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The entangled gastronomic identities of the Italian diaspora in São João Del Rei, Minas Gerais, Brazil

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Abstract

Gastronomic identities are dynamic and continuously evolve as they adapt to new sociocultural and environmental contexts. This is particularly evident in migration processes, such as the late 19th-century Italian migration to South America. This study examines the evolution of Local Gastronomic Knowledge (LGK) among the Venetian-descendant community in São João del Rei (Minas Gerais, Brazil), focusing on the mechanisms underpinning the adaptation and hybridisation of their culinary traditions. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with 20 Italian descendants, this research identifies 50 distinct dishes categorised as Brazilian (46%), Italian (26%), or hybridised Brazilian-Italian (20%). Brazilian and hybridised dishes emerged as the most frequently mentioned (39% and 32%, respectively). Three principal mechanisms of hybridisation were identified: ingredient modification (replacement, addition, and the use of cultural marker ingredients), culinary technique adaptation, and recontextualization of dishes within meals. Based on these findings, we propose a gastronomic adaptation strategies model, which conceptualises the maintenance, adoption, hybridisation, and abandonment of culinary practices in migratory settings. This study contributes to the broader discourse on food heritage, migration, and cultural adaptation, offering a framework for analysing the transformation of gastronomic practices in transnational contexts. Moreover, it underscores the role of hybridised culinary traditions as a valuable cultural asset with implications for heritage preservation and local economic development.

Keywords Foodways, Culinary hybridization, Local gastronomic knowledge, Migration

1 Introduction

Food communicates significance, sentiments, and personal as well as shared memories, which, within evolving circumstances, can be preserved, forgotten or restructured [1]. This is especially true in the context of migrations. When people move, they also take a whole set of food and cultural practices, along with tools, techniques, ingredients, values, preferences, and prescriptions [2, 3].

A growing body of works has explored the role of food and foodways in migrants' lives and identity [4, 5], showing how the adjustment and revaluation of food social customs



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and practices within migrant communities generate new culinary concoctions and patterns of consumption that are closely tied to the migration location and the associated life experiences [6, 7].

Maintaining some traits of the home food culture, despite the often-tricky availability and accessibility of the “original” ingredients, is, for many migrants, an issue of extreme importance, as it concerns the maintenance of the values and heritage tied to the culinary and cultural spheres [3, 8–10] and their gastronomic identities [11, 12]. Gastronomy extends beyond the mere acts associated with food production and consumption; it is fundamentally embedded in culture. The human experience attributes diverse meanings—social, economic, religious, and traditional—to food-related elements and practices, which are constructed and expressed within cultural frameworks. Consequently, gastronomy serves as a crucial marker of identity, reflecting the complex interplay between food and sociocultural systems [13].

Examining the academic debate surrounding migrations in food studies and ethnobiology, some authors have identified and delineated potential strategies that migrant communities may employ to adapt to new foodways. The research conducted by Uhle and Grivetti [14] examined the food patterns of ethnic Swiss residing in two geographically distinct locations: Canton Obwalden, Switzerland, and Colonia Helvetia, Brazil. The study revealed four different dynamics of adaptation, namely maintenance, transition, abandonment and adoption. In particular, certain foods were preserved in both locations, with identical ingredients and German names retained. However, other foods demonstrated varying degrees of cultural change, categorised as adoption or abandonment. The transition and evolution of ethnic food patterns followed distinct patterns, involving the maintenance of *Schwyzerdeutsch* terms with ingredient substitutions, adopting Brazilian-Portuguese names while retaining original ingredients, and instances where ethnic memory was preserved despite changes in both names and ingredients.

Hanazaki et al. [15], in their exploration of the ethnobotany of food plants and migration literature, delineated four primary adaptation dynamics: maintenance, abandonment, replacement, and incorporation of plants. The alterations in the dynamic relationships between individuals and plants following a relocation from one locale to another are heavily influenced by the group’s level of attachment to their original cultural identity. Additionally, the adaptability and support offered by the dominant society in the destination area play a pivotal role in shaping these changes. Food plants, in such contexts, can serve as sources of comfort for individuals experiencing distress due to migration, including traumatic situations and feelings of unease associated with establishing a long-lasting sense of identity in a new place.

In South America, the Spanish and Portuguese colonisation introduced several elements, such as plants, animals, dishes, preferences, prohibitions and prescriptions, associations and exclusions. However, colonisation was not the only significant force that resulted in an immigration flux. Starting in the 19th Century, new migrations from Europe occurred. For instance, in Brazil, a stratification of the Portuguese colonisation and late 19th-century migrations from several European countries occurred [16, 17]. Such diaspora, mainly driven by wars and economic reasons, portrays the mobility of culinary cultures, techniques, ingredients and recipes, which were incorporated into another cultural context [18, 2022]. In these new places, migrant people mixed their own

food sets and systems with local elements creating a dynamic and often hybrid corpora of local gastronomic knowledge (LGK) [sensu20].

