

The Flavours that Bring Us Together:  
A Personal Exploration of Colombian Foodways in the Greater Montreal Area Using Multimedia  
Journalism.

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## **Abstract**

The Flavours that Bring Us Together: Foodways and Foodscapes of the Colombian Community  
in the Greater Montreal Area

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This research-creation thesis explores how digital multimedia journalism can document and communicate the food practices of the Colombian diaspora in Montreal. Through a multimedia website that integrates photography, short videos, profile features, recipes, and personal reflections, the project examines how food operates as a site of memory, identity, and belonging. Combining journalistic storytelling with oral history, this work applies the concepts of care-based journalism (Jones, 2023) and the intimate public sphere (Berlant, 2008) to propose a more relational, empathetic, and participatory approach to media practice.

Using recipes and personal narratives as journalistic devices, the project repositions food writing and media as a form of slow, sensory storytelling that captures both the emotional and political dimensions of diasporic life. The website adopts an interactive format inspired by “Snow Fall” (Branch, 2012) style digital journalism, encouraging users to navigate content dynamically through visual and affective engagement. The result is a narrative production where participants’ voices are amplified and audiences are invited to experience Colombian food culture beyond the plate. Ultimately, this project argues that food-centered multimedia journalism offers a powerful framework for documenting the lived experiences of migration, one that nourishes empathy, fosters connection, and sustains collective identity through shared acts of storytelling and care.

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## Introduction

The food we eat is a fundamental element of our culture, shaping our identity and reflecting the traditions passed down through generations. As Mintz and Du Bois (2002) argue, food is deeply intertwined with culture, serving as a tool for both personal and collective expression. Each dish carries a history that extends beyond its ingredients, telling stories of ancestry, geography, and social customs. Through food, people maintain connections to their roots, preserving recipes and rituals that serve as tangible links to their past (Counihan & Van Esterik, 2008). Mealtime traditions, whether shared within families or broader communities, reinforce a sense of belonging and continuity, fostering a connection to one's heritage (Appadurai, 1981). The flavours, techniques, and ingredients that define a cuisine are not only markers of cultural distinction but also a means of storytelling, embedding personal and collective memories into every bite. While Bourdieu (1984) emphasizes how taste serves as a tool of social stratification, cultural distinction can also be understood through Griswold's (2012) concept of cultural objects, artifacts, symbols, or practices that carry meaning within a specific social context and contribute to the formation of collective identity.

Very few places could represent their biodiversity, multicultural heritage, and sense of community through food better than Colombia. Each region of the country is home to its distinctive flavours, from the hearty *bandeja paisa* of Antioquia to the coastal flavours of coconut rice and fresh seafood in the Caribbean. Beyond nourishment, food is essential in social life, bringing people together for everyday meals and festive celebrations. It is also deeply intertwined with traditional healing practices, as seen in the custom of drinking *aguapanela* with ginger to soothe a cold or the cherished tradition of enjoying *buñuelos* and *natilla* during Christmas. Whether through holiday feasts or the vibrant street food culture that unites people

across all backgrounds, Colombian cuisine embodies warmth, resilience, and the shared joy of gathering around a meal.

This research-creation project was born out of my longing for familiar flavours and the search for ways to reconnect with my roots while adapting to a different cultural landscape. Sourcing traditional ingredients and the act of cooking and sharing Colombian dishes not only became a way to reconnect with my heritage but also served as a means to explore how food can bridge the gap between different cultures. This personal exploration led me to delve deeper into the intersections of food, migration, and identity, aiming to understand how other Colombians in Montreal experience, preserve and transform their culinary traditions as a way of maintaining their identity and forging a sense of home. With this project, my goal was to understand not only my own relationship with food but also the broader role it plays in my community as a comforting anchor, a key to fostering belonging, and a bridge for cultural hybridity.

This research-creation project focuses on exploring the foodways and foodscapes of the Colombian diaspora in the Greater Montreal Area through interviews with restaurant and café owners in the city, as well as members of my family as a way to get a deeper understanding of traditional food practices. I examined the significance of food stories in understanding the immigrant experience through the lens of this community. Using a visual approach that combined photography, short videos, and written content on a website, my project addressed three key research questions:

1. What elements of digital multimedia journalism effectively highlight the food practices of a diasporic community, elevating their cultural significance?

2. Which aspects of lifestyle and food journalism best capture the complexity of migration narratives through food, and what makes them impactful?
3. How can the notion for care-based food journalism (Jones, 20203) and the idea of the intimate public sphere (Berlant, 2008) be applied to the production of a multimedia project focused on food and the Colombian diaspora in the Greater Montreal Area?

As previously mentioned, this research-creation project's objective was to capture the richness of Colombia's food heritage and trace its historical trajectory within the context of migration. Through a combination of literature review and oral history, gathered from interviews with restaurateurs, home cooks, and other community members, this project explores how food practices in the Colombian diaspora can highlight cultural significance and offer a unique window into the complexities of migration. The use of personal narrative journalism allowed for a more intimate connection between individual experiences and broader migration themes, adding depth to the exploration of how food can convey the richness of these stories.

The final product of this research-creation project is a multimedia website that combines photography, short videos and text to capture food in its full sensory dimension. This digital format was essential for immersing the audience in the textures, flavours, and atmospheres of culinary practices elements that written or audio descriptions alone cannot. By doing so, it highlighted the project's goal of exploring how digital multimedia journalism can elevate the cultural significance of food practices and provide a richer and more interactive representation of migration narratives.

Ultimately, this research project seeks to bridge the gap between food history, immigration studies, and journalism in Quebec by exploring the complex dimensions of food as

a cultural artifact, a vehicle for storytelling and social change. My goal in documenting the culinary journeys of Colombian immigrants in Montreal was to celebrate the richness of cultural diversity and challenge dominant narratives of assimilation and erasure. Through food, this project intended to explore how the elements of food and lifestyle journalism can effectively capture the complexities of identity, belonging, and resilience within a diasporic community, while also exploring the transformative potential of food journalism as a tool for social justice and cultural empowerment. Ultimately, my goal with this multimedia project has been to capture the stories behind the dishes, the memories they evoke, and the connections that they forge across generations and continents through a sensory journey of sights, sounds, and flavours.

### **Literature review**

This literature review examines the intersection of foodways and foodscapes within the context of immigration, a subject that spans multiple disciplines and theoretical frameworks. This multidisciplinary approach provides a profound lens through which issues of cultural identity, belonging, and adaptation will be explored. This section delves into the literature that broadens our understanding of the relationship between food practices and cultural heritage, focusing specifically on the Colombian diasporic community in Quebec. By analyzing literature about the migration processes that shape this community's experiences, this review sheds light on how food serves as both a symbol and a tool for cultural continuity in a new environment. Furthermore, the role of food journalism is emphasized as a crucial element in this study as it not only documents and disseminates the stories of these communities, but also plays a part in cultural preservation, social critique, and community empowerment. Bringing attention to the culinary practices of immigrant communities, food journalism helps bridge cultural gaps and promotes a deeper understanding of different cultures and socio-cultural dynamics. It serves as a

medium through which the complexities of identity, belonging, and adaptation are communicated to a broader audience, making these narratives more accessible and relatable.

In searching for literature around each topic, I mainly focused on studies from the last 20 years, but older literature was included to explore the historical aspect of these theories. I also reviewed secondary sources, including government and stakeholder reports, relevant dissertations, and other articles on immigration and how food studies are an important tool to analyze and protect the cultural heritage and food safety of diasporic communities. This background research, along with the research questions outlined on page 2 and 3, broadly covers four categories of literature, such as food studies, food and immigration, immigration studies, as well as food in media and journalism. Each is discussed in turn below.

### **Food Studies (foodways and foodscapes)**

It is difficult to imagine something more culturally connected than food. What we eat, how we prepare it, and how we consume it are all interwoven with the stories, relationships, and ways of being in the world that characterize our different cultural periods. Human activity is largely focused on acquiring, processing, and consuming food (Arbuckle, Benjamin, et al., 2023). In addition to being a biological necessity, food is shaped by numerous forces, such as environment, genetics, technology, identity, ideology, and power.

The field of food studies examines the complex connections between food, culture, society, and the environment. To explore how food practices shape and are shaped by cultural identities, social structures, and economic systems, it draws upon various academic disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, history, geography, and cultural studies (Almerico, 2014). In addition to its physical act, food studies examine food's symbolic meaning (Burt, 2022), its

rituals and traditions, and its broader social, political, and economic contexts. Food practices are influenced by who we are and where we live; they reflect dynamic and ever-changing subjects such as values, class distinctions, and trends.

Food tells memories, relationships, cultural histories, and personal life stories. Food choices can also reveal much about a group or individual, revealing their beliefs, passions, background knowledge, and assumptions. Annie Hauck-Lawson introduced the concept of “food voice” (in Long, 2024, p. 1), defining it specifically as food as a “channel for the expression of meaning.” While sometimes the food voice is loud and clear, in many instances, that voice is unheard, drowned out in a din of louder messages, or simply not perceived as carrying the power to communicate. In implicit or explicit ways, scholars have been observing the food voice, which tells the stories of migration, assimilation and resistance, changes over time, and personal and group identity. A person's experience can be observed in part through what they eat, avoid, no longer or more often consume, and, of course, by how they prepare and produce what they eat (Deutsch, 2004).

The concept of "foodways" is central to understanding how food practices are embedded within cultural, social, and historical contexts. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines this term as “the eating habits and culinary practices of a people, region, or historical period”. Furthermore, Darnton (2012, para.2) mentions that foodways can be defined as “all of the traditional activities, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours associated with the food in your daily life. Foodways include customs of food production, preservation, preparation, presentation, gathering, marketing (both buying and selling), uses of food products other than for eating and food folklore.”

This concept emphasizes that food is not merely a source of sustenance but is also a vital expression of cultural identity, social relations, and collective memory. Also, foodways are ever evolving as new ones are created or revived every day. Canning and preserving have been experiencing a resurgence as foodways are being rediscovered. By considering how they are alive in our lives, people can begin to appreciate their role and importance (Darnton, 2012). In the context of immigration, they encompass how food practices are passed down through generations, adapted to new environments, and used to negotiate identity and belonging within diasporic communities.

In contrast, “foodscape” is a recent concept that describes the physical environment where people access food, whereas foodways refers mainly to practices and traditions. It comes from the field of geography, and it comprises the words 'food' and 'landscape'. It has many different approaches, including spatial, behavioural, systemic, and, most importantly for this study, sociocultural. Sociologists have extended the concept to include the institutional arrangements, cultural spaces, and discourses that mediate our relationship with our food (MacKendrick, 2014). This social and cultural definition also includes food outlets and all other places where people are exposed to food messages, such as houses, schools, or streets, as well as underlining the key role of culture in the food-people-place nexus (Vonthron, Perrin, & Soulard, 2020).

## **Food and Immigration**

The intersection of food, culture, and identity plays a central role in understanding the foodways and foodscapes of a diasporic community. Food acts as a powerful medium for the construction and negotiation of cultural identity, especially within immigrant communities. It

often becomes a key element in maintaining cultural continuity while simultaneously addressing the pressures of assimilation. As sociologist Claude Fischler (1988) notes, “food is central to our sense of identity. The way any given human group eats helps it assert its diversity, hierarchy, and organization, while at the same time, both its oneness and the otherness of whoever eats differently”. This insight emphasizes that food not only serves as a marker of individuality but also as a means of social cohesion. Various scholars across the sociology and history fields agree that food plays a critical role in bridging the personal and communal (Counihan & Van Esterik, 2012; Avakian & Haber, 2005; Mintz & Du Bois, 2002; Ku, 2014), highlighting its multifaceted significance in connecting people to their cultural roots and fostering social bonds within immigrant communities.

As previously mentioned, food studies examine the complex interrelationships between food, culture, society, and the environment. In recent years, there has been an interest in applying a life-course perspective to food choice (Becuț and Puerto, 2017c). People's eating practices rarely remain static throughout their lives. Immigration is one of the key moments that leads to changes in food choice trajectories, where food management skills, resources, and standards are reevaluated. Historiographical research has shown that cuisines are symbolic representations of a nation and of the identity of its people (eating habits, table manners, taste and gastronomic sensibilities). Historiographies of gastronomy have demonstrated how gastronomic heritage expresses the collective concern of all human societies for historical continuity and community preservation (Becuț & Puerto, 2017; Counihan & Van Esterik, 2008; Mintz & Du Bois, 2002).

Moreover, there is growing academic interest in recognizing, safeguarding, and promoting both the tangible and intangible elements of foodscapes, which has brought to attention concepts like *food heritagisation* and *heritage turn* (Zocchi et al., 2021b).

Heritagisation refers to the process by which foods, places, and culinary practices are transformed into cultural heritage, as certain values are attributed to them. Essentially, it highlights heritage as a dynamic and evolving process, emphasizing how food and related practices are continuously reinterpreted, celebrated, and preserved as part of cultural identity and legacy.

Heritage turn is an approach to understanding contemporary heritage experiences based on a search for identity and a sense of belonging (Geyzen, 2014b). As the food chain has developed globally since the Second World War, there have been attempts to preserve a sense of geographic or historical distinctiveness. Several concepts are associated with this food heritage and distinctiveness, ranging from traditional cooking, authenticity, terroir, and geographical indications.

Although food heritage appears to be important to diasporic communities, there is no doubt that cross-cultural encounters occur not only with the host country's cuisine but also with other migrant communities. Given that Colombian gastronomy is characterized by regional diversity and cultural syncretism, it embraces the concept of cultural hybridity (Londoño-Mora, 2023). It blends ingredients and techniques from Indigenous and African cultures and those introduced by Spanish colonizers. In Colombia, *mestizo* cuisine has developed into a complex tapestry that reflects its geographical and cultural diversity. Regional identities are evident in Colombia's gastronomy, given that each of them has highly specific dishes, ingredients, and cooking techniques.

In the case of Colombian food practices in Montreal, the idea can further be explored as this cross-pollinated culture encounters the diversity of migrant communities in this area. The

continuity of food in diasporic communities seems to be marked by constant transformation, not only because of the encounter with the palette of the host population and other migrant cuisines, but also because there can be a lack of ingredients and the need to adapt to local commercial environments (Brightwell, 2012). Despite a community's efforts to maintain its distinctiveness through its cuisine, all the variables mentioned above can lead to not only a hybrid cuisine but a whole cultural hybridity.

