

CULINARY SYSTEMS
OF MINEIRA CUISINE:
corn and cassava

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CULINARY SYSTEMS OF MINEIRA CUISINE: corn and cassava



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CLASSIC CUISINE FROM MINAS GERAIS, OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE

Talking about *mineira* cuisine is talking about the formation of Minas Gerais, our identities, who we were and who we are. In this cultural mixing pot, whose African, Portuguese and indigenous origins come together, the past, present and future merge, and what comes out of this is the purest “mineiridade” - or Minas Gerais spirit - that overflows in this Cultural Heritage Notebook dedicated to Minas Gerais (*mineira*) cuisine.

In July 2023, the Culinary Systems of *Mineira* Cuisine – Corn and Cassava were recognized as Intangible Cultural Heritage of the State of Minas Gerais by the State Institute of Historical and Artistic Heritage of Minas Gerais (Iepha-MG). The research, which resulted in the registration dossier, relied on a significant partnership between the Instituto Periférico and its multidisciplinary team.

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The recognition of *mineira* cuisine as heritage seeks to promote the knowledge and flavors of our state, demarcating and appreciating the heritage of practices developed by traditional communities, black women and indigenous peoples in *mineira* cuisine.

The knowledge linked to corn and cassava forms the first culinary systems to be recognized as cultural heritage within the scope of food culture in the state of Minas Gerais. The entire process of processing these foods, from planting and processing to preparation and consumption, was taken into account in the dossier, which also considers one of the traits that represent our Minas Gerais origin: the sociability and ritualistic nature that is created around a “mineiro’s” table, marked by recipes passed down through generations.

Cheese bread, *angu*, cornbread, tapioca biscuits, *rosca*, cornmeal cake and so many other foods are not only part of our kitchens and our gatherings, they also populate the national collective imagination about Minas Gerais. This knowledge and flavors are also responsible for promoting the creative economy chain through gastronomic and experience tourism.

In recent years, the Minas Gerais State Department of Culture and Tourism (Secult) has been developing several programs to promote and appreciate *mineira* cuisine as a heritage. Secult’s and Iepha-MG’s current policy of safeguarding our cultural practices has as one of its fruits this notebook, which seeks to disseminate the culinary systems of *mineira* cuisine as intangible cultural heritage for different audiences. We are hopeful that all of society in Minas Gerais recognizes itself while enjoying these pages. I conclude by borrowing the first sentence from the introduction to this volume: “In homes in Minas Gerais, the heart is the kitchen”.

Leônidas Oliveira

State Culture and Tourism Secretary of Minas Gerais

MINEIRA CUISINE: INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF MINAS GERAIS

The policy for the protection of intangible cultural heritage was established in Brazil in 2000, with the publication of Federal Decree No. 3,551. In the State of Minas Gerais, the decree that establishes the forms of registration of intangible heritage was published in 2002. In a vanguard action, Minas Gerais was the first Brazilian state to register intangible heritage, inaugurating protection in that year, with an element of significant importance for our food culture: the Artisanal Cheesemaking Method from the Serro Region. Threatened by health policies in that period, protection through state registration served as a guarantee for safeguarding the traditional know how of producers and, above all, one of the main cultural references in Minas Gerais.

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New initiatives to protect and safeguard elements that make up the cuisine of Minas Gerais were undertaken. Among many, the *Inventário Cultural do Rio São Francisco* (Cultural Inventory of Rio São Francisco) identified and inventoried foods, knowledge and food practices from the north of Minas Gerais, among which are the methods of making sun-dried meat, rice with *pequi*, derived from fruits from the cerrado biome, derived from sugarcane, such as *cachaça* and *rapadura* (dried molasses), *moqueca de surubim*, milk derivatives, such as bottled butter and *moreno* cream cheese.

The relevance of products, artifacts, places and traditional food knowledge that bear the history, memory and identity of Minas Gerais is also identified in the Cultural Heritage Registries opened by Iepha-MG. The *Moinhos de Milho e as Casas de Farinha* (Cornmeal and Grinding Mills) form has so far received around 800 responses, with information on the production and processing of corn and cassava inputs across the entire Minas Gerais territory. The *Lugares da Cozinha Mineira* (Places of Mineira Cuisine) form, with almost 500 responses, provides data on restaurants, fairs, markets, pubs, bars, among other places where it is possible to experience, sell and taste traditional and contemporary dishes, promoting appreciation and stimulating associated tourism to the food culture of Minas Gerais.

This publication will bring these aspects and also the plurality of knowledge, crafts, practices and places associated with Minas Gerais cuisine, as well as the historical trajectory of the construction of the food culture of Minas Gerais, represented, above all, by the native peoples and quilombola (slave enclave) and traditional communities, the strong presence of backyard

eateries and home-baked foods, and their visceral relationship with religious festivities and rituals.

This new volume of the Cultural Heritage Notebooks is an invitation to a tasty read about *mineira* cuisine and its culinary systems, with emphasis on corn and cassava. The topic is extremely relevant in the trajectory of Iepha-MG and in the processes registry of intangible cultural assets in the state.

The following text summarizes the Registration Dossier of the Culinary Systems of Minas Gerais Cuisine – Corn and Cassava, considered at a meeting of the State Council for Cultural Heritage held in the banquet hall of the *Palácio da Liberdade* and approved by acclamation on July 5, 2023, Minas Gerais Gastronomy Day. It gains more spice, emotion, flavor and aroma with the full publication of advisor Flavio Carsalade's opinion. We suggest that your reading be accompanied by delicious cornmeal bread, artisanal cheese and one of Minas Gerais' traditional drumming rhythms. Many senses will be integrated into the knowledge of *mineira* cuisine.

Marília Palhares Machado
President of Iepha-MG



MINEIRA CUISINE, BETWEEN MEMORIES AND AFFECTIONS

For Instituto Periférico, participating in the preparation of this edition of the “Heritage Notebooks” represents another opportunity to honor and appreciate Minas Gerais’ cuisine, a mainstay of our state’s culture. It is also a time to pay homage to the cooks, the family farmers, the greengrocers and confectioners, the masters and all those who have been building knowledge over the last few centuries that transforms their land’s plenty into the wide variety of flavors and aromas that inhabit our tables and our memories.

Besides just being food, *mineira* cuisine is identity. It strengthens family ties, promotes meetings between friends, supports celebrations and rituals of faith. It moves the economy, links generations around a wood stove and sweetens good prose.

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How can you not be proud of developing and coordinating the “*Mineira* Culinary Heritage” project? Since the end of 2021, there have been many achievements: the registration of corn and cassava culinary systems as an intangible cultural asset in the state of Minas Gerais, supported by an excellent technical dossier; the publication of educational material so that teachers can guide our food culture in school processes; events that brought together hundreds of representatives from the Minas Gerais culinary chain; video documentaries and films that reflect dedication and devotion to crafts, techniques and food.

Special thanks to our sponsors – Gerdau, Cemig and Gasmig – who believe that the centrality of Minas Gerais cuisine in the lives of our people deserves even more recognition. Also, our thanks to the researchers, cooks and the multiple representatives of the sectoral entities involved, who dedicated time and dedication to the project.

Gabriela Santoro
CEO, Instituto Periférico

In São Tiago (MG), greengrocers bring flavors and aromas to tables. Photo: Bellini Andrade/Instituto Periférico Collection.



PRESENTATION

The series Cultural Heritage Notebooks, which aims to value and disseminate cultural assets protected as cultural heritage of the State of Minas Gerais, now presents the volume “*Mineira Cuisine*”. As content, it consolidates the narratives and studies developed within the scope of the registration dossier of the “Culinary Systems of the *Mineira Cuisine* – Corn and Cassava”, recognized as cultural heritage of the state of Minas Gerais on July 5, 2023.

As stated by José Newton Meneses, “more than food, *mineira* cuisine is the narrative of a unique culture, built and under construction in the territory of Minas Gerais” (IEPHA-MG; INSTITUTO PERIFÉRICO, 2023, p. 22). In other words, this food culture is a founding and fundamental element for the characterization of “being from Minas Gerais.”

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Translating actual experiences into this publication is a challenge, but it is also an important step towards promoting the cuisine of Minas Gerais, as well as its different meanings, uses and appropriations. Furthermore, the notebook is integrated into countless productions – whether academic, literary or in the audiovisual field – and many other initiatives that seek to describe and characterize elements of food culture in Minas Gerais.

This volume is, therefore, an invitation to learn about the recording process, the stories and memories related to Minas Gerais cuisine, the paths of culinary systems and, above all, the culinary matrices of Minas: corn and cassava.

We wish you a tasty and sweet read!

INTRODUCTION

In homes in Minas Gerais, the heart is the kitchen. It is there that family relationships and those who visit in search of a chat or a cup of coffee are kneaded and warmed. This is where oral tradition gains movement, when knowledge and techniques about harvesting, planting, cooking and roasting are shared. This is where hospitality pulses.

The flavors and aromas that exude from the kitchen reach other spaces in the house and return to the backyards, where food often originates in its primary and purest state. From there, they often reach the neighborhood. Coming full circle, they bring together collectivity around production, commensality, that is, sharing, eating together and celebrating the community.

Such elements were understood and characterized in the registration dossier of the “Culinary Systems of Minas Gerais Cuisine – Corn and Cassava”, whose process was initiated in 2021 by the State Institute of Historical and Artistic Heritage of Minas Gerais (Iepha-MG), in partnership with Instituto Periférico. The process began based on the realization of the need to implement public heritage policies for the world of food culture in Minas Gerais. This identification is part of a long history of Iepha-MG’s work with other cultural assets that already showed the importance of *mineira* cuisine. In 2002, the state had its first protection of an intangible cultural asset in the country with the registration of the Method for Making Artisanal Cheese in the Serro Region.

Since then, several transversal heritage processes in Minas Gerais cuisine have strengthened this movement: the Festival of Our Lady of the Rosary of the Black Men of Chapada do Norte (*Festa de Nossa Senhora do Rosário dos Homens Pretos de Chapada do Norte*) (2013); the Quilombola dos Arturos Community (*Comunidade Quilombola dos Arturos*) (2014); the Cultural Inventory on the São Francisco River¹ (*Inventário Cultural do Rio São Francisco*); Clay Crafts from the Jequitinhonha Valley (*Artesanato em Barro do Vale do Jequitinhonha*) (2018); and the Traditional Agricultural System of Collectors of Evergreen Flowers (*Sistema Agrícola Tradicional dos Apanhadores e Apanhadoras*

FOOTNOTES

¹ This process resulted in many regional elements listed, such as bottled butter, sun-dried meat, cassava flour, *beiju*, *peta* and *ginete* biscuits, *surubim moqueca* (fish stew), *tropeiro* beans, rice with *pequi*, cream cheese, sun-dried meat *paçocas* and *baru*, *buriti* sweet, *rapadura*, *murici* and *pequi* liqueurs, as well as *cachaça*. The report that consolidated the data from this inventory already recommended the registration of northern Minas Gerais cuisine as cultural heritage.

das Flores Sempre-Vivas) (2023). All these initiatives dealt with the food culture of Minas Gerais, based on the centrality they occupy in the lives of the state's population.

As a way of enabling in-depth research and starting a collaborative process, Iepha-MG signed a technical cooperation agreement with Instituto Periférico, which created and coordinated the project "Cozinha Mineira Patrimônio" (Atlas of Traditional Cuisine of Minas Gerais), which aimed, among other things, to develop a technical registration dossier – and other necessary documents – that characterized Minas Gerais cuisine as a cultural asset.

From the conclusion of this agreement, it was possible for the dossier produced to support the decision of the State Council for Cultural Heritage of Minas Gerais (Conep-MG) for the due registration of the "Culinary Systems of the Mineira Cuisine – Corn and Cassava" as intangible cultural heritage of the State.

The initial focus on corn and cassava was necessary and served as a sampling of a diversity of culinary systems existing in the State. In 2019, Iepha-MG opened a registry to understand how the production of these inputs occurred with corn and cassava flour mills. The data obtained provided an important overview of the presence of these elements in food processes in Minas Gerais. Added to this identification was the data collection carried out by the Instituto Periférico team based on the inventory files of the ICMS Cultural Heritage Program. Once again, corn and cassava were placed in a prominent position on the mineiros' tables, according to data sent by the municipalities themselves.

Given the broad, complex constitution of the cuisine of Minas Gerais and the variety of its systems, an initial characterization was deemed necessary that would serve not only as a cut-off, but also as a reference for the other systems that could and should be recorded. Due to the representativeness of the corn and cassava culinary systems, it was understood that these should be the first to be registered, reinforcing them as fundamental to Minas Gerais cuisine.

The preparation of the research was the result of intense production carried out by an experienced team of researchers from the areas of Education, Anthropology, History, Geography, Communication, as well as chefs and interns from Anthropology, Social Sciences, History and Museology. In turn, technical guidance and relevant contributions to the process were conducted by Iepha-MG's technical team.

