter in the post-siege scenario, and the strategies they use to maintain their food heritage.

METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research design was used in this study to study the position of the Maranao women in traditional culinary knowledge in Marawi City. Since oral traditions, observation, and everyday practice are significant in passing culinary knowledge to the next generation, a qualitative design was considered as the most suitable way of investigating the experiences, views, and cultural connotations related to the preparation of foods and the imparting of food knowledge.

Data Collection

The primary and secondary sources were used to collect data. Primary data were collected by taking the field to selected communities in the Marawi City where traditional culinary practices are still being practiced. The secondary data were based on academic journals, books, theses and ethnography and other pertinent literature on the Maranao culture, food heritage and indigenous knowledge systems.

Fieldwork

Fieldwork was conducted in communities known for maintaining strong culinary traditions. The study utilized the following methods:

a. Participant Observation

The research was conducted through participant observation where food preparation was done in Maranao families and community events. Cooking methods, types of ingredients and food-serving activities along with role of family members in making of traditional foods like palapa, piaparan, randang and other foods with cultural significance were paid attention.

b. Semi-Structured Interviews

The Maranao women who had been declared by their communities as owners of traditional culinary practices were semi-structured interviewed. The focus of the interviews was on the transmission of the cooking practice, cultural values surrounding food, the continuity of culinary practice and adaptation to social and cultural changes.

c. Focus Group Discussions

The discussions based on the focus group were held with the women who were involved in the preparation of traditional foods and community based cooking. It was during these talks that we learnt some past experiences or experience that we shared together and the practices and perspectives of an organization on how the Maranao culinary heritage can be carried on.

Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis

Interpretations of interview transcripts, observation notes and discussion records were analyzed through thematic analysis. The Overarching themes in the knowledge transmission, cultural identity, heritage preservation, adaptation, and resilience domains were identified and grouped to help in interpreting the data.

Content Analysis

Recipes, food-related stories and cultural practices related to the Maranao cuisine were analyzed using content analysis. The focus was made on how the culinary knowledge expresses the social values, the memory of the past, the religious beliefs, and the community identity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Categories of Maranao Culinary Knowledge

The food expertise of the Maranao in the Marawi City can be divided into various categories according to theme and culinary field which capture various facets of cultural life. According to the information provided by informants and the practices observed to date, the Maranao culinary knowledge can be structured in the following way:

- i. *Palapa* (condiment) – the foundational flavor base of Maranao cuisine
- ii. *Piaparan* (coconut-based stew) – the signature cooking technique
- iii. *Randang* (slow-cooked meat in coconut milk) -- festive prestige dish
- iv. *Mamis* (sweet desserts) – ritual sweets served at *pagana*
- v. *Kyuning* (turmeric rice) – ceremonial yellow rice
- vi. *Inaloban a isda* (grilled fish in spicy coconut sauce) — a traditional seafood dish highlighting grilling and coconut-based cooking
- vii. *Browing* (rice-based snacks) – daily and festive treats
- viii. *Pagana* (food serving traditions) – the etiquette and cosmology of hospitality

The real story and picture of Maranao society are revealed through its culinary traditions, reflecting the community's history, social structure, religious values, and artistic sensibilities. The food knowledge that the Maranao women have preserved can be studied looking at oral tradition, cultural identity, historical

documentation, moral instruction, artistic expression, language preservation and social unity. In the following sections, such exploration is presented.

Oral Tradition

The transmission of Maranao culinary knowledge is through oral tradition. Maranao Women are not paid attention to written recipes, standard measurements, or thermometers like the Western cooking culture, but they continue to depend solely on oral instructions, embodied demonstration, and learning through their senses. A daughter is not taught to make *palapa* using a recipe card, but is taught through the side of the mother or grandmother to watch the color of the toast coconut, to touch the feel of the pounded ginger and to taste the mixture at each point till the portions of hotness, sweetness, and earthiness are recorded in the palate.

This is what one of the informants of the Palapalicious group said: *"We have recipes that have been handed down from our ancestors. I learned how to cook palapa because I observed my grandmother cook it, then my mother, then my auntie"* (Sanai, personal communication, 2026). This layered observation across multiple generations ensures that variations are preserved and that knowledge is not lost even when one elder passes away.

The oral tradition extends beyond technique. Stories accompany each dish: *the legend of the young Maranao girl (Ule) who had nothing to feed her family but sakurab, ginger, and chili, and thus created the first palapa; the belief that palapa's strong spices ward off malevolent spirits (babal) during wakes; the instruction that turmeric (kalawag) tea heals childhood coughs and fevers*. These stories are passed on with the cooking methods, and the knowledge of cooking is embedded in a broader oral history of the community.

