

THE MATERIAL TURN: INTERVIEW WITH RODRIGO TONIOL

A VIRADA MATERIAL: ENTREVISTA COM RODRIGO TONIOL

EL GIRO MATERIAL: ENTREVISTA A RODRIGO TONIOL



Bruno Ferraz BARTEL¹
e-mail: brunodzk@yahoo.com.br



Maria Gleiciane Fontenele PEREIRA²
e-mail: gleicifontep@gmail.com

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Editors: Prof. Dr. Maria Teresa Miceli Kerbaux
Prof. Me. Thaís Cristina Caetano de Souza
Prof. Me. Paulo Carvalho Moura
Prof. Thiago Pacheco Gebara

¹ Fluminense Federal University (UFF), Rio de Janeiro – RJ – Brazil. Doctoral degree in Anthropology from Fluminense Federal University (UFF). Professor in the Graduate Program in Anthropology (PPGAnt) at the Federal University of Piauí (UFPI). Member of the Institute for Comparative Studies in Institutional Conflict Management (INCT-InEAC) and the Middle East Studies Center (NEOM) at UFF.

² Federal University of Piauí (UFPI), Teresina – PI – Brazil. Master's in Anthropology from the Graduate Program in Anthropology at the Federal University of Piauí (UFPI).

ABSTRACT: In the interview, Rodrigo Toniol discusses his journey from his academic formation to his participation in projects related to the consolidation of a field of study on materialities in Brazilian anthropology. The author argues that, in some cases, we need to combine the spatial turn with the material turn to think about religion.

KEYWORDS: Material Turn. Spatial Turn. Religion.

RESUMO: Na entrevista, Rodrigo Toniol discute seu percurso desde a sua formação acadêmica até sua participação em projetos relacionados à consolidação de um campo de estudo sobre as materialidades na antropologia brasileira. O autor argumenta que, em alguns casos, precisamos unir a virada espacial com a virada material para pensarmos a religião.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Virada Material. Virada espacial. Religião.

RESUMEN: En la entrevista, Rodrigo Toniol discute su trayectoria desde su formación académica hasta su participación en proyectos relacionados con la consolidación de un campo de estudio sobre las materialidades en la antropología brasileña. El autor argumenta que, en algunos casos, necesitamos combinar el giro espacial con el giro material para pensar en la religión.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Giro material. Giro espacial. Religión.

Rodrigo Toniol is an Associate Professor in the Department of Cultural Anthropology at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and in the Graduate Program in Anthropology at Unicamp. He was elected an affiliate member of the Brazilian Academy of Sciences. He holds a productivity fellowship from CNPq and has a degree in Social Sciences, with a master's and a PhD in Social Anthropology from the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul. During part of his PhD, he conducted studies in the Anthropology Program at the University of California San Diego (UCSD). He has also been a visiting researcher at CIESAS/Guadalajara (Mexico) and at Utrecht University (Netherlands).

His research focuses on the topics of body, health, science, and religion. Among his works, he has served as editor and author of the "Encyclopedia of Latin American Religions" (ed. Springer), authored the books *On the Nature Trail* (ed. N.Science Publishers, 2015) and *Do Espírito na Saúde* (Ed. LiberArs, 2018), and organized works such as *Conservadorismos, Fascismos e Fundamentalismos* (Ed. Unicamp, 2018), *Como as Coisas Importam: Uma Abordagem Material da Religião* (ed. UFRGS, 2019), *Cientistas Sociais e o Coronavírus* (ed. Anpocs, 2020), *Entre Trópicos: Diálogos de Estudios Nueva Era entre México y Brasil* (Casa Chata, 2018), and *Religião e Materialidades* (Papeis Selvagens, 2021).

In the interview, Rodrigo Toniol discusses his journey from his academic training to his involvement in projects related to the consolidation of a field of study on materialities in Brazilian anthropology.

Bruno Bartel: When, throughout your academic career, did you encounter this turning point regarding the theme of materialities?

