A Map of Research on Spinoza in Brazilian Universities

Márcio A. Damin Custódio* & Francisco Ferraz**

Abstract
This paper presents a profile of the research on Spinoza’s philosophy in Brazil, providing information concerning the beginning of the academic work, its place of origin and influence, the leading training centers, and the aspects of Spinoza’s philosophy that are most studied. First, it presents a brief history of Spinoza’s presence in Brazil and the beginning of academic studies on the author. Next, data is shown on the current state of training of philosophy researchers on Spinoza in Brazil. The data was obtained from the CNPq Lattes Platform, which brings together information on all Brazilian researchers affiliated with universities and research institutes. Spinoza’s philosophy was absent from intellectual circles in Brazil during the colonial period and started to be mentioned in Brazil only in the nineteenth century. Only with the strengthening of universities in the twentieth century did Spinoza become the object of investigation by many researchers.

Keywords: Spinoza, philosophy in Brazil, research in Brazil, Brazilian universities, French influence, cosmopolitanism

1 Historical Background

Spinoza’s philosophy was ignored in Brazil in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹ Only in the nineteenth century did his name appear in literature and Colégio Pedro II’s textbooks, the most important high school in Rio de Janeiro.² Even then, his name mostly appears as an impious

---

² Canhada, author of a thesis published in 2017 on philosophy in Brazil during the nineteenth century, did not find any study on Spinoza during that period. We only emphasise that there are negative mentions of Spinoza in textbooks. See Júlio Miranda Canhada, Construções de um século: discursos filosóficos no Brasil oitocentista. (PhD Thesis, São Paulo, FFLCH, Universidade de São Paulo, 2017).

---

* University of Campinas: msdamin@unicamp.br; ORC-id: 0000-0002-9571-4801
** University of Campinas/Federal University of Amazonas: guerraferraz@gmail.com; ORC-id: 0009-0009-9099-8372

How to cite this article: Damin Custódio, M.A. & Ferraz, F., Journal of Spinoza Studies, 3, no. 1 (2024): 121–135, doi: https://doi.org/10.21827/jss.3.1.41853

© 2023 Márcio A. Damin Custódio & Francisco Ferraz CC BY-NC-ND 4.0
metaphysician or fatalistic atheist. In the same period, he is presented in manuals intended for students at the Rio de Janeiro Polytechnic School as a philosopher whose madness is geometrically ordered. In a letter addressed to Colégio Pedro II, Euclides da Cunha (1866-1909) states: “As for Spinoza, it surprises me that humanity for so long took seriously a type who finds a way to be crazy with rules and methods, putting his hallucinations in the form of syllogisms.” In January 1880, Machado de Assis (1839-1908), acclaimed as the most important author of Brazilian literature, published some poems in the prestigious Revista Brasileira, and among them was a sonnet entitled “Spinoza”. Machado had some of the philosopher’s works in his library, such as the TTP, PPC, and Ethics, and probably also had access to Spinoza’s thoughts through reading Schopenhauer.

Clarice Lispector (1920-1977) was the first influential writer to use Spinoza’s work in the first half of the 20th century. Although never mentioned by Lispector, several scholars point to Spinoza’s influence in her work. In addition to the biographical parallels, since Lispector was also Jewish, the studies refer to the rejection of orthodox religious beliefs by both, even though in their writings, elements refer to Jewish literary and exegetical traditions. Commentators generally point to some aspects that corroborate the influence without going into comparative exercises. Moreover, specific interpretations seek to show the presence of Spinoza’s philosophy in the construction of Lispector’s characters, as in the novel Near to the Wild Heart (1943), where Spinoza’s concepts relating to the types of knowledge could be found in the character’s worldview.

Later in the twentieth century, Spinoza attracted the attention of another poet, Murilo Mendes (1901-1975), a prominent figure in Brazilian literature. The last book that Murilo Mendes published, his Retratos-Relâmpago (1973), presents a brief chapter dedicated to Spinoza, followed by three quotations from Ethics. As noted by Fernando Oliveira, Murilo Mendes begins his text by saying Spinoza “escaped from being born in Portugal.” The use of the Portuguese verb escagar, to escape or to get away from a delicate situation, recalls the context of the persecution of Portuguese Jews in the sixteenth century.