The food and hospitality rituals are mentioned infrequently in the Darangen epic of the Maranao people, but declared by UNESCO as one of the Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity 2005, which goes to show how strongly culinary traditions are bound up in the oral literature of the Maranao. In much the same way that the epic is recited through specific onor (chanters), culinary knowledge is recited and conserved by women who play the same role as the knowledge bearers in the house realm.

Cultural Identity of the Community

One of the strongest identifiers of Maranao identity is food. The Yellow color of kalawag (turmeric), the spiciness of labuyo chili, and the distinct smell of toasted coconut and *sakurab* are some of the prominent features of a Maranao meal that one can instantly identify. These flavor profiles are present in every Maranao family, both in the city of Marawi and in the diaspora as a physical reminder to the homeland and the heritage.

Particularly, the condiment palapa has been referred to as the Maranao version of kimchi in Korean culture, which is found everywhere and is a daily dish, the defining element that makes the cuisine special and does not resemble any other (Malig, 2019). One of the informants highlighted that: *"No Maranao dish is complete without palapa; meals are just not as satisfying without it"* (Sakina, personal communication, 2026). The fact that palapa is almost a ubiquitous part of the Maranao homes even in the farthest lakeside communities and even in urban Manila highlights that palapa has served as a long time marker of ethnic identity.

This culinary identity is the preserve of Maranao women. The recipe of every family differs somewhat: some have more chili, some more ginger, some more toasted coconut, some's is light. These differences are not regarded as deviation but reflectors of family ancestry and ancestry of a region. In instructing her daughter in how to prepare "our family's *palapa*," the woman is passing on not only a recipe but also a claim to a particular point in the greater Maranao kinship system.

Such an identity role is particularly acute in a diasporic environment. Even in cities like Manila, Cagayan de Oro or Iligan, where the Maranao migrated to, the preparation of traditional food is still accompanied by ingredients sourced in the Lanao, where possible, and means to make a the same dish where necessary. The fact that *palapa*, *piaparan*, and *rendang* has been carried over migrant households demonstrates how much the ethnicity is connected with food, and the continuation of the culture is left to the women.

Historical Documentation

Maranao cuisines are a kind of living historical records that serve as records of trading pathways, farming patterns, as well as intercultural interchanges. Coconut milk and turmeric can be used because of centuries of interaction with the maritime Southeast Asian trade networks. Although of Indonesian-Malay descent, the dish *rendang* has been native-adapted in Maranao cuisine as a low-stove level of beef or *carabao* meat simmering in coconut milk, chili, turmeric, lemongrass and indigenous aromatics served at weddings, royal enthronement and Eid. The mobility of people and recipes noticed in the Malay archipelago can be witnessed in our Marawi City.

The importance of sakurab, a type of scallion, which grows well in the cold mountainous areas around Lake Lanao is captured in the centrality of the palapa in the Maranao cuisine. Sakurab farming, and processing is a type of local/indigenous agricultural knowledge that has reinforced the Maranao food practices throughout centuries. The homegrown, organic producing is the focus of the pre-colonial food system with local biodiversity.

In 2017, the Siege of Marawi was a new chapter in this history of culinary. Thousands of Maranao families left their homes and ended up in evacuation centers and transitory shelters where provision of traditional ingredients was wanting. However, women made do: they purchased everything they could in the nearest markets and made where necessary and continued to cook. It is written down in the Maranao gastronomical history and the narrative of *palapa* productions in the way station shelters is a witness that even when they are in turmoil, food traditions do not lose their nature.

One informant recalled the pilgrimage Made at Hajj and how she would take *palapa* and said, "When we went to Hajj, we brought *palapa* to help us adjust to the local food. Unfortunately, we only consumed half of it because *palapa* doesn't contain natural preservatives" (Raisah, personal communication, 2026). This seemingly small act of carrying *palapa* across international borders speaks volumes about its importance as a portable piece of home, a culinary anchor in an unfamiliar environment.

Moral Instruction

The cuisine of Maranao is the means of moral and spiritual education. Inside the kitchen, the *halal* (permissible) and *toyyib* (wholesome) Islamic requirements govern the preparation and consumption of food and women have the role of ensuring these requirements are met in the kitchen. This is not just the choice of halal ingredients but also the ritual purity of the cooking area.