Rodrigo Toniol: I will try to trace that path. The first chapter of the book I wrote, titled *Religion and Materialities: New Empirical Horizons and Theoretical Challenges*, co-authored with Renata Menezes, a professor at UFRJ/National Museum, addresses this aspect. My foray into the theme of materiality is linked to my interest in the debate about the body. This occurred during my sandwich PhD at UC San Diego, supervised by Thomas Csordas. He is a scholar who develops and grounds a whole perspective on embodiment. Csordas's approach to the body, strongly based on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, emphasizes the fundamental relationship between the body and the world. It is interesting to note that, as I began to focus on the body and reflect on it, I also started contemplating the world. I began to

reflect on what in the world generates bodily engagement. It is this kind of involvement with the world that provides the body with a range of incredible sensations or experiences of wonder. At that point, my incursion into the debate on materiality was intrinsically linked to a phenomenological perspective, involving authors such as Merleau-Ponty, Csordas, and Tim Ingold. That is how these thinkers started to influence my work.

Bruno Bartel: Would you also include Thomas Csordas's work in this relationship between materiality and the body?

Rodrigo Toniol: I would include it, although I'm not sure if he would include his work in this. He's been writing a book on the subject for years, but it has never been released, and to be honest, I don't believe it ever will be. He's engaged in other activities, like making music. But it would be a book where he tries to develop the notion of materiality. However, his debate on the body doesn't involve materiality. In fact, he has many disagreements with [Tim] Ingold, for example. Csordas points out that one of the problems with anthropology, which leans heavily into materiality or the anthropology of flows, is that it ends up obscuring humans. What interests us are humans. We can never forget that. I think there's a tension in his proposal in this regard. Curiously, all of this sparked my theoretical interest. My initial research, for example, had nothing to do with this—neither materiality nor these other issues. When I finished my doctorate at Unicamp and began a postdoctoral fellowship, I became more theoretically interested in the debate on materiality. I went to the Netherlands because, empirically and theoretically, this interested me. I started researching the relationship between health, spirituality, and science. I conducted extensive research on how the notion of spirituality was mobilized by medical sciences. How do doctors mobilize the idea of spirituality? I went to the WHO, medical research labs, clinics, and São Paulo's Hospital das Clínicas. What I found was something very intriguing due to the extensive medical production on the topic of health and spirituality. Essentially, doctors say the following: if you have more spirituality, you'll have fewer heart attacks. That's the kind of formulation many doctors produce based on their research. However, to make such a claim, they need to create a metric for spirituality. They need to create some criteria to measure spirituality. In my view, they need to materialize spirituality. They need to turn this abstract concept into something describable, manipulable, and observable. When I went for my postdoctoral research, my reflection was on how

spirituality became materiality for medicine, whether in a graph, number, or test result. My question was: how does spirituality become a material object or something circumscribed?

Bruno Bartel: And did this, in any way, already appear in your doctoral thesis on the Brazilian Unified Health System (SUS)?

Rodrigo Toniol: More or less. Actually, no. The issue of materiality, as it appears in my thesis on alternative therapies in SUS, is related to medications and medical procedures. However, at the time, I didn't delve deeply into this aspect. I didn't pay as much attention to it as I could have. I traveled to Utrecht in the Netherlands to join the Department of Philosophy and Science of Religion (Religion Studies) and work with Birgit Meyer. I stayed there for almost three years, in total. Birgit led a large project, being an Africanist who has researched Ghana and issues related to local Pentecostals for many years. Since the 2000s, she teamed up with other significant researchers in the field, like Matthew Engler, forming a relevant group producing work on Material Religion. Together, they founded a journal, and Birgit led a multimillion-dollar project to investigate "how religious matters." I use the English expression because I believe there's a crucial play on words: "matters" as both materiality and things that matter. We tried to reflect this in the title of the book [*Como as Coisas Importam: Uma Abordagem Material da Religião*], but it loses its meaning in Portuguese. That was the atmosphere when I arrived there. However, what I found was a very active and diverse group in terms of composition. People came from anthropology, philosophy, and religious studies, researching various topics, but all centered on the theme of material religion. But what does it mean to think about material religion in this context? Generally speaking, the social sciences' interest in things and objects is historical, a classic theme. We can refer back to Malinowski in a class on the circulation of necklaces and bracelets, where objects play an essential role. However, in the field of material religion, there is a truly innovative formulation. This provokes shifts because it's not just about observing materialities or objects but understanding that religion *is* materiality. This represents a significant departure from the way social sciences have traditionally conceptualized religion, focusing on the symbolic, ritual, or ideas at a cognitive level. Birgit argues that our approach to religion [in an iconoclastic way] results from a Protestant bias. This suggests rethinking the issue of coloniality through the notion of religion. How can we shift our understanding of religion not through a Protestant lens but from its materialities? Birgit emphasizes that materiality is fundamental, arguing that objects in a