---

3 Between 1860 and 1906, a group of Germanists at the Faculty of Law in Recife welcomed the German philosophy. Farias Brito interacts with the group, but his knowledge of Spinoza originates from the commentary and interpretation written by the French scholar Emile Saisset (1814-1863) and German scholar Kuno Fischer (1824-1907). See Marilena Chauí, “Farias Brito,” 2. Concerning the Germanists from Recife, see: Antônio Carlos Klein, “Farias Brito, uma vida extremamente rica,” in A finalidade do mundo, vol. 3 (Rio de Janeiro: Instituto Nacional do Livro, 1957), 40.

4 Reference and quotation are given by Cruz Costa on his history of ideas on Brazil. See João Cruz Costa, Contribuição à história das idéias no Brasil (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1967), 356.

5 Machado de Assis, A poesia completa de Machado de Assis (São Paulo: Nankin/Edusp, 2009), 242.


At the turn of the twentieth century, Spinoza appears prominently in the philosophical work of Raimundo de Farias Brito (1862-1917), a Brazilian intellectual from Ceará. Farias Brito reveals that he knew Spinoza through Émile Saisset (1814-1863) and Kuno Fischer (1824-1907). In one of his texts, he regrets that there are no studies on Spinoza in Brazil and Portugal and states that the philosopher “was already three centuries old” and had thought with “enough vitality to revolutionize the whole of Europe.” In his work, *A finalidade do mundo* (1894-1095), Farias Brito writes about Spinoza enthusiastically:

Of all known philosophical systems, the most complete, coherent, and precise is undoubtedly that of Spinoza. Nor have I found anywhere more eloquently and radically the positive confirmation of the truth that I maintained in the first part of this work: morality is the end of philosophy [...] It was in Spinoza that I found the most solid support, and if there is any philosophy to which my thoughts cling, it is precisely this one.

Despite the enthusiasm demonstrated by Farias Brito, the rigorous study of the history of philosophy only appeared in Brazil from the 1930s onwards. In 1934, the University of São Paulo received a French mission, that is, a commission of intellectuals with the task of establishing the guidelines for the first secular philosophy course. The mission produced a kind of transplantation of French

---

9 Farias Brito graduated in law in 1884 in the state of Pernambuco and read Spinoza for the first time in Recife, the city where, three hundred years earlier, one of Spinoza’s teachers, Isaac Aboab da Fonseca, became rabbi in the first Synagogue in the Americas during the Dutch presence in Northeastern Brazil. An enterprise in which the Sephardim of Amsterdam, driven by commercial interests and knowledge of the Portuguese language, actively participated. The entry “Isaac Aboab da Fonseca” is listed in Brasilhis Database, a repository of information about Brazil from 1580 to 1640, during the Hispanic monarchy. See José Manuel Santos Pérez, “Isaac Aboab da Fonseca,” in BRASILHIS Database: Personal Networks and Circulation in Brazil during the Hispanic Monarchy (1580-1640). Accessed December 12, 2023. URL: https://brasilhis.usal.es/en/personaje/isaac-aboab-da-fonseca. For the history of Isaac da Fonseca and the Jewish life in Dutch Colonial Brazil, see Moises Orfali, *Isaac Aboab Da Fonseca: Jewish Leadership in the New World* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2021).


11 The trilogy *A Finalidade do Mundo* was published between 1895 and 1905. The first part deals with Philosophy as a permanent activity of the human spirit. The second part deals with Modern Philosophy, and the third part deals with the theory of purpose or teleological conception of the world.