Therefore, this edition of Heritage Notebooks proposes to disseminate this research work, as well as to value and publicize the culinary systems that constitute Minas Gerais cuisine, strengthening initiatives to safeguard and promote this cultural asset. With special dedication to the corn and cassava systems, the publication ratifies how the food culture of Minas Gerais is inherent to the identity of the people from Minas Gerais, whether born here or who chose our state as their home. We have already seasoned our food over a wood-fired stove and invite you on this journey into the flavors and aromas of our kitchen.

MINEIRO CUISINE: MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS OF KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES

The *mineiro* offers coffee, tea, any food. But he or she offers it without a rush. He/she's there to talk, [...]. People stop by to have a cookie, but the chat, telling stories is all part of it and we will listen. So, *mineiro* food, for me, is all of that. The flavor, which is wonderful, and the welcome that *mineiros* offer everyone. It is our identityTM.

Solange Aparecida Sarmiento de Oliveira, United Biscuit Makers Association (*Associação dos Biscoiteiros Unidos*), Areado (MG), 2022.

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The kitchen is a space for exchanges, meetings, affection, creativity, contradictions and conflicts, being, therefore, a fundamental venue for understanding the ways of life, forms of expression, knowledge and crafts of a people. In Minas Gerais, a territory built through conflicting processes, as well, which involve the exploitation of territories of original peoples, the processes of enslavement of black African peoples, in addition to occupation and white European violence, food culture takes on complex but fundamental contours for understanding the diverse identities that constitute the state. All these presences, which contribute elements that characterize the very different ways of living spread across Minas Gerais' territory, also reside in the kitchen and food culture, as well as in the use of instruments, techniques and basic practices that are fundamental to the configuration of this cuisine's identity. It

TRANSLATION NOTE

TM All citations were translated from the original in Portuguese, according to the data contained in the bibliographic references, exclusively for this publication.



Cobu, wood bread, corn bread. Several names for a single delight. Photo: Instituto Periférico Collection.



In the quilombola community of Ausente, in Serro (MG), the transmission of knowledge strengthens the history of *mineira* cuisine.
Photo: Instituto Periférico Collection.

15 brings together the legacies of so many historical movements, expressing a unique culture and is sometimes referenced in the narrative of what it means “to be mineiro.”

“The whole family, entirely. From mother, brother, husband, son, everyone. Everyone has participation in biscuits, one way or another. It is my husband’s turn to sweep out the oven, he takes care of the oven. I taught him. (...) There are specific people who do certain things, but everyone has to know about them. Making dough, everyone learns. My son learned how to make the dough. In addition to biscuits, we make cornmeal bread and my husband started working; he learned how the oven works and everyone else does, too. There are other people who joined the club and also learned the whole process. On a daily basis, there is a team that takes care of the oven and the daily baking process. There is someone who takes care of the oven, who will prepare it, light it, heat it. There is a team that will take care of the dough, prepare the dough. There is a team that takes care of the organization of our association members. We set the table to receive people; it has to be a beautiful, pleasant place. And there are those who take care of the service. Demand is high and we even have to ask for more help on the day because the movement is intense. We receive a lot, a whole lot of tourists.”

Solange Aparecida Sarmiento de Oliveira, United Biscuit Makers Association, Areado, MG, 2022.

Starting with sharing at the table, sociocultural relationships are also experienced in religious rituals, in fairs and markets, in festivities and in many other social venues, supported by Minas Gerais’ food culture. The knowledge, techniques and technologies, transmitted orally, mainly among generations of women, are essential for the construction of a social memory. Food culture in Minas Gerais allows its understanding as a sum of knowledge and ways of preparing food, permeated by sociocultural relationships and a complexity of systems, such as culinary, agricultural and food.

The foods, many of which are grown in household backyards, in vegetable gardens or orchards, mostly by family farming, also bear the regional particularity of where they originate and represent

the diversity of the Minas Gerais territory demonstrated in its cuisine. In the same way, know how is part of the characterization of *mineira* cuisine through traditional techniques and instruments, such as pots, clay ovens and wood stoves. This know how is also linked to religious expressions and places for selling food and other products, a fact that we observe in family festivities, in religious rites, in indigenous cosmologies, as well as in traditional festivities of Afro Brazilians, such as the *Festa de Nossa Senhora do Rosário dos Homens Pretos de Chapada do Norte* (MG). The *Quinta do Angu* is one of the cultural assets registered by Iepha-MG in 2013 as one of its traditional rites. The festival, which has been held for more than 200 years to worship black ancestry, has a close relationship with bounty and food as ways of being in community. The Festival Queen distributes the *angu* prepared by many hands, which can be accompanied by different types of sauces, such as beans, okra and pumpkin, or even chicken, beef or pork.

Such centrality in the ways of life of an entire state – and also considering its relevance at the national level – has awakened the need to elevate *mineira* cuisine to a level of formalization of what is already considered it as heritage by the *mineiros* themselves and by those who contemplate Minas Gerais.



Festa de Nossa Senhora do Rosário dos Homens Pretos de Chapada do Norte (MG) - Preparation of *angu* for *Quinta do Angu*. Photo: Iepha-MG Collection.

RECOGNIZING AND IDENTIFYING CULINARY SYSTEMS

A culinary system is based on symbolic and cosmological orders, organizing times, spaces, human conduct and social relationships. It is related to the processes of identity construction, the establishment of cultural borders and social ties. Culinary systems also constitute the way in which different social groups qualify food and mold their palates, defining what is appropriate to eat on different occasions and how to eat it. The systems are closely linked to the modes of production, preparation and consumption, religious traditions and cultural traits of different social groups. (IEPHA-MG; INSTITUTO PERIFÉRICO, 2023, p. 67-68)



Photo: Bellini Andrade/Instituto Periférico Collection

A culinary system, as explained by anthropologist José Reginaldo Gonçalves (2007), is made up of several elements, always open-ended and in constant articulation with each other: a) obtaining primary food sources, such as hunting, fishing, gathering, agriculture, creation, barter or commerce; b) the choice of foods and their combinations; c) preparation processes; d) culinary know how and its forms of learning and transmission; e) ways of presenting and serving food; f) sharing and eating rituals; g) bodily techniques that involve eating; h) the temporality of consumption; i) food in everyday life and in festive contexts; j) the gifts of food; k) classification systems between main, complementary foods and desserts; l) environment for preparing and sharing food and culinary apparatus; m) classificatory expressions of taste; and n) destination of surpluses.

Supported by this broad conception, the research for the registration process found the most appropriate way to think about the multiverses that make up *mineira* cuisine in this open, expansive format. The reason for this is, in order to register a diverse intangible cultural asset such as this, the objectives specific to a process of recognition as heritage must be considered. For the effective protection and safeguarding of knowledge, practices, techniques and other elements that constitute *mineira* cuisine, it was necessary to separate it out from within the broad universe that this food culture presents. In this sense, considering

the research and heritage identification paths already taken by Iepha-MG, in addition to data from local/municipal protection processes², the characterization of the culinary systems of corn and cassava, basic inputs for production and food processes in the state, was taken as the focal point of the analysis and characterization in the dossier. This approach favors the implementation of safeguards and recognizes the diversity of expressions that manifest themselves in Minas Gerais food culture, refusing to view it as something unique, uniform and homogeneous. The registration and safeguarding of corn and cassava culinary systems effectively promotes *mineira* cuisine, paving the way for other characterizations of many other culinary systems present in Minas Gerais.



Photo: Patuá.cc Collection

A culinary system is comprised of stages that encompass several dimensions, from planting to sharing the food at the table, through processing, preparation, established relationships and meanings attributed to the food. Thus, this is how the culinary systems of corn and cassava, the origins of Minas Gerais cuisine, were characterized.

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In a systemic, multi-focused way, this understanding materializes what is understood about *mineira* cuisine and food culture in Minas Gerais, not only by those who consume it, but by those who produce it. This dynamic process recognizes different dimensions that culminate in the final dish, in the recipes – often associated with the adjectives “mineiro” or “à mineira” –, adding different meanings and complexities linked to multiple practices, knowledge, instruments, places, relationships, products, transformations, intellects, values, meanings and people³. All of this leads to expanded perceptions about the role of food in building the identity and memory of people and communities.

Kitchen and food are part of an integrated whole of culture. Thinking about the multiple dimensions of the kitchen means taking food not only as a product necessary for survival – its character as food –, but as a language that allows us to understand actions to maintain one’s own existence, its “culinary” configuration.

FOOTNOTES

² The research for registration considered data from the files of the ICMS Cultural Heritage Program, where several municipalities in Minas Gerais present their processes for protecting local heritage, through the sending of registration dossiers, inventory forms, safeguarding actions and education for heritage.

³ “Minas Gerais”, “Mineiros”, “Das Minas” or “à mineira” food is documented in the first recipe books (or cookbooks) published in Brazil, in the 19th century. The “Cozinheiro imperial” (1840), the first cookbook printed in our country, and the “Cozinheiro nacional” (1874-1888) already emphasized the terminology of recipes linked to the making of *mineira* cuisine. In the latter, Minas Gerais is the regionality most highlighted in the titles and descriptions of the ways of doing things.



Photo: Instituto Periférico Collection.



Photo: Tales Souza/Instituto Periférico Collection.

TRADITIONAL COMMUNITIES: PROTAGONISTS OF CORN AND CASSAVA CULTIVATION

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Far beyond cultivation and food, corn and cassava are intertwined in the cosmological and temporal narratives of ways of life that constitute Minas Gerais' society. Therefore, when we speak about food culture and its diversity, we also speak about the diversity of contributions of the people who formed the state in the historical, social and political spheres of Minas Gerais. Therefore, Minas Gerais food culture, specifically, and its culture, in general, are the result of traditions of indigenous, quilombola and rural communities. The technologies and knowledge that underlie the experiences of these peoples express themselves in the ways of growing, preparing and consuming food, which were transmitted over generations of *mineiros* in the most diverse contexts. This knowledge related to food is so fundamental within these cultures that it becomes present references in the understanding of the world, bodies, divinities and temporalities. Ailton Krenak, leader among the Watu people (Rio Doce) and currently one of the most foremost thinkers in Brazil, takes the cassava field as a reference for thinking about the indigenous stance towards politics.

Even when we seek to intervene within the institutional politics of the white man's world, we do it like someone who went to the fields to look for potatoes or cassava. We know exactly the limits we have, how far we can go and the moment when we will be devoured by another thought that will mean the extinction of native thought and the very origin of the creation of the world. (KRENAK, 1994, p. 154)

Thus, we understand that the culinary systems of *mineira* cuisine make up imaginary, symbolic and cosmological multiverses. The cuisine itself can be thought of as an expressive form, a language that crosses and connects generations in the transmission of memories, knowledge, flavors and affections. When we deal with corn and cassava, we delve into even more dense and rooted ancestries. These are genetic heritages that bridge time and intertwine peoples and their cultures, memories stored in creole seeds and diversity of species, recipes handed down and mixed together, in mythological narratives, festivities and rituals.

In relation to indigenous traditions, more than 20 peoples live in Minas Gerais⁴ with their own cosmologies that support their culinary systems. It was this population, composed of thousands and thousands of people in the pre-colonial period, reduced to around 20 thousand people today, one of those

FOOTNOTES

⁴ Census carried out by IBGE in 2010. Available at www.ibge.gov.br. Accessed on July 11, 2023.

responsible for the food bases of what we call today *mineira* cuisine. These people are called Tikmu'un-Maxakali, Xakriabá, Krenak, Aranã, Mukuriñ, Pataxó, Pataxó hã-hã-hãe, Catu-Awá-Arachás, Kaxixó, Puris, Xukuru-Kariri, Tuxá, Kiriri, Canoeiros, Kamakã-Mongoió, Karajá, Kambiwá, Tikuna, Borum-Kren, Makuni, Guarani and Pankararu, belonging to the Macro-Jê and Tupi-Guarani (Guarani) linguistic trees (CEDEFES, s/d, s/p)⁵.

The knowledge and ways of doing things from the original peoples consolidated a significant cultural practice in the cuisine of Brazil, especially in Minas Gerais. The territory of Minas Gerais, initially named by the colonizers as Minas do Cataguás, in reference to the village of Cataguases, was an area of intense colonial exploration and, at the same time, densely populated by various indigenous ethnicities. Among them, the so-called Botocudos, Puris, Coroados, Caiapós, Pataxós, Malalis, Maxacalis, Panhames, and many others stand out (RESENDE, 2011, p. 28-30)⁶. Therefore, the expressiveness of these peoples was present in the history of the construction of what would be called Brazil and Minas Gerais, as we will see later.

The origin of corn in Brazilian lands, previously named in the Tupi language as avati, auati and abati (FERNANDES, 2011), followed the cultivation started in Mexico. There are reports that, shortly after the arrival of Christopher Columbus in the Americas, there was the domestication of the vegetable teosinte, which is the original corn plant that spread throughout the region known today as Central America, approximately between southern Mexico and Costa Rica. Records from that time, therefore, indicate the use of corn by American cultures.