religious context are not mere representations; they are religion itself. There is no religion without objects. This is a focus of Birgit's research. I'm not sure yet if I'll follow that path, but it's a strong proposal. She defines religion as that which transforms the invisible into the visible, giving visibility to things. In this formulation, religion would be a principle of visualization or materialization—making the intangible tangible. This would be a definition of the religious phenomenon. In Brazil, we only had one translation of Birgit's texts, done by Carly Machado, a professor at UFRRJ, in the *Campus* journal from UFPR. And that's it. There was very little literature on materiality and religion at that time.

Bruno Bartel If I'm not mistaken, that text pointed out the relationship between religion and media, right?

Rodrigo Toniol: Exactly, that's how Carly initiated the debate, through the media angle³.

Bruno Bartel: But you were talking about your experience in the Netherlands. What was it?

Rodrigo Toniol: Yes, but this requires a bit more institutional context. There's a point about the relationship between the Netherlands and some Brazilian researchers, academics, and anthropologists that has developed over time. This is a path and trajectory that is institutionally significant. I'll briefly explain. A key starting point is the relationship between professors André Droogers and Ary Pedro Oro [a professor at UFRGS]. André studied Pentecostals in Latin America for many years. So, the [empirical] path was through the [Pentecostal] movements. Before that, in Brazil, there was Marjo de Theije's dissertation, a Dutch researcher who studied popular Catholicism in the Northeast. She conducted research in the city of Garanhuns and published a book called *Tudo o que é de Deus é bom: uma antropologia do catolicismo liberacionista em Garanhuns, Brasil*⁴ ("Everything That Is of God Is Good: An Anthropology of Liberationist Catholicism in Garanhuns, Brazil"). Marjo's dissertation was initially about this subject, and she had a connection with Ari. Also in the Northeast, Mísia Reesink [a professor at UFPE] had an old relationship with the Netherlands. From there, a flow began:

³ Available at: <https://ojs.homologa.ufpr.br/campos/article/view/53445>. Accessed on: January 10, 2024.

⁴ About the book, see the review by Braga AM da C. *Tudo o que é de Deus é bom: uma antropologia do catolicismo liberacionista em Garanhuns, Brasil*. *Horizontes antropológicos*, 10 (22): 364-372, 2004. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0104-71832004000200017>. Accessed on: January 10, 2024.

Carlos Steil [a professor at UFRGS] went to the Netherlands initially. After that, João Rickli [a professor at UFPR] completed his Ph.D. in the Netherlands and did a postdoc with Birgit. And along with me, Emerson Giumbelli [a professor at UFRGS] also went. This helped to establish agreements. Several people from Unicamp went to the Netherlands because of this connection, or rather, this flow. For example, Bruno Reinhardt [a professor at UFSC] did a postdoc in the Netherlands with Birgit. Additionally, Carly continues to visit the Netherlands frequently for various reasons, and I would highlight two people in particular: Martijn Oosterbaan, who has been conducting research in Rio de Janeiro's favelas for years (decades, actually), and Mattijs van de Port, who studies Candomblé in Bahia. I would say this is the group that has fostered a very close relationship between Brazil and the Netherlands.