### **Immigration studies and the Colombian diaspora**

The field of immigration studies focuses on the movement of people across borders and the effects it has on both sending and receiving countries. The field includes aspects of economics, sociology, political science, law, history, and anthropology to understand the causes and consequences of migration. As Brettell and Hollifield (2023) point out, immigration can be analyzed top-down and bottom-up, as well as "then to now" and "then and now". Bottom-up and "then and now" approaches will be used in this study by focusing on the individual and family experiences of migrants from a given area while emphasizing "continuities".

The process of immigration is often filled with hope and fear. Many migrants leave their homes to pursue the possibility of a better future with a steady income, as well as educational and healthcare opportunities (Haas, Castles, & Miller, 2020). However, it also involves risks, including dangerous journeys and the possibility of economic failure, which can devastate migrants and their families. In successful cases, migration can transform lives, providing resources to set up businesses or secure housing

As for receiving societies, immigration is also accompanied by mixed feelings. Although migrants have historically filled labour gaps and contributed to economic growth, they face

discrimination and are blamed for societal problems, particularly during times of crisis. Over the last 50 years, global migration rates have remained relatively stable, but their political significance has grown (Haas, Castles, & Miller, 2020). Due to the emergence of ethnic and racial diversity introduced by immigration, there has been a rise in anti-immigrant parties and movements around the world recently.

As immigration to Canada has increased in recent decades, Colombian immigrants have formed part of a broader pattern of Latin American migration, shaped by political, economic, and social factors. The Colombian diaspora in Canada presents a unique case within immigration studies due to its diverse migration waves, driven by conflict, economic instability, and opportunities for education and work. Colombians have experienced both forced and voluntary migration, which affects their integration pathways and sense of identity.

According to the 2021 Canadian Census, approximately 100,555 individuals reported Colombian as their ethnic or cultural origin, with 80,570 identifying Colombia as their country of birth. In Quebec alone, 39,485 people identified Colombia as their ethnic or cultural origin, with the majority, 26,125, residing in the Greater Montreal Area. Furthermore, Nedelkoska et al. (2021), referencing the 2016 Census, reported that nearly one-third of Colombian immigrants in Canada arrived as refugees. The same study also highlighted that the Colombian diaspora is predominantly first-generation, accounting for 77% of the population, while the second generation is notably young, with 71% under the age of 15 as of 2016.

Since Colombians in Canada represent a relatively recent diaspora, this research-creation project presents a valuable opportunity to examine how food serves as a link to cultural heritage within this community. It will also explore the effectiveness of a multimedia approach in

portraying stories of intangible culture, and will identify key elements of food journalism that can help capture the complexity of such narratives. Additionally, the interviews with community members aim to provide initial insights into themes such as belonging, identity, cultural adherence, and continuity through food.

Through multimedia visual storytelling, this project aims to tell powerful stories about how cultural values and food traditions are transmitted to newer generations, despite the challenges of displacement. As Valderrama-Echavarría (2014) points out, the Colombian diaspora often bears the emotional weight of a history shaped by violence, distrust, narco-trafficking, armed conflict, poverty, and exclusion, experiences that have given rise to deep-seated feelings of fear, isolation, and shame. The multimedia approach of this project will be essential to capturing these emotional layers of the immigration experience and portraying how they may influence or hinder the transmission of cultural identity through food within the Colombian community in Montreal.

### **Food in media and journalism**

Food media has deep historical roots, with inscriptions and illustrations found in temples and tombs dating back to ancient Egypt (Gasti, 2023). The modern form of it has, however, evolved significantly as a result of technological advancements. Food content is now easily accessible, constant, and interactive thanks to social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. Today's food media reaches a wider demographic than ever before, extending beyond traditional media's limits. While interest in food has existed for centuries, the way it is consumed and appreciated has shifted, particularly with food becoming an integral part of lifestyle and entertainment media.

In the early 20th century, figures like André Simon and food writers such as M.F.K. Fisher contributed to a growing gourmet movement, particularly after prohibition ended (Collins, 2015). Print media, especially magazines like *The New Yorker* and *House & Garden*, helped establish food as a subject of intellectual and cultural value. After World War II, gourmet dining became more prominent, with media outlets playing a role in bridging class distinctions. Radio programs in the 1920s, for example, provided cooking and nutrition tips, showing early signs of mass food communication, a trend that broadcast media would expand into in subsequent decades (Collins, 2015).

The origins of specialized journalism date back to the 1923 launch of *Time* magazine in the United States, which was a pioneer in interpretative journalism by combining political and economic coverage with cultural and leisure content. Despite its long history, food journalism has received relatively limited academic attention compared to other forms of journalism. According to Acosta (2011), food has been underexplored as a narrative element, yet its significance as a literary and journalistic element is remarkable. Food news originated in the Women's Pages; it seems that for a long time, this type of journalism was considered a synonym of *newspaper food pages*, often looked at as a filler section (Voos, 2014). Although often looked down on, food sections in newspapers reflected other important subjects such as gender roles. Most importantly for this study, they have highlighted changes in demographics as new immigrants settle into communities and share their cuisines. Such is the case with an article from the *New York Herald Tribune* in 1939 that clarified the pronunciation of the word "pizza."

A recent example of the role food journalism plays in documenting migration and cultural exchange is the arrival of Venezuelan migrants to Colombia. This movement has not only reshaped Colombia's demographic landscape but has also significantly impacted its culinary

traditions. Many Venezuelan migrants have turned to selling traditional dishes as a means of livelihood, introducing Colombian consumers to new flavours and food customs. In the article “Arepas venezolanas y hallacas ya son parte de la dieta bogotana,” published in *El Tiempo*, Toro (2018) highlights how this culinary exchange has led to a growing fusion of flavours, noting that Venezuelan cuisine is increasingly shaping Colombian dietary habits, particularly in urban areas. This phenomenon has also reignited long-standing debates around the cultural origins of the arepa, a staple corn-based flatbread beloved in both countries. Articles such as “Colombia and Venezuela Have a Beef: Who Owns the, or Makes the Best, Arepa?” (Wagner, 2024) published by *The New York Times*, and “¿De dónde es la arepa realmente: venezolana o colombiana?” (Sulbarán Lovera, 2017) published by BBC News Mundo, explore this friendly rivalry, pointing out that both Colombians and Venezuelans claim the arepa as a national treasure. Both media outlets mentioned that historical evidence suggests that indigenous communities in the region were preparing corn-based cakes long before the establishment of national borders, indicating a shared culinary heritage that predates modern nationhood.

Food journalism extends beyond restaurant reviews, diving into how food connects to broader societal issues. It covers hard-hitting topics such as food safety scandals, industrial food production, legislation, and the politics of food. Investigative journalists explore cases like contaminated products, deceptive food practices or exposing the food industry (Siniauer et al., 2014). Health is a significant focus in food journalism, with trends like the low-carb diet exemplifying how the media shapes public perceptions of nutrition. The influence of food journalism on eating habits and cultural narratives is profound, impacting everything from dietary choices to popular recipes. Additionally, food journalism serves as a rich storytelling platform, capturing human experiences related to food. It encompasses a variety of formats such

as blogs, memoirs, cookbooks, and even marketing, and it answers questions that pique curiosity, like the origins of food, culinary inventions, and the best dining spots.

Several definitions exist for food journalism. Turner and Orange (2013) discuss food journalism in their book *Specialist Journalism* from the point of view of the journalist as a gastronome with authority. According to the authors, food journalism has primarily focused on shaping taste and behaviours, or in other words, on food as a pleasure. However, the field of food journalism is vast, and its definitions reflect the genre's hybrid identity, and the definition usually varies depending on the author.

Scholars such as English and Fleischman (2019) emphasize the rhetorical and cultural influence of food writing, particularly in formats like restaurant reviews, where journalistic authority intersects with entertainment and personal taste. They highlight how credibility in food journalism is constructed through sensory language, metaphor, and narrative, with the dual purpose of informing and entertaining readers. They also note a significant gap in scholarly attention to restaurant reviews and food journalism, observing that much of the existing research originates from business and hospitality fields rather than Journalism Studies. Similarly, Fürsich (2012) and Hanusch (2013) discuss that despite its growing presence, lifestyle and food journalism are still underexplored fields within journalism studies, often noting that its definition varies significantly depending on context and scholarly approach.

Fusté-Forné and Masip (2018) further advance the discussion by framing food coverage not merely as lifestyle content but as a narrative device capable of fulfilling core journalistic functions such as storytelling, agenda-setting, and representing community voices. They advocate for an expanded approach to food journalism, encouraging systematic study of

food-based narratives in daily newspapers to understand their cultural and communicative significance.

Moreover, the purpose of this research-creation project is to explore what elements of lifestyle and food journalism would be best to capture the complexity of migration through food. I was guided by four key concepts and frameworks that inform its narrative approach and methodological design. One central concept is the perspective of food journalism as a democratic institution enhanced by care ethics (Jones, 2023). Rather than positioning journalists as neutral observers, this approach views them as embedded citizens whose reporting is shaped by and responsible for the cultural, social, and material systems they inhabit. This model supports journalism that is attentive, responsive, and grounded in the lived realities of communities, particularly those historically underrepresented or marginalized.

Also, Jones (2023) explores how food journalism's roots in the "women's pages" and lifestyle sections blurred the boundaries between public and private spheres. It allows domestic topics like grocery shopping, cooking, and mealtime rituals to enter public discourse while carrying moral, economic, and political tensions. This analysis draws on Lauren Berlant's (2008) concept of the intimate public sphere, which describes a cultural space where individuals who see themselves as socially or politically minoritized come together around shared feelings, affects, and everyday experiences. Unlike traditional public spheres, often dominated by rational debate and elite participation, intimate publics are grounded in emotion and memory, using the everyday as a site of belonging and soft political action.

For Berlant, intimacy becomes a mode of political engagement because it allows people to process collective conditions, like migration and cultural displacement, through the personal

and emotional terrain of daily life. According to the author, intimate publics exist as a result of people recognizing themselves in stories about personal life, as well as imagining alternative social worlds from those stories. Jones extends this framework to food journalism, arguing that recipes and culinary storytelling, especially those authored by marginalized voices, have long served as tools for building cultural memory, community solidarity, and counter-narratives in the face of dominant representations.

Additionally, this project draws on the concept of the citizen-eater, a term coined by Jones to describe individuals as socially and ecologically embedded beings whose everyday food choices are shaped by broader structures of power, inequality, and cultural identity. This framework supports the project's aim to explore the dynamics of how and where Colombians in Montreal access and consume their traditional foods, taking into account both the immigrant experience and the city's gastronomic landscape. The project also responds to critiques in the literature regarding how food journalism can reinforce cultural hierarchies and exclusionary narratives (Kittler, Sucher, & Nelms, 2012; Veit, 2013; Jones, 2023). By employing inclusive and participatory media practices, it seeks to portray an insider's perspective that could challenge stereotypes and amplify the diverse voices within Montreal's Colombian diaspora.

Finally, the integration of slow journalism (Le Masurier, 2015), which emphasizes depth, context, and reflection over immediacy, is particularly relevant in lifestyle and food journalism that prioritizes intimate, human-centred storytelling. This type of journalism offers an alternative to fast-paced news cycles by providing space to represent migrant stories with nuance and dignity, qualities essential to documenting food practices shaped by time, tradition, and adaptation.

## Methodology

With this research-creation project, my goal was to explore (1) what elements of digital multimedia journalism effectively highlight the food practices of a diasporic community, elevating their cultural significance, (2) which aspects of lifestyle and food journalism best capture the complexity of migration narratives through food, and make them impactful, and (3) how can the notion of care-based food journalism (Jones, 2023) and the idea of the intimate public sphere (Berlant, 2008) be applied to the production of a multimedia project focused on food and the Colombian diaspora in the Greater Montreal Area.

By applying Jones' (2023) framework of *care-based food journalism*. This project adopts an ethical and participatory methodology grounded in relational storytelling. Inspired by the author's call for journalism that foregrounds empathy and responsibility, my research process was rooted in collaboration with the participants rather than extraction. Interviews were conducted as dialogic exchanges, which allowed the subjects to guide the narrative around their food practices, memories, and migration experiences. Through recipes, photographs, and audiovisual content, I created a website that not only serves as content but also as a form of care that highlights Colombian food practices in Montreal, where my goal was to humanize and dignify our collective lived experiences. My position as a member of this community allowed me to approach participants with trust and connect on a deep level of shared understanding.

In the website I created, I also applied Jones' (2023) concept of the *citizen-eater*, by inviting audiences to move beyond simple consumption of food content and instead engage critically and empathetically with the stories behind the dishes. This concept reimagines the food consumer as an active participant in democratic life, someone who understands that food is

deeply intertwined with social, political, and cultural realities. Through this lens, eating becomes a civic act, a means of identity-making, and a form of engagement with broader issues such as migration and cultural survival. My project is centred around the narratives of Colombian immigrants in Montreal, including my own, to reveal how foodways and foodscapes function as tools of cultural preservation, resistance, and community-building. My website presents traditional recipes alongside personal migration stories. The website also shows how cooking serves not just as nourishment, but as a way of asserting presence, continuity, and belonging in a new cultural landscape. Ultimately, my multimedia project aims to make the audience see themselves as citizen-eaters who understand that behind every dish is a story, a struggle, and a voice that deserves to be heard.

Moreover, Berlant's (2008) concept of the *intimate public sphere*, where personal and emotional experiences become a shared basis for collective understanding, informs the affective and narrative structure of my multimedia website. Rather than treating the site as a static archive, I created it as a living, relational space where stories resonate with broader audiences through emotion, memory, and vulnerability. The intimate public sphere is not just about making the private visible; it creates affective infrastructures where shared feelings can lead to political consciousness and recognition. My project used first-person storytelling, photographs, short videos, and reflective texts to build a space that validates emotional connection as a key form of engagement. My goal adding these details was to help audiences connect not only intellectually but also, emotionally, fostering empathy and identification. I wanted to create a digital environment where users feel alongside storytellers, recognizing food as a vessel for longing, adaptation, and celebration. In doing so, the site became an intimate public space that renders the emotional textures of migration and cultural preservation both visible and meaningful.

