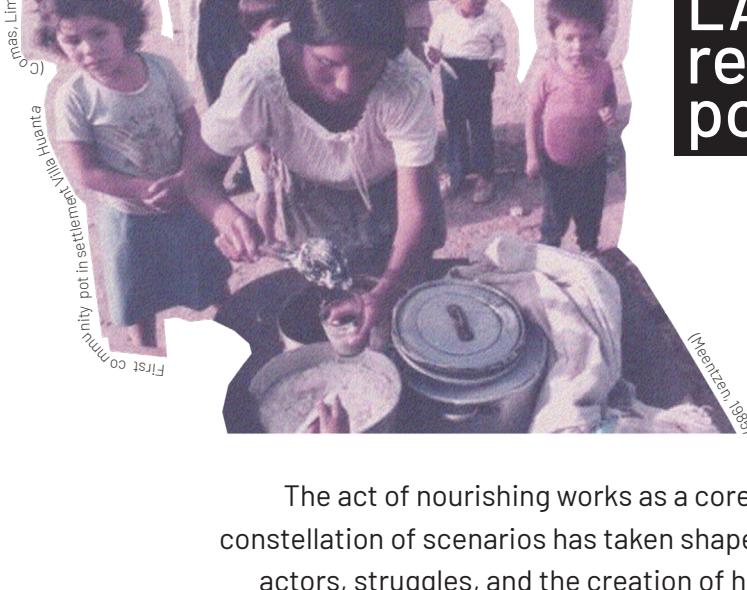


LA CONSTELACIÓN DE LA OLLA_ scenarios of resistance, support and politics

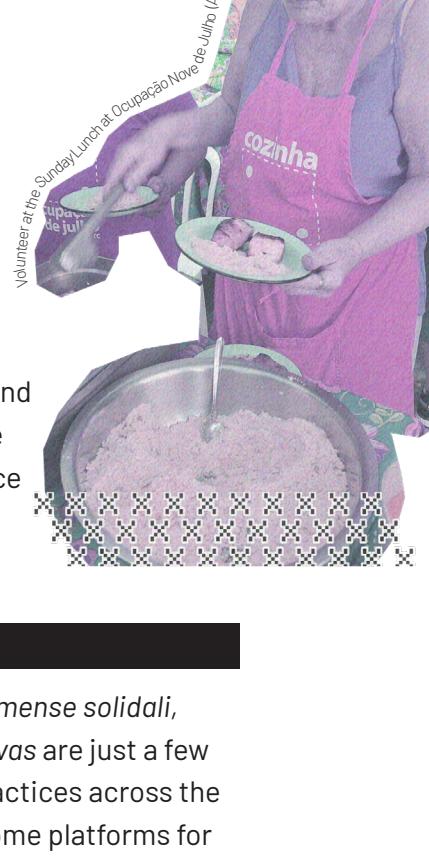


omas Lima.
villas Huanta

First community pot in settlement Villa Huanta

(Meentzen, 1985)

The act of nourishing works as a core element around which a constellation of scenarios has taken shape, weaving together diverse actors, struggles, and the creation of highly politicised spaces. As an act of care, feeding has, in certain contexts, transcended its domestic boundaries, moving into the public and collective sphere. However, following the embedded social construct of a feminine role and their work, collective care tasks have also predominantly become the responsibility of women, who weave networks of support and resistance to face the challenges presented by their specific contexts.



volunteer at the Sunday Lunch at Ocupação Nova de Julho (Author 2024)

NOURISHING AS A CITY-MAKING PRACTICE

Comedores populares, merenderos, ollas comunes, soup kitchens, mense solidali, community kitchens, cantines solidaires, foodbanks o cozinhas coletivas are just a few of the names given to spaces that emerge through collective food practices across the globe. Beyond merely providing sustenance, these spaces have become platforms for community organisation, the exchange of knowledge, and the construction of solidarity networks and resistance towards diverse challenges.

In Peru, *comedores populares* emerged as a direct response to the mass migrations of the 1950s and 1960s. During this period, thousands of people left the Andean highlands in search of opportunities in Lima, a city unprepared to receive them (Matos Mar, 1984).

In here, migrants faced not only the harsh living conditions in the city's arid outskirts but also discrimination from those who considered them alien bodies to that territory. In this context, traditional Andean practices such as *ayni* (Quechua for 'reciprocity') and *minka* (Quechua for 'collectivity'), became essential tools of resilience. These deeply rooted practices allowed communities to organise themselves for the collective benefit, deploying different activities that would give them the tools of an envisioned city and

everything that comes with the right of being part of it.

