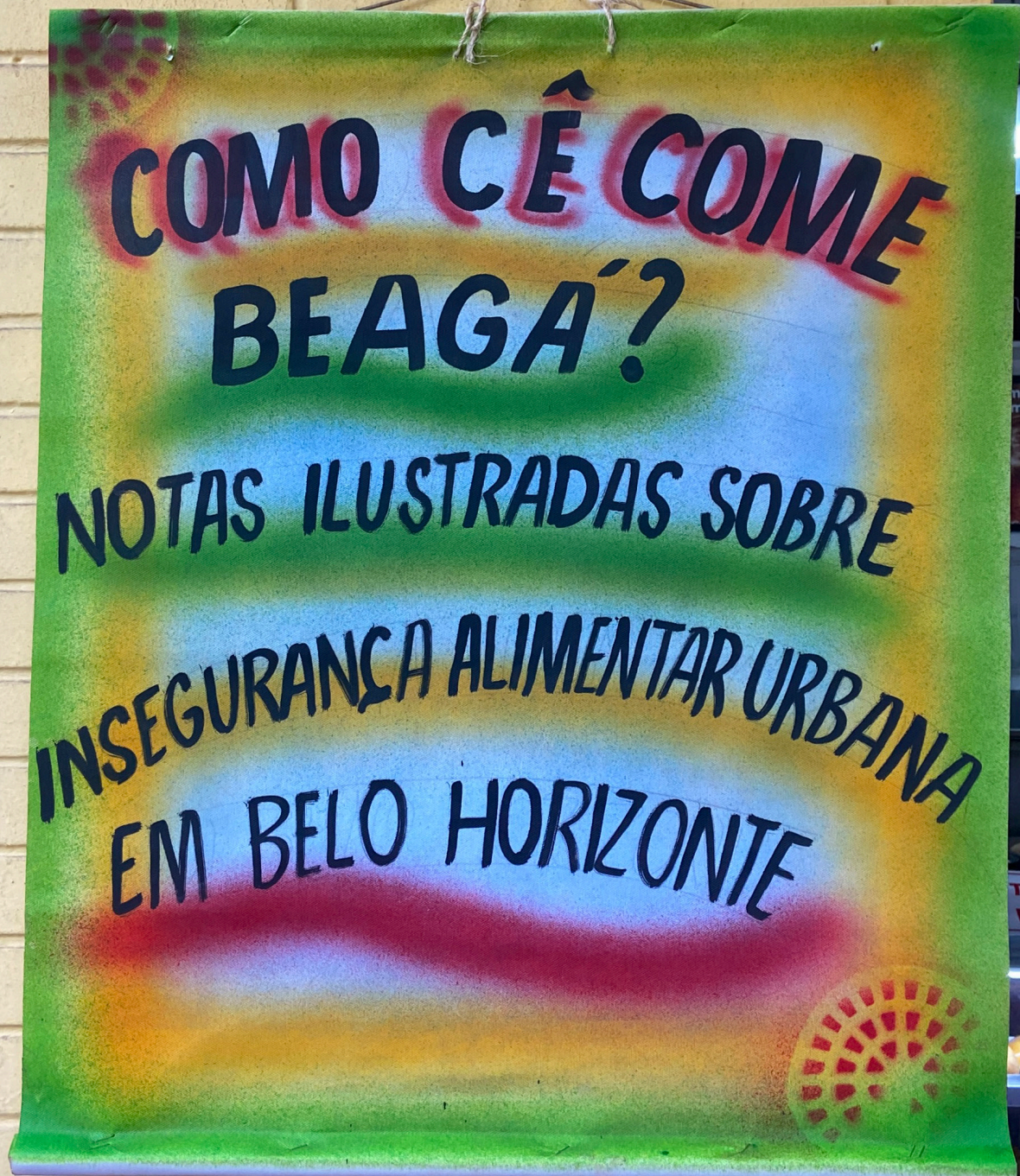




How do you eat, Beagá? Illustrated notes about urban food insecurity in Belo Horizonte