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This corn is planted among the cassava and among the new sugar canes. The new crop is harvested every three months, one in August and the other in January. The corn is eaten by the locals roasted, and they make their wines by cooking it, with which they get drunk, and the Portuguese who communicate with the locals, and the mestizos do not despise it, and drink it very heartily. (SOUZA, 1971, p. 21)

It is evident, therefore, that corn was already cultivated in the Americas before the arrival of Europeans and its use included food, such as porridge, and drink, since the Amerindians of different ethnicities and ways of life present here (FERNANDES, 2011) produced non-alcoholic and alcoholic drinks, which were reserved for festive or religious celebrations with different contexts and purposes from group to group. There are also reports that, in addition to corn, cassava itself, sweet potato, rice and babassu were also part of their diet.

The nutritional richness of corn is proven in reports of its consumption in grain, raw or cooked, by people of different ethnicities from the Macro-Jê trunk, who were reduced to the term “botocudos”

FOOTNOTES

⁵ CEDEFES. *Povos indígenas em Minas Gerais. Quem são? Aspectos gerais*. Available at: <https://www.cedefes.org.br/povos-indigenas-destaque/>. Accessed on 10/15/2022.

⁶ In recent movements, many indigenous ethnic groups have changed their ethnic self-designations. In some cases, just the spelling; in others, adopting a new term, such as the ethnic group known as Maxakali, which is self-names Tikmu'un, and Huni Kuin, formerly Kaxinawá. We chose, however, to maintain the terms as present in the referenced bibliography.

from Minas Gerais (JOSÉ, 1965). The 17th century work, “Diálogos das grandezas do Brasil” (1618) informs that corn “is a very useful food to support the slaves of Guinea and Indians, because it is eaten roasted and also in cakes (...), then made into flour.”

The publication also organizes a curious comparison, as it shows that the Portuguese thought it strange, who already consumed corn as a cooked food in the 18th century, because of the indigenous habit of preparing the vegetable as a “treat”, which indicates the relevance given to the product in the routine food for Europeans themselves.

Corn stimulated dialogue and incorporates new features throughout the history of cuisine in the Americas. Since its cultural dissemination by the original peoples, it has gained varied forms, ranging from *angu*, green corn-on-the-cob (roasted or cooked), popcorn, *curau*, tamale, flour, coarse hominy, *canjiquinha*, couscous, catimpuera, aluá and even jacuba. In addition to these preparations, the kitchen integrated fern shoots, palm hearts, game and fish, bee honey and other forest products (IEPHA-MG; INSTITUTO PERIFÉRICO, 2023, p. 31). These culinary associations to this day make up eating practices in clear reverence to indigenous and African customs.

It is clear, therefore, how consumed corn is and how democratic is its use, as it has always appeared on the tables of all social strata (MENESES, 2000). Flandrin (1998) has already observed this when indicating that the food base of wealthy and poor families in Minas Gerais differed little. What characterized them, according to the author, was their table manners (FLANDRIN, 1998, p. 491).



Cassava root is associated with corn in importance for the diet of Brazil and Minas Gerais. Portuguese chronicler of the 16th century, Pero de Magalhães Gândavo (1540-1580) already described it and reported its processing.

Cassava has been present in South America for a long time, and there are studies that indicate its presence since 2500 BC (SILVA, 2008; DEAN, 1996; DUFOUR, 1988; SAUER, 1993). The use of cassava is justified by the native populations of the territory, who lived here before the colonial invasion, as it is less demanding in terms of soil quality and has an efficient and high productivity after the first year of planting. Another advantage observed is that cassava is preserved in the soil and can be harvested in any season.

And as soon as they are pulled up, they are left to soak in water for three or four days, and after they are cured, they are crushed very well. Once this is done, they place the mass in some long, narrow sleeves that are made into thin lintels, woven like a basket, and there they squeeze out the juice, so that nothing remains; because it is so venomous and extremely poisonous, that, if a person or any other animal drinks it, they will die right then and there. And after having cured it in this way, they put a bowl over the fire, into which they place it, and an Indian woman keeps stirring it until the fire ends up boiling off its moisture and it dries and is ready to be eaten, which will take about half an hour. (SANTOS, 2022, p. 72)

Therefore, the colonial period is rich in narratives about the use of cassava. An important reference from the 18th century, Raphael Bluteau's dictionary (1712) values food even more in the linguistic culture of the time by conceptualizing the entry "roça" as the "garden or farm where cassava is sown; farms in Brazil are called that because they are on land, where brush is cleared off by burning, cutting and uprooting the trees."

As soon as they arrived in Brazilian territory, the Portuguese colonizers tried to learn from the indigenous people how to produce cassava, including through the *coivara* system, a practice of crop rotation and the alternation between years of cultivation and years of fallow soil, including the cutting, felling and burning of native vegetation. The wisdom of this learning has guaranteed the permanence of this technique to this day. In the 19th century, the "Manual do agricultor brasileiro", by Carlos Augusto Taunay, who praised cassava as "(...) a singular whim of nature, which combined a violent poison with a nutritious substance (...)" and said that it was "well known to all Brazilian farmers, and the way of treating it is common" (TAUNAY, 2001).

Publications relating to that time show a wealth of ways of making both cassava and corn. From maceration, through fermentation to cooking, they record the knowledge built through the use of heat, time, maturation, dehydration, smoking and other techniques. Understanding this entire process as cultural and procedural appropriation reiterates the importance of understanding these products as

founding elements of Minas Gerais cuisine and of immortalizing this trajectory to better consolidate Brazilian history through its cuisine.

To this scenario, the plentiful native knowledge and technologies that historically managed corn and cassava, were added to ways of life of resistance and African ancestry, through people who were subjected to the enslavement process. The processes of resistance and liberation were even more latent with mining exploitation that spans centuries of Minas Gerais' history, reinforcing the influence slavery had on the state. In this sense, the African people and their descendants, using ancestral techniques, organized themselves into quilombos, brotherhoods, terreiros and other forms of resistance, preserving and recreating their cultures over time.

Minas Gerais is the Brazilian state with the largest number of officially recognized quilombolas (runaway slave enclaves). There are 394 communities certified by the Palmares Cultural Foundation, but the Eloy Ferreira da Silva Documentation Center (2021), a civil society organization that supports and researches these communities, estimates that there are 1,043 communities self-defined as quilombolas in Minas Gerais. Among the various technologies, knowledge, recipes and techniques related to food systems developed by black people, especially within quilombos, is the perpetuation of creole seeds⁷, cultivated and managed in vegetable gardens, backyards and forests, planting techniques, recipes, and traditional agricultural systems, such as the Traditional Agricultural System of the Evergreen Flower Pickers, a cultural asset registered by Iepha-MG in 2023.

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Community collecting evergreens Pé de Serra, in Diamantina (MG), in the collective preparation of food. *Mineira* cuisine stands out as a space for sociability. Photo: Iepha-MG Collection.

FOOTNOTES

⁷ Creole seeds – or traditional seeds – are those managed and preserved over the years by farmers, on their properties or in seed banks. These seeds from local growers, already adapted to that environment, present great genetic variability, which does not occur with transgenic seeds. In Brazil, more than 80% of corn seeds are transgenic, increasing the threats and contamination of areas and plantations and reinforcing the logic of intensive, highly technological monoculture.

The quilombola community from Ausente, in Serro (MG), for example, maintains an agroecology collective that consists of 11 women and one man from the community, in partnership with researchers and farmers from the region. The association has resulted in greater production in backyards, increased income generation for women and families, and the creation of a creole seed bank.

In Minas Gerais, there are many other traditional communities – artisanal fishermen, *terreiro* people, *geraizeiros*, *vazanteiros*, *veredeiros*, *faisceiros*, evergreen flower pickers, etc. – who organize their own production, food and culinary systems. Therefore, it is recognized that the great historical and cultural diversity of knowledge and people that constitute the vast territory of Minas Gerais must occupy the centrality of future processes for recognition, inventory and recording of the culinary systems of Minas Gerais cuisine. There are countless systems that make up our kitchen and they are as varied as their origins, current configurations and roles they play in the identity constitution of the people of Minas Gerais.

THE GUARDIANS: BLACK WOMEN AND KNOW HOW IN *MINEIRA* CUISINE

In the historical and sociocultural paths that permeate Minas Gerais cuisine, there is a role that was hidden for generations, and its importance was not recognized and must be constantly rethought and given new meaning. To sustain the economic, social and cultural dynamics that would ensure the perpetuation of the white colonial elite in power, work on the farm and in the kitchen was arbitrarily delegated to people of African and Afro-Brazilian origin, who, in turn, redefined the meaning of this place with inventiveness and distinct strategies.

As a result, over the centuries, our cuisine has been the responsibility of black women, a position that is still preponderant due to our colonial heritage and the challenges of facing social demarcations bequeathed by structural racism (ALMEIDA, 2019) and the impoverishment of black populations. Such relationships were described in detail by Taís de Sant’Anna Machado in her doctoral thesis “*Um pé na cozinha: uma análise sócio-histórica do trabalho de cozinheiras negras no Brasil*”.

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Finally, it is worth highlighting the quantitative dimension and importance of the culinary work of black women in the colonial period. (...) During this period, enslaved African women (and their descendants) were forced to work domestically and, among other tasks, were responsible for cooking. To highlight how essential this work was during the slavery period: for almost three centuries, the majority of the workforce that produced Brazilian food was singularly the task of black, enslaved females. Among enslaved women who had cooking as one of their many tasks or those assigned only to this service, a situation more common in more affluent homes, the kitchen has since become a work space for black women. This culinary work was not only restricted to the space of the home. It was also performed outside it by enslaved women who worked in the earning system, as well as free and emancipated women, who carried out various commercial activities related to food. During the 20th century, the majority of black women remained in domestic work, performing culinary work, among other tasks, in addition to continuing to work in commercial establishments. (MACHADO, 2021, p. 55-56)

Although this leading role is far from being the result of a choice, amid the violence and oppression of the slavery period, some interpretations understand that women cooks were granted greater social transit and the possibility of cultural negotiations. According to Cascudo (2004), “the black cook would be the initial and powerful defender of African cuisine, advancing insensibly in the dissemination of her delicacies”, which began to diversify with the addition of natural elements from the land, indigenous procedures and traditional Portuguese culinary techniques (CASCUDO, 2004, p. 837).

In this sense, the cooks “were strategically contemporizing and mediating latent conflicts”, acting in a present, effective manner in a space in which they could cook memories and flavors in the face of the limitations imposed by the condition of the enslaved, yet they could cultivate the “materiality of their existence and of their contemporaries” (MENESES, 2007, p. 338). From the colonial period onwards, the farm and the kitchen were organized as spaces endowed with complexity, which could be perceived

as a duality between consent and resistance, within a colonial strategy of conflict negotiation, forming environments and practices in which enslaved people could cultivate part of the strength they had to have to survive in the slave system. Cooking for enslaved women also played a significant role in the fields of freedom, resistance and social organization, as it could be configured as an economic possibility, cooking their memories and nourishing their beliefs. From working in the fields or preparing delicacies, in certain cases it was possible to accumulate resources that, at times, were capable of leading enslaved people to manumission (emancipation) (MENESES, 2007, p. 342).

For cook and multi-artist Zora Santos (2022), Minas Gerais cuisine is a social, historical environment primarily constituted by black female ancestry. Given her history, which is intertwined with kitchen space, she tells how she became a woman working at the stove:

I've been cooking forever, like every black woman. We cooked with our grandmothers, our aunts, our mothers, alone... I always denied this side of cooking, I carried the image of my aunts, my mother, cooking for families that, when someone praised the food, the woman of the house would say: "This is a family recipe." I never understood that very well. What do you mean a family recipe? From the family that makes it or the family that eats it? Who is behind the stove or who is tasting? And I never wanted to be a cook, because I didn't want to have the life they had. (SANTOS, 2022, s/p)

Tuquinha, from the Chacrinha dos Pretos quilombo, in Belo Vale (MG), controls his wood stove. Photo: Belini Andrade/Instituto Periférico Collection.





Flour house in the community of evergreen gatherers in Comunidade de Macacos, Diamantina (MG).
Photo: Iepha-MG Collection.

As workers, often invisible, black women resisted, persisted and managed our food. And this applies to Brazil, in general, and to Minas Gerais, in particular. Forced to cook or even choosing to be a cook, the activity “preserves old structures of racial, gender and racial violence, which are capable of being updated in contemporary times,” as Taís de Sant’Anna Machado tells us (MACHADO, 2021, p. 20). However, aware of the importance of this cultural construction, black women, with knowledge and actions of resistance and struggle, transformed the need and obligation into peculiar and identity-based ways of eating.

PRESERVING THE MEMORIES OF *MINEIRA* CUISINE

IN THE BAGGAGE, CORN AND CASSAVA

Mineira cuisine presents itself as a multiplier not only in its origin, but also in the way it was constituted over the centuries. From its abundant backyards, its unique techniques for preparing food, the use of everyday ingredients that grace pots and pans to its spatial occupation in domestic and family life, it is one of the founding elements of culture in Minas Gerais.

