OXFORD JOURNAL
OF STUDENT
SCHOLARSHIP

From Tradition to Transition: Generational Changes in Food Practices and Cultural Identity Among Somali Immigrants in California

Janice Lee
janice2009lee@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper examined the cultural changes that occur among Somali refugees when they are relocated to another country, and the impact of that relocation on food practices and the cultural identities among Somali immigrants. This paper focused on the Somali community in City Heights, San Diego. This paper starts with the treatment of refugees in camps in East Africa, the process of resettlement, adaptation after migration, and finally an examination and contrast of the food preferences between first-generation refugees and their children due to cultural differences in adaptation. My main focus in this paper was to observe the changes among first-generation Somali refugees in food practices due to the unfamiliar grocery environment and lack of the traditional ingredients they are familiar with, and how that can impact their adaptation in California. Through this research, I found that food served as a way for the first generation Somali mothers to maintain their connection to Somalia, while their children's food preferences reflected their upbringing in California. These differences can create a disconnect of the significance of Somali foods between parent and child, although these disconnects vary for each family. Specifically, the mothers had a direct connection to Somalia, so their cultural cuisine serves as a different function of comfort for them compared to their kids, who utilize Somali foods as a way to represent familial connection to their mother.

INTRODUCTION

In 1991, the collapse of the oppressive President Siad Barre regime led to multiple conflicts between nationalist groups with the goal of taking pieces of the Horn of Africa under their own authority (The Organization for World Peace [OWP], 2020). The government's leadership of Somalia to fill the lost role of President Siad Barre disagreed with multiple nationalist groups, who took the role of leading attacks to the Government and military posts, leading to the Somali Civil War (OWP, 2020). Additionally, in 2022, the UN declared that almost half of Somalia would be in a crucial food crisis in the following months due to security issues from the civil war, a long-term drought, and the Al Shabaab restricting international food agencies that could have provided the nutritional support millions in Somalia needed (PBS NewsHour Weekend, 2022). The causes of drought, rising food prices, and structural challenges created a food environment for families that was not secure. This ongoing conflict and lack of resources that began in 1991 created a significant threat to the safety and well-being of the Somali population, resulting in

more than 8 million civilians facing hunger and one million deaths due to the prolonged violence (PBS NewsHour Weekend, 2022) (OWP, 2020). As a result, the danger many civilians faced in Somalia compelled them to seek refuge in safer countries, with refugee camps across Africa housing approximately 1.1 million internally displaced people (IDP) (OWP, 2020).

California has become one of the largest hubs for African refugee resettlement, and the state's largest Somali community is clustered in San Diego (Burks, 2013). As President for an organization called 1Must, which serves as a mentoring and tutoring service for refugee families, I have multiple connections to the Somali community in City Heights, California. Through this role, I was given the opportunity to explore a curiosity regarding the food habits among the Somali population, and how it has affected their adaptation to California culture. I found that through my research, there was a contrast between Somali culture and California culture that is evident through food. In Somalia, markets are smaller, and are based on seasonal harvest. The main products available include coarse grains, oil crops, seasonal fruits, and seasonal vegetables (International Trade Administration [ITA], 2024). Additionally, Somalia is known to have high quality meats and livestock, with a variety of protein including goat, sheep, cattle, and camels (ITA, 2024). Specifically, in refugee camps, personalized markets are more common, and more familiar to Somali citizens that live in refugee camps, which also means that certain vegetables, fruits, and livestock have a limited supply, depending on the success of the agricultural season. In contrast, in California, the grocery environment is much more plentiful and has a larger supply of ingredients and food choices. This also means that the same produce and livestock options are available year-round, no matter the season. However, California grocery markets may not carry the same traditional ingredients Somali refugees are familiar with, which can create a cultural gap when Somali refugees resettle in California.