During the colonisation process, intense cultural amalgamation occurred, marked by the introduction of exotic ingredients that blended with those already present in Brazilian territory. Furthermore, Europeans brought techniques and sophistication to enhance the flavours, complementing Indigenous and African elements [21].

In this regard, it is impossible to think of national and regional cuisines without considering the processes of miscegenation [15] and creolisation [22]. Studies involving migration and food have been carried out under several aspects, mainly by investigating the effects of eating habits and their health implications [23, 24], and also the adaptation of migrants' food habits to the new foodscape [3, 19, 25, 26].

Even though previous studies have explored the evolutionary dynamics of LGK among European migrant communities settled in Latin America [e.g. 18,27,28;29,30], limited attention has been paid thus far to the dynamics concerning the adaptation, assimilation and hybridisation of cuisine among Italian migrant communities in Brazil.

As pointed out by many diaspora theorists (i.e. see the works of DuBois and Sayad), the condition of the migrant may be represented neither fully *there* nor *here*, in the place of origin and arrival. The production of meaning by these subjectivities may be approached as an ongoing tension between this dual and dichotomous system, or, as "in-between" [31] two or more cultural areas of origins and arrival. This space of interconnection is interesting in interpreting new forms of food habits and tastes, reshaping meanings attributed both to tradition and innovation. Adopting this interpretative gaze, it is possible to assume the mobility of people across the Ocean as a common social fact, even though multiple individual and collective paths began in Italy as well as Brazil in different periods. In fact, the cultural displacement for thousands of people impacted the relationship to food, and consequently to the ways of belonging to a specific imagined community [32].

This study adopts a case study approach, using dishes as proxies to analyze the evolution of Local Gastronomic Knowledge (LGK) among the Venetian (Italian) descendant community in São João del Rei (Minas Gerais, SE Brazil). Specifically, it aims to document the current LGK by determining the multiple origins of the dishes currently prepared by this community and to identify and analyze the hybridization processes that their gastronomy has undergone.

2 Materials and methods

2.1 Study area

A *food scouting* field study [33] was carried out in the municipality of São João del Rei (SJDR) (21° 08' 00" S and 44° 15' 40" O), on the southern part of Minas Gerais State, Southeastern Brazil (Fig. 1).

SJDR has a total population of 90,225 inhabitants, with a population density of 62,14 inhab./km² [34]. The city, created in the 19th century during the mining period, was among the most essential colonial centres in Minas Gerais for several European immigrants. SJDR was one of the most essential Italian colonies, especially for people coming from Veneto [35]. Several Italians settled in the southern part of Minas Gerais by the end of the 19th century. They mainly were peasant families from the Veneto region (NE Italy), including the current provinces of Vicenza, Belluno, Treviso, Padua and Verona

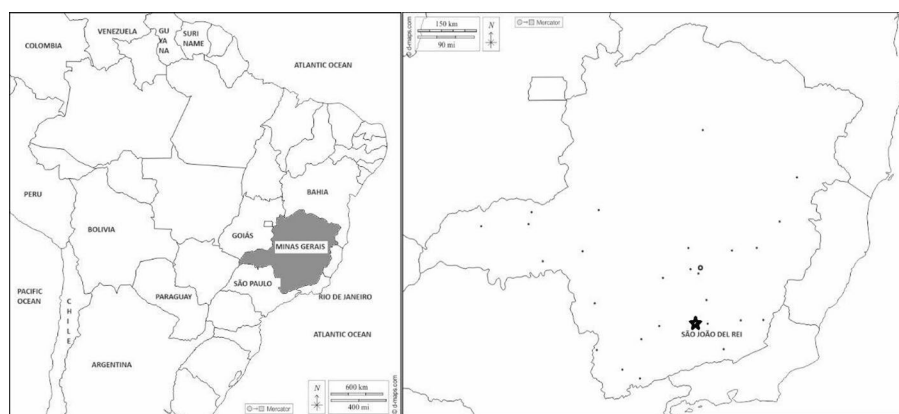


Fig. 1 Map of the study area. On the right is the map of Brazil, and on the left is the location of SJDR within Minas Gerais

[36]. Among the colonial centres created by the Government were that of São João del Rei. In December 1888, the first 102 settlers arrived, constituting 22 families destined for this city [37]. Among the colonies, communication routes were not well developed, and vast depopulated areas separated the different settlements of SJDR. In the first years after immigration, they dedicated themselves to mixed agriculture, which involved cultivating typical products from Brazil and Italy. They combined the production of corn, which allowed Italians to make their traditional *polenta*, with the cultivation of cassava, rice, beans, barley, coffee, tobacco and sugar, which were grown in warmer areas of the SJDR. Among the seven official neighbourhoods of SJDR, only one, Colônia do Marçal, which currently has almost 10,000 inhabitants [34], dates to Italian colonisation (1888–1900).