13 In 1932, the so-called constitutionalist revolution broke out in Brazil, intending to expand the power of the federated states and propose a new constitution. This attack, which opposed the state of São Paulo against the national government, was frustrating but resulted in the formulation of a new constitution two years later, in 1934. In this context, through decree no. 6,283 of January 25, 1934, the University of São Paulo (USP) was created to help the state to regain the political hegemony it had lost. Júlio de Mesquita Filho, wrote: “Overpowered by weapons, we knew perfectly well that only through science and perseverance would we once again exercise the hegemony that we had enjoyed for many decades within the Federation.” The USP incorporated existing institutions, such as the Faculty of Law, 1827, Polytechnic School, 1894, the College of Agriculture, 1899, and the Faculty of Medicine, 1912, in addition to other smaller colleges, and was the first Brazilian university to have in its conception a Faculty of Philosophy, Sciences and Letters (FFCL), which represented a significant change in the state’s academic education. International missions were sent to compose the FFCL staff, and governments of some European countries, such as France and Italy, encouraged their professors to accept invitations from the state of São Paulo. Thus, in 1934, French professors came to São Paulo to lecture in the humanities, Italians in the physical sciences and Germans in
philosophy directly from large schools and universities, such as the École Normale Supérieure, an operation carried out with a “complete package”, with books, professors, and even supervisors, a project compared to the evangelization mission of the Jesuits in the colonial times. According to the historian of Brazilian philosophy, Ivan Domingues:

While they [the Jesuits] took care to spread a single philosophy, the second scholastic, and with the help of a single pedagogy, the Ratio Studiorum, aiming to disseminate Christian philosophy and faith, the French Mission will spread a secular and plural philosophy.  

Several intellectuals arrived in Brazil, including Jean Maugüé (1935-1943), Claude Lévi-Strauss (1935-1938), Gilles-Gaston Granger (1947-1953), Martial Gueroult (1948-1950), Claude Lefort (1952-1953), Michel Debrun (1960-1965), and Francis Wolff (1980-1984). These professors formed the first generations of philosophers at the University of São Paulo and instituted a department that was later nicknamed, due to a comment by Michel Foucault during his visit to Brazil, “Département Français d’Outre-Mer.” Some professors stayed in Brazil for a few years, while others stayed for their entire lives. Martial Gueroult’s presence at the University of São Paulo deserves attention. Gueroult taught using the method of structural analysis from 1948 to 1950, a period in which he wrote his course on Leibniz, which was later published and which composed part of his famous Descartes selon l’ordre des raisons, published in France in 1953.

Lívio Teixeira (1902-1975), one of the first Spinozists at the University of São Paulo, probably had his first contact with Spinoza via Jean Maugüé. His research represents a milestone, constituting the first systematic study of Spinoza’s work in Brazil. The Doutrina dos modos de percepção e o conceito de abstração na filosofia de Espinosa was written as a thesis of Livre Docência at the University of São Paulo in 1953 and published as an internal bulletin in 1954. Lívio Teixeira’s work is essential not only for its inaugural character but, above all, for its content, as it presents an original interpretation of Spinoza’s theory of knowledge. He is interested in understanding the reasons that led Spinoza to offer three distinct expositions of his doctrine of knowledge in the TIE, the KV and the Ethics. At the same time, he discusses the place of “reason” in philosophy, showing how Spinoza’s theory of knowledge and metaphysics are connected.

He shows that Spinoza does not think of types of knowledge in terms of successive degrees but as independent and coexisting cognitive structures. Teixeira also develops a complex study of the biological sciences. For the creation of USP, see Júlio Mesquita Filho, Política e cultura (São Paulo: Martins Filho, 1969). Cf. Normas USP. Decreto no. 6.283 de 25 de janeiro de 1934. Accessed March 15, 2024. URL: http://www.leginf.usp.br/?historica=decreto-n-o-6-283-de-25-de-janeiro-de-1934.