I will be discussing the important role food plays in a resettled refugee's cultural belonging, including how food serves as a memory, identity, tradition, and cultural belonging. In this paper, I will be analyzing the importance food serves to develop one's identity, and how a disruption of food availability and variation among refugees can affect their cultural belonging and adaptation to a new environment. Additionally, I will analyze the cultural differences between first-generation refugees and their kids who were born in the United States, and how that difference can affect the later generation's understanding and connection to their ethnic roots and Somali culture. Particularly, I will be exploring how Somali food serves two different purposes in one relationship: Somali food serves as the direct connection for parents to their past, while Somalian food serves as a connection to the parents for the children. These points will be covered by the question I will answer by the end of this paper: When moving to California, how do the food practices and cultural identities intertwine and differentiate among Somali immigrants and their children?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Refugee Camps in Somalia and Kenya

Refugee Camps in West Africa, particularly in Kenya, can be described as small communities that are under host authorities and international aid agencies (Opaye, 2005). Similarly, camps in East Africa serve as a temporary home for displaced African members, often seeking shelter in different parts of the world (USA for UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency [USA for UNHCR], 2023).

Food Access and Environment in Refugee Camps

Food shortages and reduced rations are common consequences of overcrowding in refugee camps, contributing to rates of malnutrition (Gooding, Claire, *et. al.,* 2024). To be precise, refugee camps have more than 30 million refugees in Africa who suffer from malnutrition due to lack of resources (Gooding, *et. al.*, 2024). Although improvements have been made over time, these camps remain transitional spaces; given the current global political climate, many refugees may face displacement for years or decades, extending their stay far beyond initial expectations.

Resettlement Process in California

California is the host of many African refugees coming to the United States, due to its affordability and family connections, with refugee communities populated mostly in Los Angeles and San Diego (Burks, 2013). Even though California provides large refugee communities, the resettlement process of education, employment, housing, and cultural uproot can be a great toll on a refugee's identity and cultural belonging. However, incoming refugees are not alone. When coming to their destination, refugees receive financial and social support from their local Resettlement Agency (RA), which helps them settle into schools and jobs and helps refugees adapt to their new environment and culture (Fee, 2022). Refugees get assigned to a local US resettlement agency from the state they applied to, and that particular organization is responsible for the incoming refugee family for at least 3 months (Refugee Council USA [RCUSA], n.d.).

In addition to the support refugees receive from their local RA, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) is another humanitarian use of the executive branch to help resettle refugees in the United States (National Immigration Forum, 2026). The USRAP is also heavily reliant on the Refugee Act of 1980, as it created a legal framework for the program that prides itself on providing early employment and economic self-sufficiency for refugees in the United States (National Immigration Forum, 2026). USRAP is the major federal organization that works with the Department of Homeland Security, Department of Health and Human Services, and other federal and international agencies to create a smoother resettlement process for refugees (USCIS, 2026).

The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program establishes the steps for refugee resettlement. The interview process only requires one adult applicant of the family being considered to be accepted, and once the

refugee has been admitted, they first attend a Cultural Orientation of what to expect when coming to the United States. For transport to the United States, refugees receive an interest-free travel loan to pay for their flight. Once refugees land in the United States, their temporary home is predetermined by their resettlement agency. Post-arrival services provided through federal grants range from 3 months to 5 years, depending on the program each refugee is associated with (RCUSA, n.d.).

These programs also help recent refugees adapt by breaking the language barrier, helping refugees receive a job and medical care. In addition to employment support, host agencies help recent refugees access medical care and insurance before they transition to managing these resources independently. While these programs help financially and socially support refugees, once 3 months pass, these Somali migrants must adapt and navigate American culture, and food plays a major role in their cultural adaptation. This drastic change in social environments makes food a constant, as Somali foods may provide comfort, reminding them of their home and childhood amidst the chaos of adaptation in a new environment.