Expanding this view to the culinary systems of corn and cassava as matrices of Minas Gerais food culture implies considering the processes, know how, practices, places, languages and traditions that involve these two inputs, which also present countless possibilities of use and derivations.

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The presence of corn and cassava in lands that today correspond to Minas Gerais dates back centuries, as several travelers have recorded in their narratives. The experience lived by foreigners traveling through Brazil and Minas Gerais in the 18th and 19th centuries makes it possible to understand today a period narrative that is fundamental for reading contemporary senses and meanings.

Between 1816 and 1822, French naturalist Auguste de Saint-Hilaire, who covered a large part of the territory that today corresponds to Minas Gerais, spoke about the multiplicity of food culture in the state and even about the difference in access to some foods according to social class. In the Ubá region, he experienced encounters with different ethnic groups. In a passage in his texts that report the encounter with an indigenous group of undocumented ethnicity, it is mentioned that these people were taken to the farm of the traveler's host so that he could learn about "the traits of the American race." "This episode, which recounts the complex processes of the so-called cultural encounters of the colonial period, when people would be taken to be exposed to travelers, marked Saint-Hilaire's passage through those lands. He comments that, after performing dances, "he brought them beans and corn. The women dipped their hands into the food and took out what they ate by the handful. The men gathered pieces of tree bark and used them as utensils" (SAINT-HILAIRE, 2000, p. 31).

Continuing the reports about the region, he presents in detail descriptions of the routes, his routine and what he found on his travels. From the scarce commerce in small sales, to the preparation of

meals made in the “tripêça”, based on beans and bacon, the records about the inputs consumed by the delegation draws our attention:

They prepared our lunch, which consisted of black beans cooked with bacon, rice and a few cups of tea. At the beginning of the trip we had biscuits, but soon we had to settle for corn flour or, sometimes, cassava flour. (...) not yet being used to this food, out of human respect, he threw a little flour on the beans; but I experienced an unpleasant sensation when the grains of flour, imperfectly chewed, passed through my tongue and larynx. (SAINT-HILAIRE, 2000, p. 66)

The region of the then Diamantino district yielded important observations for Saint-Hilaire about corn and the products derived from it. Their reports indicated that “All farmers plant corn, not only because its flour replaces bread, but also because, for pack animals, it is what oats are for us, and it is also used to fatten chickens and, above all, pigs” (SAINT-HILAIRE, 1974, p. 106). Additionally, about flour derived from corn, “It is by cooking the cornmeal in water, without adding salt, this type of coarse polenta is made which is called *angu*, and constitutes the main food of the slaves” (SAINT-HILAIRE, 1974, p. 106).

Corn flour is very common in Saint-Hilaire’s reports, who also notes the non-existence of butter as a product and the use of fat from frying bacon as a substitute. Another indication is the rarity of wheat bread, seen as a “luxury object.” Instead, the naturalist noted the use of “corn flour” for bread making or to accompany food. “The latter is served”, says the traveler, “in small baskets or plates, sometimes on



table cloth itself, arranged in symmetrical piles” (SAINT-HILAIRE, 2000, p. 96). While eating roast meat, we noticed the diner’s habit of interspersing the pieces with a spoonful of flour and, “with inimitable dexterity, he throws the spoonful without letting a single grain fall” (SAINT-HILAIRE, 2000, p. 96).

One of the dishes part of the popular imagination among the most frequent in *mineira* cuisine is chicken with okra, was observed at that era by the French naturalist as common and appreciated by *mineiros*: “chicken cooked with the fruits of okra (*Hibiscus esculentus*) from which a thick mucilage similar to glue is released; but okra is not eaten with pleasure unless accompanied by *angu*, a type of tasteless *polenta* (...)” (SAINT-HILAIRE, 2000, p. 96).

Saint-Hilaire’s insight indicates regional differences. An example of this observation is when he arrives in the region of the Rio Doce, on the border with Espírito Santo, and he talks about the use of cassava, whose influence on food culture was indigenous:

Cassava and tapioca flour are very well known, so I will dwell much on their uses. The Portuguese-Brazilians call it cassava flour, or pau (...). It is mixed with beans and other dishes to which sauces are usually added and, when eaten with dried foods, they throw it into the mouth with a dexterity acquired from the indigenous people in origin, and very difficult for Europeans to imitate. I cannot avoid considering cassava flour to be inferior to corn flour, used in the same way by *mineiros* (...), but there are Portuguese-Brazilians who prefer the former to the latter and even think that, mixed with certain food substances, it is more pleasant than wheat bread. (SAINT-HILAIRE, 1974, p. 56)

Photo: Patuá.cc. Collection

Corn and cassava are the basis of Amerindian agriculture, culturally rooted in their sociability and cosmologies, in mythological narratives, in the relationship with epoch of the natural world, in the wisdom of planting and harvesting, in culinary and ritual uses, in barter, in understanding gifts and abundance. (IEPHA-MG, INSTITUTO PERIFÉRICO, 2023, p. 89)



The traveler, attentive to the specific and regional use of cassava in distinction from corn flour, observes that the product “is abundantly cultivated by the country folk and grows well in dry places” and that in the interior of the São Francisco River region “the cassava flour is used instead of corn” (SAINT-HILAIRE, 1974, p. 76).

Corn and cassava, as already evidenced throughout the text, play a significant role in the food culture of Minas Gerais, in addition to representing the conjoining of native and African peoples and the respective constitution of the *mineiros*.

As already mentioned, both the cassava root (*Exculenta manihot*) as well as corn (*Zea mays*) are species native to America and have been cultivated by Amerindians since 2500 BC in South America. Thanks to the migrations of Tupi groups, its planting was expanded to the coast and central Brazilian region, mainly through the processing of flour. Corn, originating in southwestern Mexico around nine thousand years ago, was derived from another cereal, teosinte, undergoing numerous modifications and manipulations.

Specifically in the case of corn and cassava, which are two crops considered to have low requirements in terms of continuous care, it is not difficult to understand why they have achieved such a presence in Minas Gerais territory. With corn, generally, within two to three months, the farmer carries out the entire planting cycle and with great harvest security. This means a differentiated ease and reiterates the diversity of its use. With cassava, it has been no different. Allied to this, the nutritional value of the root and the possibility of processing it into flour for long-term use added even more richness to the product, which has a low commercial price.

The low perishability of both corn and cassava, especially in the milled state, allowed the food to be integrated into the diet of troopers, trail blazers and travelers, which, without a doubt, facilitated territorial expansion and its uses.

Historical and literary narratives have several examples of how corn and cassava are elements that make up the ways of traditional people and rural populations. Cassava, with its diversity of species, is present in the works of Guimarães Rosa (2001), an author who brought *mineira* cuisine to his books and other works, and gives to this input the necessary centrality to the life of *mineiros*. In the book "Grande Sertão: Veredas", the author attributes to the backlands of Minas Gerais as metaphors for the cosmological dualities between the divine and the devil:

Better yet, be careful: because on the ground, and with the same shape of branches and leaves, can't you grow tame cassava, which is eaten commonly, and wild cassava, which kills? Now, have you ever seen something strange? Sweet cassava can suddenly turn angry - reasons I don't know; sometimes it is said that it is always replanted on the ground, with seedlings in succession, of *manaibas* - it becomes bitter, every now and then, it takes poison from itself. And, look: the other one, wild cassava, is also the one that can sometimes be tamed, haphazardly, and can be eaten without any harm. (...) Arre, it (the demo) is mixed in everything. (GUIMARÃES ROSA, 2001, p. 27)

When considering that culinary systems are like elements of a language, they also play the role of connecting customs, memories, know how, flavors and affections. When corn and cassava are interpreted as founding elements of *mineira* cuisine, ancestries are recovered through dishes taught, transmitted and transformed.

This sharing can be seen in the Cultural Inventory for the Protection of the São Francisco River, developed by Iepha-MG, which reinforced the importance of cassava and its derivatives as an element of unique relevance for traditional Minas Gerais cuisine (IEPHA, 2022). In research carried out in the São Francisco

River region, cassava and its derivatives, such as artisanal flour, were one of the pillars of northern Minas Gerais cuisine:

[...] customary and traditional practice in the region, and which has a wide production chain and symbolic, economic, social, nutritional meanings, among others. The production system integrates knowledge, such as observing the phases of the moon for planting and harvesting, techniques, such as the right “humidity point” for sifting flour, and places, such as the flour house, space used for its manufacturing process. and at the same time brings together families and holders of knowledge, since at least seven people are needed to produce it, including men and women. (IEPHA-MG, 2016, p. 38)

The understanding of the importance of flours and the direction of Iepha-MG’s attention to topics related to food and culinary systems resulted in the creation of a broader inventory on corn and cassava flours, also under the coordination of the institution. In 2019, a state registry was launched to identify flour mills and corn mills in the state, which should be completed directly by holders or public managers from municipalities in Minas Gerais. This registry recognized that, “in Minas Gerais, flours, both cassava and corn, represent the basis for the preparation of various foods that are rooted in the traditions and cultures of the territories that make up the state” (IEPHA-MG, 2022, p. 8).

Photo: Patuá.cc Collection

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“Cassava cake has been around for generations; I learned it from my mother. You grate the cassava to make the cake, take cassava, eggs, sugar, milk, three tablespoons of wheat. This one is cornbread, cornmeal bread, I add pork fat, lard, brown sugar, baking soda, eggs, a little sugar to make the brown sugar whole, milk. Here comes the sequilhinho, which is from the cassava starch that I make, including fat, cream from the natural milk here, a little oil, sugar and eggs”. (Luiza Faria Ribeiro dos Santos, from Conceição dos Ouros, in an interview with the Instituto Periférico research team conducted on 7/15/2022)

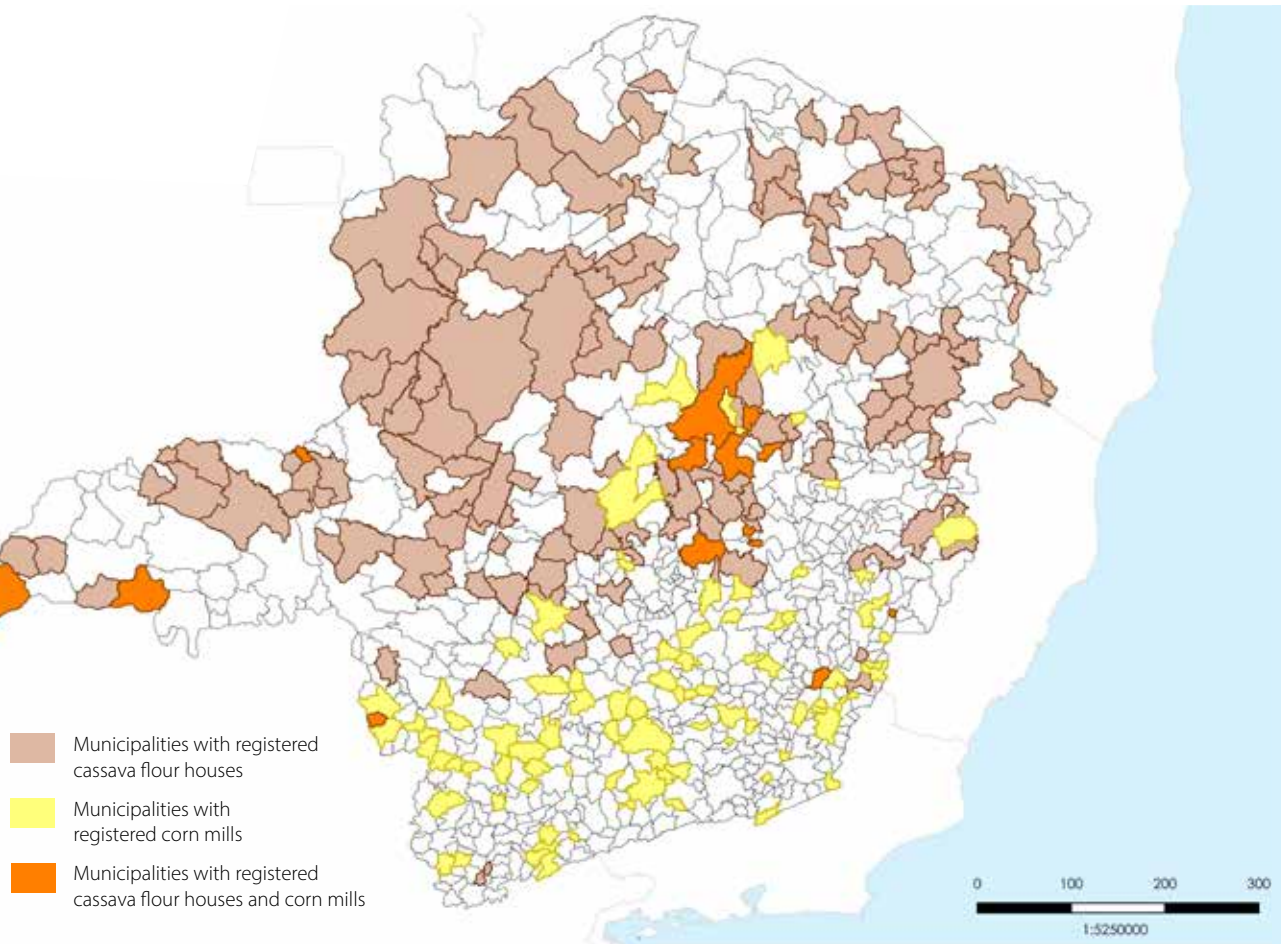


The registration approach through the survey of traditional flour processing spaces is based on the assumption that “these places are constituted not only as buildings that house part of the cassava and corn production chain, but, above all, as spaces with multiple uses” (IEPHA-MG, 2022, p. 8), which focuses on work, social life and leisure dynamics.