FICHA TÉCNICA

Credits

ELIS BORDE

SOLIMAR ROCHA

AUTORIA

ANA GOMES

LUCAS BARBI

Authorship

MARYNNA FERREIRA

LÍDIA MORAIS

WALESKA CAIAFFA

DESENHO

Design

LYDIA COLLINS

@ART_ART_LYDIA

LETRISTA

Lettering

RAFAEL DA SILVA REIS

CLAUDIELI OLIVEIRA DE PAULA



The illustrated booklet is an accessible and critical scientific dissemination proposal, designed to stimulate debate and reflection among the general public, university education institutions, social movements, and public policy makers. The material aims to summarize some of the main research findings on food, the city, and inequalities, bringing together in one place content that can guide and inspire new interpretations of food security policies and food sovereignty practices.

The illustrations are based on research on food environments in Belo Horizonte and images submitted by participants in the Food Diaries study, a qualitative and participatory study based on graphic and textual diaries about food in Belo Horizonte conducted by the Belo Horizonte Urban Health Observatory (OSUBH) at UFMG. The citations are also taken verbatim from records submitted by the participants of the aforementioned research.

Published in December 2025.

How to cite:

BORDE, Elis; ROCHA, Solimar; GOMES, Ana; BARBI, Lucas; FERREIRA, Karynna; MORAIS, Lídia, CAIAFFA, Waleska. How do you eat, Beagá? Illustrated Notes about Urban Food Insecurity in Belo Horizonte. Illustrations by Lydia Collins. Belo Horizonte: UFMG, 2025.



REFERENCES



- 1 - People's Restaurants | Belo Horizonte City Government. Available at: <<https://prefeitura.pbh.gov.br/seguranca-alimentar-nutricional/equipamentos/restaurantes-populares>>
- 2- Arnaiz M. (2019). Itinerarios alimentarios en contextos de precarización. Otras formas de comer, otras formas de vivir. In: Bosi M., Prado S, Amparo-Santos A. Cidade, corpo e alimentação: aproximações interdisciplinares. Salvador: EDUFBA, 2019.
- 3 - Freudenberg, N. (2022). A que custo?: O capitalismo (moderno) e o futuro da saúde. Editora Elefante.
- 4- Haesbaert, R. (2015). Sobre as i-mobilidades do nosso tempo (e das nossas cidades). Mercator (Fortaleza), 14(spe), 83-92.
- 5 - COMITÊ DE MEIO AMBIENTE DE BELO HORIZONTE. Deliberação Normativa nº 69, de 30 de agosto de 2010. Belo Horizonte, 2010. Available at: https://prefeitura.pbh.gov.br/sites/default/files/imagens/authenticated%2C%20editor_a_meio_ambiente/deliberacoes/comam/DN69_10.pdf
- 6 - PBH oferece mais de 400 mil refeições diárias em escolas da capital. Available at: <<https://prefeitura.pbh.gov.br/noticias/pbh-oferece-mais-de-400-mil-refeicoes-diarias-em-escolas-da-capital>>

MATERIALS TO CONSULT

AGUIRRE, Patrícia. A luta de classes na comida e nos corpos. Outras Palavras, 20 jun. 2024. Available at: <https://outraspalavras.net/desigualdades-mundo/a-luta-de-classes-na-comida-e-nos-corpos/>

CAMPELLO, Tereza; BORTOLETTO, Ana Paula, orgs. Da fome à fome: diálogos com Josué de Castro. São Paulo: Cátedra Josué de Castro; Zabelê Comunicação; Editora Elefante, 2022.

GÊNERO E NÚMERO. Caminhos da alimentação. Histórias. Available at: <https://alimentacao.generonumero.media/#historias>

O JOIO E O TRIGO. O Joio e O Trigo. Jornalismo investigativo sobre alimentação, saúde e poder. Available at: <https://ojoioeotrigo.com.br/>

O JOIO E O TRIGO. Prato Cheio. Podcast investigativo sobre alimentação, saúde e poder. Available at: <https://open.spotify.com/show/44Ubq2POFmm15Ld67plbgV>

CONNECT WITH US!