Cultural Value Food in Immigrant Resettlement

Previous researchers have highlighted that food can act as a source of community, belonging, and identity for people, particularly for those who are far away from their homeland. Emphasized among immigrant populations, food serves as an important symbol of cultural membership, fostering a sense of personal belonging in each ethnic group (Wang, 2026). Food is a direct result of cultural connection, memory, and belonging (Stajcic, 2013). Researcher Michelle Wang studied the food changes and adaptation within an immigrant community located in a higher population of white residents. Wang found that cultural foods helped immigrants connect back to their ethnic roots, while simultaneously creating greater obstacles to navigate a grocery market with foods they are comfortable with. Wang found that food serves to emphasize self-belonging and identity among immigrants, strengthening their cultural connections. Therefore, ethnic foods are not seen as just nutritionally beneficial, rather are much more complex as food holds an individual nuance that separates its significance from other aspects of culture (Lillekroken *et al.*, 2024). In addition to this, findings of cultural food preferences and older age have been linked among the Muslim population—the primary religion among the Somali population is Islam— primarily due to their religious beliefs of following Halaal (Lillekroken *et al.*, 2024). Additionally, the belief that immigrants' home country's ethnic foods were healthier than their host country also contributed to their continuation to prepare and consume the traditional meals they were familiar with (Lillekroken *et al.*, 2024). It's also relevant to understand that first generation immigrant women prioritized eating and the preparation of their cultural foods more importantly because they had significant roles involving their cuisine as wives or mothers (Lillekroken *et al.*, 2024). As a result, food as a whole and taste among first-generation immigrants is not passed down through generations, rather is taught through experiences, intertwining closely with the development of identities (Stajcic, 2013). This also means that food preferences vary between populations for this very reason, and can change between individuals in the same ethnic group due to external consequences like geographical movement.

METHODS

For this research paper, I utilized peer-reviewed articles, journals, and academic papers to answer my research question, and to provide background information on the bigger issue of nutritional deficiencies and differences among Somali immigrants and their children for additional context. I found these sources through Google Scholar and AnthroSource. Additionally, I conducted interviews with a small sample consisting of two mothers and two children. One mother and her two children were from the same family unit, while the second mother was interviewed separately. I created my own set of interview questions relating to the food backgrounds of Somali immigrants in California, and their preferred food choices for both parents and children. During my interviews with Sagal and Imani, the two mothers, I asked open-ended questions regarding their experience within refugee camps, the process of resettlement, their own perceptions on the cultural differences between Somalia and the United States, their perceptions of the food relationship between them and their kids, and what they constitute as wellbeing and nutrition. The interview questions I asked the children focused mainly on their everyday food habits, their familiarity with Somali foods, and their opinions regarding the limitations of their halal diet. Pseudonyms, Sagal and Imani were used instead of the adult participants' actual names; Hana and Amina are used instead of the children's actual names in this paper to protect the privacy of both parent and child interview participants. The reason why I chose to interview within the same family is because I want to be able to identify the cultural gap that occurs between first-generation refugees and their kids, and how food can be the disconnecting factor that eliminates one's roots or the connection to their heritage. The interview responses provided personal accounts that support the academic findings I drew on to reach my conclusion.

To note, the interview portion of this research was limited by its small sample size, consisting of two mothers and two children, with one mother and her two children coming from the same family unit. Therefore, the interview responses represent the experiences and perspectives of this particular family network and cannot be generalized to all Somali immigrants or their children in California. The interviews were used to support published academic research to provide personal accounts and additional context for the findings of this study.

RESULTS

The Challenges of Resettlement

There are many challenges to resettlement. A key example from my interviews was education. As my interviewees highlighted, the education systems and content in the United States curriculum differed greatly from the schools offered in Somalia, as Somalia prioritizes Islamic studies with a smaller focus on academic subjects (Sabrie, 2021). When I asked Imani—a Kenyan mother who immigrated to California when she was 12 in 2004—about her education, she spoke about the vast structural differences she experienced when she moved to California. Imani shared that she was being taught at an elementary level during her middle school years in Kenya. This drastic change in educational expectations made her adaptation much more difficult, as she was not taught English, and the academic level she was being

taught was much more difficult than what she was familiar with. However, once Imani became accustomed to the United States education system, she was able to attend UCSD, since receiving a higher education is much more accessible and available to young adults in the United States. Imani's educational experience in Kenya refugee camps is similar to how Somali education is given to young students, as their educational foundation is built upon Islamic teachings, and due to the continuation of the Somali civil war, the opportunities for public schooling continue to decline (Sabrie, 2021). As a result, many refugees may choose to resettle in countries like the United States so that they can give their kids a better education. Kids attending American schools daily may also help their refugee parents adapt faster, as they will likely be able to speak English and adapt to the food culture at a faster rate.