The Registry of Corn Mills and Flour Houses (IEPHA-MG, 2022) sought to identify production, food, culinary and social practices involved in their processes of interaction with the environment, crops and forms of social organization. The responses were mostly sent by municipal management agencies. Of the 494 registrations, which represent 258 municipalities in the state, 96.2% of the forms were answered by representatives of municipal government⁸.

LOCATION MAP OF MILLS AND FLOUR HOUSES

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FOOTNOTES

⁸ Data collected until July 2022. IEPHA-MG, 2022, p. 15.

There are 350 cassava flour houses registered in 175 municipalities, and 175 corn mills registered in 118 municipalities. Among these, 31 occurrences appear in which the same respondent owns both a cassava flour house and a corn mill. When data related to the location of these spaces in the state of Minas Gerais are observed, it is clear that 85.8% of houses and mills are located in rural areas. (IEPHA-MG, 2022, p. 15)

According to the responses sent to registration (IEPHA-MG, 2022), cassava flour houses are more concentrated in the northern region of the state: Northern Minas; Central Minas; Jequitinhonha; Northwestern Minas; and Triângulo Mineiro/Alto Paranaíba. In the same survey, the occurrence of corn mills is concentrated in the southern region of the state, especially in territories in the mesoregions: South/Southwest Minas; Campo das Vertentes; Belo Horizonte Metropolitan Region; and Central Minas.

Historically, agriculture and, consequently, cuisine that benefits from it lead to the possibilities for the social organization of individuals, such as the occupation of spaces, as well as the cultural construction of local values. Once the region is occupied, continuity in agricultural production is assured, which tends to sustain future generations with crops, especially corn and cassava. Families interact to the environment that surrounds them through work, cultivation, processing and transformation. From such relationships, the foundations of food culture are supported, which develops in complexity and importance.

“We plant corn, rice (now they have stopped planting), beans and vegetables from the garden, cassava to eat, sweet potatoes, the little guys, that’s what we plant. There’s quince, there’s fruit. Our consumption, really. Our consumption. We only use the corn to make cornmeal and people take the cornmeal from here for consumption. We have to prepare the land, plant the corn, take care of the corn, then they go to the fields to harvest the corn and then bring it to the mill to make cornmeal. Then it has to be passed through a sieve, put in the mill to grind. Grinding is done and the cornmeal comes out. Then you have to sift the cornmeal, leave it ready. People take the cornmeal for consumption. We don’t sell it outside, only people here take it. We make bread to eat, we do the greengrocers. Instead of going “to” the bakery to buy bread, we go to greengrocers here in the countryside. The people who take care of the corn take care of the fields here.” Luiza Faria Ribeiro dos Santos, Conceição dos Ouros, 2022.

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Maria Luiza de Miranda, 95 years old, resident of Alvorada de Minas (MG), has a family history that dates back to 1850, when her father was already a well-known flour producer. Today, the two daughters, Maria Conceição and Nadir, report that the traditional way of producing flour involved artisanal processes that currently do not occur in the same way. The tubers that were planted and harvested in the cassava field by the family were transported in handmade baskets to the flour mill, where a manual grater was used. Presses were made from hooks, cloth, stone and sleeves to dry the dough before being toasted in the stone roaster. Today, to avoid possible sandy debris coming from the stone, the roasting is done on an iron plate on top of the wood oven, and this plate, creatively, is called the Beetle shell. The cassava grater is motorized and the traditional press has been replaced by a hydraulic jack, which increases the speed and efficiency of the drying process of the grated cassava dough.

In Fervedouro (MG), Mr. Jorcelino Pedro maintains the mill and the process of manufacturing corn flour in an entirely artisanal way. From fermented hominy, production results in both biju flour and toasted corn flour. After being ground in the mill, the fermented and crushed dough passes through a sieve that will determine the types of flour. The biju is the result of what was sifted, which is moistened again

and sifted on top of the oven. The other soup flour, as it is called by Jorcelino, is the result of what was not sifted. The coarser residues are then roasted, ground in a stone mill and sieved to give the final form to the flour. Roasting biju flour is a quick, light roast, around four minutes, until the point where it becomes dry, but does not burn (PREFEITURA MUNICIPAL DE FERVEDOURO, 2020).

The rusticity of corn and cassava cultivation is symbolic and allows us to understand how communities were founded in their surroundings. This ability to gather subsistence is the driving force behind manual farming that still exists for many producers, spanning generations. In an interview with Rudá Kocubej de Andrade (2013), a farmer from the Milho Verde district, in Serro (MG), Vavá Farias, details his role in founding a farm:

[...] this year was all done with a hoe, in fact. I prefer it that way! Anyone who wants to plow with a tractor... I could do this, but this is my way. That's why I plant so much: it's hand-picked... manually. [...] A man, wanting to work, does a lot of things in a day, doesn't he? (FARIAS *apud* ANDRADE, 2013, p. 72)

Farmer Vavá uses his work with the land to express himself and has no doubt in stating that “this is it... which is my legacy” (ANDRADE, 2013, p. 72). In the same way, the subject, when making use of what he collects from the possible structure that surrounds him, such as the countless utensils used to prepare food, builds a network of meanings that becomes incorporated, gradually and permanently, into the culture and people’s sense of existence. Therefore, mills, flour mills and mills are like extensions of this social, common and cultural organization.

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Such spaces function as a starting point for relationships between plants, people and communities, acting as locus for interactions between genders, kinship relations, intergenerational transmission, division of labor, among other social dimensions. The mill itself functions as a metaphor for the relationships that are built through the processes of transforming non-human substances into food. (IEPHA-MG, 2022, p. 9)

The importance of a “holistic understanding of cultural heritage” capable of bringing together the “territorial, productive, economic, sacred dimensions, relations between humans and non-humans, among others” (IEPHA-MG, 2022, p. 10) is evident.

FARMS, GREENGROCERS AND BACKYARDS

The presence of backyards in Minas Gerais culture is significant and dates back to a historical process observed in the formation of urban settlements, camps, towns and cities in Minas Gerais, from the 18th century to present. Reflecting on the place of orchards, vegetable gardens, ornamental flowers, spices and medicinal herbs as extensions of homes is symbolic for the culinary culture of a region. Associated with this is the raising of animals, such as chickens and pigs, in these backyards, which are consolidated as significant spaces for the food culture of the 17th and 18th centuries (IEPHA-MG; INSTITUTO PERIFÉRICO, 2023, p. 40-41).

Taking them with their different functions – protection, shelter, work, family relationships – the backyards of the houses function as instruments of a good part of the cultural roles assigned to them at that time. They are not only the work place, rather they embody fundamental aspects of the construction of daily family life and the family's relationships with society. Therefore, talking about them reflects on this intimate connection between the backyard and the house itself and its kitchen. (IEPHA-MG; INSTITUTO PERIFÉRICO, 2023, p. 41)



With a fundamental role in food supply, urban sociability and home ambience, the backyards of houses in Minas Gerais, from all the production generated, from fruits, vegetables to animal husbandry, made up the daily eating practices of families and of the community.

Two forces named this classic baked good as bread: the symbolic one, the fermented cereal food, symbol of human creativity and life itself (in Christian, Jewish and Muslim cultures); and as something all mineiros identify themselves with, the Minas Gerais way of living and valuing things. The popular saying goes that “if the name exists, it is because the thing exists!” The “thing”, then, is bread, even though it is not technically bread! For Minas Gerais, it is as symbolic, significant and strong as bread. Made with sour or sweet cassava starch, or both, half and half, other ingredients often populate the creativity of greengrocers and baker, such as the incorporation of a portion of cornmeal. After all, tradition is filled with permanence and change, with creativity. Cheese is its noble ingredient. Maybe that’s why our bread doesn’t have cassava as part of its name. It is curious that “the queen of Brazilian cuisine” lets cheese reign in the name of this premier foodstuff. For something that is called by so many names (mandioca, macaxeira, aipim, castelinha, uaipi, mandioca-doce, mandioca-mansa, maniva, maniveira, etc.), the humble Exculenta manihot allows mineiros to forget to honor her as part of their bread’s name. (MENESES, 2020, p. 77)



Photo: Bellini Andrade/Instituto Periférico Collection.

Eighteenth-century dictionaries coined the entry “quintais” (backyards) as small farms. In the description, the location is noted, as behind the houses, and the function of offering food to the family and others in the neighborhood. The farm is a “country house or farm in the countryside with its houses. It was

called that because the person who rents the farm usually gives the owner one fifth (1/5) of what he harvests in fruit" (BLUTEAU, 1720). The definition of backyard indicates that "in a small city or town, it is a piece of land with fruit trees and surrounded by walls. It is called a backyard because it serves as a farm in the village" (BLUTEAU, 1720, p. 74).

Cover for corn mill in Andre-
lândia (MG). Photograph:
lepha-MG Collection.



The British mineralogist John Mawe, visiting Brazil in the 19th century, made an interesting classification of Arraial do Tejuco (currently Diamantina): it is an urban cluster “on the slope of a mountain, irregularly built. The streets are uneven, but the houses are generally well-made and well-maintained, compared to other cities in the interior” (MAWE, 1978, p. 159). The backyards of the houses he observed are abundant, with “oranges, pineapples, peaches, guavas, and there is a variety of indigenous fruits, sweet and sour, mainly *jabuticaba*, full of mucilaginous substance.” There, also, “ginger and pepper grow spontaneously and various spices are certainly cultivated with results” (MAWE, 1978, p. 161).

The tradition of greengrocers comes from this rich backyard production, represented by cheese, cornbread, tapioca biscuits, donuts, cornmeal cake... To the greengrocers from Minas Gerais, they are identified as common and part of the coffee table, by any *mineiro*. The word “quitanda”, originating in the African dialect of Kimbundu, comes from “kitanda”, a board on which goods are displayed for street sales, originating from rural Bantu society.

From the same African dialect comes the word “fubá”, whose meaning is “flour”, that of corn or rice, used to produce cornbread, bread, biscuits and cakes, identity elements of Minas Gerais cuisine in its essence. As a result of this production process, cassava starch forms part of one of the most traditional recipes in *mineira* cuisine, cheese bread.

Greengrocers multiply according to the creativity present in the food culture of Minas Gerais. Corn and cassava, as fundamental ingredients of most of them, dictate the rhythm of the cooking in their most varied forms, whether through flour, starch, grains, pieces or crumbs.

Corn and cassava are the basis of countless greengrocers, which usually bring together other inputs characteristic of Minas Gerais food culture, such as cheese, eggs and milk.
Photo: Bellini Andrade/Instituto Periférico Collection.





Kukuana festival in the Manzo Ngunzo Kaiango quilombola community in Belo Horizonte (MG)

Photo: Januaceli/Iepha-MG Collection.

FESTIVITIES AND RITUALS

“la uê ererê aiô gombê –

With permission from the curiandamba,

with permission from curiacuca,

With permission from the young man,

with permission from the land owner”

(the singer asks permission from ‘the oldest, the cook, who also knows how to sing, the young man and the owner of the land’ (or farmland) so he can sing). (MACHADO, 1985, p. 94)

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This Vissungo song dates back a hundred years ago, in São João da Chapada, Diamantina district, and was recorded by Aires da Mata Machado Filho. The request for a license to sing is directed, as Andrade (2013) explains, “to the oldest”, who stands out for bringing together the knowledge in that group. The curiandamba – cook – is also revered for his/her role and his/her relationship with food, a central element for that social organization. Through the hands of the curiandamba, the stages of a system pass, from planting to preparation, from harvest to flavors.

The food that nourishes the body, nourishes the soul. Food is full of magical and symbolic meanings capable of reconnecting the individual with the visible and invisible world and, therefore, it also has its place assured at the time of festivals and in ritual practices that span the centuries. (IEPHA-MG, INSTITUTO PERIFÉRICO, 2023, p. 143)

Traditional Minas Gerais festivals, whether of religious origin or not, do not dispense with reverence for corn and cassava, their flour and everything that comes from them. The cook’s job mixes with celebrations and embodies the dynamics and necessary safeguarding cultural assets. Festive food moves within a broad, complex culinary system, of social relations, cosmological spaces and times (GONÇALVES E CONTINS, 2009; CORRÊA, 2018). In this way, it demarcates space and time by transforming the place where it is prepared and shared. As a chronological milestone, the harvest season for corn, cassava or any other food establishes a cultural temporality and guides the culinary life of a community.

