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Food sovereignty: understanding Somali gastronomy

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ABSTRACT

Culture, acquired taste and past experiences, shape immigrants' food preferences and acculturation inclination. As people migrate from Africa, South Asia and China to Canada, Toronto's food landscape has been transformed. This migration pattern has led to a situation where unfortunately some immigrants have become food insecure, because their preferred foods have not been available as they have become increasingly dependent on inexpensive, lower nutritional foods that are available through food banks and mainstream grocery stores. This situation is particularly common for relatively deprived, refugee path immigrants (RPI). There is therefore a need for policies that will strengthen the value chain of culturally appropriate, quality foods which enhance their food sovereignty. This paper presents the outcome of our fieldwork (2015–2016) examining the preferences and economic characteristics of Somalis in the GTA. Data collection involved direct observation, participant observation, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and structured questionnaires. Our results indicate that Somalis integrate best when they are involved, as active stakeholders, in the food value chain and are given the opportunity to explore their entrepreneurial abilities connected to their culturally preferred value chains.

KEYWORDS

Consumption; Greater Toronto Area; Somali-Canadians; food sovereignty; economic integration; halal foods

Introduction

Immigration has transformed the multicultural landscape of Canada and will continue to be one of Canada's strengths moving forward this century (Adekunle and Filson 2020; Filson and Adekunle 2017). Akbari and MacDonald (2014) say that for some time improved economic outcomes have been the main goal of Canadian immigration policy in Canada, Australia and the United States. This is as true for these nations as it is for the immigrants themselves. While many Somalis have come to Canada primarily as refugee path immigrants (RPIs) and in turn for family reunification, it is also expected that their integration leads to improved economic outcomes for themselves and Canada as a whole. By contrast, the benefits to the Temporary Foreign Workers are more in dispute because the program is mainly intended to meet the short-term economic interests of employers.[1]

To remain competitive, Canada needs to create sustainable approaches to integrate the immigrant population most appropriately. This must include economic integration that provides a sustainable competitive advantage for Canada, one component of which

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would enable refugee path immigrants (RPI) including Somali-Canadians to access their preferred foods. In order for this to be accomplished, the value chains for their culturally appropriate food must be strengthened.

Adekunle, Cidro, and Filson (2015) indicate that RPIs quite often reside in food deserts,[2] where a shortage of grocery stores, along with a lack of adequate income makes ethnocultural and health promoting foods largely unavailable. Because they usually start with limited income (DeVoretz, Pivnenko, and Beiser 2004), they tend to live in inner cities wherever accommodation is cheap. Somali families and other newcomers in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) usually struggle with getting appropriate accommodation as a result of economic capability and many homeowners from the group are at the risk of homelessness (Murdie 2002; Preston et al. 2010). This is accompanied by food insecurity due both to their limited economic resources and the scarcity of healthy food in their environment (Hadley, Patil, and Nahayo 2010). "In the interests of their social and physical well being, migrants should be encouraged to retain the best aspects of the diet of their homeland and embrace the best foods and food habits of their host country" (Burns 2004, 227).

In writing this paper we intend to improve our understanding of the history, economics and integration of Somali people, who based on our estimation are more than 100,000 in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). We used Somali-Canadians' access to and control of their local food systems to understand and explain how they can integrate and strengthen the Canadian economy, based on our assumption that their ability to control their food systems will ensure better integration, reduce unemployment and strengthen the ethnocultural food value chain (see Adekunle, Cidro, and Filson 2015; Filson and Adekunle 2017).

To contribute to this endeavor, this article examines how the availability of culturally appropriate food helps Somali-Canadians integrate economically. Based on our previous research, we also assume that if ethno-cultural foods are available, and greater transparency in the value and supply chain exists, these immigrants will be better able to contribute to Canadian prosperity.

This study's specific objectives are:

- To identify the attributes and characteristics of Somalis in the GTA.
- To examine the consumption patterns of ethno-cultural foods by Somali people in the GTA.
- To assess the relationship between food security and socio-economic characteristics such as age, education, income, occupation, availability of culturally appropriate foods, and other characteristics of Somali respondents.
- To identify the factors that predict expenditure on Somali ethnocultural foods.

History of Somali RPIs

Since its government collapsed in 1991, Somalia has often been viewed as a scene of endless violence and anarchy. Before the displacement of Somalis began, Somalia itself was a major refugee hosting country, home to approximately 650,000 Ethiopians of Somali descent – mostly from the Ogaden region of Ethiopia. Whereas Somalia has a long and complex history surrounding migration, Canada has an immigration record

tarnished with racism (Adekunle, Filson, and Sethuratnam 2013; Adekunle, Cidro, and Filson 2015; Gulliver 2018). This introduction will focus on the factors influencing Somali migration, how and when Somalis came to Canada, Canada's political response to the influx of Somali migrants, where Somali-Canadians are now and what more Canada can be doing to help Somali migrants to Canada succeed.

Decades of a tumultuous political environment continue to reinforce Somalia's migration crisis. After gaining independence in 1960, Somalia briefly enjoyed a multi-party democratic system based on Somali clan structure. In 1969, a military coup occurred led by Major-General Mohammed Siad Barre (IOM 2014). Armed opposition groups, displaced this military coup in 1991, which sparked clan-based civil warfare and resulted in a failed attempt at an established central government (IOM 2014). Today, the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) holds power and there are hopes that a constitution and infrastructure development can be established.

Somalia's complex migration crisis stems not only from the decades of political turmoil but from civil unrest due to clan- and gender-based violence (Abdulle 2000). Furthermore, a weak government, an undefined institutional framework coupled with tough climatic conditions such as droughts and natural disasters, limited resources and conflicts between clans continued to increase the number of migrants, refugees and internally-displaced persons (IDPs) (IOM 2014). Initially, many Somalis migrated to refugee camps in neighboring countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Djibouti or became internally displaced persons (IDPs).