Finally, Le Masurier's (2015) framework of slow journalism added a temporal and ethical layer to my methodology by emphasizing depth, contextualization, and narrative richness over immediacy. This approach values process over speed and resists the pressure to produce fast content for digital circulation. In practice, this means allowing space and time for relationships with participants to develop organically, for interviews to unfold thoughtfully, and for stories to emerge with care and complexity.

To achieve the objectives mentioned above, I used a research-creation method, particularly referring to Chapman and Sawchuk's (2012) "Research for Creation" and "Research from Creation", and incorporated semi-structured interviews, observation, and audiovisual documentation. On the other hand, I used personal narrative journalism to bring my experiences as a member of the Colombian diaspora in Montreal into the analysis. With this multifaceted style, the research questions were answered from both an individual and collective perspective.

### **Research-for-Creation and Research-from-Creation method**

For this project, I relied on Chapman and Sawchuk's (2012) concepts of research-for-creation and research-from-creation. These approaches recognize that artistic practice is both a form of inquiry and a method of knowledge production, allowing for iterative, reflexive, and collaborative engagement throughout the research process. This methodological approach recognizes that knowledge is not only gathered before production but also generated through creative practice itself. This dual approach allows for a rich, engaged, and evolving exploration of Colombian foodways in the Greater Montreal Area, offering both scholarly contributions and community engagement.

## ***Research-for-Creation***

Research-for-creation acknowledges that the early stages of artistic production involve extensive research, conceptual development, and engagement with various sources. In my project, this phase included archival and ethnographic research, fieldwork, and aesthetic experimentation.

To establish a historical and cultural foundation, I explored Colombian food practices not only in Montreal but also in the homeland through academic literature, archives, food-related ethnographic studies, as well as interviews with my grandmother and mom. Also, I conducted in-depth interviews with Colombian immigrants, both cooks and food entrepreneurs, to document their experiences, memories, and culinary traditions. These testimonies provided a critical perspective on the role of food in diasporic identity formation. Beyond textual and oral research, I also experiment with photography and multimedia storytelling to determine the most effective ways to represent the richness of Colombian gastronomy and the community on my website. This exploratory process allowed me some flexibility, enabling the project to evolve in response to emerging themes and insights.

Also, during this phase, my goal was to collaborate with participants, ensuring their voices are authentically represented, rooted in participatory research methodologies such as friendship-as-method (Tillmann-Healy, 2003), which emphasizes building genuine, reciprocal relationships with participants to foster trust and co-create knowledge.

Finally, an essential part of this phase was my self-reflexive process, which integrated my experiences as both a Colombian immigrant and a researcher. Rather than treating my story as separate from the research, I interrogated how my own memories, emotions, and cultural

background shaped every stage of the project. As Pillow (2003) explains, reflexive research requires asking not only *what* we know but *how* we come to know it, *who* we are, who we have been, and how we feel affects the stories we tell and the interpretations we make. According to the author, reflexivity is a conscious process of self-scrutiny that demands an “other” and requires ongoing analysis of one's positionality across identity, power, and context.

### ***Research-from-Creation***

Research-from-creation recognizes that artistic outputs themselves serve as sites of knowledge production. In my project, the multimedia website aimed to be not only an artistic expression but also a research tool that generates new insights into food, migration, and identity.

Moreover, this research-creation project extends its reach into both academic and public dissemination. I have been invited to present my work at an event organized by the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia University, scheduled for the Winter 2026 term. During this event, I plan to share the oral histories I gathered while cooking traditional Colombian dishes, engaging collectively with participants through storytelling and reflection. Additionally, the lab will support the project's dissemination by featuring it through their newsletter and/or website.

### **Personal narrative journalism**

In this project, I used personal narrative journalism and reflexivity to acknowledge my dual role as both researcher and subject. As a Colombian immigrant in Montreal, my lived experiences shaped my perspective on the food practices and cultural hybridity explored in this research-creation project. Personal narrative journalism offers a subjective and immersive

approach, recognizing that storytelling is inherently influenced by the narrator's background and emotions (Neveu, 2014). This approach aligns with New Journalism and Literary Journalism, which actively involve the journalist in the narrative and center on the experiences of their subjects (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013). Rather than striving for detached objectivity, I used first-person storytelling, using detailed descriptions and sensory experiences to bridge the personal and collective narratives.

As Lindgren (2016) notes, contemporary journalism emphasizes identity, self-exploration, and personal transformation, with audiences drawn to stories that reveal how individuals navigate their sense of self. This approach resonated with my research, as I explored my own relationship with Colombian food and cultural identity as well as the experiences of the other subjects. I used first-person narration, immersive storytelling, and reflexivity to align with this broader journalistic trend, which has also fueled the rise of personal podcasts and documentary storytelling (Lindgren, 2016). Also, my project drew inspiration from cookbooks, which often combine sensory descriptions of food with historical context, and serve not only as cultural archives but also act as living documents that connect generations. The aim of my research-creation project was to create a first version of a bigger project where I would like to create a more complete website that will include more recipes, food histories, personal anecdotes, as well as more multimedia components such as videos and illustrations.

### **Interview subjects**

Besides sharing my own story, I interviewed three members of the Colombian community in Montreal who are business owners of a restaurant and a café. I also interviewed my mom and my grandmother as part of the construction of my own story and as a living source

of information for traditional recipes. My goal was to include participants from different regions of Colombia to reflect the country's diverse gastronomy. This research-creation project represents the first phase of a larger initiative that I hope to expand beyond my master's degree. Through these interviews, I engaged in in-depth conversations about participants' immigration journeys, experiences with homesickness and nostalgia, and their sense of identity and belonging in their new home. Interestingly, the interviewees had newly born family members and I was particularly interested in understanding whether they were actively passing down Colombian cultural traditions to younger generations or how they were planning on doing it as well as the importance of this cultural continuity.

For the multimedia component of the interviews I focused on photographing primarily portraits of the subjects, their businesses and/or homes, ingredients, and the cooking process. To ensure accuracy in retelling their stories for the final website, I also recorded audio of our interviews, allowing me to write the stories in a more accurate way. The project does not include transcriptions of said interviews given that during our informed consent process we agreed on keeping them only for my personal use and note taking process.

For the multimedia component of the interviews, I focused on photographing the participants in their environments, capturing portraits, their businesses or homes, key ingredients, and moments from the cooking process. To ensure accuracy in representing their stories on the final website, I also recorded audio during each interview. These recordings allowed me to write with greater precision and remain faithful to their words. However, the project does not include full interview transcripts, as participants and I agreed during the informed consent process that the recordings would remain for my personal use and note-taking only.

The following is a list of the participants and a brief description of their stories,

- José Buitrago: he left Colombia sixteen years ago with his mother and sister, eventually settling in Montreal, where his uncle had migrated five years earlier. Born in Bogotá and raised in Ibagué, José's journey reflects both displacement and renewal. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he began preparing empanadas for delivery across the city, a small initiative that soon grew into a series of community pop-ups. Those experiences inspired the creation of *De Maíz*, his first restaurant. When construction forced its closure, José and his family saw it as an opportunity to evolve. After months of planning and setbacks, they reopened under a new name, *Juanito's*, with an expanded menu that blended Colombian classics with influences from across Latin America.
- Wendy Gomez: Wendy and her family arrived in Montréal in May 2023. Out of necessity, Wendy began learning to cook at home to save money, guided by her mother's advice to sell empanadas and papas rellenas. Through video calls, her mother, who had once run a small food stand in Colombia, taught her the family recipes that would soon become the foundation of their business. With patience and experimentation, Wendy and her husband refined these dishes together, transforming a modest kitchen project into *Le Cafecito Colombienne*, a small café that celebrates the flavors of their homeland. Today, they sell the foods that have comforted them through their migration journey, papas rellenas, empanadas, pan de bono, and pastel de pollo, among others. Their dream is to make *Le Cafecito Colombienne* a place where both locals and newcomers can feel at home.
- Yolanda Ruiz and María Salomón, my mom and grandmother: I decided to interview my mother and grandmother because their stories form the foundation of my own culinary and cultural memory. Their voices offered an intergenerational perspective on how food

shapes identity and belonging. Through their memories, I traced how recipes, traditions, and everyday meals carry history, care, and resilience. I also wanted to honor the women whose labor, creativity, and storytelling have deeply influenced my relationship with food and my understanding of home.

### **Digital journalism and multimedia approach**

Multimedia journalism offers a distinct advantage by integrating multiple forms of documentation and storytelling enhancing engagement and comprehension within the same experience. In the case of my subject matter, this approach is particularly valuable as food is inherently sensory, and digital storytelling allows for a more immersive representation of culinary practices. Traditional textual descriptions often struggle to capture the textures, sounds, and visual richness of food, whereas multimedia formats such as video, photography, and interactive graphics create a dynamic and emotionally resonant experience for audiences. Bonner, Ramduny-Ellis, and Peebles (2012) highlight that emotional engagement plays a crucial role in deepening audience connection and enhancing the learning experience, as emotion is not a static state but an ongoing interaction between an individual and their environment. By fostering this level of engagement, digital and multimedia journalism can also serve as powerful tools for challenging dominant narratives and amplifying underrepresented voices. When applied to food journalism, multimedia storytelling can go beyond exoticized or assimilationist portrayals of immigrant communities, highlighting lived experiences, cultural resilience, and the evolving nature of food traditions in the diaspora.

As Dowling and Vogan (2014) emphasize in their analysis of digital journalism, techniques like the “Snow Fall” approach, named after *The New York Times*’ interactive article *Snow Fall: The Avalanche at Tunnel Creek* (Branch, 2012), demonstrate how multimedia

storytelling can create deeply engaging narratives by blending visual and textual elements with interactive features. *Snow Fall* was a groundbreaking piece that integrated videos, animations, photographs, and text in a seamless scroll-triggered design, setting a new standard for immersive digital storytelling. This approach enhances narrative depth by allowing audiences to experience a story dynamically rather than passively consuming it. While multimedia storytelling might seem overwhelming at first, paradoxically, it can draw audiences deeper into the narrative, fostering greater engagement rather than distraction. The *Snow Fall* approach is relevant to my project, as it enables the exploration of complex themes such as identity, belonging, and assimilation within the context of migration, while also effectively capturing the sensory richness of food. By integrating elements like photos, short videos, and other visual elements, I attempted to create a narrative that presents food in diasporic communities not only as historical records but as living, evolving experiences that can be communicated effectively through multimodal storytelling.

Moreover, Usher (2016) argues that interactive journalism transforms audiences from passive consumers into active participants, enabling them to engage dynamically with content through exploration and interaction. This shift is particularly evident in non-linear storytelling formats, which allow users to navigate information in ways that suit their interests and cognitive processes rather than following a predetermined, linear structure. Also, interactive journalism relies on elements such as hyperlinks, multimedia integration, and data visualization to create an engaging and participatory experience. I incorporated features such as hyperlinks, photos and short videos to foster a deeper connection between audiences and the stories being told.

## Website component

As mentioned previously, the outcome of my research-creation project was a multimedia website designed to bring together the diverse food experiences of the Colombian community in the Greater Montreal Area. Given the visual, tactile, and communal nature of food, this digital format allowed me to convey its richness and complexity more effectively than written or audio descriptions alone.

The website, created using ReadyMag, features three in-depth stories, including my own, that explore the intersections between food, migration, and identity. It combines text, photography, and short videos to create an immersive and engaging storytelling experience. Initially, I intended to include a short video for each participant and recipe, along with original food illustrations and an interactive map of Colombian restaurants and markets in Montreal. However, due to time constraints, these elements were not incorporated into the final version.

The website's structure was inspired by [\*Night Market\*](#) (Thrillist, 2022), a multimedia storytelling project where users scroll vertically to reveal different sections and interact with clickable elements. This kind of format allowed me to build a non-linear narrative experience that weaves together personal stories, recipes, visual documentation, a glossary of Colombian ingredients and recipes, and a directory of Colombian food spaces in Montréal. These sections go beyond being functional resources; they are an extension of the project's storytelling goals. The glossary helps bridge cultural and linguistic gaps, offering context for traditional recipes and culinary terms. Meanwhile, the directory highlights cafés, restaurants, bakeries, and grocery stores where Colombian and Latin American food culture is actively sustained and shared.

Together, these components align with the idea of the citizen-eater (Jones, 2023), a concept that reshapes our understanding of audiences not as passive consumers, but as active participants who interpret, preserve, and circulate cultural knowledge through food. As Jones argues, recipes and food writing are not “filler content,” but a form of collective memory that allow people to transform raw ingredients into shared meaning, community, and care.

Rather than treating readers as mere users or consumers, this project acknowledges them as engaged citizen-eaters, by offering both narrative and practical knowledge. My objective was to invite visitors to explore at their own pace, whether they begin with a story, a dish, or a place, while recognizing themselves as part of a wider ecosystem of care, memory, and cultural continuity.

While the visual and multimedia elements aim to evoke the sensory and emotional dimensions of food, the written narratives provide depth and context, forming the backbone of the website’s overall storytelling structure.

## **Ethics**

As part of my project’s ethical considerations, obtaining informed consent was a central concern, given that participants shared deeply personal narratives and experiences. To ensure ethical integrity, I clearly communicated the research objectives, the potential uses of their interviews and audiovisual materials, and their right to withdraw from the study at any point.

Being part of the Colombian diaspora in Montreal enabled me to approach this process with heightened cultural awareness and sensitivity, helping me avoid extractive journalistic practices and prevent the misrepresentation or reinforcement of stereotypes about our culture and identity.

I worked collaboratively with participants throughout the interview process to ensure their voices

and perspectives were represented accurately and respectfully. In doing so, I drew upon resources such as *The Guide to Less-Extractive Reporting* (Yahr, n.d.) and the *Trauma Aware Journalism Toolkit* (Trauma Aware Journalism, 2024) to guide my ethical framework.

To further ensure accuracy and comfort, all interviews were conducted in Spanish, allowing participants to express themselves authentically and share their stories in their native language.

