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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Cooking as commoning: struggles for commoning public space in Curitiba's community kitchens movement

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the role of communal kitchens in fostering common spaces and supporting socially vulnerable populations during the COVID-19 pandemic in Curitiba, Brazil. These kitchens, which emerged during the pandemic, operate not only as food distribution centers but also as dynamic venues for new forms of urban social activism and collective organization. The research engages with the practical and theoretical dimensions of urban commoning, and shows how these spaces challenge neoliberal urbanism through the practices of sharing and solidarity. The paper documents the interactions within these kitchens and their actions on public space, and highlights the transformative potential embedded in communal food-making activities. The analysis of community kitchens in Curitiba illustrates how urban spaces can be reimagined and reconfigured to foster communal life and resist the commodification pressures of contemporary capitalist societies. The paper argues that communal kitchens exemplify a practical manifestation of Lefebvre's "moments," acting as pivotal spaces where the ordinary is transformed into platforms for collective action and social emancipation.

KEYWORDS:

Curitiba (PR/Brazil), production of space, right to the city, social movements, urban commoning.

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1. Introduction

Collective cooking with the intent of sharing meals is far from a novel practice. In a text from 1914, the anarchist geographer Piotr Kropotkin (2023 [1914]) documented similar communal efforts in France, Russia, Germany, and England, coining the term "communal kitchens." He observed that "the necessities of daily life compel us to organize communal kitchens everywhere, offering tasty and substantial food at a low cost for those who can afford it and for free to those who cannot" (Kropotkin, 2023). This historical insight highlights the vital role of collective organization, particularly in times when the provision of basic needs is compromised, such as during economic crises, armed conflicts, and pandemics like the one we experienced five years ago.

In peripheral capitalist countries, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing contradictions and inequalities inherent in the current stage of capitalist development. In Brazil, the biennium of 2020–2021 saw record profits from agricultural commodity exports, alongside a sharp rise in domestic food prices. Almost immediately after the pandemic began, hunger re-emerged as a widespread concern in many households, becoming even more critical for those without shelter. Amid this challenging scenario, initiatives distributing meals and fresh food to socially vulnerable individuals intensified across the country. Notably in Curitiba, the capital of Paraná state, numerous collectives emerged to address this crisis. I had the opportunity to collaborate and engage in dialogue with some of these groups during my master's thesis research, conducted between 2020 and 2022.

In this article, I present some findings from this experience, specifically contributions to understanding how community kitchen practices—framed through the concept of urban commoning—disrupt the hegemonic rhythms of public space by fostering moments of labor and food collectivization. The resulting communalization of public space is analyzed through two dimensions: materially — through the appropriation of physical public spaces, such as squares in downtown Curitiba, transforming them into common spaces of commensality; and organizationally — through the creation of collaborative networks between kitchens and other political collectives, which enhanced their capacity to influence the public sphere. Using Lefebvre's "theory of moments" (Lefebvre, 2002), I seek to understand how everyday practices consolidate into large-scale changes. A clear example of this dynamic is the publication of a presidential decree in 2023 recognizing community kitchens as essential popular infrastructures in combating hunger and proposing models of state subsidies.

Starting from the concrete example of community kitchens, the article begins with a brief theoretical and practical dialogue, examining divergences between the critical and neo-institutional approaches to commons, with an emphasis on the critical approach's potential in addressing urban struggles. In the second section, I move on to methodological considerations, highlighting the interactions between rhythmanalysis and the theory of moments as a research framework, and also presenting the *Marmitas da Terra* collective. In the third section, I explore how food distribution disrupts and redefines the rhythms of public space and how commensality acts as a threshold space—an instance of liminality that challenges identity boundaries. The last section opens with a narrative recounting an attempt by Curitiba's municipal government to prohibit food distribution in public spaces and develops with the analysis of interconnections between the lived experience of urban public space and the political public sphere.

2. Community kitchens as common spaces

In practical terms, a community kitchen (also called solidarity kitchen) is defined as a collaborative space where meals are prepared collectively, not only to feed the immediate group but also to support socially vulnerable populations. However, cooking as commoning transcends the mere preparation of meals. As Stavrides (2016:02) writes, "Commoning practices, thus, do not simply produce or distribute goods but essentially create new forms of social life, forms of life-in-common". This interplay reflects the understanding of common spaces as encompassing both a material dimension—concerning shared resources and the people responsible for maintaining activities—and a symbolic dimension, characterized by the institutional practices of commoning and the mechanisms through which collaborative work and responsibilities are negotiated (Linebaugh, 2014).

In her work, Ostrom (1990) introduced the concept of community-based self-governance as an alternative to traditional public ownership by state and individual management through privatization. She outlined eight principles for effective self-management of common resources. These include defining clear boundaries and membership, ensuring rules are relevant to local conditions, allowing community members to choose their own rules, monitoring adherence to these rules, implementing sanctions that reflect the severity of violations, providing a mechanism for resolving conflicts, respecting the community's right to self-organize without external interference, and supporting nested structures for larger scale collaboration. Although Ostrom's principles have demonstrated applicability across varied rural landscapes worldwide, adapting these principles to urban common spaces introduces distinct challenges. A primary challenge lies in the inherent fluidity and permeability of urban commons, which defy the simplistic view of commons as mere resources bounded by clear, static rules. Furthermore, a critical issue in urban contexts is the illusory autonomy created by physically delineating common spaces, which can paradoxically lead to exclusion and segregation

For De Angelis and Harvie (2014, p. 180), the commons should be understood as a "social system in which resources are shared by a community of commoners users/producers, who also define the modes of use and production, distribution and circulation of these resources through democratic and horizontal forms of governance". As a collective social practice expressing shared desires, common spaces can be seen as a relationship "between a social group and its effort to define a world that is shared between its members" (Stavrides, 2016a:54). From this perspective, they are distinct from public spaces, which are established and regulated by specific authorities (local, regional, or state) dictating their usage rules, and from private spaces, owned and controlled by particular individuals or economic entities entitled to set the terms of their utilization.