 <https://changestories.be.uw.edu/>

 @change_stories_

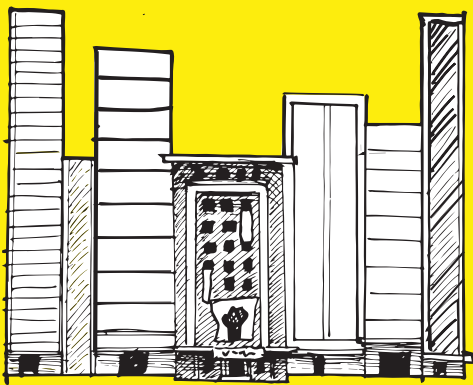


 <https://osubh.medicina.ufmg.br/>

 @osubh.ufmg

SOLIDARITY Kitchens

Solidarity Kitchens, found in favelas, occupations, and waste pickers' associations, emerge from the strength of social movements and collective organization in urban territories. More than just feeding, they transform food into a political act and a non-negotiable right, weaving networks of support while denouncing structural inequalities. They are present in:



Urban Occupations



Worker Cooperatives



Favelas

By challenging exclusionary urban models—where access to and distribution of food are unequal and unjust—they open pathways for public policies sensitive to local realities, such as the national Solidarity Kitchen program.

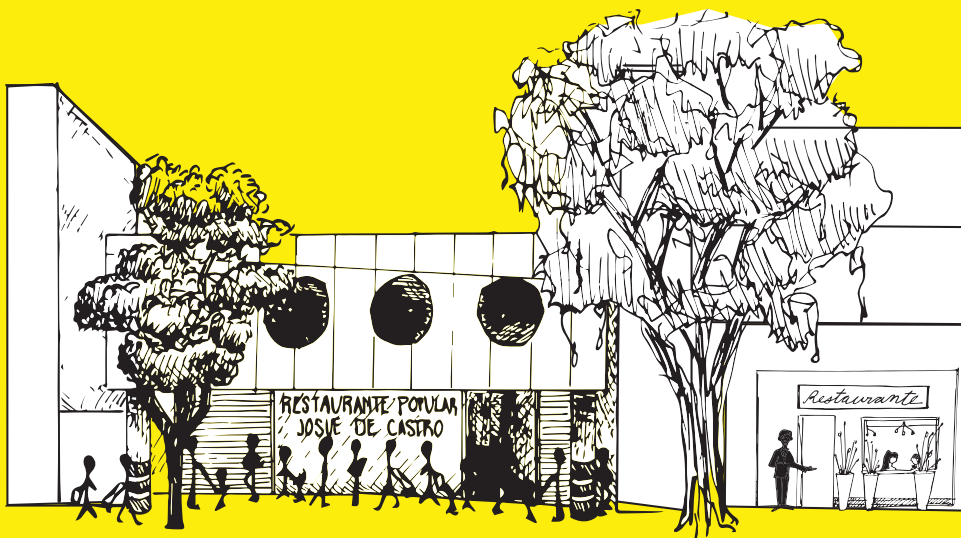
Sustained through daily struggles and scarce resources, these kitchens reveal both the transformative power of solidarity and the urgency of structural measures to guarantee the right to food in a dignified and permanent way, particularly for groups excluded or neglected by public policy.



Lunch in the solidarity kitchen

THE CONTRADICTION OF EATING OUT

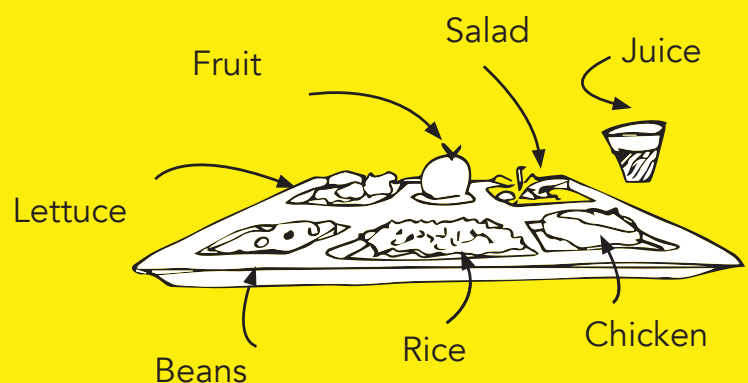
People's restaurants are strategic food security facilities. In Belo Horizonte, the city's four people's restaurants together serve approximately 10,000 meals daily, according to the city government¹.