2.2 Data collection and analysis

The field study was carried out between 2019 and 2020. Seventeen semi-structured interviews were conducted in five neighbourhoods (colonies) of São João del Rei (SJDR) with 20 Italian descendants, mainly women of the third generation of the Italian diaspora, whose ancestors immigrated to SJDR from Veneto and neighbouring regions starting in 1889. The selection of this sample was guided by the principle of data saturation, a common criterion in qualitative research that determines sample adequacy based on the emergence of new information rather than statistical representativeness [38].

The predominance of women in the sample reflects their pivotal role in preserving and transmitting culinary heritage within the community. This pattern aligns with existing research on food and culinary practices in diasporic contexts, which underscores the central role of women in maintaining and perpetuating gastronomic traditions [5, 39].

Contacts were made with the residents through convenient sampling, and interviewees were gathered through the “snowball” technique with the constraint that they were Italian descendants [40]. The interviews explore the experiences of Italian immigrants and their families in Brazil, focusing on three main areas: personal information, immigration, and food. The first section gathers demographic data about the interviewee and their family. The second section investigates the reasons for immigration, the adaptation process, the relationship with other Italian immigrants and migrant communities, and the understanding of what it means to be Italian. The third section examines changes in food habits before and after immigration, the frequency of Italian food preparation,

the exchange of recipes, the products used, adaptations made to original recipes, the abandonment of traditional recipes, and the preference for Italian dishes. The interviews were recorded using a field diary, digital camera, and cell phone recorder. Interviews were conducted in Portuguese, and notes were made.

Informed consent was obtained from all study participants, and the code of ethics of the International Society of Ethnobiology [41] was strictly followed. The protocol of this study was approved by the Instituto do Patrimônio Artístico Nacional - IPHAN (01450011671/2014-74 DPI/IPHAN) in accordance with the Biodiversity Law No. 13.123 of 2015. This legal framework regulates access to genetic heritage, the protection of associated traditional knowledge, and the sharing of benefits for the conservation and sustainable use of Brazilian biodiversity.

The study was primarily based on a qualitative analysis of the interviews conducted with Italian descendants, predominantly third-generation women of the Italian diaspora. The interviews and field notes were transcribed and entered into NVivo qualitative data analysis software version 12.5.0 (QSR International, 2019), where codes, concepts, and nodes were generated during the analysis.

A descriptive approach was adopted for data analysis. The information collected was organized into a structured database in Excel® to catalogue the different dishes mentioned by the interviewees and assess their frequency of citation. The frequency of citation was determined by calculating the proportion of interviewees who referenced a particular dish, based on the following classification: *** (Mentioned by more than 50% of interviewees), ** (Mentioned by more than 30% of interviewees) and * (Mentioned by less than 30% of interviewees). Each dish was further categorized according to its perceived cultural origin—Brazilian, Italian, both Brazilian and Italian, or other (neither Brazilian nor Italian)—based on the descriptions provided by the interviewees and supported by relevant literature.

Additionally, a qualitative content analysis [42] was conducted to explore the evolution of Local Gastronomic Knowledge (LGK) within this community. This approach allowed for an in-depth examination of the hybridization processes that have influenced the community's culinary practices. To achieve this, interview transcripts were systematically coded, and emergent themes and subthemes were identified, specifically focusing on the mechanisms through which gastronomic hybridization has occurred over time. To explore the gastronomic shifts and adaptations of dishes and related practices, four central dynamics were considered: maintenance (preserving the original recipes), adoption (incorporating host country recipes), hybridization (mixing ingredients, adapting culinary techniques, and altering the dish's role within a meal), and abandonment (discontinuing the original recipes).

3 Results

The content analysis of the semi-structured interviews identified 50 dishes used by the Italian descendants living in São João del Rei, Minas Gerais, Brazil. The mentioned dishes are of Brazilian, Italian, mixed Brazilian-Italian and international origin. The majority of the mentioned dishes are of Brazilian origin (46%) (Fig. 2; Table 1). Dishes of Brazilian origin were also the most mentioned (38,7%).

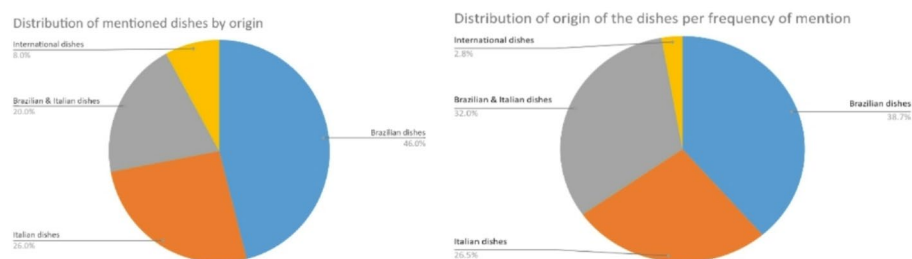


Fig. 2 The pie chart on the right represents the distribution of the origin of single reports of dishes. The pie chart on the left represents the distribution of the origin of each mentioned dish

3.1 Italian dishes (maintained)

Among the variety of pasta Venetian descendants mentioned, *cappelletti* were among the most popular (Table 2). In Italian gastronomy, *cappelletti* are generally filled with minced meat, spinach (or other green leaves), and ricotta. However, in addition to these variants, in SJDR, *cappelletti* were reported to be filled with chicken, cheese, ham and mozzarella, cheese with apricot, cheese with *taio* (*Xanthosoma sagittifolium*), cheese with basil, cheese with meat, cheese with egg, zucchini, carrot, or *moranga* pumpkin.