Dardot and Laval (2019) advocate for a paradigm shift in understanding "the common": from a qualifying adjective to a substantive concept, emphasizing its inherent essence and practice. Or as Linebaugh (2009:279) posits, "the commons is an activity (…) it might be better to keep the word as a verb, rather than as a noun, a substantive". Therefore, the "common" in "common space" transcends the mere classification of spatial typologies, aiming instead to underscore the processes through which objects and spaces are collectively constituted and maintained, or "the identification of objects that are forged and maintained through our collective endeavor" (Dardot and Laval, 2019:53), in essence, the praxis of commoning. Hence, the uniqueness of common spaces is derived not from their categorization within a transcendental framework but from their manifestation through collective practices. According to Dardot and Laval (2019), the commons "primarily exists as an institution, an institutional framework delineated by collective action, capable of manifesting in

various forms", such as urban squats or community kitchens, which serve as concrete examples of commoning practices.

Nonetheless, what distinguishes common spaces from public and private ones lies not just in an alternative property regime but in their potential to cultivate emancipatory practices (Stavrides, 2016). Stavrides (2016:32) asserts that “what is at stake is a constant redefinition of what is considered as common. This is what creates a common world and this is what, consequently, is at the basis of understanding and symbolizing community”. This constant reimagining of commoning distances itself from the imagination of common as a pre-established ideal. As such, it evolves into a concrete or experimental utopia in the sense described by Lefebvre (2013), where the utopian vision is not pre-set but is instead continually crafted in response to the rhythms of daily life. This perspective shifts the focus from achieving a static utopian ideal to engaging in a perpetual, participatory process of reimagining and reshaping our communal spaces in alignment with lived experiences. In this context, Dardot and Laval (2019) present a notable departure from Hardt and Negri's (2009) notion of multitude as the collective force reclaiming the commons’ biopolitical production. For Dardot and Laval, the only possible universality is firmly anchored in pragmatism. Against the reification of common, they argue that "only practical activity can make the common, just as it is only practical activity that can produce a new collective subject” (Dardot and Laval, 2019:28).

Community kitchens, as common spaces, transcend their physical boundaries embodying collective initiatives derived from daily practices, shared experiences, and pooled knowledge. Through Doreen Massey's spatial framework, it’s possible to interpret these spaces as dynamic “places of encounter”, arenas where experiences, values, and memories intersect and undergo negotiation. As Massey (2005: 151) writes, “Place as an ever-shifting constellation of trajectories, poses the question of our throwntogetherness”, the rich interplay of divergent paths that constitute the community’s spatial and social fabric. The establishment of negotiations for the constitution of places also finds resonance in Stavrides' perspective regarding spaces of common practices. He argues, "These spaces are not simply the result of actions that produce them or acts of interpretations that name them. Common spaces (...) emerge in the process of being collectively used, defined, conceived, and communicated" (Stavrides, 2016:210). For Massey (2005:151), “The multiplicity and chance of space here in the constitution of place provide (an element of) that inevitable contingency which underlines the necessity for the institution of the social and which, at the moment of antagonism, is revealed in particular fractures that pose the question of the political”.

Massey (2005) posits that reconceptualizing place as an ever-evolving entity introduces a unique set of political challenges. Unlike static and preconceived spatial notions, this perspective emphasizes the dynamic and negotiated character of a place, necessitating a departure from assumptions of inherent coherence or predefined collective identities. Instead, it foregrounds the “throwntogetherness” of a place, where negotiation becomes fundamental. This stands in stark contrast to traditional views of place as established entities with preconceived boundaries and identities (Massey, 2005). Importantly, recognizing places of common practices as “open and as internally multiple" (Massey, 2005:141) doesn’t mean hiding the power geometries that frame such interactions. Instead, urging a relational understanding invites a critical examination of autonomy. Hinting “towards a different imaginary of emancipating autonomy”, it’s possible to understand common spaces not as “uncontaminated enclaves of emancipation” (Stavrides, 2014:547), but as product and producer of a kind of autonomy that operates in negotiation (or opposition) with external forces such as political and economic influences that may undermine the processes of commoning.

This is vividly demonstrated in communal kitchens, where sharing meals transcends mere sustenance to become a radical practice of care and solidarity. In common spaces like those, communal relationships

materialize within tangible lived conditions and specific spatial configurations, yielding exemplary manifestations of praxis that unveil their emancipatory potential. Stavrides (2016) locates the emancipatory potential of communal spaces within the "field of possibility". For Capanema Alvares (et al, 2022), "it is at this point that the power of space to shape possible experiences lies", so that "by materializing communal relations under lived conditions, certain spatial arrangements produce exemplary forms of visibility for ways of doing (...) and highlight their emancipatory potential". As Stavrides (2016) suggests, "we need to carefully study common spaces not as pure expressions of a different culture but as necessarily hybrid and collective works-in-progress, where signs of a distinct future can emerge". Our interactions within these spaces —ranging from public squares and community kitchens to collective gardens and street demonstrations— reveal potential alternative futures, challenging existing societal constructs through tangible collective actions.