The transition from migrating to neighboring countries to settling in Canada came about by the various responses of Somalia's neighboring host countries. Some countries were overwhelmed by the influx of refugees and began to limit access to their countries via restrictive immigration laws (Abdulle 2000). For example, during the 1970s-80s, migrants initially sought refuge in the Arabian Peninsula due to religious, historical and cultural similarities in hopes of finding economic opportunity (IOM 2014). In response, the Arabian Peninsula increased its labor restrictions, so migrants then went to other parts of the world (IOM 2014). Somalis next began traveling to Europe to live as asylum seekers in places such as London, Rome and Paris (Lawrence 2005).

Canada's immigration policies had been discriminatory and exclusionary until the 'points system' of immigration was established in 1967 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2006; Adekunle et al. 2017). Canada's previous exclusionary immigration acts always had been discriminatory toward non-Europeans and non-American immigrants until at least the mid-1960s. For the first time in Canada's history, the "points system" did not take race, color, or nationality into account. Instead, skills, level of education and, language ability became important when considering who could immigrate into the country. Without these changes to the Canadian immigration policies, the Somali community and possibly other black populations, would have continued to be systematically prevented from migrating to Canada.

Between 1947–57, gradual amendments had been made to Canada's immigration restrictions but these changes were intended to mostly preserve the assumed character of the Canadian population (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2006) due to the politicians in power not being willing to reform the prevailing immigration policy. This meant that "access from countries other than those that belonged to the 'old' Commonwealth, the United States, and Europe was severely restricted" (Citizenship

and Immigration Canada 2012; Adekunle, Filson, and Sethuratnam 2013; Adekunle et al. 2017). In 1962, a reform was tabled and implemented that allowed for unsponsored immigrants with education, relevant skills, and the economic means to support themselves, to be considered for admission regardless of color, race or national origin even though immigrants of European descents were allowed to sponsor more of their relatives until recently (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2006; Adekunle et al. 2017).

In 1967 it was noted that immigration had "made a major contribution to the national objectives of maintaining a high rate of population and economic growth" (UNHCR 2015). To further decrease discrimination during the application process, the points system was implemented (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2006). In 1976, for the first time, Canada established fundamental objectives with regards to its immigration policies by implementing the Immigration Act (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2012).

The effects of these reductions of discrimination in the application process became quickly apparent. For example, 87% of Canada's immigrants in 1966 had come from Europe. By contrast, in 1970, 50% came from all different parts of the world (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2006). This notwithstanding, as Talaga recently put it "the issue of racism is far deeper and insidious [than Prime Minister Trudeau caught wearing 'black face'], tracing back more than 150 years. We live in a country built on systemic racism. It is everywhere from our legislation to our institutions, to our school curricula" (September 27, *Toronto Star* 2019). Scholarly evidence for this is extensive (e.g. McKague 1991; Dua, Razack, and Warner 2005; Cannon 2005; Backhouse 1999).

Prior to the 1960s immigration reform, there were virtually no Somalis, if any, in Canada (Abdulle 2000). Those who arrived in the early stages received no assistance from the Canadian government or humanitarian agencies. This group primarily consisted of exiled politicians and human rights activists (i.e. members of the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF) and the Somali National Movement (SNM)). During the 1970s and '80s, most of the immigrants ended up settling in the lower Fraser Valley, the Toronto area, and the greater Montreal region (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2012). More of them started settling in other places such as Ottawa and Kitchener in the 1990s.

When the civil war broke out in Somalia in 1990 the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) arranged for resettlement programs and from 1991 to 1994, 1,178 Somalis came to Canada through family reunification programs (Abdulle 2000). The UNHCR began working with Canada in 1976 and now has offices in Ottawa, Montreal and Toronto. Resettlement is one of the long-term solutions UNHCR provides to refugees who are neither able to safely return home nor remain in their country of asylum (UNHCR 2015). Canada works with UNHCR as a resettlement partner and takes in thousands of refugees every year (UNHCR 2015). Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) funds settlement and resettlement programs designed to help immigrants who are new to Canada overcome barriers to settling into the social, cultural, civic and economic life in Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2014).

Somali asylum seekers in Canada were primarily privately sponsored (IOM 2014). The Private Sponsorship of Refugees program (PSR), allows Canadian citizens and permanent residents to engage in the resettlement of refugees abroad. Others came to Canada through the U.S. on visitors' visas and claimed refugee status upon arrival. Those who may have been living in other countries for years were able to come to Canada[3] and claim refugee status on the grounds that they were not able to return to Somalia for fear of

persecution (even before the Civil War broke out) (Abdulle 2000). Without the proper infrastructure, "Canada Immigration had no way of knowing whether these people came from Somalia or from other countries with a Somali speaking population" (Abdulle 2000, 53). Due to these difficulties, amendments were made to the Immigration Act in 1993 and 1995 that required more official documentation compounded by the Canadian media misinformation and exaggeration of the conflict in Somalia allowed for higher acceptance of Somalis into Canada as refugees (Abdulle 2000).

Currently, migrants claim refugee status through the Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA) at the port of entry or make an inland claim after entry (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2012). The Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) then deals with the applications for refugee status in Canada (UNHCR 2015; Adekunle, Cidro, and Filson 2015). Once refugee status is achieved, migrants must acquire landed immigrant status before being able to sponsor family members. Once granted permanent residency or citizenship, immigrants may finally apply to sponsor certain relatives to become permanent residents for them to live, study and work in Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2015; Adekunle, Cidro, and Filson 2015).

Today, Somali refugees claim to have "encountered enormous difficulties in adjusting to Canada's socio-economic and political environment" (Abdulle 2000, 59). The many settlement difficulties that Somalis have faced upon relocating to Canada, including challenges with respect to their food sovereignty,[4] whether social or economic, has created a very challenging settlement transition for Somali-Canadians (Adekunle, Cidro, and Filson 2015). Somalis in the US also have a higher food insecurity as compared to the national rate (Dharod, Croom, and Sady 2013). Nonetheless, these difficulties are relatively minor compared to the challenges they faced back home, especially in refugee camps and locations witnessing insurgency.