Buno Bartel: The context of the publication of *Aesthetic Formations: Media, Religion, and the Senses* [edited by Birgit Meyer in 2009] marks the meeting of this group, doesn't it?

Rodrigo Toniol: Exactly. That publication is a milestone in this conversation. It shows the flow of these researchers. Among Brazilian researchers, the Netherlands became a place to meet other scholars. I would emphasize the connection that Jeremy Stolow, a Canadian researcher, established with Brazil. He just published an incredible book about the aura. But this also has to do with Jeremy going to the Netherlands as well. Emerson Giumbelli was also part of Birgit's group when I was there. It was there that the idea of producing a translation of Birgit's texts came about. It was a really cool process, starting with the selection of the texts, because that book, as a collection of specific articles, only exists in Portuguese. It was a compilation we put together with her. In the end, we selected articles that we thought made sense. We partnered with colleagues from UFRGS to produce the translations. However, we spent a long time making decisions with Birgit about how to translate certain difficult terms, which involved various issues. I can talk more about that later. When I returned to Brazil, we managed to release the book through UFRGS's press, and it was a huge success. The book sold out, and there are no more copies available due to the limitations of university presses. It's not that they can't meet market demand, but the book circulated widely. I believe the Portuguese translation helped significantly in spreading this debate. We even included an interview with her, for instance.

Buno Bartel: Do you have plans for another edition?

Rodrigo Toniol: University presses are quite complicated.

Buno Bartel: Do you have an idea of how large the print run was at the time?

Rodrigo Toniol: 500 copies. It sold out in six months. I made it available on my *Academia.edu* page⁵. When I returned from the Netherlands, we published the book and brought Birgit to Brazil. She traveled widely across Brazil. Shortly after, we also brought Csordas. But it was only after I returned to Brazil that I strengthened my relationship with Renata Menezes. We already knew each other, but she had a working group (GT) at the Brazilian Anthropology Association (ABA). I believe the first edition of this, though I'm not certain, was done with Ronaldo [de Almeida – professor at Unicamp]. He was a colleague of mine and worked at Unicamp. When I returned, Renata suggested a re-edition [of the GT]. However, several people in Renata's group were also working on materialities. She was conducting research on Cosme and Damião. At Unicamp, many people were also working on other topics. We planned to hold a seminar but opted for two actions: a seminar at Unicamp bringing together her group [from the National Museum] with the people at Unicamp who were working on the theme of materialities, and the GT at the Brazilian Anthropology Meeting (RBA). From this union, the idea for the book *Religion and Materialities* emerged. In the introduction, we explain this a bit. Renata's entry into this debate follows other paths. It's a more French debate, drawing from different literature and bibliographies. This is interesting because it also broadens our imagination. I think this book presents many situations where it's possible to look at materialities through the lens of religion.

Buno Bartel: What are your next steps on this topic?

Rodrigo Toniol: As soon as we published this book and my productivity grant period on the theme of spirituality ended, I started a new project. The first article from this project will be published in the journal *Religião & Sociedade* [*A vida, a morte e o pós-vida das materialidades*

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Available

at:

https://www.academia.edu/42285540/Como_as_coisas_importam_Uma_abordagem_material_da_religi%C3%A3o_Intro Accessed on: January 10, 2024.