3. Commoning in the making

Building on the discussion of community kitchens as spaces of commoning and social transformation, this section outlines the methodological considerations that guided the research. The investigation was grounded in fieldwork conducted between 2020 and 2022, focusing on community kitchens in Curitiba. The research was conducted through participant and rhythmanalytical observations, involving active participation in the kitchens' daily tasks. The research approach combined participant observation with rhythmanalysis, aligning with the theoretical frameworks previously discussed, particularly Lefebvre's theory of moments. Immersing myself in the kitchens' daily tasks allowed for a situated understanding of how collective practices unfold over time and space.

This methodological choice reflected the core assumption that community kitchens are not merely logistical operations for food distribution but are, in fact, performative spaces where social relations are continuously negotiated and redefined. Among the several initiatives engaged during the research, within two of them, I had closer contact: the kitchen of the *Movimento Nacional da População em Situação de Rua* (MNPR – National Movement of Homeless People) and the *Marmitas da Terra* collective, which stood out in terms of scale and depth of involvement. The latter became the primary interlocutor for this study, not only due to the magnitude of its organizational efforts but also because it embodied the theoretical concerns central to this research—namely, the tension between immediate action and the potential for broader social transformation. The choice of *Marmitas da Terra* as a representative case thus reflects a methodological intention to connect empirical observation with critical theory, ensuring that the research remained grounded in lived experience while addressing larger structural dynamics.

3.1 The "Marmitas da Terra" collective

The *Marmitas da Terra* collective was launched by the Landless Workers' Movement (MST) and independent volunteers at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Initially, the collective focused on donating food from harvest gatherings, later expanding its activities to cooking and distributing meals. Since May 2020, they have produced approximately 1,300 meals per week—amounting to over 180,000 meals distributed during the pandemic. During this period, the collective engaged over 250 people as militants and volunteers in the activities: the harvesting of food, the preparation and distribution of meals. Every Wednesday, meals are delivered to both central and peripheral areas of Curitiba, with distribution locations adjusted according to local demand. The flexibility in choosing distribution locations, always responding to shifting demands,

highlights the adaptive and relational nature of these practices—elements that resonate with the rhythmanalytical perspective adopted in this research.

The *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (MST, or Landless Workers' Movement) is one of Latin America's largest social movements, founded in the early 1980s to promote agrarian reform and food sovereignty. Organizationally, the MST's settlements adopt different models: some operate as collective cooperatives, others are divided into individual family plots, and many combine both approaches. Thus, the presence of strictly common lands or cooperative production units is frequent but not universal (Diniz; Gilbert, 2013). Beyond production, MST settlements prioritize the creation and management of community infrastructures—such as rural schools, childcare centers, health posts, and meeting or training spaces—often collectively organized or developed in partnership with public policies and the movement's internal bodies. Among these, the *Contestado* Settlement, occupied in 1999 through popular mobilization, stands out as a living laboratory of cooperative practices. Home to around 160 families engaged in farming, collective enterprises, and educational initiatives—including the Latin American School of Agroecology—it has also become a site of rural-urban articulation through the *Marmitas da Terra* collective. The group's urban volunteers cultivate crops within MST territory to supply community kitchens in Curitiba, establishing an unprecedented form of collaboration in the movement's history.

Figure 1 – Collective crops on the *Contestado* Settlement (Lapa, Paraná, Brazil)

Source: *LENON, Wellington (2022), available in: <https://mst.org.br/2022/02/08/assentamento-contestado-completa-23-anos-e-cresce-na-construcao-da-agroecologia/>*

3.2 Moments and rhythms

The methodological framework employed in the research sought to analyze how the rhythms of community kitchens—production, preparation, and distribution—interact with, resist, or align with the hegemonic rhythms of urban life. Drawing from Lefebvre's theory of moments, the study examined how these practices constitute temporal and spatial configurations that can disrupt the alienating routines of capitalist urbanism. Moments, in this context, are not seen as isolated or spontaneous events but as processes embedded in everyday life, capable of forging alternative social relations and spatial imaginaries. Therefore, through the "theory of moments" it's

possible to elaborate the relationship between the immediacy of community kitchen actions and their virtuality as a potential for social transformation.

Like the Situationists, Lefebvre believed it was possible to combat modern urban lifestyle through the provocation of destabilizing situations, or in his words, moments. However, unlike them, he contended that such transformative ruptures emerge not from sudden contingencies but through sustained engagement. As Lefebvre (2014, p. 648) states, the theory of moments' practical goal is "to transform these powers, these partial totalities which are destined to fail, into 'something' unforeseen and new, something genuinely total, which would overcome the 'triviality/tragedy' contradiction." Moments, therefore, act as catalysts for reappropriating urban spaces — "spaces of play" where use value surpasses exchange value, fostering encounters and collective celebrations against the backdrop of the administrative city (Fonseca, 2019: 92-93). Shields (1999) further elaborates on the transformative potential of moments by emphasizing their structural dimension. He highlights that moments acquire significance when immediate lived experiences are connected to broader social structures, fostering processes of de-alienation and describes them as those instances "when one recognizes or has a sudden insight into a situation or an experience beyond the merely empirical routine of some activity," situating them within a larger totality (Shields, 1999, p. 58).

Lefebvre (2014) defines moments through five key elements: intent (choice), temporal bounds (duration), historical continuity (memory), substance (content), and aesthetic (form). These elements ground moments in everyday practices such as study, rest, artistic creation, play, and non-alienating labor. They act as bridges connecting fragmented experiences, opening up spaces for difference and collective subjectivity. In this sense, we can understand moments as rhythms—temporal patterns that may align eurhythmically with or challenge the dominant rhythms of urban life. Translating this into methodological practice, the research developed an analytical pairing that examined how different moments in the community kitchen practices—food production, meal preparation, and distribution—interacted with both internally constituted rhythms and externally imposed temporalities.