Although the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) is working to stabilize the country, Somalia's migration crisis isn't going away any time soon. Following several outflows of refugees, once areas within Somalia re-stabilize, many Somalis will seek to be repatriated to their homeland. Somalia lacks the necessary infrastructure to handle the internally displaced persons (IDPs) and those returning to the country, putting even more pressure on the already inadequate infrastructure (IOM 2014).

Migration is still a very topical issue in Canada. The country has the means to accommodate and help economic and refugee path immigrants. However, many Somali-Canadians still feel marginalized (fieldwork 2015–2016). Therefore, Canada needs to reexamine the effectiveness of its policies and the adequacy of its programs.

Literature review on food preferences by the Somali community

The forces driving Somali dietary change upon migration are religion, availability (and nonavailability) of foods, relative increase in disposable income, the need and desire to save time and labor, acculturation and participation in the value chain including food sovereignty (Vincenzo et al. 2000; Burns 2004; Adekunle, Cidro, and Filson 2015). Somalis are mostly Muslims, from the "horn of Africa", have exposure to seafood because of the coastline in the home country though consumption of fish is fraught by international political economic issues which affect the consumption pattern (Henze 2016; Lightfoot et al. 2016). The consumption patterns of the Somalis reflect their cultural

history including colonization by Italy and Britain (Adekunle 2016; Young 2018). In summary, food choices are influenced by factors such as geography, culture and religion (Catering 2016).

Geography

Political instability in Somalia caused many to flee, seeking refuge in Australia, Canada, the US and other countries in the early 1980s (Im et al. 2017). Somalis living away from home have dietary habits and preferences influenced by the countries to which they have emigrated. Some will eventually visit other parts of the world, including Somalia, and introduce innovative ideas to the cuisines while keeping the fundamental part of their cuisines. Within Somalia itself the staple diet of a region is a function of the region's geography and the ease of accessibility. For example, fish is the staple food for coastal population, such as the Barawe people, while the people inland mainly consume goat and camel meat, often regarding fish and chicken as inferior (Metro South Health 2019). The presence of camels and goats in large numbers is because of their ability to withstand dry and the semi-desert conditions in Somalia. Therefore, camel and goat meat are abundant.

According to McMichael and Manderson (2004) Somali American families largely retain their food preferences. They prefer home-made meals eaten as a family. Somali women often cook food on a daily basis as Somalis like to eat freshly cooked food. Some of the favorite meals for these Somalis include rice, halal meat and fish (Heiman, Gordon, and Zilberman 2019). The meals are usually accompanied by tea. Somalis maintain their strong preference for tea, served with lots of sugar as they love sweet tea. Additionally, Somalis in the US occasionally prepare sugary products such as halwa (xalwa) for their families. They enjoy them as the ingredients are readily available, though detrimental to their health when eaten in excess. However, they prefer consuming these halal products since many of the healthy options available are not halal (Connor et al. 2016). In their homeland, food preferred for lunch is readily available including camel and goat meat (Help Somali 2019). Especially Somalis from the southern part of the country eat banana (with almost every meal), pawpaw (papaya), guava, mango among others even though most people have the impression that Somalis are meat eaters.

Religion

Religion influences the dietary practices of Somalis, describing "halal" foods as the only foods that staunch Muslims should eat (Bergeaud-Blackler et al. 2015; Fischer 2015). These include all plants as well as animal foods that meet the Halal requirements. Islam also proscribes "haram" foods as forbidden foods. Drugs, pork and animals slaughtered in improper ways are considered "haram" and as a result of these regulations, most Somalis outside Somalia avoid cheese and baby formula as they are suspected of containing pork ('Pork listed in baby formula alert,' 2019). Therefore, Somalis living far away from home experience inconveniences in obtaining meat that is consistent with their religious beliefs.

As stated earlier, the Somali community mainly observes Islamic dietary law and requirements (Sadouni 2019). These laws affect all aspects of their lives with other people, whether social, cultural, religious and/or physical interaction. For this reason, food

preferences by the Somalis portray adherences to the defined laws by their religion. In addition to proscribing pork, Islam forbids alcohol consumption (Heiman et al. 2019). According to Adekunle (2019)

> there are also similarities between halal and kosher although alcohol is forbidden in halal but not under kosher. Grasshopper is the only visible insects permissible in kosher while insects are neutral in halal. Camel is halal but non-kosher. The halal process also stipulates that animals should be treated humanely, slaughtering should not be done in front of other livestock and stress should be reduced to a minimum.

The halal food market is not well understood (Adekunle and Filson 2020) which promotes asymmetric information in the market that needs to be resolved. Imperfect information is a challenge in the ethno cultural food market. This results to opacity in the niche market. In the halal food market, the level of asymmetric information can be resolved by adequate consumer education, third party monitoring by certifying bodies regulated by the government, crypto-labeling (authenticity, transparency, and transparency enhanced via blockchain), and workable and desirable regulations that guarantees food safety" (Adekunle2019). Specific examples of how to reduce opacity include using social media and word of mouth to educate people about the tenets of halal and why halal food goes beyond simply religion. There should be regulation in place which discourages a high degree of artificial, chemically-modified, processed ingredients which result in an industrial food-like substance or food substitute. Logo and certification are also helpful if the process is not compromised.

Ramadan, the Islamic period of fasting, is another factor that influences Somalis food choices and preference (Arnold 2019). During this thirty-day period adults fast between dusk and dawn and are expected to strictly observe the sharia laws (Itabiyi et al. 2019). Fasting is observed by all adults except the, elderly, pregnant and breastfeeding mothers, those who are traveling and away from home. During this period especially, Somalis avoid food and water from dawn to dusk, and haram foods and alcohol,[5] until after iftar (daily break of fasting). The fasting is usually followed by iftar, breaking the fast, and the foods consumed include bur and sambuus, then Somali porridge (shurbad),[6] bajiya (beans fritters from cowpea), mandazi (fried wheat flour dough), bariis (traditional rice dish), goat, meat, anjera[7] (lahoh) (fermented flatbread with spongy texture), malawah (Somali crepes or sweet pancakes) among others.