Another mentioned dish was *lasagna*. The classic Italian *lasagna* consists of several layers of pasta dough with ragu sauce and bechamel. In SJDR, *lasagna* was prepared differently, quickly cooking a ragu-like sauce made with ground beef, tomato sauce and vegetables.

The predilection for pasta and its association with Italian colonies were evident during the interviews. Three types of pasta were mentioned as typical of Venetian descendants, namely *paparela* (thin pasta used for chicken soups or seasoned with bolognese sauce) and *bigoli* (long pasta thicker than spaghetti, used in beef bone broth or with beans). Although they are no longer ubiquitous, they are seldom made today during special occasions. Curious is the quote from a dish called *gratini* that one interviewee from the colony of F bricas defined as a traditional Italian recipe “First, you make a dough of flour and egg and a little salt, knead until it forms a hard ball that is then coarsely grated and dried in the shade, you make a broth (of any ingredient) and throw the *gratini* in there until cooking.” Throughout the interviews, it was said that the habit of making pasta and risotto came with the Italians and is the descendants’ favourite food and is omnipresent in festivities like Christmas, New Year, weddings, and baptisms.

Polenta was also commonly mentioned, and interviewees recalled when there was no dough machine for making it. An 85-year-old woman living in the colony of Felizardo said, “It was on the arm, opened with the *mescola*, a piece of wood, and cut with the knife. There was also the *panara*, the board on which you put the polenta and cut with the line.” The term “*panara*” is a Venetian term referring to a wooden board used to spread the polenta, while “*mescola*,” which is the utensil used for stirring the polenta, is of Italian origin. Some elderly Italian descendants mentioned both terminologies in SJDR.

As recalled by our interviewees, pork raised in backyards played an essential role in the lives of Italian descendants in SJDR. In the past, everything was entirely taken from the animal, from meat to fat, its feet, blood, and guts, while the skin, feet, ears, tail and snout were stewed with beans. During the interviews, the preparation of cured meat and salami was often considered a practice introduced by Italians. Sometimes the term *salaio*

Table 1 Dishes of Brazilian origin, their description and frequency of citation (***) >50% of interviewees; ** > 30% of interviewees; * <30% of the interviewees)

Local dish name(s)	Description	Frequency of citation	Main strategy of gastro-nomic adaptation [Specific hybridization dynamics]
Angu	A dish made of cornmeal and water, with no salt	***	Adoption of Brazilian dish Co-existence/Interchangeability of similar dishes
Arroz	Rice sautéed with garlic and onion and then cooked in salted water	**	Adoption of Brazilian dish
Bacalhau	Dried and salted cod	*	Adoption of Brazilian dish
Biscoito de polvilho	Snack made with water, milk, oil, and cassava starch	*	Adoption of Brazilian dish
Broa italiana	Bread made with pork fat, royal powder, flour, sugar or with wheat flour, lard, sugar, and eggs	*	Adoption of Brazilian dish
Camarão seco	Freshwater dried shrimps	*	Adoption of Brazilian dish
Chouriço	Prepared with meat, fat and pork blood with spices and vegetables such as parsley, spring onions, chilli peppers, and garlic	*	Adoption of Brazilian dish
Doce de cidra	Sweet made from bitter orange, sugar and spices	*	Adoption of Brazilian dish
Doce de leite dentro da moranga	The dessert involves cooking sweetened milk until it reaches a creamy and caramelised consistency and then placing it inside a hollowed-out pumpkin.	*	Adoption of Brazilian dish
Empadinha	Savoury pastry consisting of a shell made of wheat flour. Empadinha is baked in the oven	*	Adoption of Brazilian dish
Feijoada	Stew made with black beans, pork, and beef (specific ingredients can vary)	*	Adoption of Brazilian dish
Gembê	Pumpkin puree	*	Adoption of Brazilian dish
Linguiça	Sausage made from pork and seasoned with onion, garlic, black pepper and other spices. It can be used fresh in cooked preparations or undergo a curing and preservation process through smoking.	***	Adoption of Brazilian dish
Mandioca frita	Fried cassava	*	Adoption of Brazilian dish
Mingau	Porridge made with corn starch or pumpkin	*	Adoption of Brazilian dish
Pamonha	Corn dough is made with milk, sugar, and butter and cooked in a corn husk or banana leaf until firm and smooth. Sometimes, cinnamon and fennel seeds are added to the mixture.	*	Adoption of Brazilian dish
Pão da inhamé	Bread made with yam	*	Adoption of Brazilian dish
Pão de queijo	Cheese buns made with cassava starch, and cheese	*	Adoption of Brazilian dish
Pastel de queijo	Fried cheese pastries	*	Adoption of Brazilian dish
Pier	Fried pastry without filling	*	Adoption of Brazilian dish
Rosca	Sweet bread	*	Adoption of Brazilian dish
Torresmo	Pork fat skin fried	*	Adoption of Brazilian dish
Tutu	Smashed beans with cassava flour	**	Adoption of Brazilian dish