This rhythmanalytical approach allowed the study to investigate how these practices materialize within the city's socio-temporal fabric, how they negotiate with urban flows, and how they potentially disrupt the commodification of time and labor. By engaging with the rhythms of these spaces, it became possible to perceive moments of collective action that momentarily displace capitalist logic, giving rise to alternative relationalities. Thus, the methodological choices are also inherently political, aiming to situate community kitchens as laboratories of urban commoning and as spaces where the possibilities of social transformation are rehearsed in concrete, everyday practices. This connection between theory and method ensured that the fieldwork remained aligned with the study's broader critical objectives. In the following section, this discussion will be further developed by analyzing how instances of commensality—specifically, meal distributions in public squares—act as moments of commoning, confronting and reconfiguring the dominant rhythms of public space, which are traditionally defined and regulated by state authorities.

4. Commoning the public space

4.1 Commensality and reflexive solidarity

The metaphor of crafting a "collective home" in the public space, indicated by Stavrides (2016) can be used to explain the production of common spaces through food offerings. This concept extends beyond the simple notion of forming a type of "giant family" bound by ties of affectionate solidarity. It envisions a collaborative

space where everyone is welcome to participate and embrace new responsibilities. In this context, the act of meal distribution in public squares stands as a significant political and social gesture, challenging the conventional view of public spaces as domains exclusively managed by state authorities. By transforming urban squares into expansive, open-air dining areas, these initiatives foster alternative temporalities and rhythms, giving rise to new circuits of sociability that extend beyond the immediate act of meal sharing and suggest a potential reimagining of public spaces as venues for the emergence of "reflexive solidarity" (Dean, 1995). Such a reconfiguration of urban landscapes underscores the capacity of grassroots initiatives not only to transform the physicality of public spaces but, more crucially, to reshape the dynamics of social interaction and political engagement within them. For Stavrides (2016:236), "common space can be created in and through official public space even by people on the move, even by uprooted or chased people and even by people who desperately look for a place to create a life no matter how 'often the site … is pulled from under their feet".

While assisting with meal distributions, numerous narratives and testimonies were encountered. Among these, a touching account of a man experiencing homelessness stands out. On this occasion, he underscored to me his preference for getting his food in the *Marmitas* distribution in the square rather than going to the city hall's *Mesa Solidária* program venue. Not only did he find the *Marmitas*'s food more palatable, but the square offered a sense of comfort, camaraderie, and freedom from judgment that he found lacking in the institutionalized setting. Although this reflection represents a single perspective and cannot be universally applied, it illuminates the profound impact of personal liminality—navigating the thresholds of social visibility and invisibility—as a mechanism for challenging and transcending the stigma so often inflicted upon individuals living on the streets and underscores the indispensable role of common spaces in fostering not just sustenance but also social belonging and dignity.

Alongside these informal interviews, further observations from field experiences in the squares during meal distributions—a temporal window encompassing the formation of queues, distribution, and subsequent moments of commensality—suggest a "threshold" emergence. In Stavrides' analysis of urban commons, thresholds are understood as zones of passage and encounter with the potential to foster new types of social relations and communal sharing "by opening the inside to the outside" (Stavrides, 2014:547). The concept of liminality, defined as the "experience of temporarily occupying an in-between territory as well as an in-between non-identity" is a core aspect of thresholds. These spatial-temporal configurations hold the potential to "provide us with a glimpse of a spatiality of emancipation" (Stavrides, 2016: 239). For Stavrides (2016:239), "emancipation may thus be conceived not as the establishing of a new collective identity but rather as the establishing of the means to negotiate between emergent identities". Similarly, reflexive solidarity as Dean articulates, involves recognizing others "in a way that is neither immediate nor restrictively mediated" (Dean, 1995: 132).

As Stavrides posits, "in public space general rules appear as being addressed to homogenized users, users who can have access to a specific place at specific hours of the day (or who are not allowed to 'step on the grass' and so on)" (Stavrides, 2014:548). In contrast, the public squares serving as venues for food distributions are conducive to appropriation, allowing for the accommodation of new functions and serving as pivotal thresholds, constituting an open terrain for alterity encounters. This liminal state modifies the experience not solely for direct participants but also for all those traversing the square. According to Lefebvre (2013:389), it implies a conflict between the use and the exchange, for him

> Use reappears in acute conflict with the exchange in space because it implies "appropriation" and not "ownership". Now, appropriation takes time (or times), rhythm (or rhythms), symbols, and practice. The more functionalized a space is – the more dominated by the "agents" who manipulate and make it monofunctional – the less it lends itself to appropriation.

Comparing the gathering in the squares with monofunctional spaces provided by "*Mesa Solidária*" underscores the importance of spatial configurations in facilitating or hindering the emergence of reflexive solidarity and deeper social connections. For those awaiting their meals, it was not rare to encounter casual conversations on diverse topics such as political discussions, recommendations for good places to sleep and find food, and where to find work, alongside artists expressing themselves through playing musical instruments or reciting poetry. Similarly to what happens in the *Marmitas da Terra* preparation spaces, participation in the practice encourages individuals to take on new responsibilities. During distribution moments, this becomes evident when queue participants offer to assist in the kitchen or with distribution. Then, the following week, they were there helping to organize the queue and unload the boxes. The argument derived from the fieldwork suggests that spaces conducive to participation are those where the identity boundary is deconstructed, allowing for a wide range of social exchanges. Conversely, institutionalized spaces, by reinforcing the identity disjunction present in the social fracture that underlies the condition of inequality, seem to contribute less to the ideal of emancipation pursued here. This observation is drawn from the immediate and often commonplace interactions occurring in queues or during meal-sharing moments and from recognizing public spaces as vast arenas for negotiation, imbued with memories and varied trajectories (Massey, 2005).