Somali culture, beliefs, and food preferences

Traditionally, in the Somali culture, people typically have three meals a day, though some people eat less because of financial, nature of work, and/or health reasons. Breakfast is usually malawah, liver and onion stew (beer iyo basal), and Somali tea. Lunch usually consists mainly of lamb, camel meat and rice or pasta and supper comprises rice, some meat and herbs. In Somalia, lunch is considered the main meal and it is consumed as a family during midday. During these meals, common foods include pasta, rice seasoned with herbs, coriander and banana (Metro South Health 2019). Traditionally, Somalis drink camel milk in the afternoon/evening based on availability – when the camels are milked. Somali beliefs influence their food preference. They tended to prefer somewhat

fat children, believing that they are healthier than skinnier children (Steinman et al. 2010). Somalis also believe that camel milk is the best milk.

Decker (2016) reports his research based on six discussion groups conducted with 80 members of the Somali community in Maine in the United States. Participants said they usually take three meals a day. From these participants, it is evident that Somalis usually have their breakfast before nine in the morning, lunch between noon and two with dinner taken between six and nine in the evening. Among these who were working women, they admitted to having two meals a day with breakfast taken very early in the morning and lunch during midday. Some recorded taking meals only when they are excessively hungry and not necessarily taking meals as per the times of the day. As family meals are generally eaten at lunch, the participants admitted to experiencing difficulties as their children attend schools or are far away from home during the day.

A Somali meal commonly includes lamb or goat meat (Van Alfen 2014). In Decker's (2016) study, participants admitted to eating meat even during breakfast, while lunch was composed of rice accompanied with meat and vegetables mostly as salads. Rice is prepared in different ways including with spices and fruits. Also, familiar dishes in Somali culture include spaghetti with meat, rice with green beans, sambuus in combination with curry deep fried with vegetables and a banana accompanying the main meal (Burpee and Wood 2012). Breakfast typically includes anjera and tea. Tea from camel's milk, porridge and fried eggs also serve as breakfast for this community. For pregnant Somali women, food intake is often reduced to one meal a day in the last two months of the pregnancy to avoid issues during childbirth (Decker 2016). Somali women believe that eating three meals per day for pregnant women is likely to increase the size of the unborn baby and therefore pose dangers for both the baby and the mother during childbirth. Meals are taken with the whole family present except when there are guests. The main aim of these family meals is customarily intended to train children in table manners and strengthen family ties.

Chevon (goat meat), considered the best meat by most Somalis, is mostly consumed fried (Zaring 2015). Tea is the highly preferred beverage by the Somalis who typically consume four or more cups per day with homemade cakes. As with any other communities, the Somalis seek a balanced diet. Their diet is rich in fiber, proteins, carbohydrates, fats and nutrients (Gardner et al. 2010).

Implication of food preferences and rationale of the study

Often, the type of food consumed in a community determines the kind of diseases prevalent in the society (DeAngelis 2018) and the Somali community is no exception. Many Somali children and adults suffer from diet-related problems. Diabetes, anemia, allergies, poor oral health and eating disorders among the young are some of the common health problems which mainly stem from the eating habits, food preferences and the manner of consumption of sugary products by the Somali community (WHO, 2019).

Thus, Somali communities have unique food preferences, settings and other dietary manners. While they strictly adhere to the religious obligations that guide them in dietary matters, they still have some delicious meals with kitchen habits influenced by European, Middle East, and other African countries' foods integrated into their cooking. The Somali cuisine is diverse, salivating and sweet. Although hunger is still a significant concern in Somalia, Somali communities try to adhere to their cultural ways especially regarding their

eating habits and food preferences while refraining from haram foods. Somali people who are residents in other countries still adhere to these regulations and even maintain their focus on the Somali traditions. However, "the national cuisine of the Somalis, for instance, is influenced by India, (because of the Indian Ocean trade); the Arabian Peninsula (Arab immigrants came to Somalia in different waves and in the process exchanges of ideas, culture and commodities took place); Ethiopia (because of trade caravan networks); and Italy (because it colonized Somalia for half a century, from 1889 to 1936)" (Adekunle 2016).

In short, the Somali food preferences is like what Srinivas (2006) refers to as "narrative of affiliative desire" where authenticity is based on how it was made by their mom or the way it is done back home. The Somalis in Canada will have food sovereignty if they can obtain something close to what they have in their home countries. Whether it is in their respective homes, abroad or their businesses, Somalis embed different levels of gastronomic behavior to ensure their food sovereignty. Furthermore, they should be involved in the value chain from farm to fork. This is already happening with goat meat importers, grocery store owners, butchers, and restaurant owners in the GTA, but more needs to be done. And since spending patterns differ significantly among different ethnic groups in Canada (Abdel-Ghany and Sharpe 1997) a better understanding of Somali expenditure on their food will strengthen the Canadian food system and contribute to Somali integration.

This study was designed to improve our understanding of Somali food preferences and their contribution to the Canadian food landscape. The relative absence of critical research about Somali food preferences, their access to halal food instead of, for example, junk food clearly affects their well-being and integration. In the absence of such research on Somali-Canadian gastronomy, food security and food sovereignty, various levels of government have been unable to develop the most appropriate policies for this growing sector of multicultural Canada. This research is designed to fill part of this knowledge gap.

Research methods

A decade ago, due to approaches by the Toronto Food Policy Council, a Greater Toronto Area farm organization and the provincial Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Adekunle, Filson and Sethuratnam (2010) conducted University of Guelph based research on the demand for ethnocultural vegetables in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Initially focusing on demand from South Asians, Chinese and Afro-Caribbeans which increasingly made up for the bulk of immigration to Toronto, this research led to a number of publications (e.g. Adekunle, Filson, and Sethuratnam 2012, 2013; Filson and Adekunle 2017) and greater information about the specific ethnocultural food demand, the food security and food sovereignty of specific groups within the overall immigrant (e.g. Filipinos) and indigenous populations (e.g. Winnipeg). Our graduate students willingly participated in a number of ECV Ontario research projects in Ontario and Manitoba.