Beyond the food environment, Imani touches upon the support of her host agency, as they helped her mom obtain employment, regardless of her lack of proficient communication at the time. Most jobs given to recent refugees usually require little to no communication. In Imani's mother's case, she worked as a house cleaner, and all concerns or comments were directed to her host agency. As a result, it was easy for Imani's mom to adapt to the work environment in the United States, while also making income to eventually support her family without the host agency present.

Food as a Source of Somali Community, Familiarity, and Connection

Amidst the challenges of resettlement, food often served a source of Somali community and connection among my interviewees. I asked Imani her experience during the migration process and her housing situation when she first arrived in California. She recalls that her mother and she were "placed in a shared home with another recent refugee family until they were financially stable enough to look for separate housing." Imani also mentioned that their roommates were in the same tribe as her and her mother, so they were able to communicate with each other through language, food, and culture, making her transition a little easier. In other words, Imani was able to find external connections beyond her mother, which may have made the resettlement process in America easier. Similarly, Sagal—a different Somali mother who immigrated to the United States when she was 19—told me that when she migrated to California she rarely ate outside of her home and mostly made Somali dishes she was comfortable cooking. Through my interview with Imani, she said that even though she is unable to visit Somalia again, due to financial and political difficulties, she is able to remind herself of the life she lived through food, as it reminds her of her family and self-belonging. In contrast, her kids are unable to understand the nostalgia and connection to Somalia through cuisine alone, contributing toward the cultural gap that can occur between generations.

Additionally, during my interviews they mentioned that the new grocery environment in the United States differed greatly from the Somali markets they were familiar with, as vegetables and fruits are available year-round in the United States. In contrast, in Somali and Kenyan markets, fruits, vegetables, and meat are limited. In fact, the food availability in the United States has been characterized as "uncanny" by one of my interviewees, Imani, and she spoke for many of the parents of the Somali community in City Heights she knew, who tended to feel more comfortable purchasing food items from personalized farmers' markets or Asian markets. The grocery environment in Asian markets allowed Imani to recreate Somali

foods with greater accuracy; and as a result, during my interview with Imani, she told me that in the early months when she was settling in California, she and her mom would usually cook only Somali food, as it was their way to connect with their home. Therefore, Imani utilized Somali food as a vessel for her cultural identity, rather than for the purpose of greater nutritional value. Somali food holds a significance to Imani and her mother other than surface-level consumption, where Imani's kids may view Somali food without the depth of cultural context.

What is "Nutritious Food?" Differences in Nutrition Education between Refugees

Comparing my interviews with Sagal and Imani, their awareness of nutritional education varied, as Imani was an undergraduate at UCSD, University of California, San Diego, while Sagal pursued motherhood. When asking both interviewees about their views on nutritional courses, Imani, who took a nutritional class at UCSD strongly recommended these types of courses as she felt that it might've been easier for her and her mother to create a better dietary transition after resettlement. In contrast, Sagal was unable to attend nutritional courses, as she was placed in marriage and a parental role quickly after resettlement. As a result, Sagal was unsure of her stance in nutritional education, as she never received it. This may have contributed to their preferences in grocery markets, where Imani prefers Asian markets that rely more on seasonal crops, compared to Sagal who prefers American chain markets that hold all produce regularly.