was used for sausage. Among the regional sausages, the most frequently mentioned was *cudiguim* or *cudiguini*, a term possibly coming from the Italian word “cotechino” or the Venetian one *codeghin* [21]. It is prepared by filling the casings with pork skin and a mixture of fat, salt and spices. It is usually cooked with tomatoes or beans (Fig. 3).

Among the top-mentioned holiday dishes of Italian descendants were *tutu*, *linguiça*, *angú* and *arroz*.

Tutu, a smashed bean dish made with cassava flour, is widely consumed in Minas Gerais. It consists of baked beans seasoned, beaten, and mixed with corn or cassava flour

Table 2 Dishes of Brazilian origin, their description and frequency of citation (***) >50% of interviewees; ** > 30% of interviewees; * <30% of the interviewees)

Local dish name(s)	Description	Frequency of citation	
Cappelletti	Ring-shaped pasta filled with chicken; cheese; meat, ham and mozzarella; cheese with apricot; cheese with spinach; cheese with taioba (<i>Xanthosoma sagittifolium</i>); ora-pro-nobis (<i>Pereskia</i> spp.); cheese with basil; cheese with meat; cheese with egg; zucchini; carrot; moranga pumpkin.	***	Maintenance of Italian dish or Transition of ingredients (Substitution of Italian ingredients with Brazilian ones) [Addition of taioba or ora-pro-nobis]
Cudiguim	Sausage is made by filling animal casings with pork skin and a mixture of fat, salt, and spices. It is usually served with beans.	*	Maintenance of Italian dish or Transition of ingredients (Substitution of Italian ingredients with Brazilian ones) [Addition of malagueta pepper (<i>Capsicum frutescens</i>)]
Figo seco	Dried figs	*	Maintenance of Italian dish
Gratini	A dough made with flour, eggs, and salt that is coarsely grated and dried in the shade. Gratini are usually cooked in a broth.	*	Maintenance of Italian dish
Lasagna	Stacked layers of pasta alternating with fillings such as ragù, béchamel sauce, vegetables, cheeses seasonings and spices.	*	Maintenance of Italian dish
Molho de tomate	Tomato sauce with onion and garlic	*	Maintenance of Italian dish
Pão italiano	Rustic bread, resembling a baguette with a sturdy dough and crust, is round in shape	*	Maintenance of Italian dish
Pizza	A baked flat base of leavened wheat-based dough topped with tomato, cheese, and often various other ingredients	*	Maintenance of Italian dish
Polenta	Boiled cornmeal	***	
Ravioli	Stuffed pasta	*	Maintenance of Italian dish
Tagliarini	A type of pasta made with wheat flour and eggs, similar to tagliatelle, but thinner	*	Maintenance of Italian dish
Tagliatelle / Taidela / Paparela	A thin type of pasta made with wheat flour and eggs	**	Maintenance of Italian dish

**Fig. 3** Some of the SJDR dishes: Tagliatelle (Maintenance of Italian dishes), Cappelletti (Maintenance of Italian dishes) and Risotto (Brazilian-Italian dishes). Credits: Odara Boscolo

to achieve a pasty consistency. It is usually served with *torresmo* (pork fat skin fried), bacon, and sliced boiled eggs.

Linguiça is a generic term for any sausage, always made with pork meat, lard, and spices. In SJDR, blood and/or pork skin can be added to the filling, made with pork meat and seasoned with onion, garlic, black pepper, and other spices. The sausage can be used

fresh in cooked preparations or undergo a curing and preservation process through smoking.

Angú is a porridge made solely of cornmeal and water, with no salt. Some interviewees compared it to the Italian polenta but specified that it is thicker than polenta. A common variant is *angú pocecio* which is fried in pork fat (pork fat is locally called *poceto* or *pocecio*).

3.2 Italian & Brazilian dishes (hybridised)

The most cited dishes of mixed origin among the Venetian descendants were *macarrão* and polenta (Table 3).