Commensality removes itself from everyday life and sets the table in front of the sacred, in offering, in connection, in sharing, in delivery. The religiosity that guides the festive calendar of the municipalities of Minas Gerais is strengthened by groups, associations and other communities that are dedicated to actions of care for food, preparing dishes, donating or selling and perpetuating elements that characterize our food culture.

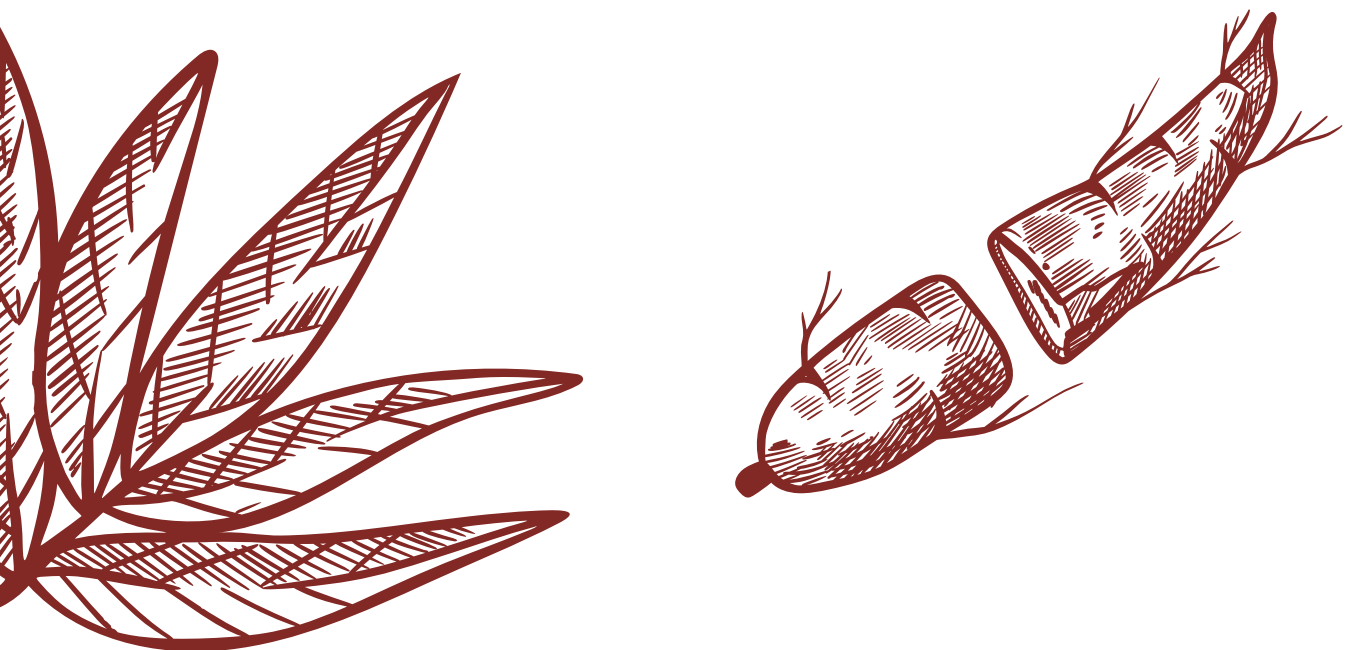
Groups of festivities and congados, for example, maintain religious traditions of black Catholicism and devotion to Our Lady of the Rosary and Saint Benedict – among many others – by offering lunches, dinners, breakfasts and snacks, since the days precede the festive days until the ritual itself. Corn and cassava are present in *canjiquinha*, in cassava broth with meat, in greengrocer shops, in *tropeiro* beans and in farofas.

Greengrocery shops are also central to other popular Catholic festivities in Minas Gerais, such as Nossa Senhora Aparecida, Santo Antônio, São João, São Pedro and São Gonçalo, among others. They are the ones that exude aromas and present inviting flavors at fundraising stands and when shared with the community.

Afro-Brazilian religions, also with their rituals and festivities, include corn and cassava as foods that are elevated to sacred status.

Popcorn and white corn hominy are used in various individual and collective rites, both as offerings to entities and deities and also in processes of discharging bad energy and spiritual purification. In Candomblé, popcorn festivals held in connection with [Nsumbo and] Obaluaê, an orixá that moves between health and illness and can promote healing, are common. Furthermore, corn is considered a ritual food, generally offered to Oxóssi and Mutakalambô in the Candomblés, or to the Caboclos of Umbandas. Cassava flour is widely used for rituals related to Candomblé deities, such as Exu and Nzila, and Umbandas guides, Exus and Pomba-Giras. (IEPHA-MG, INSTITUTO PERIFÉRICO, 2023, p. 148)

- 44** The preparation of festivals, rituals and the relationship with the sacred is also a moment of sharing knowledge. Oral transmission that links generations reinforces the centrality of food culture for sociability in Minas Gerais. Like their mothers, grandmothers, aunts and neighbors, many women receive teachings that go beyond festive moments. Respect for food, abundance and community expand the sacred that begins on earth while in front of the stove.



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Photo: William Gomes/iepha-MG Collection.

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Cobu, made from cornmeal, is traditionally prepared in banana leaves.
Photo: Tales Souza/Instituto Periférico Collection.



AN OPINION TO BE READ, SAVORED

OPINION ON THE APPLICATION FOR REGISTRATION OF THE “CULINARY SYSTEMS OF MINAS GERAIS CUISINE – CORN AND CASSAVA”

I dedicate this opinion to Irene da Cruz, a poor black woman, who, like so many others, also anonymous, passed on to us the legacy of our cultural citizenship while transforming nature into love, by the stove.

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corn flour, cassava flour, cassava shavings flour, water mill cornmeal, hominy cornmeal, *mimoso* cornmeal, sweaty cornmeal, white cornmeal, *canjiquinha*, corn bagasse broth, corn starch, *pamonha*, *paçoca*, *curau*, *jacuba*, *tipiti*, biscuit, cornbread, popover, *pastel*, cake, cheese bread, cassava starch, *tropeiro* beans, *feijoada*, bean *tutu*, *corda* beans, *andu*, golden beak, *jalo*, romano, tomba corn, *miúdo*, *mulatinho*, sulfur, *sessenta-dias*, black beans, *carioquinha*, *beiju*, stew, couscous, *rosca*, hominy, quince soup, chicken soup, thickened cornmeal, *quenga* recipe, *cambuquira* broth, *bambá*, *biquinho* pepper, *cumari*, *cambuci*, goat pepper, *dedo-de-moça*, chilli pepper, pot meats, okra, cabbage, *angu*, broths, *pequi*, pot sweets, greengrocers,^{TN}

engenho mills, *moenda* mills, *moinho* mills, *monjolos*, flour mills, hoppers, cranks, kneaders, seasoning machines, threshers, presses, grinding machines, wood and floor stoves, *quitanda* ovens, cheese boards and molds, brown sugar molds, barrels wooden pots, copper pots, soapstone, iron and clay pots, jugs, wooden spoons and mixers, pestle, grater, couscous pan, furnace, pan, hoe, knife, sickle, trivet, plate, pan,

table grapes and mango from the Lower São Francisco Valley, *jabuticaba* derivatives (liqueur, jelly, sauce, candied peel and jam) from Sabará, artisanal Minas cheese from Serro, Canastra cheese, green coffee beans and roasted industrialized coffee beans or ground from Mantiqueira de Minas, sugarcane brandy (*cachaça*) from the Salinas region, green coffee beans, industrialized coffee in roasted and ground condition from Campo das Vertentes, raw, processed, roasted and ground coffee beans from the region das Matas de Minas, coffee of the species *arabica* coffee in green beans (raw coffee),

TRANSLATION NOTES

^{TN} On the following two pages, some terms have not been translated, but are in italics, to maintain the original writing style and because not all terms have a counterpart in the English language.

industrialized in the roasted condition and/or roasted and ground from Caparaó, green coffee in beans and industrialized coffee roasted in beans or ground from the Cerrado Mineiro region, bee honey from the *aroeira* tree in the North of Minas,

farmer's market, markets, fairs, *Festa de Nossa Senhora do Rosário dos Homens Pretos de Chapada do Norte* and the *Comunidade Quilombola dos Arturos*, *Comunidade de Manzo Ngunzo Kaiango*, *Folias de Minas*, *Festas de Reinado*, *Festa de Nossa Senhora Aparecida*, *Santo Antônio*, *São João*, *Saint Peter*, *Folia de Reis*,

Maxakali, *Xakriabá*, *Krenak*, *Aranã*, *Mukuriñ*, *Pataxó*, *Pataxó hã-hã-hãe*, *Catu-Awá-Arachás*, *Kaxixó*, *Puris*, *Xukuru-Kariri*, *Tuxá*, *Kiriri*, *Canoeiros*, *Kamakã-Mongoió*, *Karajá*, *Kambiwá*, *Tikuna*, *Borum-Kren*, *Makuni*, *Guarani e Pankararu*, *Quilombo do Ambrósio (Quilombo Grande)*, *Quilombo do Campo Grande*, *Quilombo do Bambuí*, *Quilombo do Andaial*, *Quilombo do Careca*, *Quilombo do Sapucaí*, *Quilombo do Morro de Angola*, *Quilombo do Paraíba*, indigenous peoples, from *quilombola* communities, artisanal fishermen, *terreiro* people, *geraizeiros*, leakers, *veredeiros*, collectors of evergreen flowers,

fresh vegetables planted in domestic gardens, hot milk in a mug directly from the dawn milking, the fresh aroma of coffee brewed in the *mancebo*, the sound of the stone “munho” grinding the corn into cornmeal, the white cloud of cassava transforming in flour, the desperate grunt of the pig that will be prepared for lunch, the plucked chicken in the backyard, the cheese that entangles families in its preparation, the dizzying smell of the greengrocers baking in the heat of the oven, the sweets cooking in the pan in the early mornings, wood burning in the stoves, the giant pots that bring families and friends together in festive preparations, the stalls at fairs and auctions of dishes at fairs and various parties, the bar and pub portions.⁹

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1.

The dossier that supports the registration of the “Culinary Systems of Minas Gerais Cuisine – Corn and Cassava” was prepared much like preparing sweets. The cooks took pains to mix our Minas Gerais identities in the pot, placing ingredients that complement each other in delicious harmony: fruits of nature, gifts from the forest, farm work, stoves of all types fueled by different fires, recipes from all corners. Flustered, they denounced erasures from history, social injustices, climate threats, hunger, false food security. They sought people and stoves from various parts of the immense state of Minas and the rich Gerais and, in the very heart of Iepha-MG, data from the ICMS Cultural Heritage and the record of the artisanal preparation method of Serro cheese – seasonings that I have the discreet satisfaction of having offered some help – and from the São Francisco River Inventory. Many farms, also highly preferred by Iepha-MG, make up the raw material used to prepare a dossier. Its sweetness

FOOTNOTES

⁹ All these names were extracted from the dossier prepared by the Iepha-MG and the Instituto Periférico. Their combination is free association of this reviewer.

lies in the enormous sympathy for the simple people who effectively build the foundations of our culture, so often obscured by the most common records of great deeds and great heroes, preferred by a historiography that does not seek our core, but only the surface of the facts.

The recipe in the dossier, as in all good cuisine, resulted from different sources, so many, as there is no shortage of researchers on Minas Gerais cuisine. Eduardo Avelar added a few touches to our land, with its gastronomic territories; Vani Pedrosa, with her nine pillars of Minas Gerais cuisine: vegetable gardens and orchards; the processes and preparation of flour, bread and greengrocers; the traditional ways of cheesemaking, sweets, alcoholic drinks; the cultivation and uses of coffee and teas; the creation and culinary preparations of meat and other animal derivatives; Dona Lucinha, with her farm and herdsman's kitchen; the non-peripheral cultural landscapes of the Instituto Periférico. But these are just a few who, since the travels of Saint-Hilaire and his curious fellow travel reporters, have been amazed by the delicious taste of our food. Among so many possibilities, the Brazilian chef Débora Raiza and her traveling troupe chose the recipe that seems appropriate to me: *mineira* cuisine is a system. It is a system because it is not restricted to the contents of a pot full of certain possibilities of seeing the world, but which overflows into the living room, gatherings, markets, parties, celebrations and thanks to the gods¹⁰.