Sagal is not the only one, as many recent refugees' lack of nutritional guidance have resulted in food insecurity, obesity, and cholesterol issues due to the lack of communication with grocery staff and unfamiliarity with the grocery environment in the United States (Dharod, *et. al.,* 2013). A study conducted by Jigna M. Dharod, Jamar E. Croom, and Christine S. Sady in 2013 hypothesized that food insecurity was associated with a lower consumption of nutrition dense foods, like fruits and vegetables, and a higher consumption of calorie dense foods, like meat and eggs (Dharod, *et. al.,* 2013). Additionally, the difference in food options can create caution among recent refugees in the United States, which can result in an increased intake of meat and eggs and a decrease in fruits and vegetables, as meat and eggs are more familiar to refugees than vegetables they've never eaten before (Dharod, *et. al.,* 2013). The unfamiliar grocery environment America offers compared to refugee's market environments can create discomfort.

Food Choices and Generational Impact After Resettlement

Although employment can provide refugees with greater financial independence, longer work hours may encourage parents to rely on fast food, or low effort foods because it requires less time and effort to prepare. Rising grocery prices may also influence these choices, particularly for low-income families who may prioritize rent, transportation, and utilities over food.

As a result, parents may not be able to purchase independent ingredients to cook traditional Somali meals, which could eventually affect their kids' understanding and connection to their ethnic roots. Typically, Somali meals have a side with meat, usually goat meat, which is not as accessible in America, and ingredients like goat meat unavailable in the United States can discourage cooking Somali meals at home. This lack of Somali cuisine in their diet, and the increasing consumption of American foods can lead

toward the absence of Somali cuisine in refugee children's lives, which can impact their ability to understand their ethnic culture. Someone's identity is created over time based on personal beliefs, environment, social influences, and personal experiences, generally being constructed within a sociocultural context (Shahimi *et al.*, 2024). Therefore, while the mothers may still be heavily influenced by their Somali roots, if their children are not exposed to Somalia, their foods, or language on a regular basis, it's likely that kids will immerse themselves in America, while their parents will likely depend on their Somali roots as a cultural navigator instead of American ideals.

The reason why the Somali refugees I spoke to may still be heavily connected to their Somali identities—even though they resettled in the US during their young adult years, and may have spent more time in the US as a whole—is because many theories regarding identity acknowledge that late childhood and adolescence years may have a significant impact on one's identity due to potential trauma and displacement that can impact their identity construction, making a heavier impact on their cultural identity (Shahimi, *et. al,* 2024). Since the children of Imani and Sagal have not been exposed to that environment during their developmental years, and instead have experienced American foods, language, and school, their kids may foster a heavier American identity in comparison to their parents, who may value Somali culture and language more.

Interviews with Somali parents revealed varying levels of interest in Somali food among their children. Imani shared that her children often prefer traditional American food. So, she adapts by incorporating Somali ingredients into American dishes or serving both options. Conversely, Sagal reported that only one of her five children maintains an interest in learning more about Somali culture and food, while her other kids prefer to eat out. It's also beneficial to understand that two of Sagal's older kids, above the age of 15, tend to eat out more frequently because they have the resources to do so. Sagal's younger kids, ranging from ages 8-12 eat Somali food more commonly because that is what is offered at home. This difference can be due to the prioritization of the social aspect of food among older children, rather than the cultural and familial significance of Somali food. The younger children may understand better the familial connection Somali food brings because they tend to spend more time with their mother than the older kids.

However, in both conversations, I found a similarity. Both parents were open to exploring American foods, and are not restricting their kids to only being exposed to Somali cuisine, as parents tend to adapt to what their kids are comfortable with because they are in an environment their kids have adapted faster to.

The Juxtaposition of the Cultural Identities between Generations

Understanding the differences between parent and child cultural identities requires examining their distinct experiences during developmental years. Interviews with Imani and Sagal, who immigrated to California as adolescents, highlighted these generational gaps. For these parents, Somali food is tied to memories of Somalia and a sense of cultural identity, a connection complicated by the civil war and limited access to traditional ingredients. In contrast, their children, born and raised in California, may

view Somali food simply as a meal, lacking the deep cultural and historical significance held by their parents.