On Sundays, as is also common in other parts of Brazil, the *macarronada* is often prepared by Venetian descendants in SJDR. The terminology *macarrão* itself is used in Brazil to name any variety of dry pasta. However, *macarrão* and *macarronada* are different from Italian pasta as Brazilian pasta has a connotation of accompaniment for meat or fish, especially among the poorest layers. It is consumed together with rice, beans and *farofa* (toasted manioc flour). Other adapted dishes include gnocchi recipes in which potatoes are substituted with pumpkin and roots such as cassava, yams/taro, sweet potatoes and *baroa* potato (*Arracacia xanthorrhiza* Bancr.), *rondelli* which are made with lasagna dough and filled with chicken, four kinds of cheese, chicken and cheese, or ham and mozzarella, as well as *fagottini* that are small dumplings filled with meat, cheese and meat, or cheese.

The local risotto is very famous and appreciated. Also, some adaptations of the Italian recipes have been observed for this dish. Rice varieties such as *arborio* and *carnaroli* are replaced by the *agulhinha* variety, one of Brazil's most planted and consumed rice varieties. For its preparation, a broth made with beef breast and free-range chicken is cooked for several hours, strained, and added to sauteed rice. Eventually, butter and grated cheese are added. Parmesan cheese is replaced with cured Minas cheese.

Among sweets and pastries, *bigoloto* was mentioned, which is typical of SJDR. It is like a cake of stiff dough made of wheat flour, cornmeal, sugar, bicarbonate, and, when available, eggs. In traditional Venetian cuisine, *bigoloto* is a focaccia (flatbread), usually made from yellow corn flour during Carnival.

3.3 Gastronomic adaptation strategies

To discuss the gastronomic shifts and adaptations that occurred among Venetian descendants in SJDR, we elaborated a conceptual framework (Fig. 4) that is partially based on the models proposed by Uhle and Grivetti [14] and Hanazaki et al. [15]. Drawing from our results and existing literature, four central dynamics underpinning the adaptations of dishes and related practices among migrant communities may occur. They include maintenance (of its original recipes), adoption (of host country recipes), hybridisation (mixing ingredients, adapting culinary techniques and shifting the role the dish plays in the meal), and abandonment (of its original recipes).

During our field study, we recorded 13 dishes which were maintained from the Italian gastronomic culture (e.g. lasagne), 27 which were adopted from the Brazilian gastronomic culture (e.g. tutu) and 10 which hybridised (Table 1).

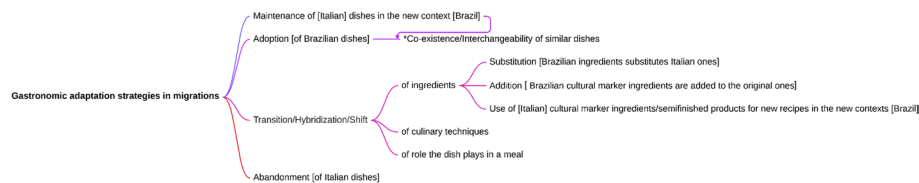
Among the hybridised dishes, we identified three different shifts consisting of the replacement or addition of ingredients, the adaptation of culinary techniques and the

Table 3 Dishes of mixed Brazilian-Italian and international origin, their description and frequency of citation (***) >50% of interviewees; ** > 30% of interviewees; * <30% of the interviewees)

Origin	Local dish name(s)	Description	Frequency of citation	
Italian & Brazilian	Bigoloto / Broa de milho or de angu	Hard dough made of flour, cornmeal, sugar, bicarbonate, and eggs	*	Maintenance of Italian dish or Transition of ingredients (Substitution of Italian ingredients with Brazilian ones)
	Bigoli	Long pasta thicker than spaghetti, cooked in beef bone broth or with bean	*	Transition of ingredients (Substitution of Italian ingredients with Brazilian ones) [Addition of white beans]
	Cannelloni	Cylindrical type of lasagna filled with chicken; four cheeses; chicken and cheese or ham and mozzarella; minced meat without sauce; ham and cheese with white sauce; ham and cheese with red sauce	*	Transition of ingredients (Use of Italian cultural markers ingredients for new recipes) [Filled with chicken, 4 cheeses, chicken and cheese. ham and mozzarella, with minced meat without sauce; with ham and cheese with white sauce, and with ham and cheese with red sauce]
	Fagottini	Filled pasta with meat, cheese and meat, or cheese	*	Transition of ingredients (Use of Italian cultural markers ingredients for new recipes) [Filled pasta with meat, cheese and meat or cheese]
	Gnocchi	Dumplings made of semolina or plain wheat flour, egg, mashed pumpkin, and roots such as cassava, yams/taro, sweet potatoes and baroa potato (<i>Arracacia xanthorrhiza</i> Bancr.)	**	Transition of ingredients (Substitution of Italian ingredients with Brazilian ones) [Substitution of potatoes with pumpkin and roots such as cassava, yams/taro, sweet potatoes or baroa potato]
	Macarrão	Dry non-filled pasta	***	Transition of the role of the dish in the meal [As a side for different dishes such as tutu de feijão, chicken, ora-pro-nobis (<i>Pereskia</i> spp.)]
	Macarronada	Variety of pasta cooked and seasoned with different ingredients, such as bolognese sauce and linguça.	*	Transition of the role of the dish in the meal [As a side dish]
	Molho de carne	Sauce made with minced meat	*	Transition of culinary techniques [Shorter cooking time]
	Risotto	Rice dish cooked with broth until it reaches a creamy consistency. For its preparation, a broth made with beef breast and fat-free-range chicken is cooked for several hours, strained, added to rice, and, when it is almost cooked, fried butter and grated cheese are added.	***	Transition of ingredients (Substitution of Italian ingredients with Brazilian ones) [Arborio and carnaroli rice varieties are replaced with the <i>Oryza sativa</i> agulhinha Parmesan cheese is replaced with cured Minas cheese]
	Rondelli	Rolled fresh pasta dough filled with chicken; 4 kinds of cheese; chicken and cheese; ham and mozzarella; ora-pro-nobis (<i>Pereskia</i> spp.)	*	Transition of ingredients (Use of Italian cultural markers ingredients for new recipes) [Rolled fresh pasta dough filled with chicken, four cheeses, chicken and cheese, or ham and mozzarella]