One of the authors of this research was a Somali-Canadian RPI and former graduate student living and then working in the GTA. He was able to expand our research contacts among Toronto Somalis in restaurants, butcheries and food stores. The teaching and research at Toronto's Ryerson University by another author of this paper also enabled us to expand our connections to Somali students, their parents, Imams and other Somalis.

Throughout this research our research organization, ECV Ontario, has published a series of blogs, podcasts and produced an App to connect Somalis, Toronto Muslims and non-Muslims interested in buying and consuming halal food in the GTA. Social media has also helped connect us with East Africans including especially Somalis in Somalia and within Kenya where many Somalis live. Our connections with Somali Associations and groups was solidified by these efforts and also provided us with access to respondents willing to participate in interviews, focus groups and a survey whether in Scarborough, Etobicoke, Rexdale or even the Guelph/Kitchener/Waterloo/Cambridge region. These are some of the methods by which we have gained Somali Canadians' trust and made contacts with knowledgeable store owners, butchers, Imams and Somali food consumers along their most important food chains in the GTA.

Prior to collecting the data, an application to approve the research was made through the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board (REB). This required that our graduate students, who were of appropriate ethnicities for the data collection, be trained in interview techniques, focus group dynamics and questionnaire administration. While Somali interviewees were selected through the "snowball technique" with the help of our community-based research assistants, the research participants who completed questionnaires were provided with the questionnaires at preselected Somali grocery stores and restaurants after approval by the REB.

The data presented in this paper were based on a mixed methods approach utilizing qualitative interviews, focus group discussions, direct observation, participant observation and questionnaire administration. It presents the analysis of our fieldwork on the preferences of Somali people in the GTA (2015–2016 and intermittently until 2020). We conducted 18 in-person interviews with people knowledgeable about the Somali food value chain and their preferences both within Canada and globally. The people chosen were the main grocery buyers in their households, restaurants or grocery stores owners and community leaders. We also interviewed two Imams when respondents indicated that halal food is very important to these Imams. All the interviews were recorded, transcribed and stored in locked cabinets in our University of Guelph offices.

We also ran three focus groups at Scarborough, Etobicoke and Ryerson University to obtain a deeper understanding of the attributes of Somali people with respect to their food sovereignty in Canada. The focus group at Etobicoke had eight participants (September 5, 2015), seven participants were present at the Scarborough meeting (September 12, 2015), and nine participants, mostly students of tertiary institutions, attended the third focus group (November 20, 2015). Notes were taken at the location and documented. The interviews and focus group discussions helped us to develop a questionnaire that was administered to Somali-Canadians in preselected restaurants and groceries stores patronized by Somalis in the GTA. Furthermore, codes were developed on key themes and quotations were inserted in text to support the quantitative analysis. The Somali stores/restaurants were selected based on systematic sampling, a probability sampling technique where we selected every third outlet on our list of all Somali restaurants and stores in the GTA.

The qualitative analysis used a modified grounded theoretical approach which focused mostly on open coding to identify the most important patterns within the data without resorting to axial or synthetic coding (Strauss 1987; Loflande and Loflande 2005; Berg

2001). This involved constantly comparing the categories that emerged from every participants' answers to particular questions provided in the interviews and themes that emerged during the focus groups. The properties of each important category were then identified and described. We paid attention to indigenous, sensitizing Somali concepts such as their perception of trust around whether or not what they were buying was really "halal" food. The trustworthiness of the data was enhanced by the researchers' and research assistants' participation in community meetings, eating Somali food at favorite Somali GTA restaurants, buying halal meat at Somali butcheries such that triangulation existed not only among the interviews, focus groups and survey data but within the qualitative research among community participatory observation, interviews and focus groups.

Respondents were only involved if they were willing to participate in the survey and they were free to pull out of the exercise at any time of their choosing. In total, we were able to analyze 253 questionnaires, a sample that is reasonably representative of the GTA's Somali population (confidence interval 95%, margin of error 6.07, estimated population 100,000). To assess and measure acculturation we used the Ethnic Canadian Dietary Acculturation Scale (ECDAS) first developed by Adekunle et al. (2011), (2013)) for our previous research with South Asian, Chinese and Afro-Caribbeans living in the GTA. Furthermore, the model: *expenditure on Somali foods* was adapted from Abdel-Ghany and Sharpe (1997) and Adekunle, Filson, and Sethuratnam (2010), Adekunle et al. (2011), (2013). The results below are based on the analysis of our data using SPSS. It presents descriptive analysis, factor analysis, correlation, linear regression (double log), and our estimation of Somali-Canadians food sovereignty in the GTA.

Results

This section presents the results of our analysis of quantitative data with the integration of qualitative results. People consume food not only to satisfy hunger but also for cultural, religious and social reasons. Somalis living in the GTA generally find food prices to be arbitrary and expensive especially when it is fresh. Nevertheless, they are willing to pay more for their cultural foods and to support Somali butchers, stores and restaurants but they find that some of their preferred foods such as camel and even goat are often very difficult to find. They do substitute similar foods to their preferred foods wherever possible. In general, however, Somalis in the GTA have food preferences that are similar to people from other parts of Africa (ethno-cultural) and Middle East (influence of religion and trade interaction that has lasted for centuries). The details of our findings are presented below:

As seen in Table 1, Somalis spent 44% of their total food expenditure on their ethnic or culturally appropriate foods (see Adekunle, Filson, and Sethuratnam 2010; Adekunle et al. 2011; Adekunle, Filson, and Sethuratnam 2013 for further explanation). Some large families spent as much as $2000 CAD per month on their cultural food but the average expenditure on Somali food was $400 CAD Somali-Canadians take the consumption of their cultural food seriously. On average the respondents have lived in Canada for 19 years. The average monthly income, age, and household were $4000 CAD, 41 years, and five people respectively.