These cases bring to the fore oft-ignored linkages between the tangibly experienced urban public spaces and the political public sphere, highlighting the ongoing disputes over divergent visions and interests concerning urban space. The sites of meal distribution represent critical junctures where the operations of community kitchens intersect with urban public space. Although the production and preparation moments are vital to foster communal ties and facilitating knowledge exchange, it is through the act of distribution that the spatial practice of community kitchens manifestly engages within public space. Referring to the occupation of Tahrir Square in Cairo as an example, Stavrides (2016:49) observes that

> the food offering was part of a process that extended socially important habits of hospitality, usually connected to the realm of the family house, to the appropriated public space (…) and thus, contributing to forms of sharing in and through space that 'enable alternative forms of circulation and distribution, and encourage forms of relationality different from capitalism (in both its welfare and neoliberal renditions).

To fully grasp the food distribution's emancipatory potential in producing common spaces, it is essential to view them not as unidirectional acts from the haves to the have-nots but as collective efforts built upon horizontal and reciprocal relationships. Solidarity, as Stavrides writes (2016:49) "is both a prerequisite of egalitarian sharing and a set of practices that create equality through offering". Delving into the complex landscape of solidarity within communal practices, Jodi Dean's (1995:115) exploration of affectional, conditional, and reflexive solidarity sheds light on their significant implications. Dean (1995:115) delineates affectional and conditional solidarity as constrained by emotional bonds and shared convictions, respectively, which inherently limit their scope to a specific circle of individuals. She argues that such forms of solidarity inherently promote an 'us versus them' mindset, wherein "our care or solidarity remains confined to those 'concrete others' to whom we can see ourselves as related".

In stark contrast, reflexive solidarity, as Dean later articulates (1995:123-124), emerges from the understanding that the continual possibility of dissent necessitates a rational transformation to serve as a foundation for solidarity. This form of solidarity, by adopting the "generalized other" as a relational perspective, enables a conception of mutual expectations without resorting to rigid normative frameworks. According to Dean, "By focusing on the generalized other as the perspective of relationship, reflective solidarity provides a way of conceiving the mutuality of our expectations without hypostatizing them into a restrictive set of norms" (DEAN, 1995:124). Reflexive solidarity, thus, holds the potential to transcend the

inherent limitations of affectional and conditional forms, paving the way for more inclusive and expansive commoning relations. This reconceptualization steers clear of reverting to the outdated and criticized universalism symbolized by the white male paradigm, as critiqued by Seyla Benhabib. As Dean (1994:131) posits, "is not simply the generalized other, but a variety of different generalized others". This underscores the imperative for a solidarity that appreciates and incorporates the multitude of human experiences and identities. Through this lens, reflexive solidarity emerges as a fundamental mechanism for reimagining and actively producing common spaces.

According to Dean, reflexive solidarity can be evaluated at least in two dimensions. The first dimension emphasizes the importance of recognizing and respecting the distinctiveness of others, coupled with a foundational trust that motivates individuals to support one another, and the second "involves the readiness of members to take responsibility for their shared relationships through an attunement to our mutual vulnerability", in which "a lack of solidarity is manifest through a 'consumerist' orientation toward relationships, an orientation which treats association with the other merely as a means to one's own ends" (Dean,1995:133). *Marmitas da Terra* is a grassroots movement that exemplifies reflexive solidarity through its worker-centric approach, also referred to by the members as "active solidarity", or in Marcos' words, "a worker's solidarity for workers". Within this framework, the "worker" category, serving as a "generalized other", creates a liminal space of identity, fostering mutual recognition among all participants, regardless of their roles in society. Whether one's daily occupation is that of a lawyer in a downtown office or gathering recyclable materials from the streets, within the context of the meal distribution queue, we and they are united under the common identity of "workers".

4.2 Commonality and political organization

It's April 2021. I open, in my messaging app, the MNPR's community kitchen group. The conversation was dominated by concerns about a new legislative proposal from the City Hall, identified as proposition No. 005.00103.2021, and submitted as an "urgency requisition" seeking approval from the Municipal Council to initiate a governmental food provision program named "*Mesa Solidária*" ("Solidarity Table"). While the establishment of such a program might seem beneficial at first glance, the proposal raised significant concerns among community kitchen volunteers and organizers, due to some of the bill's additional stipulations, which would restrict the operations of all unregistered organizations involved in food distribution in public spaces. Specifically, the proposal aimed to enforce penalties for those distributing food outside the designated areas and times set by the municipal authority. Furthermore, it required volunteers to wear uniforms featuring the "*Mesa Solidária*" program's logo. This move was perceived by the collectives involved as an attempt to centralize and control food distribution efforts, potentially hindering the flexibility and spontaneous nature of volunteer-driven initiatives that have been pivotal in addressing food insecurity among the city's most vulnerable populations. The proposed legislation thus sparked a debate on the balance between regulation and the autonomous efforts of community groups. By potentially limiting the ability of these groups to operate freely, the proposition threatened to undermine the grassroots solidarity and community engagement that characterize the work of community kitchens across Curitiba.