Table 3 (continued)

Origin	Local dish name(s)	Description	Frequency of citation	
International	Spaghetti	Dry pasta made with water and wheat flour. The dough is coloured by adding carrot, spinach or beet	*	Transition of ingredients (Substitution of Italian ingredients with Brazilian ones) [Carrot, spinach or beet are added to the dough to give colour to the pasta]
	Charuto de repolho	Stuffed cabbage rolls (sarmale)	*	Adoption of Brazilian/International dish
	Queijo frito	Fried cheese	*	Adoption of Brazilian/International dish
	Pudim	Pudding with condensed milk, eggs, milk, and caramel	*	Adoption of Brazilian/International dish
	Marmelada	Thick jam made with quinces	*	Adoption of Brazilian/International dish

**Fig. 4** Gastronomic adaptation strategies of Italian descendants in SJDR

change in the role of the dish within the meal. For instance, in the case of the Italian dry pasta, which is called *macarrão*, we observed changes in the culinary technique used for its preparation (it is cooked for a longer time than the Italian pasta) as well as in its role within the meal (it is a main course in Italy and a side dish in SJDR).

Furthermore, we identified three possible shifts of ingredients, including (1) the substitution of ingredients, (2) the addition of new ingredients, and (3) the use of Italian cultural marker ingredients to create hybridised recipes in the new context. An example of the substitution of ingredients is *gnocchi*, made of potatoes in Italy. Since these tubers are not so widespread in SJDR, the Venetian descendants have been substituting them with other crops such as pumpkin and roots such as cassava, yams/taro, sweet potatoes and *baroa* potato. An example of adding new ingredients is the one of *cudiguim*, which corresponds to an adaptation of the Italian recipe for *cotechino*. *Cudiguim* includes the *malagueta* pepper that is not added to the original recipe. Finally, the *rondelli* is an example of using an Italian cultural marker (rolled stuffed pasta made with *lasagne* sheets) to produce a new recipe that does not exist in Veneto/Italy.

We also noticed the interchangeability of some similar dishes with different roots. For instance, only two (minor) differences exist between the Brazilian *angu* and the Italian polenta. Polenta is cooked with salt (while *angu* is not), and its texture is tougher. Nevertheless, these two staple foods are perceived as interchangeable and coexist in the LGK of SJDR. Contrarily, two similar dishes such as risotto and arroz, both based on rice, are not perceived as interchangeable since the rice varieties used in the two dishes are very different, as well as their preparation and cultural role in the SJDR society.

4 Discussion and conclusions

Overall, our results show that the Venetian descendants of SJDR have maintained their “original” LGK (which now represents 26% of the dishes) but also adopted local recipes (which now represent 46% of their dishes) and created hybrid dishes “in-between” the two gastronomic cultures.

Indeed, the Venetian descendants adapted their gastronomy to the new environment, creating a hybridised gastronomic culture different from that of their country of origin and that of their new country.

The research highlights some processes and dynamics underpinning the maintenance and adaptation of Italian dishes to the Brazilian foodscape.

As the Italian anthropologist Ernesto Di Renzo wrote, in all migratory processes, food assumes a role as a “catalyst for memories”, offering the protagonists of these human mobilities a possibility of breaking down the space-time barriers and reconnecting with places and the affections of origin [43]. Over the years, Italian gastronomy has contributed, at the same time, to fostering integration and interaction processes, building new transnational culinary identities in its fusion with the diverse gastronomic cultures of a multi-ethnic country like Brazil. This cultural process provokes multiple effects – such as nostalgia and the need to create a new national collective identity when abroad—overlapping the literature produced in recent years about migration from Brazil to Italy and vice versa. For instance, the work of Banini and Cilene Tabai [44] about the food habits of Brazilians living in Italy seems to have many points in common with the vast literature about Italian migrants in Brazil and other parts of Southern America [see for instance, 45, 46, 47, 48].