Yet the demand for these restaurants is also a hunger barometer, revealing deep paradoxes: while for some “eating out” signifies status and leisure, for others it marks impoverishment and food insecurity. An increasing number of people now rely on people's restaurants, solidarity kitchens, and welfare programs to secure their next meal—spaces where gratitude and shame often coexist, and where autonomy over what, when, where, and with whom to eat is severely limited².



Breakfast in the People's Restaurant



Lunch in the People's Restaurant

HOMEMADE FOOD

PRIVILEGE, TIME, OUTSOURCING, AND CARE

Shifting the focus from “food” to “the meal” exposes hidden layers of inequality. Preparing a meal depends on, but goes beyond, food availability: it requires time, planning, and a form of care work historically rendered invisible. These demands turn homemade food into a paradoxical privilege—outsourced by some to domestic workers, while for others it means reconciling double workdays or resorting to fast food.

The naturalization of this care as a “female vocation” obscures the complexity of an essential labor that carries affection, memory, and knowledge, yet depends on material and temporal conditions unequally distributed along lines of gender, race, and class.



At the same time, eating at home may signal necessity: lacking the means to move around the city and eat out, many families are forced to cook at home or rely on packed meals distributed by social organizations. In this contradiction, “homemade” takes on conflicting meanings—sometimes a symbol of privilege and autonomy, other times a marker of survival in contexts of scarcity, where inequalities dictate who has the luxury of cooking for pleasure and who cooks or eats at home out of need.

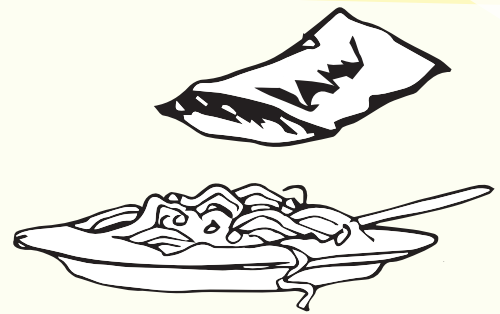
“Today was tense, I just finished work. I can’t always take a break for a snack. As a single mother, I have to put bread on the table. My dinner tonight is the leftover yogurt drink from my son’s snack. Good night.”

-Saturday, 1:16AM

** BETWEEN ** *PRECARIOUS CONSUMPTION* *AND* *ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS:* *URBAN FOOD INSECURITY*

Food insecurity is not only about scarcity; it also expresses itself in denied quality, lack of choice, and irregularity of supply. Families are often forced to replace fresh foods with ultra-processed items, consuming products of poor quality—sometimes without even realizing it.

This reality is shaped by structural inequities: racism, the feminization of poverty, and the unequal division of labor. It is further entrenched by a food system dominated by agribusiness and the food industry, which benefit from reduced taxes to produce inferior goods rich in sugar, fats, and sodium. At what cost?³



Instant Noodles

“I asked God for dinner and he took 3 years off my life (instant noodles).”

-Wednesday, 9:14PM



NOURISHED STRUGGLES



"You don't discuss the right to the city, you don't discuss anything,
if you don't discuss food security."
— Housing movement activist



Traditionally made invisible, food is central to the strategies and organization of urban struggles—and even grounds alliances, whether temporary or lasting, between rural and urban areas. Collective food practices developed by social movements destabilize neoliberal individualism, particularly in times of crisis: whether in the establishment of a new squad or in protests against forced evictions.

In these moments, solidarity networks materialize in food donations from agrarian reform and the collective preparation of meals in community kitchens. Public space thus acquires new meaning: it becomes a site of care, sharing, and resistance.