### **Reflections and discussion**

While searching for inspiration during the creation phase of my multimedia project, I came across a Colombian book titled *Recetario de Sabores Lejos* (Ojeda, 2020), a beautiful documentary comic that presents eight stories exploring the relationship between socio-environmental conflicts and the food produced and consumed in affected communities. The first line of its epilogue is simple yet compelling: “This book is about the belly and its nostalgias.” I immediately connected with that sentiment because, in many ways, my project is also about that. It began with my own homesickness, cravings, and longing. As I reflect on the process of creating this project, I realize how it evolved into something far beyond academic research; it became a deeply personal journey of connection, listening, and belonging.

Through conversations with other migrants in Montreal and with my own family, as well as by cooking Colombian dishes at home, sometimes following my mother’s recipes or shared by other Colombians (special thanks to the website *My Colombian Recipes*), I found myself not only collecting stories but also rediscovering my relationship with memory and reframing migration through multiple perspectives. hooks (1990) describes the “homeplace” as a site of resistance; in this sense, I view each interview, shared meal, photograph, and video as an act of remembering

that resists cultural erasure. These moments became gestures of preservation and celebration, affirming our collective identity within displacement.

The following section unpacks my reflections behind this research-creation journey. I will discuss my process, the role of food journalism as a space for cultural dialogue and its potential to address broader social issues, as well as how elements of digital multimedia journalism can serve to highlight and honor food practices as expressions of identity and community.

### **The process of creating my website and using digital multimedia journalism to capture food practices of a diasporic community**

Using digital multimedia journalism was essential to capturing and communicating the richness of food practices within the Colombian diasporic community in Montreal. From the beginning, I envisioned this project as more than an academic exercise; I wanted it to serve as an evolving platform for storytelling that I could continue developing beyond my thesis. My goal was to build a digital space where stories could be seen, heard, and felt through the multisensory language that food naturally evokes. Food is inherently visual, tactile, and emotional, and digital multimedia offered a way to translate those qualities into a form of journalistic storytelling capable of reaching audiences both intellectually and sensorially.

Barnes (2012), drawing on Zelizer's work, argues that images do not simply accompany narratives, they create meaning in their own right and shape how audiences understand and emotionally engage with social realities. They explain that, in many cases, photographs can transcend their immediate journalistic context to become cultural symbols that represent broader social issues, demonstrating how emotion can move people to reflection and even action. In this sense, the photographs and short videos in my project were not merely aesthetic choices but

integral tools for constructing meaning and evoking empathy. Echoing Barnes's (2012) insights, my goal was for the emotional resonance of these visual elements to go beyond affect, inviting audiences to reflect on cultural identity, belonging, and the lived experiences of diasporic communities in Montreal.

Moreover, my project was never intended to promote or review any particular restaurant or business, nor even to specifically showcase Colombian cuisine. Rather, its purpose was to make visible the presence of the Colombian community and its foodways within the greater Montreal area, to spark curiosity and invite viewers to discover stories and flavors that might otherwise go unnoticed. Food served as an entry point to explore broader themes of belonging and cultural contribution, highlighting how immigrant communities shape the city's social and emotional fabric. In this sense, the project was not about consumption but about connection. As Ojeda (2020) observes, contemporary society often celebrates food as an aesthetic, exotic, and touristic experience, turning it into a depoliticized commodity detached from its context. Yet behind each dish lie memories, affections, and longings, stories of recipes that can no longer be cooked, ingredients that are unavailable or unaffordable, and flavors that migration transforms forever. My project, therefore, seeks to counter this commodification by restoring food to its relational and affective dimensions, framing it as a medium through which diasporic identity, memory, and resilience are continually negotiated.

Given time and technical constraints, I primarily used photography and short videos for this first version of the website. However, I imagine future iterations to include soundscapes, longer-form videos, and illustrations to further immerse audiences in the stories. Despite lacking some elements I had initially planned, I wanted to communicate the sensory dimensions of food that written journalism alone cannot express. Photographing participants as they cooked, ate, or

handled ingredients revealed subtleties that would have been lost in transcription, the steam rising from a pot of ajiaco, the motion of kneading arepa dough, or the smiles shared while eating a meal with loved ones. These small, embodied moments represent what Pink (2015) describes as sensory ethnography, where meaning emerges through movement, sound, and affect rather than words alone. In that sense, digital multimedia journalism became not only a storytelling tool but also a methodology that honored the material and emotional dimensions of food practices.

Building on this sensory and affective approach, the structure of my website was designed to mirror the same multisensory experience. Beyond the section that includes my story and those of the interviewees, the website is organized into several interconnected sections, each reflecting a different layer of the project's narrative. One section features three recipes that I recreated using my mother's instructions: mantecada, papas rellenas, and salpicón. Each recipe is accompanied by a photograph of the final dish that I took myself, extending the visual storytelling of the interviews into the culinary sphere. Another section presents a glossary of traditional Colombian ingredients, designed for visitors who wish to learn more about the culinary language of Colombia. Each entry includes concise descriptions of key ingredients such as guascas, bocadillo, and arequipe, helping bridge cultural gaps for audiences unfamiliar with Colombian cuisine. In the near future, I plan to add illustrations or photographs, taken by me, to make this section more dynamic and visually accessible, allowing users to better recognize each ingredient and further engage with the sensory richness that defines Colombian food culture. A key inspiration for this approach is the project [\*100 most Jewish Foods\*](#). (Newhouse & Tablet, 2019) which presents an interactive table of traditional Jewish dishes where users can click on each item to reveal descriptions and contextual information. I aim to incorporate a similar level

of interactivity and user engagement, enabling visitors to explore Colombian ingredients not just visually, but also through layered, contextual storytelling.

Furthermore, the directory of Colombian food spaces in Montreal adds an interactive element to the site. It includes clickable links to Google Maps that guide users to restaurants, markets, cafés, and bakeries where they can experience Colombian flavors firsthand. Although my initial plan was to design a custom interactive map, I decided to link directly to Google Maps profiles instead. Given the time constraints and the rapid changes that occurred during the research period, such as new restaurants opening and others closing or relocating, this approach ensured that the information would remain accurate and up to date.

Additionally, the website incorporates photographs by Colombian photographer and friend Tomás Silva Luna, who generously provided me consent to use his work and personally sent me the images for this project. Since it was not possible for me to travel back to Colombia during the research-creation process, his images became a meaningful way to represent the colors, textures, and everyday scenes that evoke nostalgia among members of the diaspora. These photographs also provide valuable cultural context for audiences unfamiliar with Colombia.

One of the advantages of digital multimedia lies in its potential for non-linear storytelling. Unlike traditional forms of print and broadcast journalism, which often adhere to chronological or textual sequences, digital platforms enable layered, interactive, and exploratory narratives. Viewers can move fluidly between photographs, videos, and fragments of text, constructing their own pathways through the material. This non-linearity mirrors the complexity of diasporic identity, fragmented, fluid, and continually in negotiation. As Hall (1990) reminds

us, diasporic identities are “produced, not discovered,” emerging through dynamic processes of representation and reinterpretation.

From a methodological perspective, developing a multimedia website expanded my understanding of journalism as a form of research-creation. As Chapman and Sawchuk (2012) describe, research-creation challenges the boundaries between making and thinking. Selecting and editing images or short videos became akin to composing an aesthetic argument, an essay of textures and emotions. Each visual decision from how to frame a shot to what moment to highlight, constituted an act of meaning-making and reflection.

### **Dynamic and Interactive Journalism: Reimagining “Snow Fall” in 2025**

When I was conceptualizing the structure of my website, I knew from the beginning that it was crucial to make it as dynamic and engaging as possible. Although I was not able to incorporate all the interactive features I initially envisioned, creating a sense of participation and immersion remained central to my goals. Early in my research process, I revisited *The New York Times*’ “Snow Fall: The Avalanche at Tunnel Creek,” (Branch, 2012; Dowling & Vogan, 2014) a landmark piece that transformed digital storytelling by blending long-form narrative journalism with immersive multimedia elements. Its combination of written narrative, video, photography, maps, and animation redefined what storytelling could look like online.

However, more than a decade later, audiences’ attention spans and media habits have evolved drastically. The rise of short-form content on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts has reoriented how people engage with stories, prioritizing brevity, immediacy, and visual stimulation over extended reading or viewing. Recent studies suggest that such platforms cultivate fragmented attention and reinforce rapid, surface-level engagement with

media (Chen, Li, Guo, & Wang, 2022). Personally, I have experienced this shift; as someone who once spent hours reading long-form features or watching documentaries, I now find my own media consumption increasingly fragmented. The constant exposure to short-form content has challenged my ability to focus on longer pieces, and I have had similar conversations with fellow journalists who admitted to the same struggle. Many of us recognize the need to become more conscious and intentional about how we consume information, actively resisting the pull of algorithm-driven feeds and re-learning how to engage deeply with stories. This reflection was pivotal in shaping my project; it reminded me that if I wanted to reach contemporary audiences, interactivity and design dynamism were not merely aesthetic choices but communicative necessities.

To “Snow Fall” something in 2025, therefore, is less about recreating a specific visual format and more about embracing its ethos, its commitment to depth, experimentation, and storytelling that engages both intellectually and emotionally, while adapting it to today’s fragmented, mobile-first, and interactive media environment. It means crafting a story that remains rich and layered but is told through modular and accessible forms that resonate with audiences accustomed to navigating multiple digital touchpoints simultaneously.

### **Using Food to Tell Stories That Go Beyond the Plate**

Food has always been more than nourishment; for me, it has been a way of understanding who we are, where we come from, and how we adapt when we move elsewhere. As Svensson (2020) notes, food carries complex cultural and social meanings, it can act as a site of translation between the culture we leave behind and the one we inhabit. For migrants, what we cook, what we miss, and what we learn to eat anew all become part of how we negotiate belonging and

identity. In that sense, I have often felt that my own cooking practices mirror this ongoing translation: trying to find ingredients that resemble those from home, adapting recipes to what I can find in Montreal, or sharing Colombian dishes with friends who are curious to taste something unfamiliar. These moments reveal, as Svensson suggests, the in-between space of hybridity, where food becomes a bridge between histories, places, and emotions. This understanding became central to my research project, where food served as both subject and method, a way to document and connect with other members of the Colombian community in Montreal.

The storytelling power of food lies in its universality. Everyone eats, and therefore everyone has food memories that connect them to family, place, and a sense of belonging. Yet, these intimate experiences are inseparable from broader structures, access to food, labor conditions, environmental degradation, and migration. Ray (2016) mentions that food translates taste into social knowledge, revealing how culinary practices express hierarchies of power and identity. Similarly, Heldke (2003) argues that food practices reflect “cultural food colonialism,” where consumption of ethnic cuisines by privileged consumers raises questions about appropriation and authenticity. Thus, exploring food stories allows us to interrogate not only identity but also global dynamics of power, representation, and exchange.

For diasporic communities, food functions as a site of memory, identity, and resistance. As Sutton (2001) explores in his anthropological study of food and memory; the sensory act of eating, the smell, taste, and texture of familiar dishes, can awaken deeply rooted recollections. He argues that food embodies memory, connecting people to their past and shaping how culture travels and transforms across borders. Within my project, I witnessed this dynamic as participants described cooking as a way to “feel close” to home, to preserve family traditions,

and to navigate hybrid identities shaped by migration. In this sense, recipes and cooking become both personal archives and cultural testimony, forms of grassroots storytelling that resist erasure and reclaim agency through everyday acts of nourishment. I will expand on this idea in a following section, where I discuss recipes as a journalistic tool for documenting memory and cultural transmission.

In my interviews, I noticed that food often acted as a bridge to deeply personal narratives. What began as conversations about recipes or favorite ingredients quickly evolved into reflections on family histories, migration journeys, and the emotional challenges of adapting to life in Canada. Talking about food seemed to dissolve emotional barriers; participants became more open and expressive when describing the flavours, smells, and rituals of their traditional dishes. According to Lupton (1996), food is a powerful signifier of identity and belonging, capable of evoking powerful sensory and affective memories. For many participants, especially those who arrived as refugees and have not been able to return to Colombia or reunite with their families, cooking or eating familiar dishes became a vital way to preserve connection and memory. In some cases, like Wendy's, or even my own, traditional recipes were learned through video calls with our mothers in an attempt to recreate those familiar flavours. For me, cooking Colombian food has also become a form of exchange and bridge-building; my partner, who is from Quebec, has learned to make arepas and Colombian hot chocolate for breakfast. These shared culinary rituals not only recreate a sense of home but also foster new forms of belonging across cultures.

This connection between food, memory, and resilience became even more evident during the interviews with my mother and grandmother. Most of their stories about family recipes were accompanied by side stories about the rituals and celebrations surrounding the food, the holidays,

birthdays, or gatherings where certain dishes were prepared and shared. They spoke about how, despite periods of economic hardship or the scarcity of ingredients, they always found creative ways to cook something delicious for their families. Cooking, for them, was an act of love, care, and resourcefulness. These stories also revealed the socio-economic and political contexts of Colombia during their lives. My grandmother, in particular, spoke about her experiences during *La Violencia*, a brutal civil conflict in Colombia between the late 1940s and 1950s, marked by political persecution, forced displacement, and widespread rural suffering. For many families like hers, daily life during this period was defined by uncertainty and loss, yet also by acts of endurance and solidarity. The atrocities affected what her family ate and how they cooked. She remembered having to adapt recipes based on what was available, replacing ingredients, simplifying dishes, or bartering with neighboring communities, yet still finding joy in feeding others. To the extent that, when refugees arrived at their doorstep, my great grandfather extended this tradition of collective perseverance and let them stay on their farm. In such circumstances, food became both sustenance and resistance, a way to preserve dignity, create comfort, and hold on to a sense of normalcy amid chaos.