Even the kitchen is revered. According to traditional Maranao beliefs, there are certain behaviors in the kitchen which are discouraged as they are thought to influence the quality of the food and the blessing (*barakah*) of the family. Older women show younger women how to handle the ingredients, not to waste them, to give food to the neighbors, and to cook slowly and thoughtfully. These teachings are presented in direct teachings, proverbs and by way of example.

Formal food is served during *pagana* (formal food service) and will be strictly etiquetted. A minimum of three to four persons of the same gender squat around a *tabak* (brass tray). Visitors are treated on a high table known as *panggao* and certain parts of the fish (head and middle) are only to be served to the high ranking guests whereas the tail can never be served to a high ranking guest. These rules impart the younger generations the principles of hierarchy, respect and hospitality as the main virtues of Maranao social life.

The communal ideals of egalitarianism in the group and interdependency are enhanced by the focus on commensality sharing either food on a communal tray. Children are taught at a very young age that it is not an individual but a community affair to eat. The women, being the planners of meals, are the key instructors of these social values.

Artistic Expression

The Maranao culinary practices is an art form that helps maintain traditional practices, artistic sensibilities and sensory standards of this specific culture. This is particularly shown in the making of *mamis* (sweet desserts). *Dudol* (cooked glutinous rice in coconut milk and sugar such as calamay), *browa* (baked pastry such as mamon),

amik (ground glutinous rice pounded in coconut milk and sugar) and *tiateg* are delicacies. These candies are not food at all, but it is a sort of food art, it requires precision of the procedure, time, and a discerning sense.

Some recipes including the *dudol* preparation entail taking many hours of stirring on 20-40 low-heat to be able to reach the point of thickening and achieving a semi-smooth glossy texture. The cook prefers to apply his sense of touch on the spoon used, the sound of the bubbles and the odour to gauge when it is cooked. The art of these techniques is a point of pride and a measure of culinary skills between mother and daughter.

Presentation of food is also important in the Maranao culture. The yellow rice (*kyuning*) is heaped in cones, the *palapa* rise on little bowls of ceramics and the *tabak* are arranged in a way that is precise like perfection. The Maranao food presentation aesthetic can be linked to the artistic values in general, including *okir* (geometric and floral woodcarving) and *langkit* weaving, whereby balance, symmetry, and geometric detailing were put in high esteem.

Even *palapa* as it is prepared, is a sensory act: pounding in a mortar and pestle of ginger and chili till it turns golden, the painstaking process of toasting the shavings of coconuts until a golden powder is produced, and the blending of all the separate ingredients into one cohesive unit. All these are artistic practices in their meaning and not just the taste of the Maranao culture but the touch and appearance as well.

Language Preservation

Knowledge of culinary is a potent instrument of maintaining the language of the Maranao, especially its set of specialized terms pertaining to food industry, cooking, ingredients and rituals. It is a special language that is handed down orally together with cooking methods and therefore it helps to maintain the younger generations language wise in methods that would have been lost due to displacement or language change.

Key Maranao culinary terms preserved through kitchen practice include:

- i. *Kalawag* – turmeric, the foundational spice and natural dye
- ii. *Sakurab* (also *sibujing*) – white scallions, the defining ingredient of *palapa*
- iii. *Palapa* – the signature condiment made from *sakurab*, ginger, chili, and coconut
- iv. *Piaparan* – the cooking technique of simmering meat or fish in coconut milk with *palapa*
- v. *Papar* – shredded coconut meat, a key ingredient in *piaparan*
- vi. *Mamis* – sweet desserts collectively, and the concept of sweetness in food
- vii. *Dudol* – glutinous rice dessert with coconut milk and sugar
- viii. *Browa* – baked flour-and-egg delicacy
- ix. *Kyuning* – yellow turmeric rice
- x. *Randang* – slow-cooked spicy meat in coconut milk
- xi. *Inaloban a isda* – grilled fish in spicy coconut milk
- xii. *Tabak* – brass food tray used in *pagana*
- xiii. *Panggao* – elevated serving platform for honored guests
- xiv. *Pagana* – the formal act of serving food, and the associated hospitality traditions
- xv. *Kandori* – thanksgiving feast

These words are incorporated into the daily language in the kitchen but also might be foreign to the younger Maranao who have spent time and are in the diaspora or have not been exposed to traditional cooking. The women who still cook traditional food are regarded as alive lexicographers, as they keep this culinary lexicon alive and meaningful. One of the informants mentioned that as she teaches her granddaughters to cook, she concurrently gives them the Maranao names of ingredients and techniques, which serve to strengthen their linguistic roots, in addition to their culinary prowess.