The "*Mesa Solidária*" proposed bill, aimed at regulating food distributions in public spaces, highlights a material and symbolic dispute over the use of these spaces. The justifications provided by the proposition (Curitiba, 2021) cite concerns over waste, dirt accumulation, and the potential for increased pests and disease vectors, attributing these issues specifically to the activities of food distribution. Additionally, the proposition criticizes the lack of "organizational parameters" and sanitary controls in the conduct of such distributions. However, this perspective has been met with criticism from various stakeholders, including the Brazilian

Institute of Urban Law (IBDU, 2021), which interprets the bill as a "clear intent to demobilize ongoing social projects and hinder the survival and presence of the homeless population in public places". Despite these allegations, the dispute's aftermath revealed an outcome contrary to the city hall's intentions, with the emergence of stronger collaborative networks among these kitchens.

In response to the controversial bill proposed by Curitiba's city hall, community kitchens, and allied organizations quickly organized themselves in opposition. Their concerted efforts propelled the issue into the spotlight, garnering attention from both local and national media outlets. This widespread publicity, coupled with significant public support, compelled the mayor's allies in the council to reconsider the bill's implications. Consequently, a public hearing was convened to facilitate a dialogue on the proposed regulations, leading to a revised version of the bill that was markedly less coercive, with the elimination of penalties. In the aftermath of these discussions, the "*Mesa Solidária*" initiative was modified to offer a compromise in which the kitchens under its institutional canopy gained access to resources from the municipality's food bank. However, the public administration continues to enforce constraints concerning the operational locales and timings for food distribution. Under the pretext of regulating food distribution in public spaces, the program also sought to exert control over the very labor carried out by these collectives — an attempt at co-optation that resonates with what Rosnay (2020, p. 11) terms "commonswashing", that is, the instrumental use of the commons language to legitimize practices that ultimately contradict its principles. In this case, however, it was not a corporation seeking profit, but a political group attempting to accumulate symbolic and political capital, through the voluntary work of organized citizens.

For Dardot and Laval (2019), when we understand labor as a collective effort and concerning a "common action", it's possible to engender new forms of relationships. The work employed in the community kitchens thus transcends mere humanitarian assistance, revealing them as spaces where cooperation and shared responsibility redefine both the labor significance and public presence. According to Dardot e Laval, "when it is not completely prescribed and channeled, work is always creative, or as we would like to put it, instituent" (Dardot and Laval, 2019:333), fostering "relationships of camaraderie, new gestures, new modes of coordination and cooperation" and so on. In a similar vein to Shields (1999) takes on the "moments theory", for Dardot and Laval (2019:335), creative collective labor empowers workers to overcome "the fragmentation of daily life by creating some degree of transversality between the spheres of social life". In this way, "the common, in the form of concrete cooperation within freely formed groups, is still one of the best ways to counter the effects of hierarchical domination in work and social life" (Dardot and Laval, 2019:336), thus the appropriation of work routines thought cooperation It is not merely a consequence of self-management but also a propellant for its implementation.

In contrast to capitalistic logic, which reduces work to a means of capital accumulation (Dardot and Laval, 2019), community kitchens exemplify an alternative approach to labor. Centered on self-management, these spaces challenge the conventional valuation of work by emphasizing the social utility and altruistic dimensions of labor. However, simply aligning their function with the "feeling of social usefulness of what we produce" would underestimate their broader societal impact (Dardot and Laval, 2017, p. 513). Therefore, a deeper exploration into these kitchens (and other types of common spaces) as sites of "disruptive moments" is essential. This entails embracing the notion of "cooperative resistance" (Dardot and Laval, 2019), which lays the groundwork for "extended self-management" as envisioned by Lefebvre (2017). In this framework, self-management initiatives are valued not merely for their immediate outcomes but as manifestations of a transformative potential inherent in the process—the virtual present in the actual conditions.

Aligning Lefebvre's analysis, the concept of self-management must be examined both “as a means of struggle, opening the path, and as a means of reorganizing society, transforming it from the bottom up, from everyday life to the state” (Lefebvre, 2017:140). Dardot and Laval, however, offer a narrower interpretation of the term, viewing it predominantly as an organizational structure and contrasting it with the concept of self-govern, which encompasses the “institutions and rules people create in order to coordinate their relations” (Dardot and Laval, 2019:313). Thus, they advocate for "a deliberate politics of the common” that facilitates the creation of “self-governing institutions that enable the freest expression of common action as possible" (DARDOT and LAVAL, 2019:313). While “the politics of the common always cuts transversally across institutional separations” (Dardot and Laval, 2019:314), extending such institutions throughout the social fabric resonates with Lefebvre’s advocacy for the right to the city as an extended form of self-management.

Adopting self-governance as a concrete utopia challenges these entrenched binaries, fostering convergences between individual and collective interests. The traditional view that upholds individualism as the norm in urban life overlooks the city’s potential for pioneering new forms of communal living. It is both a theoretical and political oversight. Community kitchens exemplify the tangible possibility of nurturing relationships that respect differences while simultaneously constructing a common world. Challenging traditional notions of autonomy and individualism, these spaces also serve as practical demonstrations of how urban environments can experiment with and realize forms of shared living that transcend conventional political and social boundaries.

During a journey to the *Contestado* settlement, Marcos explained that the collective’s efforts aimed not merely at harvesting food for later preparation but at cultivating another sphere of collective action. By “establishing a relationship from production,” as he put it, the collective sought to transform the crops into spaces of encounter and political formation. In these spaces, production was not limited to agricultural outcomes but extended to the produce fellowship, collective learning, and mutual recognition. Daily tasks such as preparing the soil, planting, and harvesting became opportunities for cooperation and dialogue. Those with greater experience mentor newcomers, facilitating learning through direct engagement and practice. Through this shared labor, participants gradually shaped a collective rhythm of work grounded in reciprocity and care. These interactions illustrate how the praxis of production itself generates collective bonds — the act of cultivating the land becoming inseparable from cultivating community, which was fundamental to the expansion of the collective’s commoning practices, both in terms of people and realms of action.