In contemporary media, food has become a bridge between the personal and the political, allowing journalists, artists, and creators to tell complex stories in accessible and emotionally resonant ways. Food documentaries, podcasts, and digital journalism frequently use meals or recipes as entry points into discussions of migration, climate change, or inequality. De Solier (2013) argues that food culture today reflects broader socio-cultural transformations in which individuals seek meaning and moral value through creative, productive engagement with food, such as cooking, writing, and storytelling, rather than mere consumption. This process of “productive consumption” situates food as a medium of self-making, where people construct

identity, express ethics, and connect with community through culinary practice. Projects like NPR's *The Salt*, which explores the cultural, environmental, and economic forces of food, or Netflix's *High on the Hog*, a documentary tracing the history and influence of African American cuisine, illustrate how food discourse has expanded beyond consumption and how recipes, restaurants, and ingredients can act as narrative devices to explore broader social realities.

For me, using food as a lens in this project was not merely a creative choice but an ethical one. It provided an accessible, familiar way to connect with my participants around kitchen tables, over shared meals, or while cooking together. These encounters often invited vulnerability and intimacy that might not have surfaced through traditional interviews. Food allowed participants to articulate migration, identity, and belonging in embodied and affective terms. As DeVault (1991) points out, food work often constitutes a “language of care,” a medium through which people communicate love, identity, and responsibility. Recognizing this, I came to see that food is not just a topic, it is a method, a form of inquiry that invites listening and empathy. This perspective aligns with what I will later expand in a following section as care-based journalism, an approach that prioritizes relational ethics and emotional sensitivity in storytelling.

### **Why is food journalism unique and what are the elements that best capture the complexity of migration narratives through food?**

Throughout the development of my multimedia project, I reflected on what makes food journalism uniquely suited to exploring the complexity of migration narratives. One defining characteristic is its capacity for slow storytelling. While mainstream journalism privileges speed and immediacy, food journalism lingers, listens, and observes. This slowness creates space for empathy and reflection, qualities that are vital when representing migration. As Le Masurier

(2015) explains, slow journalism resists the pace of the 24-hour news cycle, allowing stories to mature through time, context, and human connection. For instance, the origins of the California roll (Tomicki, 2012), and the General Tso chicken (Lewis, 2015) are all contested, yet they can be traced back to some form of Asian migration to North America. These origins are then reported on when their adoption became widespread bringing the greater cultural context to the forefront of their stories. Even if a food historian could define their true origins, they would have all been preceded by an untold number of meals, experiments and collaborations. The stories I gathered from members of the Colombian diaspora in Montreal emerged much the same way. Through long conversations and shared meals, participants reminisced about what they ate in Colombia, how their mothers cooked, and how they have adapted traditional dishes with Canadian ingredients. These intimate recollections revealed not just culinary practices, but emotional geographies, how food becomes a map of belonging that evolves with migration.

Interestingly, Le Masurier (2015) notes, the concept of *slow journalism* drew direct inspiration from the *Slow Food* movement. Both respond critically to the acceleration and homogenization of global culture, emphasizing transparency, quality, and ethical production. Just as Slow Food encourages consumers to become “co-producers” by learning about the origins of what they eat and making conscious sustainable choices, slow journalism invites audiences to understand how stories are made, to value depth, context, and integrity over instant consumption. This ethos shaped my own approach by taking time to verify information, to listen, and to build trust with participants. The process felt less like extracting data and more like co-creating meaning through shared reflection and dialogue.

My goal with the website was to inform audiences about the food stories of the Colombian diaspora in Montreal, highlighting migration from a perspective different from

traditional narratives of displacement or loss. Through these culinary stories, I hope to foster a deeper understanding of Colombian culture, which is often overshadowed by the global visibility of other Latin American cuisines such as Peruvian or Mexican. In this sense, I see food journalism as a form of ethical storytelling, where narrative care mirrors culinary care, and where slowing down allows the complexities of migration to be experienced, not just reported.

Food journalism becomes a particularly powerful medium for exploring migration narratives because, as Long (2004) observes, experiencing foodways may be one of the most complete ways of perceiving otherness, engaging all the senses and offering a deeply integrated form of understanding. The preparation and sharing of food are everyday acts through which migrants negotiate belonging, identity, and adaptation. Through its attention to these intimate practices, food journalism allows such nuances to surface, bridging the sensory and the symbolic, and transforming something as ordinary as a meal into a compelling narrative tool.

In my case, I have always been passionate about food, yet I had never spoken about it as much as I have since migrating. Coming from Colombia, a country with relatively little immigration, I became fascinated by how everyone I met abroad carried their own culinary memories and traditions. Food became my bridge to others, a way to connect, learn, and show genuine interest in their lives. I also noticed how people's demeanors changed when they spoke about food; their tone softened and their expressions brightened. Lupton (1996) suggests, food is an emotionally charged object of consumption that mediates relationships between the embodied self, family, and society. Like eating itself, emotions have traditionally been linked to the feminine, to what is intimate, disempowered, and often marginalized. This emotional resonance, I believe, is what distinguishes food journalism from other lifestyle genres, it carries the potential to tell stories that are not only about what we eat, but about who we are and how we belong.

Historically, food journalism was often dismissed as “soft” content or as consumer-oriented material primarily targeting women, particularly homemakers. Johnston and Baumann (2010) note that while food can be significant when situated in the domains of men, markets, and production, everyday eating and sustenance have traditionally been associated with the private, seemingly less important sphere of women. However, this perception has shifted considerably. Scholars now increasingly recognize the multidisciplinary nature of food discourse, which can blend narrative nonfiction, anthropology, visual storytelling, and more. These qualities make food journalism especially well-suited to exploring complex phenomena such as migration, which itself requires a multifaceted approach. Food writing can function as a form of cultural translation, mediating between different worlds and allowing audiences to move fluidly from a single kitchen table to the global food system, all while preserving the immediacy, intimacy, and human dimension of the story.

Ultimately, what makes food journalism “its own thing” and particularly suited to exploring migration narratives is its belief that the everyday matters. By taking seriously the stories embedded in meals, kitchens, and markets, it has the potential to democratize whose voices are heard and what counts as news. It elevates the expertise of home cooks, migrants, and community members whose experiences are often marginalized in mainstream media. This inclusivity aligns with Zelizer’s (2004) notion of journalism as a relational and interpretive practice, one that extends beyond the confines of “hard news” to embrace cultural meanings, rituals, and symbols. As Zelizer notes, the field of journalism has expanded its agenda by integrating perspectives from sociology, anthropology, and cultural analysis, recognizing that understanding news also involves understanding the different social worlds and ideologies that shape it. From this broader lens, food journalism exemplifies the interdisciplinary and

self-reflexive turn in media practice: it values the everyday as a site of meaning-making and positions journalists as mediators of cultural experience.

### **Recipes as Stories: Journalism in the age of copious food content**

I grew up watching cooking shows with my mother, surrounded by boxes filled with her handwritten notebooks, collections of recipes she had gathered over the years from her cooking classes, television programs, and even some she created herself. Cooking content has long existed in different media forms, from cookbooks and magazine columns to radio and television programs. Yet in recent years, there has been an undeniable surge of interest in everything related to food. I remember how unusual it seemed to be a “foodie” growing up in my small hometown in Colombia, and how much that perception changed as I became an adult and moved abroad. Today, food culture is omnipresent, found across a wide range of media formats, including long-form articles, short-form videos, photography, podcasts, illustrations, and social media posts.

The rise of digital platforms and social media influencers has blurred the boundaries between journalism, creative nonfiction, and food writing, revealing the potential of recipes to serve as a medium for storytelling. Traditionally, recipes have been perceived as functional texts—lists of ingredients and procedural steps designed to transmit culinary knowledge. However, as Chartrand et al. (2024) argue, recipes can also act as creative frameworks for improvisation and relational knowledge-sharing, extending beyond written instructions to include communal practices, oral traditions, and embodied experiences. When viewed through this lens, recipes transcend their utilitarian purpose and become powerful vehicles for narrative

and journalistic expression, capable of capturing the complexities of migration, adaptation, and identity in subtle yet profound ways.

Until recently, I had never considered recipes as a form of journalistic storytelling. But as I delved deeper into food studies and consumed more food-related content online, I began to recognize their narrative and cultural value. For example, while researching Colombian recipes for my project, I noticed that the comment sections beneath these recipes often turned into spaces of exchange, people debating the origins of certain dishes, offering ingredient substitutions for those living abroad, and sharing personal reflections on food nostalgia and cultural hybridity. By allowing anyone to reach into each others' intimate spheres or even a celebrity's audience, the saturation of cultural information and moments of relatedness are dramatically increased. It reasonably follows that these digital interactions reveal how recipes function not only as culinary guides but also as platforms for dialogue, memory, and identity.

Journalism and recipes intersect first through their documentary nature. Both forms are grounded in observation, research, and communication of real-world practices. Recipes, much like journalistic texts, are a form of documentation, a record of cultural practices, ingredients, and methods. Recipes are a kind of historical record that captures everyday life; this notion parallels the journalistic mission of chronicling reality and making sense of human experience. As Banerjee (2015) observes, food and cooking are crucial elements of culture and personhood, serving as codes that transmit complex social meanings. Through them, creativity, competence, desire, and nostalgia intertwine, shaping how people think about themselves and others, and how they build connections and boundaries. In this way, recipes can be viewed as ethnographic and journalistic artifacts, texts that preserve stories of place, tradition, and change while reflecting broader negotiations of identity and belonging.

Moreover, recipes embody a narrative potential that closely aligns with journalistic storytelling. Writers like Samin Nosrat exemplify this approach by blending personal narrative, sensory detail, and cultural history throughout her work. In *Salt, Fat, Acid, Heat* (2017), Nosrat transforms the cookbook format into a vehicle for storytelling, using recipes not only as practical guides but also as windows into her culinary journey and the lessons learned along the way. Through her accessible and embodied storytelling style, she demonstrates how recipes can anchor broader showing that food writing, at its best, nourishes both knowledge and empathy.

Furthermore, recipes can democratize journalism by centering everyday voices and domestic knowledge, traditionally excluded from mainstream reporting. Feminist media theorists like Carol Counihan (1999) have emphasized how recipes historically served as spaces of women's authorship and oral history. When used journalistically, they can challenge dominant narratives by elevating marginalized perspectives and by framing cooking as a site of political, cultural, and emotional expression. This democratizing quality aligns with the goals of participatory and community journalism, which seek to represent lived realities from within rather than observing from afar. As explained by Rosenberry and St. John (2010), participatory journalism invites audiences to become co-producers of news and meaning, reshaping the relationship between journalist and community through collaboration, inclusivity, and shared storytelling.

Therefore, the process of creating this research-creation project has led me to firmly believe that recipes can indeed serve as a form of journalistic storytelling, particularly when they are used to convey social meaning and cultural memory. In the case of my project, this was my first attempt at writing recipes, and I did not want to include only the practical elements such as the ingredients and step-by-step instructions, but also my goal was to provide a brief historical

and cultural context. As a food history enthusiast, I have always appreciated discovering a “fun fact” behind a dish. For instance, letters preserved in Colombia’s National Archives are said to reflect Simón Bolívar’s delight with *salpicón*, a detail that situates this refreshing fruit drink within both culinary and historical narratives (Nueva Lengua, n.d.). Alongside these historical notes, I also incorporated snippets of personal or family memories attached to the dishes I recreated, allowing each recipe to become a narrative thread between past and present.

I see recipes as bridges between the personal and the collective, the sensory and the analytical. Like journalism, they tell stories that inform, connect, and humanize. In a world saturated with food content, the challenge lies not in producing more recipes but in telling them differently. When we read a recipe not only for what it teaches us to cook but for why it exists, where it comes from, and who it represents, we move toward a form of journalism that nourishes both knowledge and connection.

### **Applying care-based journalism and the intimate public sphere in my project**

Drawing on Jones’s (2023) framework of *care-based food journalism*, I sought to challenge traditional models of detached, fact-driven reporting by emphasizing empathy, attentiveness, and responsibility. In the context of food journalism, care becomes especially meaningful because cooking, feeding, and sharing are themselves acts of care and cultural continuity (Williams, 2021). This methodology guided every stage of my project, from the way I approached participants to the aesthetic and ethical decisions that shaped the final multimedia website. Rather than striving for neutrality, I embraced a relational stance, acknowledging myself as both a journalist and a member of the Colombian diaspora whose identity is intertwined with

the stories I tell. As Jones (2023) argues, journalists are not external observers but “fellow citizens who care with the public”.

This perspective influenced my methods of interviewing and representation. Each conversation took place in intimate, familiar spaces, homes, kitchens, or restaurants, and unfolded in Spanish, our shared language. I prioritized informed consent, transparency, and open dialogue, understanding interviews not as interrogations but as shared moments of reflection. As Jones (2023) emphasizes, care ethics involves being “attentive to others on their own terms”, avoiding the projection of one’s own assumptions. Participants were collaborators who actively shaped the narratives; their words and gestures informed the direction of the project. Through this process, journalism became a relational practice grounded in listening and mutual recognition.

Care also extended to how I designed the digital platform. My goal was to evoke warmth and familiarity, what Williams (2021) describes as the *material dimensions of care*, through the use of photography, soft tones, and sensory storytelling. The website’s structure invited viewers to experience intimacy through visual and textual proximity, fostering empathy rather than distance. This attention to aesthetic and emotional detail was crucial in ensuring that the final product communicated care not only in content but in form.

At the same time, I came to understand that care is never perfect or static. Jones (2023) reminds us that care is a continual negotiation shaped by vulnerability, power, and emotional labor. Balancing empathy with accuracy and connection with reflexivity required constant awareness of my positionality as both insider and journalist. Care, in this sense, became both a methodology and a theme.

Complementing this framework, Berlant's (2008) concept of the *intimate public sphere* helped me conceptualize my website as more than a repository of stories. My goal was to create a participatory space where personal experiences resonated collectively. The project sought to foster recognition between migrants, locals, and anyone who associates food with belonging. As Miller and Deutsch (2009) note, food is an affective language that transcends linguistic and cultural barriers. Through photography, short videos, recipes, and first-person reflections, I sought to create what Berlant (2008) calls an "affective mode of publicness," privileging emotion and shared vulnerability as forms of connection.

Ultimately, bringing together the frameworks of care-based journalism and the intimate public sphere allowed me to reimagine journalism as a social and emotional infrastructure. In representing the Colombian community in Montreal, my goal was not simply to showcase cuisine but to document its existence and vitality, to build a digital space where culture could be experienced through shared meals, affective storytelling, and the resilience embedded in everyday acts of cooking.