STREET VENDORS

Food environments include the sale of food and beverages by street vendors and informal salespeople. These vendors are part of the city's food culture and are part of celebrations and leisure activities, offering typical products such as:



Wafers



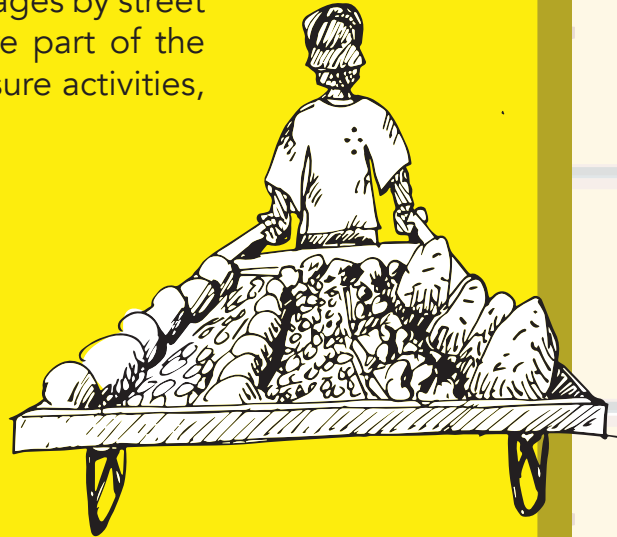
Popcorn



Fruit



Peanuts



But there are also highly processed foods, sugary drinks, and alcohol such as:



Candy



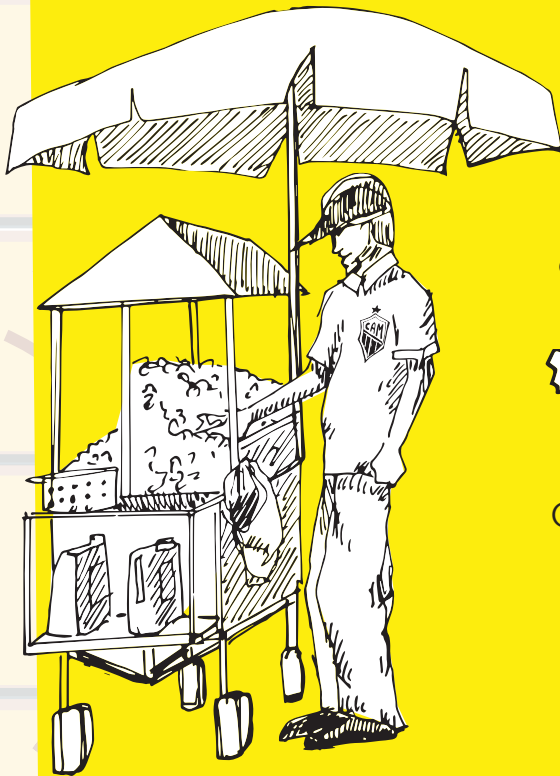
Chips



Beer



Soda



Mobile markets in metro stations, such as São Gabriel, and street fruit vendors increase access to fresh, healthy food.

Street food has this dual presence - it can alleviate "food deserts" by providing food and nutrients, but it can also facilitate the consumption of low-nutrition and unhealthy items.