Brings Social Unity

The maranao social cohesion is based on the process of food preparation and sharing. The cooking that women do are the forces that form and maintain relationships that bind families and communities. Large scale food preparation of communal feasts *kandori*, *weddings*, *pagana*, *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha* demands a united effort

of many women which often extends to three or even four generations. The importance of these cooking events is to share experiences, exchange knowledge and recall stories and strengthen social relationships.

At the month of *Ramadan* it is an occasion when women share efforts and devotions in preparing the *iftar* (the evening meal which breaks the fast). Food delivery to neighbors and relatives has been an unalterable practice that fosters community connections. The preparation of *palapa* is usually done in large quantities and handed out to the extended family and jars are passed through homes to homes like gifts and signs of love.

The food practices by women emerged as an important tool of communal healing and rebuilding in the wake of the Marawi Siege. The displaced women in transitional shelters organized cooking groups, sharing their funds and recipes. Created in 2018, the Palapalicious project gathered women around various villages, teaching each other their family recipes of palapa and learning each other's tricks, befriending each other and establishing new relations of friendship and solidarity. According to one interviewee, the methods of cooking palapa vary; this is why we get to know the ideas expressed by the other people in our group (Sanai, personal communication, 2026).

Similarly, in 2022 the Brave Women People organization of Marawi City in Malimono formed women around the production of palapa as a community-building activity and a livelihood. The customary cook-ins, training seminars, and product fairs transformed these women into support groups, that were not confined to single homes, but brought them together, as one community, with one objective.

The events that have become part of life in Maranao, seasonal and life cycle are all associated with food prepared by women. Another Byword of Maranao hospitality that has resisted centuries of colonization, war, and even modernization is the pagana, with its delicate tabak prescriptions and thorough serving rules. In these meetings, the unity is expressed and maintained through the food that is cooked by women.

CONCLUSION

The women of Marawi City, the Maranao, are the main custodians of the traditional food culture, an extension of their role which goes well beyond the practical goal of feeding their families. They safeguard the cultural identity, historical memory, moral values, artistic sensibility and linguistic heritage and social cohesion of the Maranao people by transmitting not only recipes and techniques but also the embodied practice and oral tradition as well as intergenerational teaching of Maranao history.

It is in this study, as compared to the kitchen which seems to avoid the focus of a venue of cultural production, that emerges to be an institution that matters a lot in the preservation of intangible heritage. Students of the Maranao women have preserved their knowledge of cooking without written cook books or organized training of food cooks; they have all stored knowledge in their minds and have perfected their knowledge by practice. This oral culinary tradition has amazingly withstood colonization, armed conflict, displacement, the pressures of modernization and globalization.

Despite the catastrophic nature of the 2017 Marawi Siege, it also demonstrated that Maranao women could be extremely versatile in their culinary skills. Women continued to cook in exile, changed their cooking recipes based on the available food and collected food production which changed traditional food to livelihood and a source of power. Palapa that was once a mere condiment product in the home has been altered to produce both signs of survival within cultural and economic independence.

However, the continuity of the Maranao culinary knowledge as determined in this study also has threats to it. The mentioned displacement of families out of the land where their ancestors used to live, the growing popularity of fast food among the younger generations, degradation of young women being taught how to cook in a traditional manner and the lack of a systemized process of documenting all the information are all threats to this intangible heritage. Unless there is an explicit effort to promote the transfer of knowledge between generations, a rich culinary heritage can wither away.

It has been proposed that local government units, schools such as the Mindanao state university together with the cultural organizations merge together and capture the Maranao culinary practices in multimedia, oral media history projects and community based cook books. Incorporation of Maranao food heritage in school programs

and the youth programs is necessary to ensure the continuation of knowledge between generations. This could be coupled with cultural preservation and economic empowerment where the women cooperatives that engage in traditional food production (Palapalicious) and those that train women in the art of procurement of traditional foods (Brave Women People Organization) can be supported.

By maintaining the culinary arts of the Maranao women, the Maranao retain an important element about their identity. Being part of genes reflects the inescapably powerful narratives of birth and creation underlying the flavor of each dish, as one informant viewed, all caught up in the Color Prism of Philippines and Philippines islands. The cooks, the makers of these stories, are the women of the kitchen, who ensure it is the bringer of the living formula of a strong people of a strong people that each meal that is eaten around the tabak is the bearer.

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