Table 1. Summary statistics – socio-economic characteristics of Somalis in the GTA.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Out of the total amount spent on food what approximate percentage do you spend on your cultural foods?	211	.00	100.00	43.6725	27.59600
How much do you spend on your cultural foods in a month?	201	20.00	2000.00	401.8159	364.37592
Total amount spent on food in a month	32	5.00	700.00	209.0937	155.18779
Years spent in Canada	222	0	50	19.33	9.251
Number of years spent outside Somalia	126	.00	60.00	17.9484[a]	12.23468
Age of Respondent	214	18.00	67.00	40.6355	11.84833
Monthly Income (Full time occupation)	87	1000.00	10,416.67	4505.2721	2328.21020
Monthly Income (Part-time occupation)	19	600.00	4000.00	1509.5789	837.44886
Total Monthly Income	107	600.00	10,416.67	4015.3334	2433.84129
Number of people in the household	233	1.00	11.00	4.5880	2.29171

[a]The question was interpreted as years spent outside of Somalia as a refugee.

Table 2 presents the factor analysis of the factors that underlie purchase decisions, expenditure and acculturation.

Table 2. Factor analysis[8] (see Table 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 below).

Table 2.1. Attributes that affect the decision to purchase Somali foods.[a]

Factor[b]	Quality (freshness)	Versatility	Origin (traceability)	Selection
Store availability	.311	−.136	.031	.479
Language	−.046	.229	−.469	.584
Selection	−.013	.115	.323	**.759**
Freshness	**.703**	−.126	.210	.084
Quality	**.733**	.054	.173	−.103
Price	.446	.380	−.022	.024
Packaging	.150	.507	.151	.054
Origin of food	.111	.022	**.789**	.019
Method of production	.181	.185	.560	.291
Taste	**.678**	.090	−.049	.235
Preservation method	.578	.192	.052	.044
Grown in Ontario	.012	.406	**.675**	−.002
Easy to cook	−.081	**.723**	.088	−.087
Versatility	.017	**.724**	.182	.143
Medicinal ability	.452	**.661**	−.130	.068

[a]52% of the variation was explained by four components.
[b]Figures in bold represent factor loading.

Table 2.2. Expenditure decisions: importance of place of purchase.[a]

Factor[b]	Locally produced	Somali stores	Genetically modified
Ethnic outlets	−.017	**.826**	−.161
Grown in local farms	**.748**	.178	.137
Organically grown	**.794**	.117	.223
Genetically modified	.251	.146	**.748**
Labeled according to country of origin	**.743**	−.061	−.388
Supermarkets	.308	.427	**−.605**
Imported from home	.216	**.680**	.317

[a]Three components account for 66% of the variation.
[b]Figures in bold represent factor loading.

Table 2.3. Acculturation.[a]

Factor[b]	Ability to speak English	Ability to criticize culture
I enjoy speaking English	**.759**	−.115
Most of my friends are Canadians	.675	.323
I enjoy English language movies and TV programmes	**.799**	.138
I don't identify myself as ethnic Canadian	−.098	**.626**
I welcome most of the values held by Canadians	**.629**	.088
I have difficulty accepting most of the values held by my ethnic group	.163	**.758**
I prefer western food to my ethnic food	.214	.621

[a]Two components account for 52% of the variation.
[b]Figures in bold represent factor loading.

As presented in Table 2.1, four components underlie the Somali people's decisions to purchase their ethnocultural foods. Consumers are interested in consuming food that is fresh and of superior quality. Quality can also be interpreted by the Somalis as halal food because they believe that it tastes better (focus group discussions 2015). In fact, at the focus group at Scarborough one of the respondents said he doesn't invest time looking for halal because some butchers/meat sellers are very deceptive (asymmetric information). Furthermore, versatility is very important to them because obtaining value for money is of paramount importance to them. Moreover, there is a general impression that these foods have medicinal abilities thus reducing the amount they will spend on health care and enhancing their life expectancy. Place of origin is also an attribute these consumers are not willing to compromise as the respondents mostly consumed foods that are traceable. Another component that loaded heavily was a diverse food selection. A one stop shop for all these factors is a Somali outlet as seen by the growth and survival of Somali restaurants and grocery stores in Etobicoke, Scarborough and other parts of the GTA.[9] This behavior is not peculiar to the Somali population in Canada alone as it is common with mainstream and other ethnic groups in Canada (Filson and Adekunle 2017). A value chain with the involvement of Somali people will guarantee food sovereignty for this group, enhance a niche market, strengthen the economy of Canada and promote appropriate integration. Table 2.2 presents their expenditure decisions and shows the importance of the place where they purchased their food.

To understand the behavior of any group of consumers or analysis of a niche market, it is logical to explore the importance of the place of purchase to the respondents. The refugee path immigrants in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), especially the Somalis, prefer to purchase foods locally, in their Somali stores, especially if they know it is imported from their home[10] country, and are interested in whether the product is genetically modified or not. It may be the reason for the preference of their ethnic stores over supermarkets for certain products. These attributes are important to the Somalis because of their affinity for halal foods (please see below a few quotes from our respondents).

"I don't trust it. *No Frills* sells Halal. [These supermarkets] say Halal, Halal, Halal, but you don't know who to trust. I know other people buy from there. For me, I go to my small trusted stores." (Respondent 1)

"It depends on the person – if you want to trust it." (Respondent 3)

"I trust the Halal more in small ethnic stores. *No Frills* have the brands, so I think they are fine. These stores are fresher, they slaughter and cut the meat in front of you so you get it in kilos or pounds. In No Frills, you get it frozen or packaged." (Respondent 6)

This is consistent with the findings of Adekunle et al. (2011); Adekunle, Filson, and Sethuratnam (2013); and Adekunle, Cidro, and Filson (2015). Moreover, the preferred place of purchase by the Somali-Canadians is an indication that they have affinity for outlets they can trust, especially Somali businesses. Therefore, restaurants such as Xawaash, Hamdi, Istar, Sahan, and Salama Hut were usually patronized. The Somali restaurants and grocery stores are part of the small businesses promoting African cuisines – especially east African and halal certified, an indication that Somalis are willing to contribute to the Canadian economy if they are involved in the value chain (Interviews of Somali restaurant and grocery owners and direct observation during our 2015–2016 field work)

As seen in Table 2.3, the acculturation level of Somali consumers was explained by their ability to speak English and their willingness to criticize their culture. People who are willing to speak English and criticize the culture from within have a higher possibility of integrating into Canadian mainstream culture and social classes.[11] Acculturation proxy indicators, such as length of stay in the United States and language spoken at home, are associated with food insecurity (Dharod, Croom, and Sady 2013).