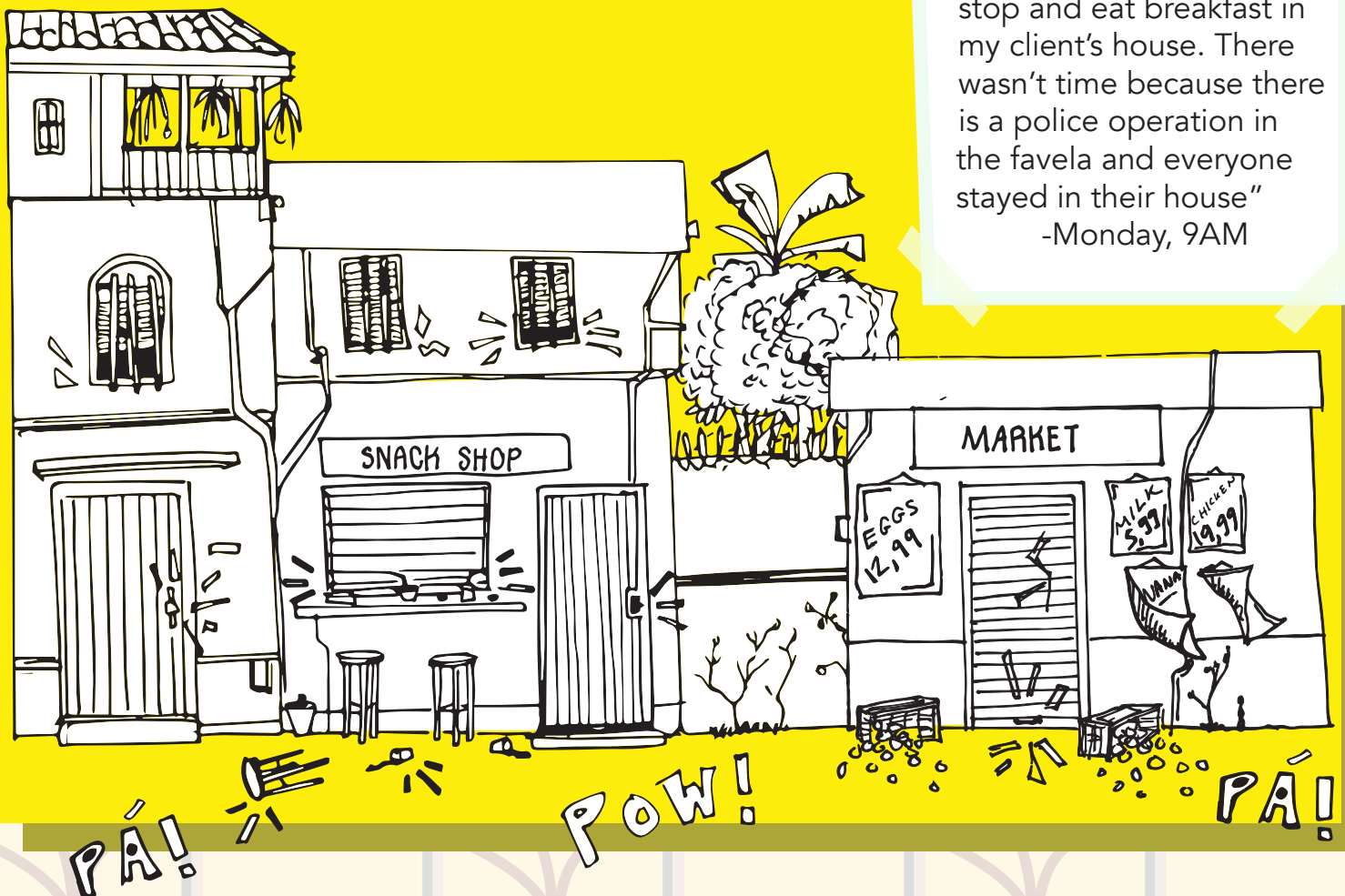
FEAR AND HUNGER

URBAN VIOLENCE AND FOOD INSECURITY

Urban food inequalities cannot be reduced to metrics of distance or density of outlets. In Latin American cities, territorial dynamics create i-mobilities⁴ imposed by fear: shootings, curfews, and territorial disputes erect invisible barriers that keep popular restaurants, fairs, and markets out of reach, even when physically nearby.

Should we recognize, beyond mobile, domestic, community, and digital food environments, the food environments of fear—territories where violence redefines access to food? Hunger is inherently violent, and violence itself produces hunger.

"There wasn't time to stop and eat breakfast in my client's house. There wasn't time because there is a police operation in the favela and everyone stayed in their house"
-Monday, 9AM



Urban AGRICULTURE

Urban agriculture goes far beyond cultivation: it is a practice of social transformation. What distinguishes it is not merely its location in the city, but its interaction with the urban ecosystem, proposing new ways of inhabiting and producing life and community.

In Brazil, it transcends gardening or isolated soil-sustainability practices to assert itself as both a struggle and a strategic public policy for food sovereignty, deeply linked to Black, rural, and peripheral memories and ways of life.

It is therefore an agroecological, disruptive practice in vulnerable territories of large cities, claiming the right to the city. It also mobilizes encounters, exchanges, affection, grassroots organization, health, and sustainability.