In contrast, refugee children have been born and raised in California, already adapted to the environment their parents had to adapt to, offering greater opportunities for food, education, and language. As a result of the environment their children are surrounded by and born in, it is only natural that their kids will adapt faster and create a greater cultural identity surrounding California culture rather than prioritizing their ethnic roots, even if their parents have exposed them to Somali foods, language, and culture.

Somali Cuisine Significance for Refugee Parents

During my interview with Imani, I asked her about the foods she ate when she was in Kenya. She told me that she mainly made fufu using corn flour and their main dish was Sukuma Wiki, usually collard greens, served with beef stew or another variation of the main course. When I asked further on her ability to cook Kenyan food, Imani recalled that ever since she was younger she would always watch her mother cook, eventually taking on the responsibility to cook Kenyan food as well, and when she moved to America she took pride in her cooking skills, as they came with her. Her Kenyan roots became a continuing prominent figure in her adoption in America, as she avoided American grocery markets, preferring Vietnamese grocery stores or farmer markets, which held produce she was more familiar with.

Interestingly, during my interview with Sagal, when I asked her about what types of grocery markets she shopped at, she told me that she exclusively shopped at markets like Smart & Final, Walmart, and other American chain grocery markets. However, she also emphasized the importance of Somali cuisine in her household and how it influenced what she made at home for herself and her kids. Although Sagal did adapt better to the grocery environment compared to Imani, she continued to utilize American resources to recreate dishes she was familiar with because of the cultural significance and connection to her Somali roots. Regardless of societal integration, Sagal still wanted her kids to eat Somali food because of the significance and connection it has to her own identity and past.

Somali Cuisine Significance for Second-Generation Children

Following my discussion with Sagal, I asked her about her kids' food habits and whether they differed from her own preferences. Surprisingly, she responded with “They don’t like eating my food.” This statement was later clarified to only apply to her older son and daughter, both who frequently eat outside instead of Sagal’s home cooking. This should not be interpreted as a disinterest or rejection of their Somali culture though, as research explains how older children start to develop their own identities outside of their direct family, and this identity development can be seen through changes in food preferences. As children grow up, media outlets and social integration in their community can change their food preferences over time, directing adolescents to foods that have greater social approval than others, which can push them away from their ethnic foods (Beckermen *et. al,* 2017).

Interestingly, Sagal told me that her younger daughters, Hana and Amina frequently eat Somali food at home and dislike the school provided lunches. This can also be seen as a result of Hana's and Amina's current connection with their mother, Sagal, where they may prioritize their family more than social interpretations of cultural foods because they have not been exposed to that yet (Beckermen *et. al,* 2017). When I interviewed Hana and Amina separately, Sagal's children who are 5 and 9 years old, they told me that the Somali food they like has potatoes and vegetables, and their favorite Somali food is "Suqaar." Even though Hana and Amina both eat Somali food and are familiar with the flavor and cuisine, they were unable to name specific dishes, only providing brief and broad answers. Even though Hana and Amina showed more interest and preference of Somali food than their siblings, I still noticed a disconnect to Somali foods, referring to Somali food when they said how "their mom's food was good" and they like Somali food.