## **Conclusions**

While creating this project, I have come to understand how digital multimedia journalism can powerfully convey the emotional, cultural, and material layers of food practices within diasporic communities. Building this project required me to move between roles, researcher, photographer, interviewer, and designer, to hopefully bring audiences closer to the lived experience of the Colombian diaspora in Montreal. To accurately represent these foodways, I had to immerse myself in the community's kitchens, to capture what written journalism alone could

not. As Pink (2015) argues, sensory ethnography depends on embodied participation; to “see” food in this context means listening, smelling, and tasting it as an act of witnessing.

Using digital multimedia journalism allowed me to connect journalistic storytelling with affective experience. The combination of photography, short-form video, and narrative text made it possible to build a multisensory digital environment where audiences could move beyond reading and begin to *feel* the stories. The process of designing the website taught me that multimedia work requires not only technical skills but ethical intentionality; every visual or auditory choice carries representational meaning. Working with the Colombian community, I became acutely aware of my responsibility to avoid exoticization and instead highlight everyday creativity and resilience.

This project also responded to the challenge of dynamic and interactive journalism, reimagining what it means to “Snow Fall” something in 2025. While *The New York Times’ Snow Fall* (Branch, 2012) pioneered long-form multimedia storytelling more than a decade ago, audience habits have changed. Today’s readers are accustomed to fast, mobile, and visually driven content. My goal was to adapt the spirit of *Snow Fall* to contemporary attention spans. I designed the website so that visitors could navigate between recipes, photos, and videos non-linearly, creating their own narrative pathways. This approach mirrors both the fragmented nature of diasporic identity and the exploratory behavior of digital audiences. Even within time and technical constraints, this interactive format became an essential part of my storytelling method, demonstrating that depth and engagement can coexist in short-form, multimedia spaces. Also, this project used food as a lens to tell stories that go beyond the plate. Our memories of cooking with our mothers, adapting recipes with new ingredients, or sharing meals during celebrations became windows into broader narratives of migration, belonging, and cultural

hybridity. As Ray (2016) and Mintz and Du Bois (2002) have shown, food embodies histories of mobility, labor, and identity. Through each story, I witnessed how the act of preparing and sharing food is both intimate and political, reflecting the complex intersections of adaptation and cultural preservation.

Food journalism is uniquely positioned to capture such complexity. Unlike hard news, it operates through emotion, sensory detail, and slowness. While documenting food stories of migration, I realized that this form of journalism is not simply about consumption or taste; it is about recognition. It honors voices that have often been excluded from mainstream narratives, affirming that a story told through a kitchen can be as revealing as one told through a newsroom. Writing and curating recipes for the site also became a journalistic act. Rather than treating recipes as static instructions, I wanted to use them as simple narrative tools, each accompanied by personal reflection and cultural context. These small stories can transform recipes into cultural texts, bridging the sensory and the historical. As Banerjee (2015) argues, culinary writing embodies nostalgia, identity, and creativity, dimensions that make recipes a form of journalistic storytelling in themselves.

The frameworks of care-based journalism (Jones, 2023) and the intimate public sphere (Berlant, 2008) guided my approach to both process and representation. Care-based journalism reframes the journalist as a relational participant. In practice, this meant conducting interviews in Spanish, in familiar environments, and always with informed consent and conversation. Participants were co-authors of their stories, shaping the narratives as they unfolded. Food, inherently tied to acts of care, became the perfect medium for such an approach. Meanwhile, Berlant's (2008) notion of the intimate public sphere helped me conceptualize the website as a space of emotional connection, where personal stories of migration resonate collectively.

Through the affective language of food, the project invited audiences to engage not only intellectually but emotionally, forming what Berlant calls “an affective mode of publicness.”

In bringing these frameworks together, I learned that journalism can function as a form of social and emotional infrastructure. To me, this project was not only about documenting Colombian cuisine in Montreal, but it was also about affirming the community’s presence. Food became both the method and the metaphor for connection. In a time of increasing fragmentation and displacement, this project reaffirmed my belief that food journalism can nourish, not just inform, by cultivating empathy, preserving memory, and creating spaces where stories can be felt as much as they are read.

### **Limitations and next steps**

While this project has been a rewarding process of discovery, creativity, and community engagement, several limitations have shaped both its scope and execution. The most immediate challenge was time constraints; working within this thesis framework imposed a tight timeline that limited the development of some of the multimedia and interactive components initially envisioned. Elements such as longer-format videos, longer photo essays, and illustrated graphics had to be simplified or postponed. Similarly, my limited experience in web design meant that creating a fully responsive and dynamic platform required a steep learning curve; consequently, several interactive features, such as animations or map integration, remain under development.

Another significant challenge was participant recruitment and trust-building. The Colombian diaspora, as documented by the Migration Policy Institute (2011), is characterized by low levels of trust due to decades of political instability and civil conflict that fragmented communities both within and beyond Colombia’s borders. This dynamic affected my own

process, as many potential participants were hesitant to engage in recorded interviews or to have their stories shared publicly. Establishing rapport required patience and sensitivity, yet I found that deeper relationships could have been built with more time. I would have liked to gather participant feedback on the website itself, to move toward a co-created model of storytelling in which community members not only share their stories but also actively shape how they are represented.

Additionally, while the final website successfully included key sections such as the interviews, recipes, a glossary, and a directory of Colombian food spaces, the interactive potential of these sections remains only partially realized. I was unable to finalize features like a clickable map of food spaces, bilingual navigation, or vegetarian and vegan adaptations of traditional recipes. Moreover, although the project primarily focused on the Greater Montreal Area, my original plan was to include stories from other regions of Quebec where Colombian communities are growing. Limited resources made this expansion unfeasible.

From a research perspective, navigating positionality and reflexivity was another inherent challenge. As both a researcher and a member of the Colombian diaspora, I occupied a dual position of insider and storyteller. This facilitated intimacy and understanding but also risked bias through over-identification. Acknowledging and reflecting on this tension became central to maintaining ethical integrity throughout the project.

Despite these constraints, this project successfully helps fill a notable gap in scholarship on the Colombian diaspora, which remains understudied not only in Canada but globally. By combining journalistic inquiry, digital storytelling, and food studies, this work documents a

dimension of diasporic life that is often overlooked: the everyday culinary practices that sustain memory, belonging, and cultural continuity.

Looking ahead, I plan to build upon this foundation by improving the quality and accessibility of the website. My immediate priorities include the development of a Spanish-language version to better serve Colombian and Latin American audiences, the inclusion of new recipes and updated interviews, and an expanded glossary of ingredients. I also aim to incorporate vegetarian and vegan alternatives to make the recipes more inclusive and reflective of evolving food practices within the diaspora.

From an interaction design perspective, future iterations will feature a map-based directory of Colombian restaurants, bakeries, and food spaces in Montreal, enabling users to explore the diaspora's culinary geography dynamically. I also intend to improve user experience (UX) and optimize the site for mobile devices to better engage contemporary audiences.

Equally important are the community engagement and collaboration goals. I plan to reach out to Colombian organizations and the Consulate of Colombia in Montreal to establish partnerships that can support the project's sustainability and expand its reach. Such collaborations could lead to the co-creation of public events, food storytelling workshops, or pop-up exhibitions that merge the digital and physical dimensions of the project. These events would not only showcase Colombian culinary heritage but also foster dialogue among migrants, researchers, and locals. Overall, I think this project will be a valuable starting point for these future initiatives, which will then feed back into the website itself.

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## Appendix I

### Spanish to English translation of interview questions

1. Can you tell me about your arrival in Montreal? What brought you here, and what was that transition like for you and your family?
2. How do you define “home,” and in what ways is that idea connected to food?
3. What is your personal relationship with food? How has it evolved since you moved to Montreal?
4. What role has Colombian food played in maintaining your cultural identity while living here?
5. What were your favourite dishes in Colombia? Have your tastes or eating habits changed since arriving in Montreal? What has stayed the same?
6. Are there specific foods, ingredients, or rituals that connect you to your memories or to people back in Colombia?
7. What role does nostalgia play in your connection to Colombian food here?
8. Are there dishes or food traditions that make you feel “at home” in Montreal?
9. Have you faced challenges preparing or accessing Colombian food here? How have you adapted, and have you modified any traditional recipes because of ingredient limitations? Could you share an example?
10. Where do you usually find Colombian ingredients or prepared foods in Montreal, and what do those places represent for you?
11. How do you share Colombian culinary traditions with others here, such as family, friends, neighbours, or colleagues? How do people usually react?
12. What food traditions do you hope to pass on to future generations, and what do you want them to understand or remember through those traditions?
13. Do you think younger generations who are growing up here will connect with Colombian culinary traditions? Why or why not?
14. What inspired you to open your restaurant/café/food business?

15. Beyond offering food, do you feel your business helps build community? How?
16. How do you feel Colombian food is represented in Quebec? Is there anything you wish were different or more visible?
17. How do non-Colombians respond to Colombian cuisine when they try it?

## **Appendix II**

### **José Buitrago**

José Buitrago left Colombia sixteen years ago, when he was 20 years old, with his mother and sister for security reasons. They settled in Montréal, where his uncle had moved five years earlier. Born in Bogotá and raised in Ibagué, José grew up surrounded by the aromas and sounds of Colombian street food. His grandmother ran a small food stand where she sold empanadas, papas rellenas (stuffed potatoes), perros calientes (hot dogs), and other street foods. Every morning before dawn, she and José's aunt Rosa would prepare fresh dough and fillings, a memory that would later spark his lifelong fascination with cooking.

Despite his growing passion for food, José's father never saw cooking as a "serious" career. In Colombia, he tried three different university programs, but none of them gave him a satisfying sense of fulfillment. What he truly wanted was to study culinary arts, a dream that had to wait until life took him to Canada.

When he arrived in Montréal at twenty years old, José remembers the city as more open and welcoming to newcomers than it is today. He attributes this to both the stories he's heard from more recent newcomers and the current political climate, which has made immigration feel more restrictive. He enrolled in culinary school, began working in kitchens across the city, and

immersed himself in learning techniques from different cuisines. His curiosity took him even further to Mexico and New York, where he gained experience in a range of culinary scenes that deepened his appreciation for the art of cooking, the importance of service, and the intimacy of feeding others.

When the pandemic hit, José began preparing empanadas for delivery across Montréal. Soon, he and his friends transformed these homemade efforts into pop-ups, lively community events with DJs, BBQs, artists, tattooists, and food. “It felt like a mini festival,” he told me. Those moments of creativity and togetherness became the seed for D’maïs, his first restaurant, a small shop in Saint-Henri where empanadas were the heart of the menu.

When construction in the area forced them to close in November 2024, José and his family took it as a sign to grow. After ten months of planning and setbacks, they reopened with a new name and a new vision: Juanito’s, located in the St-Henri area. At this new restaurant, the menu has expanded beyond Colombian classics, blending dishes and influences from across Latin America. Inspired by friendships with people from Mexico, Peru, and Guatemala, José wanted to create a place where food could unite people from all backgrounds, Colombians, Latinos, and locals alike.

José believes that Colombian street food deserves a bigger place in Montréal’s culinary scene. Too often, he says, Colombian cuisine abroad is limited to a few traditional dishes, when in reality it’s full of creativity, diversity, and room for innovation. Street food is part of our daily life back home, and he thinks it should be celebrated, or even reimaged to show others the richness of our food culture.

He has noticed a change in how Colombia is perceived abroad. “In recent years, people’s perception of Colombia has improved a lot,” he said. “Now, when you say you’re Colombian, people’s eyes light up. Everyone wants to travel there. Many of our customers are locals who’ve visited Colombia, and they come back full of our culture.” Nowadays, it seems, people are more aware of the beauty of our beaches, our food and our music.” For José, this shift is powerful. “It feels like we’re finally being seen for who we are, not just through the old narratives of violence and narcos, but through our creativity, hospitality, and joy.”

During our conversation, I asked José if he could tell the story of Colombia through a single dish. I thought it would be a difficult question, one without a clear answer, and I wasn’t even sure how I would answer it myself. But his response came naturally and with conviction: arepa con hogao y bistec a caballo.

“Hogao is the soul of our cuisine,” he explained. “It’s the base of so many dishes, it’s like our national sauce. The arepa represents corn, which connects us to all of Latin America, and the steak with egg reflects the flavours and proteins Colombians love most.”

Still, José’s food is not just about tradition; it’s also about evolution. His empanadas at Juanito’s have colourful doughs and unexpected fillings that reflect his multicultural influences. “I still feel very Colombian,” he told me, “but living here expanded my palate. I didn’t even like fish before, but now I love sushi. My cooking is a mix of where I’m from and everything I’ve learned.”

For José, Montréal is both a second home and a creative playground. The growing Latin community has made finding ingredients easier; what once required hunting through markets can now be found in local Latin stores. “When my mom used to make ajiaco, finding guasca was

almost impossible,” he recalled. “Now it’s much easier, and it means so much to taste something that brings you back home.”

Looking ahead, José dreams of expanding Juanito’s menu to showcase more of Colombia’s culinary richness, from simple pairings like cheese with bocadillo (guava paste), to ambitious dishes like lechona and mazorcada. But more than anything, he wants to use food to share Colombian and Latin American cultures, not just with the Colombian or Latin community, but with Montréalers of all backgrounds.

During our long conversation, I noticed how José spoke about food not just as a profession but as memory, connection, and identity, all wrapped in one. It’s the aroma that brings back family, the table that gathers friends, and the taste that says: you are home. Through Juanito’s, he continues his grandmother’s legacy, one empanada at a time, proving that even thousands of kilometres away, a kitchen can still feel like Colombia.

Before we spoke, I had already been to Juanito’s as a customer. I tried the classic empanadas, shredded chicken and beef, and the El Parcero Bowl, a dish named after the Colombian word for "friend." Everything was accompanied by the familiar taste of Colombiana and Manzana sodas. The food was delicious, comforting, and nostalgic, but what struck me most was the atmosphere. Everyone there was warm and welcoming, joking with me as if we’d known each other for years. Beyond the food, that sense of generosity and openness is what truly makes Juanito’s feel like home. They even carry frozen products and pantry staples from Colombia and other Latin American countries, a thoughtful gesture for anyone craving the flavors they grew up with.