While initially conceived as spaces of collective care, the *comedores populares* quickly transcended their primary role of providing food.

Predominantly led by women, these spaces evolved into centres of community power, where social bonds were forged. These connections not only addressed fundamental needs but also fostered the creation of grassroots organisations and support networks, with women emerging

as the backbone of this social production of the space (Barrig, 1991).

These often expanded their roles to encompass other forms of communal care, becoming for instance, *wawawasi* (Quechua for 'babylhouses' – childcare centres), and even safe havens against

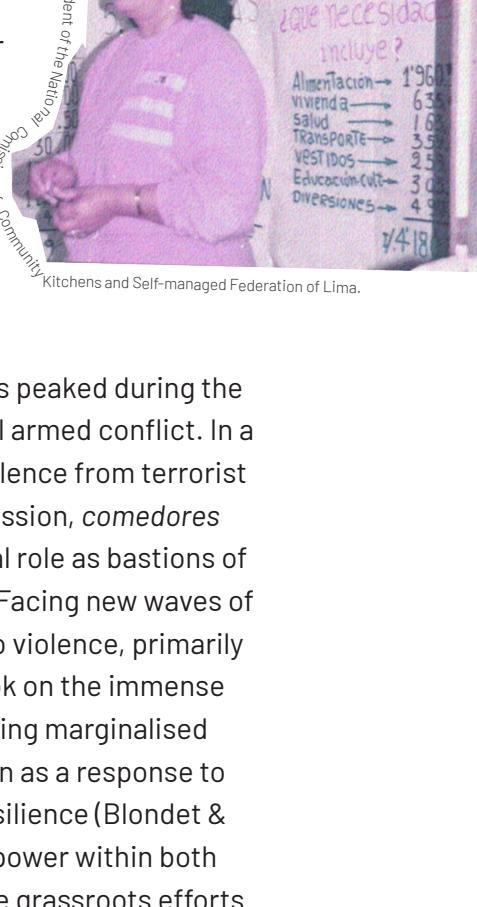
domestic violence (Blondet & Trivelli, 2004). Moreover, they

challenged traditional gender norms and disrupted societal

expectations, leading many husbands to question why

women needed their own spaces for discussion –

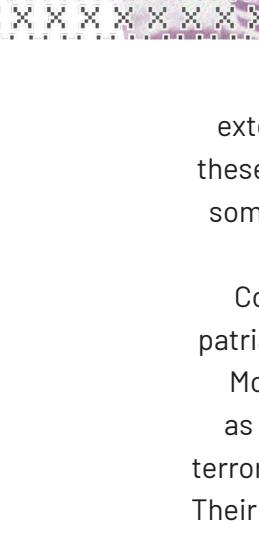
'What could they possibly need to discuss?'



The impact of these spaces peaked during the 1980s, amid Peru's internal armed conflict. In a country torn apart by violence from terrorist groups and state repression, *comedores populares* played a critical role as bastions of resistance and solidarity. Facing new waves of internal displacement due to violence, primarily from Andean regions, women took on the immense responsibility of feeding and protecting marginalised communities. What had initially arisen as a response to necessity evolved into a system of resilience (Blondet & Montero, 1995) – reference points of power within both community and urban discourse. These grassroots efforts extended their influence into political spheres (Sarmiento Viena, 2017), transforming these kitchens into what Miraftab (2004) describes as 'invented spaces': alternative and sometimes unofficial sites of action configured and shaped by grassroots movements.

Community kitchens became spaces of resistance against failing public services, patriarchal norms, and, later, an internal war. In such scenarios, women like María Elena Moyano and Emma Hilario emerged as emblematic leaders. These kitchens served as platforms to articulate social demands and defend those unjustly stigmatised as terrorists, all while confronting threats from both insurgent groups and the government. Their activism came at a great cost – forcing Emma to flee the country, while María Elena Moyano ultimately sacrificed her life (Minaya, 2015).

From Peru's still-active *comedores populares* to Brazil's *cozinhas solidárias* – crucial spaces often intertwined with the fight for housing – the communal pot becomes the nucleus of a constellation of simultaneous actions that transcend mere nourishment. What began in many countries as a simple act of sharing a meal or a glass of milk has evolved into what Fraser (1990) describes as 'subaltern counter-public spaces' led by women: sites that challenge power structures and articulate struggles for justice, resistance, dignity, and recognition.



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