The debate about the flow of Italians to Brazil seems to be explicative of different theoretical positions. For some scholars, Italians simply re-created their regional cuisines, with a large range of dishes which were – usually – directly connected to their cities of origin – *alla bolognese*, *alla parmigiana*, *alla fiorentina* [49]. Capatti and Montanari, then, moved their point of observation on the process of acquiring a specific food into a collective framework. For instance, they mention mortadella produced in Bologna which automatically became *Mortadella di Bologna* when the product moved from its manufacturing environment to other regions [50]. Other perspectives emphasize the origin of both migrants and food, reproducing a rigid division of the Peninsula based on modernity: North, Centre, and South. Another point of view, then, considers the birth of Italian cuisine because of what is not a food, place or taste belonging to another European culture. And, again, someone affirms that Italian cuisine is an invention – without pointing out why and for what reasons it should be that.

In this article, we propose another approach. When we talk about hybridization, we do not mean simply that two cultures combine together: we are interested in mapping different processes concerning the gastronomy through which Italians re-created their identities, beliefs, and habits in Brazil. In this sense, “in-between” means how this combination happened and the reasons why. In other words, there is not a unique formula able to resume the huge history of Italians in Brazil. It is important to consider this hybridization as a process in progress which requests a large amount of information for trying to propose a scientific interpretation. For instance, who migrated to Brazil (gender, age, generation, etc.), from what part of the Peninsula (North, South, Region, etc.) and where in the Latin country. Only by combining all these data – as we try to do in this contribution – will be possible to map different forms of food hybridization.

This hybridised and syncretic gastronomy developed in SJDR constitutes a cultural asset that must be valued.

Phenomena such as migrations mobilise actors towards recognising food as part of their collective heritage [51]. While some studies have recently explored the dynamics of hybridisation and adaptation of the food culture of migrant communities [52–54], few initiatives have recognised these corpora of products, practices and knowledge as part of the cultural heritage of the hosting countries. In this regard, our research, by outlining the dynamics of hybridisation that have led to the current definition of Italian descendants' food and gastronomic heritage, could foster the creation of gastronomic-centred projects able to shed light on the role that exchanges and mobilities have in the enrichment of local and regional cuisines.

Recognizing this hybridised gastronomic heritage as a valuable cultural asset can lead to initiatives aimed at safeguarding and promoting this heritage. In practical terms, local communities in SJDR could leverage these culinary traditions for socio-economic development and strengthening of gastronomic identities through initiatives such as:

- Food festivals and gastronomic tourism: Celebrating the unique culinary identity of the Venetian descendant community could attract visitors and contribute to the local economy.
- Product certification and branding: Traditional or hybridized dishes could be marketed as part of the region's intangible cultural heritage, providing opportunities for local food artisans and restaurateurs.

Educational and community engagement programs: Initiatives aimed at documenting and transmitting LGK to younger generations could ensure its continuity while fostering community pride. Our findings show that studying migrants and diasporic cuisines is vital for evaluating cultural adaptation in the food domain and the continuous coevolution across time of food local systems within specific socio-ecological spaces. Other future studies will need to look at these trajectories urgently, not only to contribute to food history but to provide local communities with concrete tools for valorising their food biocultural heritage and for fostering attached small-scale economies based upon speciality foods and restaurant enterprises that ultimately could guarantee the future of local foodscapes.

4.1 Limitations of the study

The study has two main limitations. First, the limited number of semi-structured interviews does not allow statistical analysis and therefore to generalize the results. Second, the semi-structured interviews conducted among Italian descendants specifically did not allow the investigation of the phenomenon of the abandonment of Italian recipes, particularly concerning those dishes consumed before migration or in the initial period post-migration that are no longer prepared or consumed. Future research could expand to other historical methods to better address the diachronic dimension of this gastronomic adaptation upon the findings of this study by considering this aspect as well. Insights into abandoned dishes could significantly contribute to a better understanding of the adaptation process for various Italian dishes currently regarded as integral to Brazilian cuisine. Finally, the data collection was conducted in 2019–2020, however, we believe that the late publication of this data is not impacting the quality of the presented results because of the long timeframe we are considering (1880s–2020).

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Author contributions

OB and AP conceptualised the study design, which was later integrated by GM and DMZ; OB collected the field data and preliminarily analysed them; GM, DMZ, and VG conducted further substantial data analysis; DMZ, GM, and OB drafted the manuscript. GP deepened the historical perspective of the manuscript. All the authors approved the final version of this manuscript.

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Data availability

The data supporting this study's findings are available on request from the third author (OB).

Declarations

Ethics approval and informed consent to participate

Informed consent was obtained from all study participants. The protocol of this study was approved by the Instituto do Patrimônio Artístico Nacional - IPHAN (01450011671/2014-74 DPI/IPHAN) in accordance with the Biodiversity Law No. 13.123 of 2015.

Consent for publication

All the authors have read and approved the content of this manuscript for publication.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

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