15 Concerning the importance of the French mission in São Paulo, see: Paulo Eduardo Arantes, Um departamento francês de ultramar: estudos sobre a formação da cultura filosófica uspiana (Porto Alegre: Paz e Terra, 1994).
the theory of the common notions of reason, situating them between imagination and intellectual intuition, regarding them as a point of passage from one to the other. Furthermore, he explores the meaning of abstraction, etymologically understood as the separation between the part and the whole. This is crucial for abstraction to be understood as responsible for error and falsehood and foundational to the ethics of human servitude.\footnote{Lívio Teixeira, \textit{A doutrina dos modos de percepção e o conceito de abstração na filosofia de Espinosa} (São Paulo: Unesp, 2002).}

Marilena Chauí, the most prominent scholar in Spinoza’s philosophy in Brazil and author of \textit{A nervura do real: imanência e liberdade em Espinosa}, whose volume I appeared in 1999 and volume II in 2016, studied with Lívio Teixeira.\footnote{Marilena Chauí, \textit{A nervura do real: imanência e liberdade em Espinosa}, 2 vols (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1999-2016).} Chauí’s work intends to show that Spinoza carries out an unprecedented philosophical subversion. The philosopher was the author of a significant opposition to hegemonic Western thought involving Judeo-Christian theology and metaphysics as structured in modernity. Chauí’s work shows Spinoza’s conflict with the received philosophical tradition, and how the latter comes to be demolished step by step. Hence, Chauí builds up the idea of Spinoza’s philosophy as counter-discourse, a thesis whose first great formulation appears in \textit{Da realidade sem mistérios ao mistério do mundo} (1981).\footnote{Marilena Chauí, \textit{Da realidade sem mistério ao mistério do mundo, Espinosa, Voltaire, Merleau-Ponty} (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1981).}

The \textit{Nervura do real} consists of a monumental study of Spinoza’s philosophy and the early interpretations of Spinoza’s work, examining the reaction of his close correspondents as well as Leibniz, Henry More, and Malebranche. A great example of the impetus for research on Spinoza in Brazil by Chauí is the foundation of the \textit{Grupo de Estudos Espinosanos} (Spinoza Studies Group) at the University of São Paulo in January 1995. The \textit{Grupo de Estudos Espinosanos} was first formed by students who decided to continue reading Spinoza’s texts which had been the subject of a History of Modern Philosophy course delivered by Chaui. Shortly afterwards, Chauí herself became involved in the Group’s activities.

The result of the Group’s work was the collective translation of \textit{Ethics} into Portuguese, a work that began irregularly in the late 1990s and was interrupted several times.\footnote{Spinoza, \textit{Ética}. Marilena Chauí ed. and Grupo de Estudos Espinosanos trans. (São Paulo: Edusp, 2015).} During this long period, however, the translation was assisted by many researchers who visited the University of São Paulo to discuss the translation choices made by the Group. During this period, several members of the Group translated works such as the \textit{PPC}, the \textit{TIE} and the \textit{KV}.\footnote{Spinoza, \textit{Princípios da filosofia cartesiana e pensamentos metafísicos}, Homero Santiago and Luis César Oliva trans. (Belo Horizonte: Autêntica, 2015); Spinoza, \textit{Tratado da Emenda do Intelecto}, Cristiano Novaes de Rezende trans. (Campinas: Editora da Unicamp, 2015). Cf. the translation by Lívio Teixeira and edited by the Spinoza Studies Group: Spinoza, \textit{Tratado da reforma da inteligência}, Lívio Teixeira trans. (São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2004); Spinoza, \textit{Breve Tratado de Deus, do homem e de seu bem estar}, Emanuel Angelo da Rocha Fragoso and Luis Cesar Guimarães Oliva trans. (Belo Horizonte: Autêntica, 2012).} Likewise, parts of Spinoza’s \textit{Correspondence} were translated by specialists — of note were the exchanges with Henry Oldenburg, Georg Hermann Schuller, and Ehrenfried W. von Tschirnhaus, an author who has aroused great...
interest among Brazilian specialists and whose work *Medicina Mentis* received in 2023 a partial translation into Portuguese.\(^\text{22}\) The collective translation of the *Ethics* was only published in 2015.

It is also worth highlighting the publication by Tomaz Tadeu da Silva in 2007 of a complete translation of the *Ethics* and between 2014 and 2019 the complete translation of Spinoza’s work by J. Ginsburg and Newton Cunha, demonstrating how Spinozist studies have flourished in Brazil in recent decades.\(^\text{23}\)

Along with the foundation of the Spinoza Studies Group, the journal *Cadernos Espinosanos* appeared in 1996. The publication began with a three-folded first volume entirely focused on analyzing the affective life from Spinoza’s perspective.\(^\text{24}\) Also, during this period, the University of São Paulo held the First Meeting of Studies in the Seventeenth Century, which began a series of colloquiums organized by the Group.

