Spatial clustering and violent crime near places of worship in Recife, Brazil. Do moral communities have a spatial dimension?

Edivaldo Constantino das Neves Júnior ·
Breno Caldas de Araujo · **Tatiane
Almeida de Menezes** · **Antonio Paez** ·

Abstract Religious tenets of the type "thou shalt not kill" and their equivalents in many world religions have functioned as *de facto* social policy for determining appropriate and acceptable behavior over the centuries. With the advent of the scientific study of religion, there has been a growth of interest in the role of religions to operate as moral communities. Moral communities, a concept closely related to informal social control, are of interest in countries and regions where formal controls are weak and ineffective. The objective of this paper is to present a spatial analysis of Violent and Intentional Crime in the city of Recife in Brazil, with a focus on the possible interactions between criminal events and places of worship. Previous research into moral communities has advocated the need for analysis at different scales, and this analysis contributes to the literature by using micro-level data and appropriate spatial analytical tools for spatial point patterns. Analysis is conducted using three different types of places of worship (Catholic, Evangelical, and Spiritist) and

Edivaldo Constantino das Neves Júnior
University of Sao Paulo - Brazil
E-mail: `edivaldoconstantino@gmail.com`

Breno Caldas de Araujo
Federal University of Pernambuco - Brazil
E-mail: `brenocaldasdearaujo@gmail.com`

Tatiane Almeida de Menezes
Federal University of Pernambuco - Brazil
E-mail: `tatianedemenezes@gmail.com`

Antonio Paez
McMaster University - Canada
E-mail: `paezha@mcmaster.ca`

three types of business establishments as controls (ice cream shops, pharmacies, and supermarkets). The results suggest that Catholic places of worship do not project moral communities geographically more than, say, ice cream shops. The intensity of criminal events in the proximity of Evangelical places of worship, in contrast, is markedly higher at short distances than for any of our other referential events; however, at distances between 300 and 500 m the intensity is lower. Finally, the intensity of crime with respect to Spiritist churches, albeit lower at short distances, tends to be significantly higher at distances between 300 and 500 m.