In comparison, when I asked Amina and Hana about their favorite foods, they were considerably more specific. During our conversation, Amina said that she loves Buldak, and she would like to eat it everyday, and Asiya said that she loves the chicken nuggets at McDonalds. After our interviews, I noticed some key observations between the two responses. When I asked both girls about the Somali food they ate, I found that they had less enthusiasm and a shyer behavior than when I asked them about their favorite types of food. When I asked Hana and Amina about their favorite foods, they showcased much more interest in sharing what they enjoyed, Amina expressing that her favorite Buldak flavor is Rose and Hana telling me her favorite sauces with her chicken nuggets. Additional to these observations, I noticed that food seems to be a connecting and separating factor when examining the cultural relationships between parent and child. Although the parent has much of the power in deciding what kind of foods their children will eat, their kids who are more comfortable with American cuisine may request certain foods that differ from their parents traditional values or preferences.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I discussed the factors that contribute toward resettled Somali refugees cultural change over time, and how the connection to their ethnic roots can separate them from their kids in a cultural context. The various factors that can affect resettled refugees' adaptation to a new settlement are the language barriers, differing education systems, new grocery environment, and the new introduction of food habits, including fast food. The academic journals and personal interviews I conducted suggest that first-generation refugees that resettle in new countries, in this case California, tend to limit their diet to what they are familiar with; meaning that resettled refugees typically do not eat out a lot, or buy products they are unfamiliar with. Although City Heights is the largest Somali community in California, the language barrier and ability to adapt to a new environment is still difficult, and Somali food has been one of the ways Imani was able to connect to her cultural identity. However, once these first-generation refugees have kids, their kids adapt to American culture, and their cultural belonging often surrounds American ideals, not prioritizing their ethnic roots.

Through my research, I reviewed the effects of resettlement among refugees in California, and how their adaptation in a new environment can be shaped by their experiences in refugee camps, resettlement programs, different grocery environments, and the cultural differences between their kids and themselves. Through my conversations, I found that during Imani's and Sagal's time in refugee camps, even through the lack of conditions, including food and nutrition, education, and medical resources, their sense of community is strong, as many of the refugees in the camps hold a shared experience of Somali culture and love for their country, even though it is going through a political conflict. When refugees are resettled in California, resettlement programs support new populations and families, introducing them to a new culture, language, education, and workforce. Although resettled refugees may live in their new home for years, their cultural identity remains intact through connections with people from similar backgrounds and most importantly, food. Through this, I reasoned that food became a memory for Imani and Sagal, a way to connect themselves to their cultural identity even though they are no longer in Somalia. Additionally, traditional dishes from Somalia may be culturally impactful and respectful to their ethnic roots.

In contrast, their kids may not feel the same way about Somali foods, as they never lived or visited Somalia, the same dishes that hold cultural significance to their parents may not apply to their kids. Experiences of upbringing change the meanings and memories Somali food can bring to a family, which can separate their own beliefs and thoughts about their ethnic food. The different responses from parent to child from my interviews revealed this idea to be more clear. In my interview with Sagal, she told me that whenever she cooks and eats her mother's dish, there are memories behind the food, and it helps her connect on a greater level with her Somali background. When I interviewed her kids, Hana and Amina, I asked them what they think about Somali food, and they told me that they like their Mom's food, but nothing further. I noticed a shift in passion and knowledge about Somali dishes within the same family, as Sagal utilized food as a connecting source to her Somalia childhood, while her kids utilized Somali food to connect themselves to their mother.

Hana and Amina are growing up with the changes their mother went through in their most developmental years. This means that they have adapted faster and better to American culture than Sagal, because they were born there. Since Somali mothers Sagal and Imani were raised and born in Somalia, Somali food holds a greater significance to both mothers, reminding them of their past and their comfort, which is why they prefer eating Somali food. In contrast, their kids did not grow up in that environment where Somali food acted as a safe and comforting symbol of their childhood, which is why they tend to eat Somali food to connect themselves with their parents who prioritize Somali cuisine in their everyday life. Even though mothers like Sagal and Imani have lived in America for years, resettled Somali refugees like Sagal may still inhabit a split identity through their adaptation to American culture and prioritization of their Somali background, while their kids may view their Somali background as their ethnicity and prioritize American culture through their ideals, beliefs, and social orientation.