## **Appendix III**

### **Wendy Gomez**

When I first met Wendy Gomez and her husband in September 2025, they welcomed me into their home with the kind of warmth that instantly felt familiar, the smell of pan de bono fresh from the oven, the sound of coffee brewing, and that hospitality I always miss from back home. Over the next few hours, as we talked about migration, our memories, and food, it became clear their story was one of resilience, of two people rebuilding their lives through flavours that remind them of home.

Wendy and her husband arrived in Montréal on May 2, 2023, after having to leave Colombia abruptly. Her husband, once a military officer and lawyer, and Wendy, also a lawyer, packed their lives into a few suitcases, withdrew their savings, and boarded a plane with no clear idea of what awaited them. “We didn’t really have time to think,” Wendy told me. “We just had to leave.”

Their adjustment to life in Canada unfolded differently for each of them. Her husband describes it as surprisingly easy, almost peaceful, after a lifetime spent under pressure. He joined the army at sixteen, went to a military school before that, and spent most of his adult life either on military bases or deep in the countryside. “For me, things like driving a car or eating ice cream meant I was on vacation,” he said with a laugh, “so living here feels like being on vacation all the time.” Since moving to Montréal, he says, he has finally been able to rest, to sleep without fear, and to feel safe in silence.

For Wendy, the transition was much harder. She left her career, her family, and everything she had built back home in Bogotá, Colombia. Shortly after arriving, she discovered she was pregnant, another life-changing moment in a year already full of upheaval. “I had to start from zero,” she said. “I wasn’t just adapting to a new country; I was redefining who I was.”

Cooking became her bridge between the life she left and the one she was trying to build. Before coming to Canada, Wendy barely cooked. But in Montréal, with limited resources and a baby on the way, she began learning to prepare meals at home to save money. While considering what to do as a way to earn some side money while she was pregnant, her mother told her to sell empanadas and papas rellenas. It was through video calls with her mom that she learned how to cook these dishes. When I asked her how her mom learned these recipes, she told me that her parents owned a food stand on a military base when she was younger.

After much trial and error, Wendy and her husband kept improving the recipes, guided by friends' advice, until their food started to taste like home. Eventually, they bought a small used deep fryer on Facebook Marketplace to accelerate their process. With it, they perfected their technique, learning to control temperature and texture until their recipes felt just right. For both of them, making food became a form of emotional continuity. For her husband, home is inseparable from flavour. Beef guiso, a type of stew made with potatoes and rice, creates the kind of aromas that instantly transport him back to a Sunday in Colombia. "Those smells take you out of the chaos of Montréal and bring you back home," he said. For Wendy, too, aromas carry her back to childhood. "The smell of your mom's cooking is something that never leaves you".

Adapting Colombian recipes in Canada, however, comes with its own challenges. Some ingredients are hard to find, and even the ones that are available taste different. "The potatoes here are sweeter," Wendy explained, "so at first it was hard to get the right flavour for the papas rellenas." When I asked which dishes held the most emotional weight for them, Wendy mentioned *camuro*, a traditional goat stew from Santander that her mother used to make. She spoke of it with a kind of reverence, the way people talk about things they can't quite recreate.

Finding the right meat has been impossible in Montréal; the closest she's come is goat head from a local butcher. She also reminisced about several other irreproducible recipes for them, such as pepitoria, arepa de maíz pelado grilled over charcoal, and carne secada al carbón, a method where the meat is salted, hung over firewood, and later fried. This unavailability goes as deep as not having the specific species of corn, goat or wood. As she explained, even the faintest defect in a recipe's taste profile can erase one's personal connection to the dish. Still, stores like Sabor Latino and Marché Andes have proven indispensable for sourcing essential ingredients.

Our conversation soon drifted to the diversity of Colombian cuisine, how every region reinterprets even the simplest dish. We laughed about how we all grew up with a different kind of changua, the milky breakfast soup typical of the Andean region, which seems to vary from town to town. "In Colombia, no two *changuas* taste the same," Wendy said, smiling. In my hometown of Villavicencio, the changua I grew up with was always served with pan de arroz, a rice-based bread that's iconic to the plains region in Colombia. Unlike typical wheat bread, pan de arroz is made with rice flour, cuajada (fresh cheese), and sometimes anise, giving it a slightly crunchy texture and a subtle aroma. Wendy's family, who are from the Santander region, add pieces of arepa, while her husband's recipe calls for regular bread. Many Colombians hold strong opinions as to whether a changua made with potatoes instead of some sort of bread should even bear the same name. Nevertheless, this recipe will always be milky soup with boiled eggs and some form of baked good to any of us.

In their home, tradition remains non-negotiable. Wendy says she still cooks almost exclusively Colombian food: "It's not even something I think about. It's what I know, what I saw growing up," she said. When they crave other cuisines, they go out to eat, but their kitchen remains an extension of their mothers' kitchens back home. Their daughter, born in Montréal, has become

the reason they continue these traditions. They want her to grow up surrounded by the smells and sounds of Colombia, to speak Spanish and to learn where she comes from through the food they make at home.

Since their arrival, they've created new rituals that keep them connected to their roots, like celebrating Christmas and Día de las Velitas, a tradition of lighting candles to mark the start of the holiday season with solemn contemplation and wishes, with a circle of friends who have become their chosen family. They've also shared their culture with friends from other countries, like a Lebanese classmate from Wendy's French classes who fell in love with arepas and now makes them for her own children.

To continue sharing their traditions with an even broader audience, they've evolved from their home kitchen experiments to a small café called Le Cafecito Colombien near the Jean-Talon metro station. Wendy and her husband now sell the foods that brought them comfort, such as papas rellenas, empanadas, pan de bono, and pastel de pollo, among others. Their dream, they said, is to create a space where people, locals and newcomers to Montréal can feel at home.

“When people come here, we don't just serve them food,” her husband explained. “We talk. People tell us how hard it's been to adapt, how lonely it can be. I think if we all helped each other more, it would be easier. That's what we want, for this café to be a place for community.” They've found that locals are increasingly curious about Colombian cuisine and delighted when they try it. The papa rellena has become a favourite, perhaps because, as Wendy's husband says, “Quebecois already love potatoes.” Still, they hope for a day when Colombian food receives the recognition it deserves, beyond empanadas and bandeja paisa. “People know Mexican food, Peruvian food, but Colombian cuisine is still undervalued,” he said. “We need more spaces that show it can be refined and creative”.

A few weeks after our first meeting, I visited Le Cafecito Colombien. As I watched Wendy, her husband and their team serve food and chat with customers, it was abundantly clear to me that what they had built went far beyond a business. Several people lingered over their cups of coffee, talking not just about food but about life, migration, nostalgia, and new beginnings. Though Wendy and her husband's story here is only beginning, with plans to open a bigger location, they are poised to accomplish the goals they had set out for themselves.

## **Appendix IV**

### **My story**

I arrived in Montréal by myself in 2022. Unlike the people I've interviewed for this project, I came here by choice, as an international student undertaking graduate studies at Concordia University. Even when migration is a choice, the difficulties with adaptation still exist. Living far from home has made me very aware of how essential it is to carry my cultural practices with me, to hold on to my identity through the small rituals of daily life, especially those that happen around food.

This isn't my first project about gastronomy, but it is the first time I've written about myself. I've always found it easier to interview others, to listen, observe, and tell their stories. Writing my own felt strange, almost uncomfortable. On a personal level, it was important for me to push through that feeling as a way to make sense of my experience. Every friend made along the way had gone through a different version of the same story. Sharing their experiences and the process of creating this project allowed me to better answer questions for myself, such as when my passion for food began, when I started cooking and why.

I grew up in a home filled with delicious food and a mother who was, without exaggeration, an expert in the kitchen. Still, I didn't learn to cook until adulthood. My curiosity wasn't born from

tradition, but from the food documentaries I used to watch endlessly, fascinated by the colours, textures, and stories behind dishes from around the world. At the time, Colombia's gastronomic scene was still developing, and many international recipes were hard to find in restaurants or markets.

So I began searching for ingredients back home in Colombia, wherever I could, experimenting with recipes in my kitchen, and trying to understand how flavours could capture the essence of distant cultures. Cooking became a different way of travelling and a way of learning about the world through my senses.

It took years, however, for me to turn that curiosity inward, to look at my own country with the same wonder I had for others. A few years before leaving Colombia, I began to feel a deep urge to understand our own food traditions, the diversity, complexity, and memory contained in each dish. Ironically, it was only after migrating that I truly began to see how food connects us to who we are. Cooking became an act of self-preservation, a way to reclaim my identity while creating a sense of home far away from it.

This project grew from a desire to understand myself, my roots, and the shared experience of migration through the language of food. It is also a tribute to the many Colombians who are elevating our cuisine on the global stage, such as writer and food stylist Mariana Velásquez, whose book *Colombiana* reimagines traditional flavours with a modern flair, and award-winning chef Leonor Espinosa, known for her pioneering work in biodiversity, ancestral cooking, and culinary activism.

For decades, Colombian gastronomy has lived in the shadow of other Latin American cuisines like Mexico's or Peru's. Years of violence and instability shaped a collective shame that made it harder to celebrate our culture. But living abroad, I've watched new generations in Colombia

reclaim that pride: valuing local ingredients, honouring ancestral techniques, and redefining what Colombian cuisine means today.

As I explored my own relationship with food, I realized my story wouldn't be complete without looking back at the women who came before me, my mother and grandmother, who still live in Colombia and continue to carry the traditions that shaped me.

My grandmother learned to cook out of necessity at a very young age. She grew up in Restrepo, Meta, Colombia, on a rural farm, in a low-income family of seven children who worked mostly in agriculture. Her father built rudimentary tools from river stones to roast arepas over firewood, while the family cultivated coffee and cacao, harvesting, drying, and roasting the beans by hand. My great-grandmother, who was the true expert in the kitchen, taught her to cook when she was about eight years old. My grandmother still remembers making sancocho de gallina, tamales, and the typical breakfasts of caldo and amasijos alongside her mother, long before these foods became symbols of cultural memory for me.

My mother's story followed a similar path. The eldest of four children raised by a single mother, she learned to cook early out of responsibility rather than passion. But in her teenage years, while attending an all-girls school that taught domestic crafts, she discovered that cooking could also be an act of creativity and care. After graduation, she took culinary courses for several years, mastering both family recipes and international cuisines.

She often tells me about the food of her childhood— sancocho de costilla, sudados con cilantrón, and arroz con leche infused with orange or lemon leaves. Every time she visits the countryside and walks past an orange or lemon tree, she's transported back to her grandmother's kitchen. These flavours, she says, are memories that live in her hands.

Those same memories live in me now. Even from afar, my mom continues to pass down our culinary traditions. Through video calls and long text exchanges, we share recipes, advice, and small tricks. Thanks to her, I've learned to make the dishes that taste like home, like arepas, pandebonos, arroz con pollo, patacones, and sopa de lentejas.

Living in Montréal and sharing my life with my partner, who is from Quebec, has also shaped my tastes. I've discovered new ingredients, flavours, and rhythms around food. Still, it's important to me to share my culture with my partner and friends from other parts of the world.

December, for example, has a special place in Colombian hearts. There's a famous saying back home: "Desde septiembre se siente que viene diciembre," which roughly translates to, "As of September, you can feel that December is coming." We start anticipating Christmas months in advance—the music, the lights, and, of course, the food. Here in Montréal, I've tried to keep those traditions alive by celebrating Día de las Velitas and Christmas with friends from Colombia and from different cultures, gatherings where food, laughter, and memory bring us closer to home.

Food has become my language of belonging, a way of remembering where I come from and a means to share it with others. This project is, in many ways, a reflection of that journey, of learning to taste memory, identity, and home one recipe at a time.

## Appendix V

*The Flavours  
That Bring Us*

*"Barriga llena, corazón contento"*

*"Full belly, happy heart"*



This project was created by Nicole Carrillo, a Colombian journalist and visual artist based in Montréal, whose work explores the connections between food, memory, and migration. This website invites you on a journey through Colombian culinary traditions, uncovering the stories behind our dishes, the cravings that connect us to home, and the ways food becomes a language of belonging across distance.

When we migrate, food becomes our way of remembering. A familiar flavour can bring back a whole world, the people we love, the places we miss, the stories that shape us. Cooking and sharing these dishes in a new home is how we keep our roots alive, blending memories and new beginnings, one bite at a time.

When we migrate, food becomes our way of remembering. A familiar flavour can bring back a whole world, the people we love, the places we miss, the stories that shaped us. Cooking and sharing these dishes in a new home is how we keep our roots alive, blending memories and new beginnings, one bite at a time.



## *The Diaspora*



Photos courtesy of photographer [Tomás Sierra Luna](#)

In recent decades, many Colombians have made Canada their new home, each carrying stories shaped by conflict, hope, and opportunity. Their journeys reflect both necessity and choice, from seeking safety to chasing dreams. Through these stories, we'll see how migration reshapes identity and how Colombians continue to build belonging far from home.

According to the 2021 Census, over 100,000 Colombians now call Canada home, with nearly 40,000 in Quebec and most living in Montréal. The Colombian community here is mostly first-generation, accounting for 77% of the diaspora's population, while the second generation is notably young, with 71% under the age of 15.

The stories you'll find here belong to members of Montréal's Colombian community, restaurant owners, dreamers, and storytellers who carry home in their hands and hearts. As the creator of this project, I am also part of this journey. Through my own story, I explore how food can connect us, helping us remember where we come from and how we continue to belong.

### Discover Our Stories



*Wendy and David*  
*Le Cafecito Colombienne*

[Read More](#)



*José*  
*Juanito's restaurant*

[Read More](#)



*Nicole*  
*My story*

[Read More](#)

True to our traditional sayings about food, Colombian cooking is rooted in generosity and joy; it's about sharing, celebrating, and keeping our traditions alive wherever we go.



Photos courtesy of photographer [Tomás Silva Luna](#)

One of the things we miss most about Colombian food in Montréal is the street food and the panaderías (our neighbourhood bakeries). In Colombia, street corners overflow with flavour, from fruity treats like cholao and salpicón, to crispy empanadas and papas rellenas. Every neighbourhood has its own bakery, where people gather for breakfast or onces, sharing pandebonos, churros, mantecadas, and traditional drinks like kumis and masato.