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They are “traditional agricultural practices (planting, harvesting, management); inputs (creole seeds, varieties of species/races, etc.); cooking/preparation techniques; material elements of culture (artifacts, tools, instruments, utensils, etc.); sacred bonds (festive, votive, devotional foods, etc.); places (fairs, markets, restaurants, kitchens, pantries, backyards, flour mills, etc.); professions (cooks, fishermen, pot makers, greengrocers, etc.); seed and root farmers (seed guardians, root growers, etc.); traditional communities (riverbank planters, fishermen, flower pickers, *quilombolas*, indigenous people, *terreiro* (Candomblé) people, etc.); forms of associations (cooperatives, local networks, popular, social and solidarity economy, seed exchange policy), forms of sociability (popular and civic festivals, sitting at the table, commensality), among others”. (IEPHA-MG; INSTITUTO PERIFÉRICO, 2023, p. 18)

With many hands mixing the broth, they chose corn and cassava as the protagonists of this first gourmet session: ingredients that permeate histories and civilizations and that unite the many regions of Minas Gerais. Two inputs, a thousand results, millions of people, one story. Stories told by the stove.

And suddenly the memory returns. The taste was that of the little crumb of madeleine which on Sunday mornings at Combray (because on those mornings I did not go out before church-time), when I went to say good day to her in her bedroom, my aunt Léonie used to give me, dipping it first in her own cup of real or of lime-flower tea. The sight of the little madeleine had recalled nothing to my mind before I tasted it; perhaps because I had so often seen such things in the interval, without tasting them, on the trays in pastry-cooks' windows, that their image had dissociated itself from those Combray days to take its place among others more recent; perhaps because of

FOOTNOTES

¹⁰ Concept of food culture: “inherited recipes, traditional dishes, local products and ingredients, indigenous species and varieties, daily eating practices and festive meals, as well as utensils and objects of all kinds that constitute the material culture related to the production and consumption of food, mechanisms of sociability through which its circulation takes place and, also, spaces in which practices associated with the act of eating take place – including markets and fairs, among others – which, at the same time as they are ‘constituted by’, constitute ways of life and specific views of the world” (Renata Menasche, *apud* IEPHA-MG; INSTITUTO PERIFÉRICO, 2023, p. 17).

those memories, so long abandoned and put out of mind, nothing now survived, everything was scattered; the forms of things, including that of the little scallop-shell of pastry, so richly sensual under its severe, religious folds, were either obliterated or had been so long dormant as to have lost the power of expansion which would have allowed them to resume their place in my consciousness. But when from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, still, alone, more fragile, but with more vitality, more unsubstantial, more persistent, more faithful, the smell and taste of things remain poised a long time, like souls, ready to remind us, waiting and hoping for their moment, amid the ruins of all the rest; and bear unfaltering, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection. (Marcel Proust. *Em busca do tempo perdido: no caminho de Swann*)

Cheese bread recipe

Ingredients for 5 servings

- 4 cups (American) sweet cassava starch (500 g)
- 1 tablespoon seasoning or salt to taste
- 2 glasses (American) milk (300 ml)
- 1 cup (American) oil (150 ml)
- 3 eggs
- 4 cups (American) grated half-cured Minas cheese
- Oil for greasing

Method of preparation

- 1 - Place cassava starch in a large bowl.
- 2 - Separately, heat the salt, milk and oil.
- 3 - Bring to boil, blanch the cassava starch with this mixture, stir very well for a homogeneous texture.
- 4 - Wait until cool.
- 5 - Add eggs, one by one, alternating with the cheese and kneading well after each addition.
- 6 - Grease hands with oil.
- 7 - Roll into small balls and place on a greased baking tray.
- 8 - Place in a preheated medium oven.
- 9 - Bake until golden.

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2.

When Iepha-MG chose cheese to make its first record of intangible culinary heritage, it was not because Brazilians everywhere identify Minas Gerais with cheese. It was not even for the revolutionary side of our people, who, as Charles de Gaulle said – about France, but which could be about Minas Gerais – it is impossible to manage a country with so many types of cheese. Nor was it to reveal the importance of cultural heritage, since the value added to the cheese produced by small farmers compensated for low prices of their milk, pressured downward by the large dairy cooperatives. Rather, above all, because food culture is one of the main aspects of our identity.

What common identity can this be, in a state so diverse, so multiple, so varied, as Guimarães Rosa said, that “Minas are many”? The same Rosa said that “Minas – we don’t know”. I think we know, we just don’t talk about it. To prove this, Rosa himself, in the same text, see, reveals to us:

If there are so many Minas’, however, and yet one, is what determines it, then, just an atmosphere, with the *mineiro* being the man in a minasgerais state? We, the indigenous people, do not always realize this. They have accustomed us, however, to a lively list of attributes, of qualities, more or less specific, whether they are: shy, affable, freedom-loving, orderly, anti-romantic, benevolent, kind, restrained, clumsy, dutiful, compliant, suspicious, disciplined, disinterested, discreet, scrupulous, economical, funny, balanced, faithful, phlegmatic,

grateful, hospitable, harmonious, honorable, intelligent, ironic, fair, loyal, slow, morose, meditative, modest, sluggish, obstinate, opportunity (gifted with the sense of), stupid, prudent, patient, plastic, lazy, honest, cautious, cheap, personalist, persevering, perceptive, quiet, modest, respectful, routine, countryman, secretive, simple, serious, sensible, without no rush, sagacious, sleepy, sober, hardworking, tribal, taciturn, shy, utilitarian, virtuous. Therefore, the *mineiro* exists. (GUIMARÃES ROSA, 1957)

The *mineiro* reveals himself around the stove, that's where the *mineiros* are that make up the amalgam of the *mineiro* from all sides, it's the pristine unity that brings together so much disunity, so much variety, whether of people or of landscapes. It is in the corn and cassava, which spread throughout our entire area, that we recognize ourselves as inhabitants of a unique land. By stirring the pot and sharing our food, we are able to exercise all our affection and hospitality: "Come on, are you going to leave without eating anything?", "just have one more, a little more", "I'm making fresh coffee". Allow me to reveal, in this official opinion, something from my personal life: it was while traveling through Minas Gerais, as president of Iepha-MG, that I went from skinny to chubby. So much ethnic, cultural and landscape diversity is mixed in the recipe of the Minas Gerais men/women: here, it is the mixing and conciliation of the diverse, being a congregator is the trait of Minas Gerais and *mineira* cuisine. Therefore, cuisine reveals our identity: we choose what represents us and cuisine is the representation of our culture.¹¹

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Our three-hundred-year-old mining civilization was born in search of gold, although the *bandeirantes* (trailblazers), who went around here establishing villages and camps; they did not know that the real gold was not under the ground or in the river currents, but in the scupper they already carried with them or on the table, placed by caring hands. So much so that the decline of gold did not leave a poor place, but, on the contrary, a thriving domestic economy, stimulating the region's wealth. The *tropeiros* (supply troops) that followed, throughout history, took recipes and food, spreading the Minas Gerais spirit as if it were flour. We are, therefore, flour from the same bag¹². However, Minas is not just about movement: food gave us roots as we searched for cassava tubers or carefully planted corn seeds. Our families also emerged from the fields and backyards, the transmission of our knowledge, our solidarity, so many grandchildren and great-grandchildren, in the form of people or recipes.

FOOTNOTES

¹¹ "If culture itself 'largely depends on unconscious processes' (CUCHE, 1999, p. 176), identity is always a conscious construction of who we are and, thus, denotes popular knowledge, collective choices, recognition of what is one's own, pride in its historical construction. Considering our kitchen, therefore, we must ask ourselves if it identifies us, if we see it as ours; makes us proud, motivates us as if we want to keep it" (IEPHA-MG; INSTITUTO PERIFÉRICO, 2023, p. 64).

¹² "As they are products with little perishability and help preserve other foods, flours soon become prominent on the menu of troopers and travelers. In this way, the mixture of cassava flour with cooked beans, pork meat, such as fried pigskin and sausage, egg, onion, garlic and seasonings became a typical food for the *tropeiros*, who carried the preparation in containers throughout the territory of Minas Gerais, carrying goods, history and culture. Today, this popular dish represents the intangible culture rooted in several locations in Minas Gerais and is considered one of the most characteristic of Minas Gerais cuisine" (IEPHA-MG; INSTITUTO PERIFÉRICO, 2023, p. 130).

This is our territory, our *terroir*, that which gives us our sense of belonging. We are inimitable: go try and make the recipe you learned here somewhere else, you will see¹³. So, here or elsewhere, we mix some ingredients very well, but he will never “confundir alhos com bugalhos” (mistake garlic for cornflakes). Wherever he is, a *mineiro* is always a *mineiro*:

Mineiro's spirit, circumspect

perhaps, but enclosing a spark

of intoxicating fire, which breaks out suddenly

and, if necessary, we are inclined to be crazy:

don't run away from me in Rio de Janeiro,

as the cloud moves away and the bird flies away,

but open a portal before my eyes that leads to your deep sea, Minas

Mines, beyond the sound. Minas Gerais.

(CARLOS DRUMMOND DE ANDRADE, “Prece de mineiro no Rio”)

String beans, possum meat, elephant ear plant stew, all prepared to last three nights. The passing back and forth of little people, with twisted, scruffy feet, created more noise inside the mess (...) As the hours went by, there wasn't even any bacon left. Our flour, much appreciated, rich – the whole cassava flour was not bleached – sometimes it left my father embarrassed. (Tavinho Moura. Maria do Matué – a story from the São Francisco River.) Just like poetry, breadmaking is a somewhat melancholic vocation, whose primary requirement is free time for the soul. The poet and the baker are brothers in the essential task of feeding the world. (Isabel Allende. Afrodite. Contos, Receitas e Outros Afrodisíacos)

FOOTNOTES

¹³“As soon as I returned from my trip, I wanted to reproduce Hilma’s coconut candy recipe, considering it very easy to make. In addition to the fresh memory of what was experienced, there was a filmed tutorial. Everything properly prepared in my kitchen, in addition to the confidence of a good cook that I believe I am. When the bullet point arrived, the failure began. Nothing else followed the rhythm that could work. I tried to fix it, but once I missed the point, goodbye to the whole process. Gone was the expectation of sweetening my afternoon with Hilma’s authentic coconut candy. There I understood one of the reasons why Minas Gerais food is different. There is a set of elements, such as utensils, climate, ingredients and, mainly, the cook’s hand, which is not just the hand, but the other senses that she uses to execute any recipe” (VENTURELLI, 2016, p. 61, *apud* IEPHA-MG; INSTITUTO PERIFÉRICO, 2023, p. 88).

3.

That which gives us identity and belonging is always changing. The transmission of knowledge is always a resignification, each generation recreates it; thank God for the gift of creativity and the search for a better world that is more our own, but preserves a link: the past as the “vigor-of-having-been”, an expression coined by Heidegger. Each link in the chain is tightly linked to the previous one; otherwise it would not be possible to remain in a single piece, so that it does not fray. If history and culture are transformative and in transformative sequences, so is cuisine. If new dishes appear, their origin comes from our ancestors. If new flavors are tried – since experience presupposes the present – they are tributaries of a pact, a pact that is made with the culture and the land we inhabit¹⁴.

The dossier knows that it doesn't end when it closes, that new recipes will certainly come. However, it raises the question of what transformation is possible, acceptable. And warns us:

Knowledge is not limited, it is not clinging. The problem of the continuity of culture, cuisine and tradition (which is challenged with the effort to value it, record it, safeguard it) does not concern an “erosion of knowledge”, but the “erosion of the conditions of production of this knowledge” (CUNHA, 1999, p. 156). By “conditions”, we understand what supports culture, social “structure” and, ultimately (or first), the biological environment that provides the inputs, the matter, and that determines the interactions and possibilities of the beings that inhabit each environment. In this way, the “erosion of knowledge”, or “erosion of the conditions of local knowledge production and knowledge circulation systems”, is associated with social erosion (social forms and institutions) and genetic erosion, or erosion of biological diversity. (CUNHA, 1999, p. 159, *apud* IEPHA-MG; INSTITUTO PERIFÉRICO, 2023, p. 151)

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I am concerned that this erosion is an irreversible result of the presence of capital that transforms agriculture into a commodity (*commodities*), the unique into the generic, which promotes the rural exodus of young people, every product into a marketable object of consumption, affections into habits, tastes into banknotes, flavors into dollar signs, slow food into fast food, turnips into barbecue sauce.

The ubiquity of these foods [industrialized or resulting from transgenic crops] and the hegemony of these production processes reflect not only the immense loss of biodiversity (as a result of the direct degradation of these activities on the environment), but also the loss of autonomy of producers (who become progressively dependent on the market and industry) and knowledge linked to food, standardized by the imposition of economic interests and criminal elimination of alternatives, be they local, traditional, artisanal and sustainable. (IEPHA-MG; INSTITUTO PERIFÉRICO, 2023, p. 132)

FOOTNOTES

¹⁴ “The raw material of the kitchen is food, and at the end of food is the land. Food does not exist without the transformation of inputs that come from soil and water. No matter how great the transformation (cultural, physical-chemical) of the ingredients to prepare them, eating is renewing the covenant with the environment, is to reinforce our participation in biological diversity as a species, which interacts, facilitates, promotes, extracts, selects, but also suppresses, combats and manipulates” (IEPHA-MG; INSTITUTO PERIFÉRICO, 2023, p. 139).