Table 3 presents the relationship among different attributes of the Somali consumers in the GTA.

Table 3 is not a proof of causality but an indication that these variables are linearly related and associated. In Table 3, monthly income and the amount spent on food were inversely related,[12] an indication that an increased income and the amount spent on food move in opposite directions. The percentage spent on Somali foods out of the amount spent on food was positively correlated to the amount spent on Somali foods but negatively related to acculturation. Thus, people who have lived in Canada longer spent less on Somali food. The amount spent on cultural food by the Somalis was positively related to the age of respondents and number of people in the household. Acculturation was positively related to age and inversely related to gender. That is, male respondents have better acculturation scores. Number of years spent in Canada was positively related to age, total income and household size. People who have lived in Canada longer tend to be older, have better income on average and have more people in their households. Age of respondents had a positive relationship with household size but was negatively related to gender.

Tables 4.1–4.3 present the model summary, ANOVA and regression analysis for the determinants of expenditure of Somalis in the GTA on their ethnocultural foods. As seen in Table 4 the Adjusted R^2 is 0.125 (12.5% of the variation in the expenditure on Somali food is explained by the model). This value is relatively good considering that the data was based on a cross sectional survey.

Table 3. Correlations: expenditure on Somali foods, personal characteristics and acculturation.

	Out of the household monthly income, what approximate percentage do you devote to purchasing food in general?	Out of the total amount spent on food what approximate percentage do you spend on your cultural foods?	How much do you spend on your cultural foods in a month?	Total amount spent on food in a month	Acculturation (Raw score)	Years spent in Canada	Age of Respondent	Total Monthly Income	Number of people in the household	Sex
Out of the household monthly income, what approximate percentage do you devote to purchasing food in general?	1	.128	.165*	.384*	.070	.070	.098	−.325**	.069	−.015
Out of the total amount spent on food what approximate percentage do you spend on your cultural foods?		1	.186*	−.299	−.155*	−.110	.006	−.065	.029	.055
How much do you spend on your cultural foods in a month?			1	.255	.043	.098	.171*	−.040	.193**	−.027
Total amount spent on food in a month				1	.076	.228	.251	.170	−.172	−.135
Acculturation (Raw score)					1	.147*	.021	−.107	−.039	−.141*
Years spent in Canada						1	.517**	.300**	.214**	−.034
Age of Respondent							1	−.004	.145*	−.180**
Total Monthly Income								1	−.100	−.128
Number of people in the household									1	.097
Sex										1

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4. Determinants of expenditure on Somali foods[13]

Table 4.1. Model Summary.

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. Error of the estimate
	.487[a]	.238	.125	.79542

[a]Predictors: (Constant), Sex, education dummy, LN (respondent income), LN (respondents age), LN (percentage spent on cultural foods), LN (Acculturation), LN (household size), LN (years spent in Canada).

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) as presented in Table 4.2 shows that the model is significant and reliable.

Table 4.2. ANOVA[a].

Model		Sum of squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	10.643	8	1.330	2.103	.051[b]
	Residual	34.166	54	.633		
	Total	44.809	62			

[a]Dependent Variable: LN (expenditure on ethnic vegetables per month).

[b]Predictors: (Constant), Sex, education dummy, LN (respondent income), LN (respondents age), LN (percentage spent on cultural foods), LN (Acculturation), LN (household size), LN (years spent in Canada).

Table 4.3. Regression[c].

Model	B	Std. Error	T	Sig.
(Constant)	5.100	2.429	2.099	.040
LN (respondent income)	.232	.163	1.424	.160
LN (household size)	.103	.160	.644	.522
LN (respondents age)	.292	.379	.770	.445
LN (years spent in Canada)	−.005	.189	−.027	.978
LN (percentage spent on cultural foods)	.324	.127	2.541[a]	.014
LN (Acculturation)	−1.086	.573	−1.896[b]	.063
Education (University education = 1; Otherwise = 0)	−.112	.244	−.460	.647
Gender (female = 1; Otherwise = 0)	−.419	.242	−1.731[b]	.089

[a]T > 1.96 (sig at 5%) = Percentage spent on cultural foods out of amount spent on food.

[b]T > 1.65 (sig at 10%) = Acculturation and Gender (with respect to female: dummy).

[c]The log transformation did not include sex and education because they are dummy variables.

The most important table with regards to the determinants of expenditure on Somali foods is the regression table (Table 4.3). The variables that predict expenditure as discovered by our model were the percentage spent on cultural foods out of the total amount spent on food (5% significance level), acculturation and gender (10% significance level). Acculturation and gender had a negative relationship with expenditure. The longer people live in Canada the less they spend on their Somali foods. Women also spent less on food in comparison with men.[14]

Table 4.3 presents the results of the regression analysis.

Estimation of Somali Population in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA)

We present below our estimation of the total number of Somalis in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) of Canada. This estimate is based on our study of the Somali-Canadians in the GTA from 2015–2018. Data were collected from our focus group discussions in Etobicoke, Scarborough and Ryerson University, in-depth interviews of 18 stakeholders, a survey of 253 main grocery shoppers and several trips to Seif grocery store (the main

grocery store patronized by 20% of Somalis in the region) to count the number of shoppers in the store.