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de uma igreja demolida para a construção da Avenida Presidente Vargas, no Rio de Janeiro], co-authored by Marcella Araújo [professor at UFRJ], who researches cities. The focus of the research is demolished Catholic churches. I began observing the process of demolishing several Catholic churches. There are three initial cases that are very interesting: the churches that were demolished for the construction of Avenida Presidente Vargas in downtown Rio de Janeiro. Basically, what I'm proposing with the team of scholarship students is to trace the objects from these demolished churches. The guiding question is: what happened to the objects or the materialities? There are three aspects I'd like to highlight here. The first is that only by focusing on the theme of materiality could I conduct this research. It's only because I pay attention to this that I can observe demolished churches and frame it as a problem. By framing it and focusing on the materiality of churches, we can challenge the idea of the temple as a closed, self-contained place. By looking at churches and the circulation of objects, we perceive an immense flow between objects and churches. Not only in the churches that still stand, but especially in my case, [the objects from] demolished churches end up in many other places. We can provoke the idea of the temple as a closed or self-contained space. I start with the idea of understanding temples as spaces of significant circulation. The second aspect concerns the observation of the circulation of objects from demolished churches. What we've already mapped, and this will be covered in the article, is how these objects begin to be inscribed into universes entirely different from religious ones. That is, they start circulating, for instance, in museums. They become auction pieces or decorations in public buildings. Another issue is: what happens with the bodies buried in the churches? Therefore, there is also circulation between cemeteries. Some of these objects, for example, end up in other churches, taking on new roles. The third point is the size of the research agenda, which I started considering from the material theme. My feeling is that I opened Pandora's box. We started surveying demolished churches in Brazil. Just in the 20th century, the Catholic Church cataloged over 200 churches, many of which were demolished due to roadwork projects. The circulation of these objects is fascinating to think about, for example, the presence of religion in public spaces. This opens up a series of questions, and this is what I'm currently dedicating myself to. The debate on materiality leads me to think about religious temples and something beyond the temples themselves, which would be a kind of afterlife of the objects. Another point has been the impact of this so-called material turn. When we look at churches and these demolition processes, there's another turn that anthropology has yet to fully incorporate: the spatial turn. That is, how

will we think about space in religion or the relationship between religion and space? I believe we still discuss this too little. Space is usually seen as a landscape or backdrop.

Bruno Bartel: Or tied to the old systems of classifications, right?

Rodrigo Toniol: Exactly. But I think we've given very little thought to the production of space, which is a very classic theme for Geography and Urban Sociology.

Bruno Bartel: I find all of this very interesting because I studied Geography. I left Geography to explore other things in the Social Sciences.

Rodrigo Toniol: We'll have to go back to [Henri] Lefebvre. But I think there's something important here. Marcella, the group, and I are conducting research on the construction of Avenida Presidente Vargas. That's where the focus on demolished churches came from. However, we started discovering literature that, at least I personally, was not familiar with, and that was recently published in early 2023. In May, a dossier called "Rites and Stones" was published in a journal called *Espaço e Cultura*, which we translated. All of this will be published in the journal *Debates do NER*. Essentially, the argument is that we need to merge the spatial turn with the material turn to think about religion. There are cases where space and religion matter in various ways. I'll give an example from the dossier I mentioned, written by an Indian anthropologist named Leilah Vevania. She tells the story of two Zoroastrian temples that would be affected by the construction of the subway in Mumbai. This would be a classic subject of Sociology or Geography, but it doesn't appear in Urban Anthropology. In other words, we confine the temple to itself; we don't look at the space and the things around it. So, my focus now is to start paying more attention to space.

Bruno Bartel: Would you say that this almost obsession with fixed points is still tied to a Durkheimian reading of the division between the sacred and the profane?

Rodrigo Toniol: Absolutely. I think that's the point. We've cracked the code.

Bruno Bartel: It's interesting to see this in Talal Asad's work. When he constructs the notion of secularism, it's based on this discussion. The Catholic Church built its fixed points only to diffuse them later.

Rodrigo Toniol: Exactly.

Bruno Bartel: His very idea of religion speaks volumes about this, doesn't it? For Asad, the category of religion still has this basis [fixed spaces]. If Birgit reflects on Protestantism, Asad will reflect on the Christian [Catholic] world.

Rodrigo Toniol: Yes. I think we are in a privileged position to bring these things together. I really believe we have something to contribute based on the formation of our cities and the shaping of our public spaces through religious spaces.

Bruno Bartel: You reminded me of something from my Urban Geography classes. European cities had formation "x"; Arab cities had type "y"; ours would be...