It seems to me that the great safeguard is fundamentally a social transformation that assures social justice, access to land, distribution of wealth and respect for diversity. However, the Iepha-MG technicians, more realistic than me, propose what is possible in a Safeguard Plan: sustainability, community organization, promotion and training, all under the umbrella of transversality. There are several excellent proposals contained in the dossier, but Iepha-MG will not be able to carry them out without organization in networks and without the encouragement – I would even say the induction – of key partners, such as those institutions linked to agriculture (Ministry of Agriculture, Emater and family farming, among others), in addition to intergovernmental actions, standards and support emanating from the legislative branch (agrarian reform).

“Just as I understand traditional cuisine as only the trivial, the routine that feeds us day to day: what we generally choose to cook over the fire more out of the imposition of habit and intuition than through a weighed and measured choice. Having said that, I am asked: “What is the first ingredient you put in the pan?” “Love,” I answer. After that, the understanding that no ingredient goes into the fire by chance. Each one has their story, their memory.” (D. Lucinha)

“Everything, just as long as whoever enters here always leaves satisfied and happy. That has always been my strategy. I go to the tables to find out what people are thinking and make them feel welcome here. Because, for me, this isn’t my restaurant, it’s my home. And those who attend are not my clients, they are my friends. To this day, I feel the obligation to stay in the house until the last customer leaves.” (Nelsa Trombino)

“A long time ago, in the times when our ancestors appeared, Omama, our creator, gave this name: *në ropë*. He gave this name *në ropë* and said: ‘Take good care of *në ropë*! If you live in the forest-land with *në ropë*, you are fed, you live well and in health! You will be well and healthy to have your parties, you will make your children grow up healthy too! Therefore, because you wake up well and healthy, you wake up to this name: *në ropë*.”

You people take that name. When the food grows, when you want to have a party, you invite each other. You feed off each other! So said Omama.” (Davi Kopenawa. “*në ropë*”)

“An important feature of the infiltration of black culture into the Brazilian economy and domestic life remains for us to highlight: cuisine. The African slave dominated colonial cuisine, enriching it with a variety of new flavors.” (Gilberto Freyre. *Casa Grande e Senzala*)

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4.

When talking about Minas Gerais cuisine, we are talking about the feminine, the original people, our African ancestors.

The feminine that nourishes, that loves unconditionally, that sets another plate for whoever comes. The one who prepares *cauim*, a local drink, an alternative to European wine¹⁵, the one who prepares, welcomes and receives. The one that truly supports the generational continuity. The companion who also helps work the soil, along the entire journey from seed to mouth. It is thanks to the feminine and her presence at the edge of the fire that we can, today celebrate our cuisine. It is thanks to her, I guarantee it, that new generations will also enjoy her flavors. Fire should be a feminine noun, as it is

FOOTNOTES

¹⁵ FERNANDES, 2011, *apud* IEPHA-MG; INSTITUTO PERIFÉRICO, 2023, p. 35.

that that warms us, that that embraces us in loving protection. It's a bit like the word "fires", which the Portuguese use to refer to "homes": the fire that cooks and heats is the fire that protects, it is feminine, after all.

From a culinary point of view, we are all a bit *botocudos*, heirs of the "bodega dos matos" (storehouse of the forest) and the "corn civilization" (Sérgio Buarque de Holanda), a civilization that in the Americas completes its beautiful and lush nine thousand years. Cassava is also part of the indigenous tradition and its preparation methods take us back to tribal traditions that we import from the bush to the table.

So much culinary influence was passed on to us by black hands, some also mothers, who prepared our daily food on the wood stoves of large houses (not counting the slave quarters experiences), in the large white mansions of contemporary times or in the tiny kitchens of the urban apartments, sleeping in even tinier "maid's rooms" in the country's most populous cities. From what we can see, these bodies are responsible for transmitting knowledge, creating ways and practices for the energy of cities, for the infrastructure of workers. When free, in their private moments, they exalted their divinities and paid homage to them with culinary delicacies, food for gods and men, united in festivals and beliefs.

56

We can highlight, for example, the celebration of the *Festa de Nossa Senhora do Rosário dos Homens Pretos* that takes place in the municipality of Chapada do Norte, located in the Jequitinhonha Valley. The festival, which was registered as Intangible Cultural Heritage of the State of Minas Gerais in 2013, has as its oldest documentation the Book of Commitment of the Brotherhood of the Rosário, dated 1822, although there is evidence about the cult to the Saint and the organization of the festival in previous century, since the Rosário Church in the municipality has features of carvings and altars that date back to construction in the 18th century. This centuries-old celebration features in its rituals the "Quinta do Angu", a moment in which *angu* is offered, which is served with different sauces to devotees in front of the church. This is an ancient practice, perpetuated by the community as a highlight of the celebration, in which food acquires a sacred dimension and feeds, above all, the souls of devotees. (IEPHA-MG; INSTITUTO PERIFÉRICO, 2023, p. 27)

It is in cuisine that the encounter between native peoples and Africans takes place, especially under female aegis. Cuisine then establishes itself as one of the main foundations of our ethnic formation and our Brazilianness. How can we not consider it the title of our cultural heritage? A heritage that celebrates our effective roots, distinct cosmologies, diverse sacred spaces, souls in unison. So different from the Catholic, white and elite tradition that, unfortunately, marks our history of heritage.



Who can make that love die
If love is like a grain?
It dies and wheat is born
It lives and dies bread
(Gilberto Gil)

A grain of corn slipped from Belonisia's hand onto the plowed soil. With his own feet he covered the seed, fluffing it with the necessary delicacy so that the movement of the world would take care of the rest. It's a bigger field than the last planting. His feet were once again on the floodplain of the Utinga River, shaping the dark, damp earth nourished by the flood. The waters fell generously in recent weeks, covering every corner and inviting residents to cultivate their gardens with whatever they could plant. There were fish in the pools of water along the previously dry areas. Another grain of corn left his hand to fall into the earth, forming an underground trail of golden seeds. (Itamar Vieira Junior. *Torto Arado*)

5.

Cassava and corn do not compete for primacy on our tables. They only compete with each other when agribusiness favors soybeans, sugarcane and corn, stealing space from the cassava plantation. But, in general, corn and cassava are docile by nature and only want to serve the cycle of life that allows them to transform into the bodies that, after eating them, will grow for them. "Far beyond cultivation and food, corn and cassava are entangled in the cosmological and temporal narratives of traditional indigenous, quilombola and rural ways of life. Their diversities, ways of cultivation and preparation are metaphors commonly present in the understanding of the world, bodies, divinities and temporalities" (IEPHA-MG; INSTITUTO PERIFÉRICO, 2023, p. 89). In rituals, cassava and corn are also companions and equally celebrated:

In Candomblé, popcorn festivals held in connection with Obaluaê, an orixá that moves between health and illness and can promote healing, are common. Furthermore, corn is considered a ritual food, generally offered to Oxóssi and Mutakalambô in the Candomblés, or to the Caboclos of Umbandas. Cassava flour is widely used for rituals related to Candomblé deities, such as Exu and Nzila, and Umbandas guides, Exus and Pomba-Giras. (IEPHA-MG; INSTITUTO PERIFÉRICO, 2023, p. 146-147)

Cassava is also a bit like our native peoples, at least in the view of Europeans: "they are poisonous and harmful by nature, unless through human industry they are prepared to eat" (Padre Anchieta, *apud* IEPHA-MG; INSTITUTO PERIFÉRICO, 2023, p. 34). Their flavor, also like our indigenous people, did not give way to the colonizer, although some were enslaved by human industry. It is a taste that reminds us of the earth, the depth of the soil and that, gently, lends itself to various forms of food, the basis for so many culinary adventures, in this case, happily integrated into our contemporary table, urban or rural. It is "natural food", according to reports by Dutchman Gaspar Barléu, in our colonial beginnings. Fortunately, at least in the case of cassava, we continue to be "natural", culturally natural. *Mandioca, macaxeira, aipim, castelinha, uaipi, mandioca-doce, mandioca-mansa, maniva, maniveira*, etc., *Exculenta manihot* is easy to plant, has multiple uses, has great nutritional value and a low commercial price. Is it nice and easy or what?

It came to fruition, Minas Gerais! Taratá!
There are also sincere harvests!
Corn fields, persistent coffee plantations
Climbing up the hill.
But what stingy people like the *zebu mineiro*!
They say the big ones get stuck
I didn't notice, thank God!
At *Barreiro's* farm the native dishes
Opulently, as signs of nationality.
But at the *Grande* Hotel in Belo Horizonte they serve them up French style.
Et bien! Je vous demande a toutou!
Bring on the sweet potatoes and fondant cracklings!
Not pork!
The Russian doctor claims that there are microbes of madness in pork...
My madness is quite sufficient!
(Mário de Andrade. *Noturno de Belo Horizonte*)

Stroke the earth
Know the desires of the earth
The earth is in heat, propitious season
And fertilizes the ground
(Milton Nascimento/Chico Buarque)

6.

58

Please also allow this reviewer a little rant about the issue of food safety, which I have been dying to talk about since recording the artisanal way of preparing cheese in Serro. It is not only the metaphor that is relevant, but also its discussion at this time, as the dossier does. Firstly, food security becomes food insecurity when it deprives indigenous peoples and quilombola communities of their access to their traditional food through land grabbing, extensive and environmentally harmful agricultural and pastoral techniques, deforestation and water pollution. However, when it dresses the mantle of security, it seems to have eyes only for industrial production, profoundly impacting the traditional ways and objects of production in Minas Gerais cuisine. Understanding the importance of these modes of production is not only ethically desirable, it is also a great help in preserving our traditions, our traditional communities and our cultural heritage. The loss of this knowledge would mean an unacceptable impoverishment of our ethnic wealth, our memory, biological varieties and possibilities for the future. In the wake of this issue, there is also a discussion about productivity and management, about environmentally correct practices and about the intensive and exhaustive use of land. Perhaps we have much more to learn from traditional techniques than from pesticide and transgenic laboratories. It is important to remind those who believe that only these contemporary techniques guarantee food for an overpopulated planet that the great Brazilian agricultural production is exported and what guarantees the Brazilian table is family farming, which widely uses traditional techniques. Nor is it large-scale production that guarantees the survival of the planet. There is a lot of hunger in Brazil and in the world and commodities will not suffice: for them, salvation is having a piece of land to plant and traditional, low-impact cultivation and management techniques.

This situation profoundly affects the pillars of Minas Gerais' traditional food systems, represented here by the material and immaterial culture of corn and cassava, present throughout the territory. These two foods, the founding basis of Minas Gerais and Brazilian food culture, express the complexity of these systems and the social, cultural and environmental implications related to the act of production and reproduction of food and foodstuffs. The abandonment or loss of varieties, the deterioration of stone mills and flour mills, the forgetting of recipes, flavors, methods and times of cultivation are visible influences of these processes and dynamics. (IEPHA-MG; INSTITUTO PERIFÉRICO, 2023, p. 185)

Her name was courage. She was from the lineage of Donana, the woman who gave birth in the sugarcane field, who built a house and farm with the strength of her body. The woman who felt the pain of childbirth and laid down in silence, biting her lip to give birth to another child. The one who buried two husbands, and only didn't bury the last one because she bled him like a savage beast. It was riding his body that I felt that the past never leaves us. Belonisia was the fury that had crossed time. She was the daughter of strong people who had crossed an ocean, who were separated from their land, who left dreams behind and forged a new and enlightened life in exile. People who went through everything, enduring the cruelty imposed on them. (Itamar Vieira Junior. Torto Arado)

7.

It is customary to end an opinion with the expression "unless the Council so decides..." So, in this moment of conclusion, I dare to say that, in our collective judgment, our cuisine is already cultural heritage and that it is only up to this Council to follow the vox populi, this recognition is already so natural that the dossier only ratifies it. If this is so, the decision made by this Council is not, in fact, to formalize something that already exists and that, let's face it, with a title or without a title, it will continue to be so. What is up to us, dear colleagues, is to take a position in favor of a model of civilization that recognizes the diversity of contributions; the importance of the feminine, African and indigenous peoples in our culture and their effective protection; the fight for the free circulation of our people's traditional products; criticism of predatory exploitation of the land. The dossier, the title and this opinion call them to this safeguard position. By approving this reviewer's judgment, we are approving much more than a document, we are engaging in the fight for a more supportive and respectful world.

59

Tastier, for sure.

Save the best judgment of this Council!

This is the opinion I submit to you, around this table that today symbolizes a full table.

Belo Horizonte, July 5, 2023.

Advisor Flavio de Lemos Carsalade / Member of Conep - Representative of UFMG

This opinion was presented at the meeting of the State Council for Cultural Heritage (Conep), on July 5, 2023, at Palácio da Liberdade.

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Flours, both cassava and corn, have been part of the food culture of Minas Gerais since its beginnings. Photo: Patuá.cc Collection



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