Crucial contact was established between Spinozists in Brazil and Argentina, specifically with the Group from the National University of Córdoba, coordinated by Diego Tatián. Brazilians and Argentines have held the Spinoza International Colloquium annually since 2002, with the regular presence of Latin Americans (from Uruguay, Chile, Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela and Costa Rica) and Europeans (from France, Italy, Portugal, United Kingdom, and the Netherlands). The presence of researchers from North America is irregular. There is also the international Colloquium held in 2023 at the Florestan Fernandes National School of the Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST). The event was organized by several groups, such as the Spinoza Studies Group of the University of São Paulo, the Spinoza Reading and Philosophy Circle (Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro), the Spinoza Studies Group of the National University of Brasília, the Centre for Seventeenth-Century Cerrado Studies (which involves the Universities of Goiás, Brasília and Tocantins). The Colloquium was held over a week, with 80 researchers from abroad and all parts of Brazil.

Spinoza also had another critical academic reception in Brazil, no less important than the one at the University of São Paulo. In the 1980s, at the University of Rio de Janeiro, Raul Landim Filho, a professor graduated in logic at Louvain, approached Spinoza’s philosophy from a different angle and became responsible for developing a research group that gave rise to some of the most respectable researchers on Spinoza’s philosophy, such as Marcos Gleizer, a professor at the State University of Rio de Janeiro, author of *Verdade e Certeza em Espinosa* (1999) and several articles on Spinoza.\(^\text{25}\)

---


\(^\text{24}\) See URL: https://www.revistas.usp.br/espinosanos/index. There is another journal dedicated to Spinoza in Brazil, the *Revista Conatus – Filosofia de Espinosa*, edited by Emanuel Angelo da Rocha Fragoso from the State University of Ceará, see URL: https://revistas.uece.br/index.php/conatus/index.

\(^\text{25}\) Raul Landim is not a Spinozist, and his interest in Spinoza arises from the issues he addresses in his texts. For example, in the article *Can the cogito be called into question?* Landim investigates whether the cogito can be considered the first principle of philosophy that provides true knowledge. He answers affirmatively using Spinoza’s interpretation of Descartes’ *Principles of Philosophy*. See Raul Landim Filho, “Pode o cogito ser posto em questão?” *Discurso* 24, (1994); Marcos André Gleizer, *Verdade e certeza em Espinosa* (Porto Alegre: L&PM, 1999). Also published in French: Marcos André Gleizer, *Vérité et Certitude chez Spinoza* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2017). In addition, see Marcos André Gleizer, “Spinoza on Metaphysical Doubt and the Cartesian Circle,” *Phenomenology and Mind* 15, (2019). DOI: https://doi.org/10.13128/Phe_Mi-24980.
Also, Lia Levy, based at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, created a center for Spinoza’s studies near the south border with Argentina. She is the author of *L’automate Spirituel. La naissance de la subjectivité moderne d’après l’Éthique de Spinoza* (1998). According to Lia Levy, the theory of knowledge outlined in the *Ethics* implies a notion of self-awareness and, therefore, depends on a theory of subjectivity. Although Spinoza himself did not state this explicitly, Levy reconstructs this theory on his behalf. In so doing, she reveals that *Ethics* makes it possible to think about subjectivity in a very original way. Another member from Landin’s circle who deserves attention is Ulysses Pinheiro, a Federal University of Rio de Janeiro professor who defended a thesis on the third kind of knowledge in the *Ethics* and the notions of knowledge and freedom.

Importantly, there is research linked to the Law Department at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC Rio), including Francisco de Guimarãens and the coordinator of the Spinoza and Philosophy Reading Circle, Maurício Rocha. Among the Spinozists at PUC Rio, post-Marxist influences dominate, such as those of Antonio Negri and Gilles Deleuze.