** * TO PLANT IN THE CITY IS TO CULTIVATE WELL-BEING * **

THE BASIC FOOD BASKET

The basic food basket is composed of items considered essential for survival. Instituted in 1938, it became the cornerstone of food assistance policies, traditionally including processed foods such as:



Processed foods in the Basic Food Basket

In 2024, a new decree expanded its contents to include fresh and minimally processed foods, following the Brazilian Dietary Guidelines, such as:



Natural foods in the Basic Food Basket

Despite this progress, the basket's quantity still does not reflect families' diverse needs, raising crucial debates about what should be considered "essential" and how its composition might foster more sustainable and diverse food systems.

FRUIT IN THE CITY:

FISSURES IN THE CONCRETE



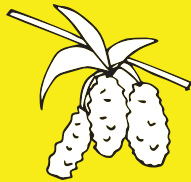
Mango



Tamarind



Avocado



Blackberry



Jackfruit



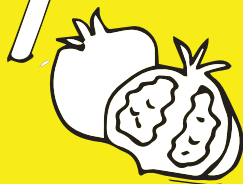
Lemon



Acerola



Soursop



Pomegranate

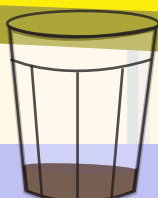
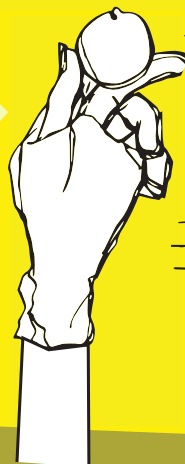


Coconut

These fruits, common in Belo Horizonte's markets, fruit and vegetable markets, and supermarkets, also hang discreetly from trees scattered throughout the city—available to anyone who, in the hurried pace of everyday life, stops to see and pick them.

This abundance is far from solving food insecurity, especially since 2010, "tree specimens producing fruits for common human consumption" have not been recommended for planting on sidewalks⁵. Even so, it challenges the logic of food as a mere commodity and urban planning that ignores food production. It also reveals the metropolis with hinterland features and reminds us that streets can be more than just passageways.

"I picked this guava from a tree in the neighborhood where I work"
-Wednesday, 10AM



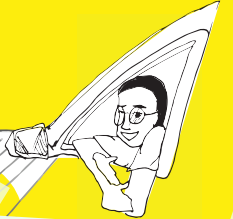
FOOD ROUTES: MOVEMENTS DUE TO FOOD

The way people move around the city in search of food reveals strategies, constraints, and choices that express diverse and unequal urban experiences, marked by access and social and territorial barriers.

Brenda travels around the city on a motorcycle selling artisanal bread.



Lucas explores different areas of the city by car to discover and try new restaurants.



Ana is a university professor and usually has lunch at restaurants near her workplace.



Pedro lives in an urban occupation in the city center and walks to the soup kitchen every day to eat his meals.