Rodrigo Toniol: Exactly. We maintain a fixed view of these things. We don't see this circulation or these flows. I must admit, as I look at and conduct this research, from the perspective of how objects circulate, I feel very happy, but at the same time, also very frustrated for not having seen this earlier. Our sociological imagination is very fixed. The essence of this entire issue of materiality is also to think about the circulation of things. This is an advantage due to the sociological openness regarding our imagination of the social life of things. We see something circulating and becoming something else. It's an invitation to look at the flow and transformation. This would be a good starting point to stop fixing things.

Bruno Bartel: When you talk about flows, would you highlight a certain difference in this notion compared to a classic processual reading? If everything is a flow, don't we risk seeing it as something that extends to infinity? If not, when does it end? One of my major critiques of processual analysis comes from the idea that the process never ends. What would be the difference between flow and process?

Rodrigo Toniol: I'm glad you asked that. I think that problem exists. I also make that critique. I share that view with you. It's a good question: where should we stop with network analysis?

Bruno Bartel: We return to the old [Franz] Boas question. When does ethnographic research end? He moved from one group to another until...

Rodrigo Toniol: It's kind of paranoid, isn't it? Everything is connected...

Bruno Bartel: A typical obsession of Enlightenment thinking, right? A totality that needs to be analyzed...

Rodrigo Toniol: Yes, I had to deal with this issue in a very pragmatic way: where am I going to draw the line in my research? How am I going to propose this project? There are two things I would like to highlight. The first is that research has very clear phases. When observing the demolished churches, I see three distinct moments: a) the controversies surrounding the demolition of these sites; b) the processes that lead to the demolition work (many things can happen here, for example, when a group of workers refuses to destroy a church. The act of striking the altar with a hammer wouldn't be trivial, right?); and c) the afterlife, which involves the circulation of the objects (what happened to the objects up to that point?). Therefore, there's a very precise cutoff here. Moreover, this is a research project based on archival investigation. In this case, I am essentially examining documents. My research assistants and I are immersed in the National Library, exploring the newspaper archives and collections. Reading old newspapers is essential to building these controversies. In the case of some listed churches, the IPHAN [National Institute of Historic and Artistic Heritage] dossiers have been very helpful. We are reading letters. It's an archival anthropology based on documents. In this case, the research is strictly confined to this universe. So, there isn't much room to fall into the paranoia that everything is connected to everything else.

Bruno Bartel: You've made that clear in the title of your forthcoming publication [in the journal *Religião & Sociedade*].

Rodrigo Toniol: Exactly. My approach has been that of someone who observes and is interested in the field of materiality. Interestingly, I've directed my focus to the universe of the

Catholic Church, which is absolutely material and extensively studied but still very static. I want to examine these flows and transformations through materialities. Because, even when temples fall, the materialities remain. The field of religion has received more attention in recent years due to political issues involving religion. Everyone is watching this. There are various political issues today, from the Israel-Palestine conflict to our domestic policies. I think there's a risk of simply responding to these contingencies. There's a risk of neglecting daily reflections on the non-contingent or more structural aspects of religious anthropology and sociology of religion. There's a kind of siren call in wanting to respond to public demands of the moment, like during elections. All religion researchers are called upon again: should we take a stand or talk about the subject? I confess I get a bit concerned when I look at the working groups on religion. They have almost all become monolithic. That's why João Rickli and I are trying to revive a classic working group at ANPOCS [National Association of Graduate Studies and Research in Social Sciences] on religion and society. Themes that are more open: let's talk about religion. That way, everyone can contribute. The debate is about religion. It would be less segmented.

Bruno Bartel: When you emphasize controversies, I imagine not just the weight of the intentions behind these actions, but also the ambiguities, paradoxes, and contradictions of these situations. Paula Monteiro has developed this issue of religious controversies for the Brazilian case. In the Islamic world, there's the work of Samuli Schielke, who challenges the propositions of Saba Mahmood. The role of contradictions in the production of daily life seems fundamental here. He doesn't focus on the issue of objects, but rather on the construction of Muslims' ways of life. The idea of controversy would be very valuable in the case of objects, wouldn't it?