2 \hspace{1cm} \textbf{The Present State of Research}

To estimate the size and thematic scope of Spinoza research in Brazil, we used the Lattes curriculum base maintained by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq). We built our dataset by considering all the doctoral theses defended in postgraduate programs in philosophy in Brazil, plus theses on Spinoza defended by professors who work in philosophy programs in Brazil. We accessed only updated curricula in the last forty-eight months. We included theses on Spinoza’s philosophy defended in graduate programs other than philosophy, such as linguistics and education. In this regard, we made a subjective assessment to exclude theses that dealt with Spinoza.
only secondarily, i.e., those whose investigation focused on other thinkers. We found seventy-one theses defended in the Lattes database out of thirty-four doctoral programs in philosophy in Brazil.³⁰

We identified seventy-one doctoral theses, and from them, we collected the author’s name, title, year and place of defence. From this dataset, we then separated thirty-eight theses for sampling, in which we gathered the year in which the author graduated, supervisor, and place of professional activity of the author, as well as information about the subject of the thesis. For this last category, we consulted the abstracts, keywords and the main texts to understand in which area of philosophy the thesis fits.

The subject falls under one of these eight categories: Politics, Metaphysics, Theory of Knowledge, Physics, Ethics, Religion, Aesthetics and History of Modern Philosophy. Finally, we worked with the bibliography of the thirty-eight theses to identify influences on the training of Spinoza’s researchers. For this, we considered the original language in which each bibliographic reference was produced — Portuguese, French, English, Italian, Spanish and others. This information, combined with where the researcher studied and work, helps us to understand Spinoza’s reception in Brazil from the 1990s onwards. The theses collected for the survey were primarily defended in the twenty-first century, and only five theses were defended in the twentieth century between 1992 and 1998. In the twenty-first century, the theses were defended between 2001 and 2023.

We excluded from the sample Marilena Chauí’s thesis, the first on Spinoza in Brazil, defended at the University of São Paulo in 1971. This thesis was an exception given how much earlier it was defended than the rest. Among the theses considered in our survey, five were defended during the 1990s, of which Jean-Marie Beyssade supervised two in Paris IV and a third by Clément Rosset in Nice. Raul Landim Filho supervised the other theses at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. The authors of these five theses studied philosophy at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, and after their doctorate, three were hired by the Federal University, one by the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, and a researcher was employed in the country’s extreme south at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul.

Although small, the sample portrays Rio de Janeiro as the centre of origin for training and research in Spinoza in Brazil. Of the total number of theses in the sample, that is, including the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, ten were defended in Rio, eight at Federal University, one at Catholic University and one at the State University. The sample gives us two relevant elements: nine of the ten authors of the theses came from undergraduates in Rio, and after graduation, five were hired to work in Rio, one in Ceará and one in Bahia. Both states are in the northeast of the country.

The largest training centre is São Paulo, with twenty-one theses defended (see Figure 1). Of these twenty-one researchers, twelve did their undergraduate studies in São Paulo, and only four continued to work in São Paulo. The university that trained the most researchers in Spinoza is the University of São Paulo (seventeen theses), and the other theses were defended at the University of Campinas (four theses). Marilena Chauí supervised eleven theses and five professors supervised the rest.

Finally, only five theses in the sample were defended outside Brazil, four in France and one in the United States. Rio Grande do Sul and Bahia are other Brazilian states that trained researchers
with one thesis each, implying that 54% of theses from the sample were defended in São Paulo and 26% in Rio de Janeiro, followed by 13% abroad.

Figure 1. Percentage of PhD theses on Spinoza defended in each states of Federation

Research on Spinoza in Brazil maintains a strong relationship with research in France, not only because four theses in the sample were defended in France but also because the primary contacts maintained by researchers after their doctorates favour France, especially Paris I, IV and VIII (see Figure 2). This cultural bond with France was established during the 1950s and 1960s when public universities expanded in Brasil and undergraduate courses in philosophy were implemented. The bond remained until the beginning of the twenty-first century.