Number of shoppers in the selected store[15] per hour (A) = 20[16]

Number of shoppers in the store per month (B) = 6000[17]

Family visit per month (C) = one and a half[18] (three times in two months)

Household size (D) = five[19]

Number of households visit (E) = {(B)/(C)} = {6000/1.5} = 4000

Population = (E) * (D) * (1/percentage of Somalis that patronize Seif out of the total population)

4000 * 5 * (1/0.2) = **100,000** people[20]

Based on our assumptions, there are **more than one hundred thousand Somalis in the GTA.**

Conclusion

We sought to identify Somali attributes and characteristics in the GTA. Our research leads us to the conclusion that there are more than 100,000 Somali-Canadians living in the greater city. We know that they maintain strong affinity for their Somali cultures including their culturally preferred foods, even though this culture and these foods are not entirely present in the GTA. In examining their cultural and ethno-cultural food preferences and consumption we also found a strong affinity for genuine halal food. Though not always food secure, the GTA's Somalis are even several more steps away from being food sovereign, at least in part because they do not control local food production let alone most of its marketing and distribution.

Almost all of them are at least ostensibly Muslim and, even though on average they've lived in Canada for about two decades, they still prefer halal food. The examination of the consumption patterns of ethno-cultural foods by Somali people in the GTA reveals that they expect or at least would like their food to be certified halal from a reputable body because they do not eat pork, insist that the blood has been completely drained from their meat, that it has been blessed, usually by an Imam, and they especially prefer camel meat and camel milk if available. Because they want their food fresh and traceable, they find it very difficult to get the kind of camel that they prefer. Though that part of their cuisine which has historically been influenced by Italians includes a preference for pasta and foods like halva commonly associated with the Middle East. Like most Arabs and unlike most Italians, most Somali-Canadians do not consume alcohol. They eat relatively fewer vegetables than most GTA residents. While most eat three meals per day, the times during the day that they eat vary based on when they feel hungry.

Canada's revamped immigration policy allowed Somali RPI to move to Canada. However, they haven't fully integrated (see Abdulle 2000; Hopkins 2006; Collet 2007; Berns-McGown 2013) because of lack of access to their ethno-cultural foods, especially authentic sorghum flour, goat meat, camel milk and meat. Improving the food value chain for RPIs would help them economically integrate contributing to the Canadian economy. Geography, religion and cultural beliefs affect the food preferences of Somalis and our regression analysis indicates that the percentage spent on cultural foods out of the total amount spent on food (5% significance level), acculturation and gender (10% significance level) are significant predictors of expenditure on Somali foods. Based on our

sample, Somali families spend about $400 CAD a month on their cultural foods with their main food considerations being that it is fresh, versatile, traceable and varied and the longer they lived in the GTA, the less they spend on Somali food.

Attaining a sustainable competitive advantage includes supporting Somali-Canadians to grow their restaurant and grocery store businesses. It is also desirable to create incubator farms that will train and educate Canadian immigrants' population on how to grow goats that will produce excellent chevon and goat milk for the domestic and international market. A well-developed halal food market with active participation of refugee path immigrants may also enhance Canadian international trade with countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia and in the Middle East.

Notes

1. Many have criticized Canada's Temporary Foreign Workers' Program for being excessively exploitative (or superexploitive, Filson and Adekunle 2017) of the large pool of seasonal workers imported to work mainly in the agricultural sector (Akbari and MacDonald 2014). Though minor remediation has occurred, the Seasonal Agricultural Workers' Program (SAWP) has been criticized for workers' confined living conditions conducive of spreading COVID-19, the inability of workers to apply for permit status and the dependence of the workers on one employer only among other issues (see for e.g. Weiler and McLaughlin 2019).
2. Areas where there are "physical and economic barriers to accessing healthy food" (Shaw 2006).
3. We are aware of the fairly widespread negative perception of Somalis which we think is mainly due to media misrepresentation (Yusuf 2014; Yimer and Amour 2020). These impressions notwithstanding, Somalis were qualified to be refugee claimants in Canada because of the insurgency and war in their country. Furthermore, some are already registered in third countries like Kenya with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and were resettled in Canada based on their vulnerability.
4. Food sovereignty is the ability of people to own and control their food systems including promoting their culturally appropriate foods (Patel 2009; Wittman and Desmarais 2012; Adekunle 2016; Adekunle and Filson 2020) while food security is access to food that may not necessarily be sustainable or desirable.
5. They try and often do completely avoid alcohol. The few who drink, tending not to do so openly, avoid it during the Ramadan period.
6. Mostly from sorghum, maize, and or any other cereals.
7. Also spelt as anjero, canjeero, canjeera, and laxox. Pronunciation varies among regions.
8. *All the models were adequate according to Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and the Bartlett's test of sphericity was also significant. Principal components analysis was used for the extraction method. The rotation method employed varimax with Kaiser normalization. The figures in bold are the items that load heavily on the underlying components/factors.
9. Non-Somalis have also benefited from this development. For example, a significant number of people from the Middle East, other African countries, and European descents Canadians eat at Xawaash and purchase goat meat from Salama Hut butcher and Seif (field survey, 2015–2016).
10. Home can be Somalia, Kenya (Garissa), Ethiopia (Ogaden region), or Djibouti. All these countries have indigenous Somalis.
11. For a comparative assessment of how social class and ethnicity affect Canadians' perception of immigration and native people's rights see Filson (1983).
12. As income increases the amount spent on Somali foods decreases. The more well-off respondents spent a lower relative amount on Somali food even if they spent more on it.

13. Unlike the correlation the regression result is required to prove causality.
14. We are not sure whether this is an artifact of culture or religion, both or neither. For instance, in most English Canadian homes, the women do most of the grocery shopping whereas there are mostly men in Kano, Nigeria food markets. Of course, in southern, more Christian Nigeria, the traders and shoppers are mostly women. We need to explore this interesting discovery further.
15. Seif was selected after extensive consultation with Somalis in the GTA.
16. Based on the average per hour computed from data collected from our personal visits and estimate from the manager.
17. The store is opened 10 hrs/day for 30 days in month = 300 hours.
18. This is an average from our focus groups, interviews and survey.
19. This is from the analysis of the responses of 253 Somalis selected based on probability sampling technique in the GTA.
20. We assume, based on our interactions with Somalis that around 20% of the Somalis in the GTA go to Seif on average 1.5 times per month.

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