REFERENCES

Beckerman JP, Alike Q, Lovin E, Tamez M, Mattei J. (2017). The Development and Public Health Implications of Food Preferences in Children. *Front Nutr.* 4:66 https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/nutrition/articles/10.3389/fnut.2017.00066/full#cite

Brankamp, H., de Jong, S., Mackinder, S., & Devenney, K. (2023). The camp as market frontier: Refugees and the spatial imaginaries of capitalist prospecting in Kenya. *Geoforum, 145*, Article 103843. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2023.103843

Burks, M. (2013). San Diego's Somali population explained. *KPBS*. https://www.kpbs.org/news/living/2013/02/22/san-diegos-somali-population-explained

Dharod, J. M., Croom, J. E., & Sady, C. G. (2013). Food insecurity: Its relationship to dietary intake and body weight among Somali refugee women in the United States. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior, 45*(1), 47–53. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2012.03.006

Fee, M. (2022). *Resettled but displaced: Refugee incorporation in San Diego, California and Boise, Idaho* [Doctoral dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles]. eScholarship. https://escholarship.org/content/qt4n91w8vj/qt4n91w8vj_noSplash_46540b777c056478c9d5ce191df90bed.pdf

Gooding, C., Musa, S., Lavin, T., Sibeko, L., Ndikom, C. M., Iwuagwu, S., Ani-Amponsah, M., Maduforo, A. N., & Salami, B. (2024). Nutritional challenges among African refugee and internally displaced children: A comprehensive scoping review. *Children, 11*(3), 318. https://doi.org/10.3390/children11030318

International Trade Administration. (2024). *Agribusiness and food*. U.S. Department of Commerce. https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/somalia-agribusiness-and-food

Lillekroken, D., Bye, A., Halvorsrud, L., Terragni, L., & Debesay, J. (2024). Food for Soul—Older Immigrants' Food Habits and Meal Preferences After Immigration: A Systematic Literature Review. *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health,* (26), 775–805. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10903-023-01571-5

National Immigration Forum. (2026). *Reshaping refuge: The new era of United States refugee admissions*. https://forumtogether.org/article/reshaping-refuge-the-new-era-of-united-states-refugee-admissions/

Opaye, C. (2005). *Refugee camp security in West Africa: An ECOWAS priority?* (KAIPTC Paper No. 11). Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre.

https://www.kaiptc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/New%20folder/OpayeC.2005-REFUGEE-CAMP-SECURITY-IN-WEST-AFRICA.pdf

PBS NewsHour Weekend. (2022). Famine looms over Somalia as drought, civil war displace millions. *PBS NewsHour*. https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/famine-looms-over-somalia-as-drought-civil-war-displace-millions

Polman, L. (2008). *The crisis caravan: What is wrong with humanitarian aid?* Metropolitan Books. https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=xNdZnPXsKN4C&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=humanitarian+aid+for+refugee+camps+in+africa&ots=U4UXrrMNGA&sig=eUx_3a_c8ywJhhd423UjzD-PKv8#v=onepage&q=humanitarian%20aid%20for%20refugee%20camps%20in%20africa&f=false

Refugee Council USA. (n.d.). *Resettlement process steps of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program*. https://rcusa.org/resources/resettlement-process/

Sabrie, S. (2021). The academic struggles of Somali families. *MinneTESOL Journal, 37*(2). https://minnetesoljournal.org/the-academic-struggles-of-somali-families/

Shahimi, F., Block, K., & Alisic, E. (2024). Sense of identity among young people with refugee backgrounds: A scoping review. *Children and Youth Services Review, 157*, 107378. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2023.107378

Stajcic, N. (2013). Understanding Culture: Food as a means of Communication. *Hemispheres. Studies on Cultures and Societies*, (28), 77–87. https://academia-edu-documents.ada3b51d29be5ae5c31d26340608fd48.r2.

The Organization for World Peace. (2020). *Somali civil war*. https://theowp.org/crisis_index/somali-civil-war/

USA for UNHCR. (2023). *Inside the world's five largest refugee camps*. https://www.unrefugees.org/news/inside-the-worlds-five-largest-refugee-camps/

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. (2026). *The United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP): Consultation and worldwide processing priorities*. https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-and-asylum/usrap

Werker, E. (2007). Refugee camp economies. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 20*(3), 461–480. https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fem001