This dynamic of inclusion and learning through shared work resonates with Stavrides’ (2016) understanding of commoning as a flexible and evolving process. According to him, “institutions of expanding commoning need to be flexible because ‘newcomers’ need to be included in them without being forced to enter a pre-existing taxonomy of roles” (Stavrides, 2016:41). He argues that these institutions must also provide opportunities and tools for “translating differences between views, between actions, and between subjectivities, one to the other" (Stavrides, 2016:41-42). While comparison recognizes internal differences as relational and positive for the group's composition, translatability "creates the ground for negotiations between differences without reducing them to common denominators" (Stavrides, 2016:42), bridging gaps between diverse political, cultural, and religious backgrounds, facilitating a deeper level of communal engagement (Stavrides, 2016a:43). In the context of a community kitchen in Athens, where the integration of immigrants as commoners necessitates active efforts in translation, Stavrides describes how, around the collective kitchen's pot and in various other communal spaces, acts of translation weave a common space that fosters shared stakes, habits, views, and dreams, transcending traditional barriers and cultivating a shared ground enriched by diversity (Stavrides, 2016:43).

This principle of inclusivity and adaptability was vividly demonstrated within the operations of *Marmitas da Terra*, where each gathering—whether in the kitchen on Wednesdays or at the Settlement on Saturdays—welcomed at least one new participant. The sharing of resources and knowledge within this framework significantly boosts the collective's transformative potential and simultaneously nurtures individual growth among its members. As Marcos, emphasize "We have come to recognize the space managed by the MST for meal preparation not merely as a facility for cooking but as a pedagogical structure, which we have developed into a formative framework". By reimagining food production and preparation spaces as arenas for horizontal educational exchange, the initiative underscores the value of each participant's contributions. As Stavrides (2016:41) posits, inventing "forms of collaboration based not on homogenization but on multiplicity" allows "subjects of action and practices themselves to become comparable and relevant".

The collective endeavors in these communing spaces provide a form of social learning that transcends individual accumulations but also transforms knowledge and experiences into commons, as highlighted by (Hardt e Negri, 2009; Stavrides, 2016:126). This process elevates cooperative work to a platform for social inventiveness, where shared knowledge and experiences catalyze communal innovation. The concept of *mutirão*, traditionally understood as a form of mutual aid essential for survival in rural settings, similarly emerges as a crucial socio-spatial practice within the MST context (Martins, 2000). In the activities of *Marmitas da Terra*, the *mutirão*'s survivalist underpinning may not be directly felt, yet the essence of this organizational model—characterized by a shift from monetary transactions to values of collaboration, sharing, and social bonding—remains. Consequently, the significance of these collective efforts is accentuated not only in the tasks performed but also in the communal moments of respite, such as coffee breaks and shared meals following the morning's labor. These interactions serve as critical junctures for reinforcing the communal ethos, demonstrating the shift towards alternative forms of value and the deepening of social connections.

The dialogue within the community kitchens has revealed that translatability is indispensable not only for the internal coordination of collective tasks but also for facilitating the expansion of commoning practices into diverse socio-spatial contexts. This ensures compatibility with the existing dynamics of such spaces and fosters synergies with local demands. It is related to the Landless Workers Movement (MST)'s recent efforts in promoting political mobilization in urban peripheries. The MST's engagement illustrates the vital role of translatability in bridging the division between rural-urban, and the importance of navigating different "grammars" of language and struggle. Despite the differing contexts of rural and metropolitan areas, the shared experiences of exploitation and marginalization provide a foundation for constructing meaningful connections and collaborations. Translatability, in this case, deals with the challenge to articulate shared goals and build common ground for action, reflecting the movement's profound understanding of the diverse realities within Brazil's territory.

This diversity is expressed in the *Nova Esperança* occupation, home to over 1,200 families, including a significant number of immigrants, and situated in the metropolitan area of Curitiba. This urban common space exemplifies the productive intersection of urban and rural social movements' strategies and grammars of struggle in fostering the common. Similar to an MST settlement, this urban occupation is organized into 11 units, each represented by a rotative leader position responsible for coordinating collective endeavors, such as waste management and conflict resolutions (Ragnini et al., 2021). Initiated in May 2020 amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the occupation transformed a previously neglected site, once a rehabilitation ranch for people with substance abuse, into a thriving urban settlement. Despite initial conflicts with law enforcement, including barricades to thwart the provision of essential supplies, the community's persistent efforts culminated in securing collective land tenure after three years. The emergence of self-constructed dwellings marked the beginning of the settlement's transformation. Gradually, a variety of communal facilities, including gardens, a

community kitchen and bakery, a recycling shed, and a sewing workshop, began to flourish. Moreover, the preservation of an area of native forest within the settlement underscores the community's commitment to environmental stewardship alongside social development.

One day, while cutting tomatoes in the *Marmitas da Terra*'s kitchen, a profound conversation about the MST's strategic extension into urban struggles, unfolded with Roberto, a young activist who had left his home, on a MST's settlement in Paraná's hinterlands to live in the Nova Esperança occupation. This initiative, he explained, emerged from a political evaluation of the movement as a whole, acknowledging the critical importance of urban spheres as arenas of struggle for the working class, parallel to the fronts in the hinterland. Roberto outlined the distinctive challenges inherent to urban occupations, contrasting them with those faced in rural settlements. He noted the logistical challenges of urban living, where occupants must venture outside for employment, the heightened frequency of confrontations with law enforcement (although here he compares them to "*jagunços*", rural private militias serving large landowners), and the exploitation of the territory's social vulnerability by illicit activities. Despite these obstacles, Roberto confidently affirmed the significance of cultivating popular organization in urban settings. He stressed that the MST's role is not to lead the process, but to show, from the movement's experience, examples of collective organization and in this way, "build the struggle together".