Rodrigo Toniol: I could say two things about that. The first would be to mention that I just published a text in a dossier of [the journal] *Sociologia & Antropologia* [from UFRJ] about [Michael] Taussig. We did a translation.

Bruno Bartel: A text titled “Defacement”⁶?

Rodrigo Toniol: Yes. The text was written by Emerson [Giumbelli] years ago.

Bruno Bartel: I saw some familiar names involved in the text, such as Christina Vital da Cunha and Edilson Pereira. They are people I’ve interacted with at academic events.

Rodrigo Toniol: Great. At the time, we did an interview with him [Taussig], and I wrote a text trying to systematize his thoughts on religion and magic. Returning to the topic of controversy and focusing on his work, the notion of transgression would be fundamental. A transgressive act involves an absolute activation of the sacred because, as you attack it, you activate what is most sacred about it. This is a very powerful image, especially when reading the materials I am analyzing in my research. In cases where there is an intent to destroy a church, what do you do with it? Sometimes, there might be an attempt at preservation, invoking the idea of sacrality in the face of the blows it begins to receive. However, there was controversy during the execution of this work. For example, the action of the worker hammering to demolish the church generates a series of chronicles. And there is another side to this public controversy. Take, for example, the demolition of the Church of *São Pedro dos Clérigos*. It was a fundamental church and one of the first listed by IPHAN [National Institute of Historic and Artistic Heritage]. The public controversy around this church did not revolve around its supposed sacred aspect but rather its artistic and historical value. That is interesting. We miss a lot if we only look at and try to understand controversies without considering religious objects. The case of this church was not just a matter of religious controversy. It happens on other terms. It is controversial in terms of the destruction of a national heritage site. Additionally, there were several attempts to preserve the church and the layout of the avenue [Presidente Vargas], which had to be straight.

Bruno Bartel: And the [Church of] Candelária positioned as if everything converges onto it, right?

Rodrigo Toniol: There was an issue with it because it would be facing backward [with respect to the avenue]. It's fascinating to read the letters about this because they try to find technical solutions. One suggestion was even to reposition the Candelária. Paula Montero and Carlos Procópio have just published a book called "*Arquiteturas Religiosas e a Construção da Esfera Pública*". It's fascinating to look at the construction process contained in the book while I'm examining a kind of reverse of that story, which is destruction. It would be the construction of the public sphere of religion through destruction rather than construction.

Bruno Bartel: Destruction as a project, right?

Rodrigo Toniol: Exactly.

Bruno Bartel: You're reminding me of another counterpoint in terms of the historiography of predominantly Muslim countries. In Saudi Arabia, for example, many saints' mausoleums [men endowed with miraculous abilities] were destroyed. Places like these, for example, have a significant presence, especially in North Africa, as in the case of Morocco, where I conducted ethnographic research. In Saudi Arabia, in the mid-19th century, these constructions were destroyed, as if the tombs of these saints had never existed there. The saints were literally erased from the city's urban plan to align with new political and religious visions. Today, there is also the issue of the sounds emitted by mosque minarets in Europe. There's a debate about whether the call to prayer through loudspeakers interferes with public space...

Rodrigo Toniol: It's a fascinating topic: processes of destruction and construction. In this case, I'm referring much more to destruction. These are critical events that open up space for imagination. That is very powerful. The cases of the minarets are significant. How they are built, destroyed, whether there will be sound or not...

Bruno Bartel: This issue of sound raises important questions. The problem isn't the minaret itself, but when it emits sounds.

Rodrigo Toniol: Yes. A solution has been to stop broadcasting the calls to prayer. But we can observe that, in some cases, a whole lighting system has been created for the minarets during prayer calls, which brings these questions back in a different way.

Bruno Bartel: And no one complains when the Eiffel Tower emits its lights at night like a giant twinkling beacon, right?