The three recipes shared here were born from that longing for familiar flavours. Recreated from my mother's recipes and adapted to the ingredients I could find nearby.

## *Explore Our Recipes*



***Mantecada***  
*Butter sweet corn cake*

[Read More](#)



***Papa rellena***  
*Stuffed potato*

[Read More](#)



***Salpicón***  
*Fruit cocktail*

[Read More](#)



Photo by Tomás Silva Luna

## Glossary

Explore this section to discover traditional Colombian ingredients, regional dishes, and culinary terms that shape our food stories.

[Read More](#)

## Directory

Explore this section to find places that keep Colombian flavours alive in Montreal.

[Read More](#)



Photo by Tomás Silva Luna

I'd love to hear from you!


Whether you want to collaborate, share your story, or simply talk about food, culture, and belonging, feel free to reach out.

**Submit**

## Example of story page

*The Flavours That Bring Us*

### José Buitrago




*José Buitrago. Photo by Susan Landman*

José Buitrago left Colombia sixteen years ago, when he was 29 years old, with his mother and sister for security reasons. They settled in Montreal, where he, as well as several other young couples from Bogotá and other cities in Bogotá, first grew up surrounded by the aromas and sounds of Colombian street food. His grandmother ran a small food stand where she sold empanadas, paper-wrapped fried potatoes, potato cakes, fresh dough, and other street foods. Every morning before dawn, she and José's aunt would prepare fresh dough and fillings, a necessary that would later speak his lifelong fascination with cooking.

Despite his growing passion for food, José's father never saw cooking as a "serious" career. In Colombia, he had three different university programs, but none of them gave him a satisfying sense of fulfillment. What he truly wanted was to study culinary arts, a dream that had to wait until his return to Canada.


When he arrived in Montreal at twenty years old, José remembers the city as more open and welcoming to newcomers than it is today. He attributes this to both the stories he heard from more recent newcomers and the current political climate, which has made immigration feel more restrictive. He enrolled in culinary school, began working in kitchens across the city, and learned himself in learning techniques from different cuisines. His culinary work has taken him to Mexico and New York, where he gained experience in a range of culinary scenes that deepened his appreciation for the art of cooking, the importance of service, and the meaning of feeding others.



*José Buitrago. Photo by Susan Landman*

When the pandemic hit, José began preparing empanadas for delivery across Montreal. Soon, he and his friends transformed these homemade efforts into programs, freely community events with DJs, BBQ, art, live music, and food. "It felt like a mini festival," he told me. These moments of creativity and togetherness became the seed for [JUANITO](#), his first restaurant, a small-shop in Saint-Henri where empanadas have the heart of his home.


When construction in the area forced them to close in November 2020, José and his family took it as a sign to grow. After ten months of planning and setbacks, they engaged with a new name and a new vision. [JUANITO](#), located in the St-Henri area. At this new restaurant, the menu has expanded beyond traditional Colombian dishes, blending dishes from across Latin America, inspired by friendships with people from Mexico, Peru, and Guatemala. José wanted to create a place where José could make people from all backgrounds, Colombian, Latino, and local alike.



*José Buitrago. Photo by Susan Landman*

José believes that Colombian street food deserves a bigger place in Montreal's culinary scene. For often, he says, Colombian cuisine abroad is limited to a few traditional dishes, when in reality it's full of creativity, diversity, and endless for innovation. Street food is part of our daily life back home, and for Buitrago it should be celebrated, as even recognized to show others the richness of our food culture.

He has noticed a change in how Colombia is perceived abroad. "In recent years, people's perception of Colombia has improved a lot," he said. "Now, when you say you're Colombian, people's eyes light up. Everyone wants to chat with you. Many of our customers are locals who've visited Colombia, and they come back full of our culture." "Incredibly, it seems, people are more aware of the beauty of our beaches, our food and our music." For José, this shift is powerful. "It feels like we're finally being seen for who we are, not just through the old narrative of violence and unrest, but through our creativity, hospitality, and joy."



*José Buitrago. Photo by Susan Landman*

During our conversation, I asked José if he could tell the story of Colombia through a single dish. I thought it would be a difficult question, one without a clear answer, and I mean I was sure here I would answer it myself. But his response came naturally and with conviction, as he began to bring a subtle smile.

"Hogues is the soul of our cuisine," he explained. "It's the base of so many dishes, it's like our national identity. The drops represent corn, which grows in all of Latin America, and the shell with egg reflects the flavors and products Colombian have used."

Still, José's food is not just about tradition, it's also about evolution. His empanadas at Juanito have colorful fillings and unexpected fillings that reflect his multicultural influences. "I still feel very Colombian," he told me. "But being here expanded my palate. I didn't even like fish before, but now I love eating. My cooking is a mix of where I've been and everything I've learned."

## Example of recipe section

The Flavours  
That Bring Us

### Papa Rellena



The papa rellena is one of Colombia's most beloved street foods, a humble yet deeply flavorful dish that tells a story of cultural fusion. Its origin is believed to be the result of culinary exchanges between Arab, Andalusian, and Afro-descendant traditions, blending techniques, spices, and creativity into one perfect bite. The dish can be traced back to the Andean regions, where potatoes have been a staple for thousands of years, long before colonial times. As families sought hearty, portable meals, they began filling mashed potatoes with seasoned ground beef, boiled egg, scallions, and spices, shaping them into golden rounds and frying them until crisp on the outside and soft within.

Over time, papa rellena became a comfort food found in street stalls and bakeries across the country, often enjoyed with aji (our traditional spicy sauce), during breakfast, family gatherings, or after a night out. Though variations exist in other Latin American cuisines, like the Peruvian version, which can include raisins and olives.

My father, who was born in the Andean region, is a true potato enthusiast in all its forms. I still remember how he would buy papas rellenas from street vendors after work or while running errands and bring them home as a treat. It was one of those small gestures that felt like love wrapped in paper. When I first arrived in Montreal, I couldn't find this dish anywhere, one of the many foods I missed the most. Eventually, I learned to make it at home, and now it has become one of my favorite comfort foods to share with my partner, a simple way of keeping those familiar flavours and my memories of home alive.

#### Ingredients

Makes approximately 6 servings

##### For frying:

Vegetable oil

##### For the potato base:

5 to 6 large potatoes  
1 small bunch of cilantro, finely chopped  
½ teaspoon salt  
Ground pepper, to taste

##### For the batter:

1 egg  
½ cup all-purpose flour  
Pinch of salt  
½ tablespoon Color El Rey or annatto  
A splash of water (enough to reach a light, smooth consistency)

##### For the filling:

1 tablespoon olive oil  
2 small tomatoes, diced  
2 tablespoons tomato paste  
½ cup finely diced onion  
½ cup finely chopped scallions  
2 garlic cloves, minced  
½ teaspoon ground cumin  
½ teaspoon Salsina El Rey seasoning or a mix of paprika and turmeric  
½ teaspoon salt  
½ teaspoon ground pepper  
250 g (about ½ lb) ground beef  
6 small boiled eggs (or 3 if you prefer to use half an egg per potato)

##### Optional for serving:

Guacacole or aji (Colombian spicy sauce)

#### Instructions

##### Prepare the potatoes

1. Peel and cut the potatoes into cubes. Place them in a medium pot, cover with water, add ½ teaspoon of salt, and bring to a boil over medium-high heat.
2. Once boiling, reduce the heat to medium and cook until fork-tender. Drain well, then mash the potatoes with a fork or masher.
3. Season with salt, pepper, and finely chopped cilantro. Set aside to cool slightly.

##### Make the filling

1. In a large pan, heat olive oil over medium heat. Add the onion and sauté until translucent. Add the garlic, scallions, and tomatoes, stirring for about 2 minutes.
2. Stir in the tomato paste, cumin, Salsina El Rey (or paprika and turmeric), salt, and pepper. Cook for another 2 minutes.
3. Add the ground beef and cook, stirring occasionally, until fully cooked. Remove from the heat and let cool.

##### Prepare the batter

In a medium bowl, whisk together the egg, flour, salt, Color El Rey (or annatto), and a splash of water until smooth and slightly thick, about the consistency of pancake batter. Set aside.

##### Form the stuffed potatoes

1. Divide the mashed potatoes into 5 or 6 equal portions and roll them into balls. Flatten each one slightly into a thick patty.
2. Place 1 tablespoon of the filling in the center and add a whole or half-boiled egg on top.
3. Carefully shape the potato around the filling, sealing the edges to form a smooth ball. Set aside.

##### Fry

1. Heat vegetable oil in a deep, heavy pot to 360°F (180°C).
2. Dip each stuffed potato into the batter, then carefully lower it into the hot oil. Fry for about 4–5 minutes, turning once, until golden brown and crispy.
3. Remove with a slotted spoon and drain on paper towels. Serve hot with guacacole or aji.

## Directory section

The Flavours  
That Bring Us

### Directory

The following is a selection of businesses in the Greater Montreal Area that stock or serve Colombian food. Click on the buttons to learn more about each business and on the addresses to see their location on a map.

#### Grocers

##### Sabor Latino

The self-proclaimed largest Latino grocer in Canada has been in business for 15 years. With three locations in the Greater Montreal Area, they are a recognizable brand for Latinos and culturally curious Canadians.

**Sabor Latino Saint-Laurent** - [4387 St Laurent Blvd, Montreal, Quebec H2W 1Z8](#)

[Learn More](#)

**Sabor Latino Saint-Hubert** - [6955 Rue St-Hubert, Montréal, QC H2S 2N1](#)

**Sabor Latino Brossard** - [7800 Boul. Taschereau, Brossard, QC H2W 1Z8](#)

##### Marché Andes

Marché Andes has acted as a cultural bridge between Latin America and Canada since it was founded in 1986. In Marché Andes' restaurant areas, you can enjoy typical dishes as our grandmothers concocted. In the bakery, you will find the taste of traditional breads. And the butcher's counter displays sausages from various different countries. When I was being nostalgic with a friend they had excitedly told me that this grocer had an ingredient kit to make *ajíaco*. It is these stories that make these local markets so important.

[436 Rue Bélanger, Montréal, QC H2S 1G2](#)

[Learn More](#)

##### Epicerie et café Marco Rosa

Though not Colombian themselves, here you can find the best selection of Colombian products in Montréal's Hochelaga neighbourhood. I never forget to grab a fresh empanada and churro on my way out.

[3668 Ontario St E, Montreal, Quebec H1W 1R9](#)

#### Restaurants

##### Le Cafecito Colombien

They serve 100% Arabica specialty coffee graded 85.75% alongside typical homemade Colombian appetizers. Their booth is tucked away in an angled glass display at the front of an electronics boutique. Though the location is very quaint, it was buzzing with community and passerbies dropping in for a snack the whole time I was there. I was delighted to find *papa rellenas* and *pastel de pollo* on their menu—rare finds in this city.

[7123a Rue St-Hubert, Montréal, QC H2S 2N1](#)

[Learn More](#)

##### Juanito's

Juanito's signatures are their loaded Latin American-inspired bowls and crunchy empanadas. Each menu item is highly distinct, offering high variety without the burden of choice. They are unafraid to experiment with tradition and pride themselves on taking Latin American cuisine to the next level. The crispiness of their empanada dough and the creative fillings were the biggest standouts to me.

[4919 Notre-Dame St W, Montreal, Quebec H4C 1S9](#)

[Learn More](#)

##### Tostadito Cafe Boulangerie

A piece of Colombia in Canada. They are at the heart of the Latino section of Jean Talon Street East in Montréal's Saint-Leonard neighbourhood. Their *caldo de costilla*, a beef rib broth, and their *picada* are to die for.

[5412 Rue Jean-Talon E, Saint-Léonard, QC H1S 1L6](#)

[Learn More](#)

## Glossary section

The Flavours  
That Bring Us

## Glossary

### Agua de panela

A traditional drink made by dissolving panela in hot water, sometimes with lemon or cheese

[Learn More](#)

### Amasijos

A general term for baked or dough-based goods like arepas, almojábanas, and pandebonos, often shared at breakfast or with afternoon coffee

[Learn More](#)

### Arequipe

A creamy caramel spread made by slowly cooking milk and sugar, Colombia's version of dulce de leche

[Learn More](#)

### Bocadillo

A sweet guava paste often paired with cheese

[Learn More](#)

### Changua

A comforting milk and egg soup from the Andean highlands, traditionally eaten at breakfast with bread or amasijos

[Learn More](#)

### Lechona

A festive dish made from a whole roasted pig stuffed with rice, peas, pork, and spices, baked for hours until the skin is perfectly crisp

[Learn More](#)

### Pandebono

A chewy, cheesy bread made with cassava flour, perfect with coffee or aguapanela, sometimes filled with bocadillo

[Learn More](#)

### Pastel de yuca

A fried pastry made with cassava dough and filled with shredded chicken or beef, crispy on the outside and soft inside

[Learn More](#)

### Ajiaco

A hearty chicken and potato soup from Bogotá, made with three kinds of potatoes, corn, and guasca, served with capers, cream, and avocado

[Learn More](#)

### Arepa

A round corn cake that comes in countless regional varieties, served as a staple with many Colombian meals

[Learn More](#)

### Bistec a caballo

A grilled or pan-fried steak topped with a fried egg, often served with rice, plantains, and a simple tomato-onion sauce

[Learn More](#)

### Buñuelos

Golden, round cheese fritters with a soft center and crisp crust, a must-have during the December holidays

[Learn More](#)

### Hogao

A rustic tomato and green onion sauce sautéed in oil, the flavorful base of countless Colombian dishes

[Learn More](#)

### Mazorcada

A comforting street dish of grilled corn kernels mixed with cheese, sauces, crushed chips, and a mix of meats, creamy, cheesy, and smoky

[Learn More](#)

### Panela

Unrefined cane sugar moulded into solid blocks, used to sweeten drinks and desserts, prized for its rich, caramel-like flavour

[Learn More](#)

### Pepitoria

A traditional dish from Santander made with goat organs, rice, and blood, seasoned with cumin and garlic

[Learn More](#)