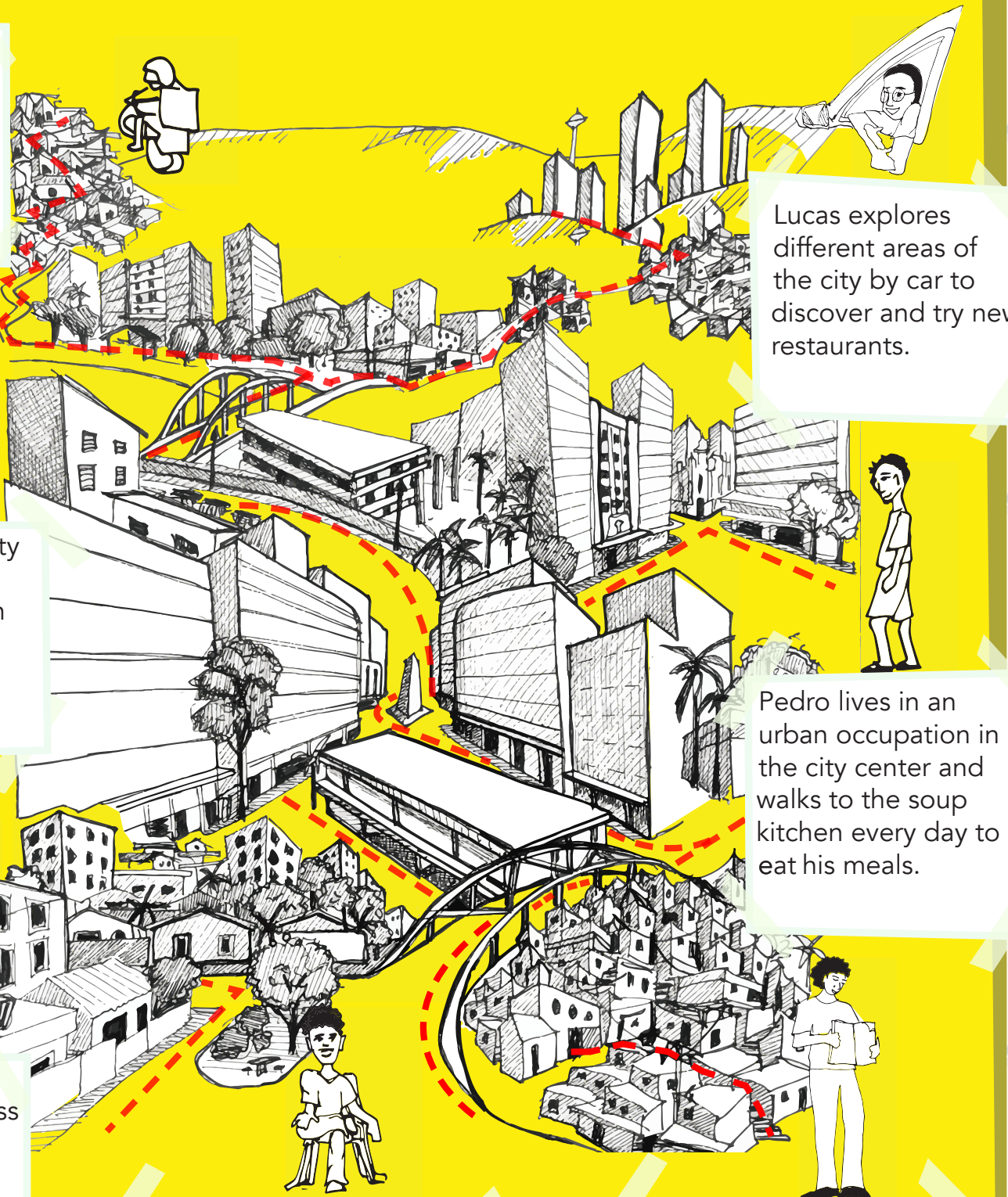
João is houseless and each day he goes to a different places that have meal donations.



Marco doesn't commute because he works remotely and eats his meals at home.

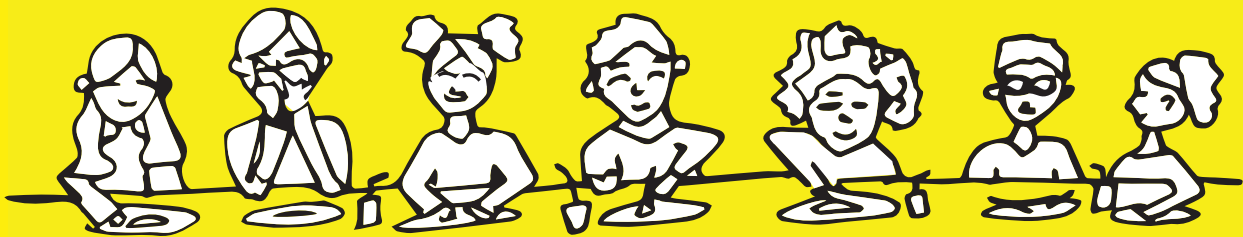


Natália lives in the periphery and works at the public school in the same neighborhood where she has lunch every day.



SCHOOL Meals

Beyond their educational role, school meals constitute one of the largest food and nutrition security policies in Brazil.



According to the city government, more than 400,000 meals are served daily in schools, ensuring adequate nutrition for children and adolescents⁶ — often their only meals of the day. This is a transformative policy because it directly combats hunger and food insecurity, guaranteeing not only conditions for learning but also the fundamental human right to food.

At the same time, it helps ease the historic burden placed on mothers and caregivers, who are disproportionately held responsible for feeding children in contexts of gender and social inequality.