Rodrigo Toniol: Exactly. We have to look at the city, that is, we have to look at space. I have discovered some really interesting literature on this. There is a more familiar body of work, but there is also another one that we need to work with, understand, and develop. That is what we are trying to do a little in this dossier. There is an opportunity for dialogue with Geography and Urban Sociology. They expand on certain issues in a unique way. It's a debate about space, right? There's a contribution to be made. For example, drawing from [the work of] Lefebvre.

Bruno Bartel: I'm thinking of the Russian Orthodox churches that were altered during the Soviet period and have regained their centrality under the current Russian government.

Rodrigo Toniol: Yes, I find all of that fascinating. Conversions and refunctionalization of spaces. In Europe, this discussion often revolves around churches that stopped being places of worship and were turned into bars, for example. In Brazil, this issue seems somewhat reversed. Pentecostal churches began occupying spaces that weren't originally religious, like old cinemas. But here, there's a provocation to think about the functions of spaces and these new forms of circulation. The word of the day is circulation. This opens up avenues for reflection. I live in Tijuca, next to [the Church of] Our Lady of Lebanon. Just talking to people about the circulation of things that inhabit the Church could generate a lot of insight.

Bruno Bartel: They are connected, in some way, to the Middle East. The role of transnationalization in constructing local imaginaries is certainly a current topic, isn't it?

Rodrigo Toniol: Yes. Social sciences of religion in Brazil have always been fascinated by the importation of stones from Israel, for example, for the construction of the Temple of Solomon.

This happened because we never looked at the stones or other things that also circulate constantly.

Bruno Bartel: I've heard stories about the tombs of Moroccan Jews being transported to Israel after 1967. Even though the Moroccan Jewish community no longer has the same presence as it once did, it's significant to think of these creative examples, where even the dead are not abandoned.

Rodrigo Toniol: That's another topic with a lot of potential: looking at cemeteries and bodies. How do bodies circulate? This brings in materiality. Once we grasp the debate around materiality, we can find other productive insights in less obvious places. How should we think about bodies as materiality?

Bruno Bartel: One of the Sufi ritual centers I studied in Morocco was trying to revitalize its spaces alongside local municipal projects. One of the justifications was that these spaces housed the buried bodies of important city figures. There was an opportunity to frame this within the concept of heritage. Categories like culture, religion, and heritage were constantly at play.

Rodrigo Toniol: That triad [culture, religion, and heritage] is something I come across all the time. When we examine these objects, the notion of heritage in the debate becomes more and more central.

Maria Gleiciane: I was still thinking about the idea of permanence involving Catholic churches, for example. These fixed locations become heritage due to their relationship with the communities they gather. But what I want to emphasize is the relationships developed by Evangelical churches. They move around constantly. This is different from a Catholic church, which stays in the same place for years, and everything grows around it. Many cities were built around a Catholic church. However, Evangelical churches open and close their doors anywhere. Here, we have a reverse movement: it's not the city growing around the churches; it's the churches fixing themselves around the city. What would you say about that? In the case of Umbanda, the *Terreiros* can relocate as they

follow the paths of the priests and priestesses. How can we think about the materialities of these spaces?

Bruno Bartel: I'm not aware of an ethnography on the relocation processes [of *Terreiros*].

Rodrigo Toniol: I don't know of any, either. But I have a student who is interested in studying this. Regarding the previous topic, these circulations you mentioned have a presence in the city. They are producing the city and shaping its maps. The question that arises is: what kind of city is being created by these religious practices? I see two key issues. The first relates to the role of itinerant churches that bring this circulation into urban spaces, and how these churches are also shaping the city. The second concerns prayer houses that transform into churches, especially on Sundays. In the Evangelical context, at a certain point, the house becomes the sacred or church space. All of this highlights the flow and circulation, prompting us to view these temples and religious spaces from an anti-fixity perspective.

Bruno Bartel: Charismatic Christians' homes that turn their intimate spaces into places of worship on Sundays...

Maria Gleiciane: Catholic homes that organize novenas...

Rodrigo Toniol: Exactly. But this doesn't show up in academic works. The way we think about religion doesn't focus on this circulation or this kind of space occupation. Examples like these are perfect because they involve materiality, space, and circulation.

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