Following the consolidation of its core activities—namely, the production, preparation, and distribution of meals— the *Marmitas da Terra* collective embarked on an initiative to establish a broader collaborative platform. This assembly integrated *Marmitas*' activists with representatives from a wide array of Curitiba's social organizations, including labor unions, recyclable materials collectors' movements, cultural and periphery movements, housing and urban rights movements, and neighborhood associations. This collective endeavor catalyzed an unprecedented level of mobilization across the city. The group, through a series of training meetings, organized itself into various thematic fronts aligned with the participant's interests, such as "culture and youth", "urban infrastructure", "health", and "education". Each front was granted the autonomy to identify demands and action opportunities within the territories served by the meal distribution initiative. This organizational strategy led to the implementation of several impactful projects: the construction of a work shed for a recyclable materials collectors' cooperative, the establishment of two agroecological gardens on the outskirts of Curitiba, the provision of supplementary schooling and the organization of *mutirões* for medical care in urban occupations throughout the city.

Such collaborative efforts fortified the community kitchens movement, but have also bolstered other political endeavors, such as securing the *Nova Esperança* occupation and expanding the influence of local mobilizations like the Union of Residents and Workers of Bolsão Formosa (UMT). The last one currently hosts the UMT community kitchen, also serving as the headquarters for the Vila Maria and Uberlandia community association in Curitiba's Novo Mundo neighborhood. Originally functioning as a distribution point for meals from the *Marmitas da Terra*, through a process of mobilization and exchange of learning, it has been transformed into a fully functional community kitchen. Echoing Stavrides' (2016) considerations about the prevention of power concentration, Pedro Carrano, a key leader within the UMT kitchen, underscored the necessity of shifting away from traditional leadership models, which often place the onus of problem-solving on a few, toward a more inclusive approach that encourages broader community involvement. In his words, "it's a huge challenge (...) to break away from the notion that leadership has to solve everything, and how to involve the community more". He describes this challenge as creating conditions where "people don't just understand what that space represents and that it's open in times of urgency, but also that we can foster a culture where 'hey, the association is yours; you can have tasks here, you can participate". He posits the kitchen as a unifying instrument, bridging five neighborhoods with diverse histories. According to Carrano, the kitchen

serves as a critical focal point where, regardless of varying perspectives or backgrounds, the collective goal of meal preparation and distribution necessitates unity and collaboration. For him, “it would be very difficult in a short time for everyone to have the same vision, and the same process about things”, in this context, “the kitchen is that moment when, no matter what happens, we have to complete this task, we have to deliver the food”.

The community kitchens movement’s capacity to build alliances and create political mobilizations in broader scales of struggle is exemplified by the publication of Presidential Decree No. 11.937, OF MARCH 5, 2024 (BRASIL, 2024). This decree not only regulates the Solidarity Kitchen Program but also redefines a solidarity kitchen as a "social technology to combat food and nutritional insecurity, of a popular, non-state base, structured by the local community, through its collectives, social movements, and civil society organizations". It emphasizes as one of its guidelines "support for the autonomy of solidarity kitchens in operation, management, and service to the local community, with the participation of civil society in decision-making processes and encouragement of the best possible use of resources", starkly contrasting the municipal bill proposal from Curitiba previously discussed. In addition to financial resources, the program also provides solidarity kitchens access to another important public policy, the Food Acquisition Program, which facilitates the purchase and distribution of food from family agriculture and agrarian reform settlements, favoring organic and agroecological productions.

5. Conclusion

The social experimentation undertaken by Curitiba’s community kitchen movement—particularly the *Marmitas da Terra* collective—highlights the urgency of reimagining urban spaces in ways that prioritize common uses and collective modes of existence. By extending established practices of commoning into new territories, they create openings for collaboration with territorially diverse movements, thus enabling the emergence of communal practices that connect urban and rural contexts.

The organizational structure of these kitchens depends not only on productive capacities—such as access to material infrastructure and the engagement of volunteers—but also on the social and political relations, as well as the imaginaries, cultivated within and beyond the physical arenas of commoning. As Massey (2005) argues, the ways in which we imagine space have profound implications for the shaping of spatial practices and the construction of political relationships. Community kitchens practices demonstrate that when space is conceptualized and enacted as a collective endeavor, it holds transformative potential—not only for sustaining shared practices but also for fostering active political praxis through the process of commoning.

In collective kitchens coordinated by social movements such as *Marmitas da Terra*, labor is redefined as a form of political action rather than an act of charity. It becomes a constitutive practice within a broader project of social transformation, grounded in everyday solidarity and collective self-management. These practices illustrate that even while addressing the urgent and immediate issue of hunger, community kitchen efforts go beyond meeting basic needs. They contribute to expanding what Lefebvre (2013) called “the field of the possible.” At the same time, these initiatives cultivate the virtual—the unrealized but imaginable future in which hunger is no longer a systemic reality. In doing so, they open space for envisioning and enacting a society grounded in principles of emancipation, autonomy, and social justice. It is through these everyday practices of communal labor and care that an alternative future is not only imagined but gradually brought into being, affirming the transformative power of urban commoning as a praxis of emancipation.

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