We did not find any significant difference between Rio and São Paulo regarding the dominance of France in international relations. There is, however, something peculiar about São Paulo — both the University of São Paulo and the University of Campinas. Researchers and professors from São Paulo maintained close contact with the Università degli Studi di Milano-Bicocca, specifically with Professor Vittorio Morfino. If we consider visits frequently made by Brazilians, the number of international institutions related to Brazil concerning research on Spinoza is ample.31

31 Victor Goldschmidt is commonly presented in Brazil as the one responsible for a way of doing philosophy that still influences universities in São Paulo. Goldschmidt would have been the one who best worked under Émile Bréhier’s precept, according to which “what is essential in a thought is a certain structure.” See Émile Bréhier, La philosophie et son passé (Paris: PUF, 1949), 41. Also see Paulo Eduardo Arantes, Departamento francês, 111–112. Goldschmidt’s paper on structuralism was published in Brazil in 1982: Victor Goldschmidt, “Remarques sur la Méthode Structurale en histoire de la Philosophie,” Manuscrito 5, no. 2 (1982).
The sample shows that contact with research abroad takes place primarily in Europe, not so much for the doctorate but mainly for post-doctoral research or visits. The sample also shows that there is only one international professor (French) working in Spinoza in Brazil (Rio de Janeiro) and two international students (Argentinians) trained in Brazil (São Paulo).

Besides the interaction with South America captured in the sample, it is worth noting the association between the Brazilian members of the Spinoza Studies Group (but also from groups present in the states of Ceará and Rio de Janeiro) with the researchers from Argentina, specifically with the group from the National University of Córdoba, as mentioned before. The University of São Paulo is the dominant force in international relations in research on Spinoza because of its ties with Paris I and IV, Milano-Bicocca and because it is the leading Brazilian participant in the Córdoba Group.

Contact with international universities seems to determine the literature researched in these doctoral theses, since it is also mostly of French origin, with no differentiation based on the place of training, whether in São Paulo or Rio de Janeiro (see Figure 3). The French language is responsible for 37% of the doctoral thesis literature, followed by Portuguese (19%) and English (19%).

Figure 3 shows that languages other than French, Portuguese and English have minimal participation in the bibliography of Brazilian theses. For instance, 9% of texts are in Italian and 8% in German.
Seven of the thirty-eight theses in the sample have more than 50% of the literature in French. In contrast, there are also some theses with 25% or less of references in French — these are theses defended in the United States (one), in Bahia (one), and in São Paulo (two), one at the University of Campinas and another at the Institute of Language Studies. Only two theses have more than 50% of the literature in English. One such thesis was defended at the Federal University of Bahia, and the other was defended at the University of Georgia (USA).

If the training of new researchers is concentrated in Rio and São Paulo, the picture changes a lot when one verifies the place wherein the researchers work professionally. They are spread across ten states, including Amazonas, Bahia, Ceará, Goiás, Minas Gerais, Paraíba, Paraná, São Paulo, Rio Grande do Sul, Rio de Janeiro, in addition to the Federal District and abroad (see Figure 4). Furthermore, Rio de Janeiro is the state with the highest number of professors researching Spinoza (33%), followed by São Paulo (15%), Paraná (11%) and Bahia (11%). Only one researcher in the sample, trained in Brazil (in São Paulo), works abroad, in Buenos Aires.

Figure 4. Geographical distribution of academic position

Academic work on Spinoza in Brazil, according to the sample, deals mainly with metaphysics, representing 32% of the literature, and politics with 29%. Studies on metaphysics is spread across Brazil, taking place in Bahia, Paraná, Goiás, and the Federal District, in addition to Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Studies on politics is concentrated in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Paraná. The subjects of the studies on metaphysics vary enormously — these include God, substance, time, infinity, immanence, and causality, among others.
The studies on politics focus more on the imagination, democracy and religion. Worthy of mention are studies on the theory of knowledge (15%) that deals with the senses and sensations, certainty, and the imagination, and studies that are eminently historical or that are better classified as Early Modern Philosophy (9%), dealing with the Spanish Baroque, the Renaissance and the reception of Lucretius. Few researchers who do not work in philosophy departments have written on very different topics. For instance, there is research on the presence of Spinoza in Goethe, research developed on Germanic literature, and studies that appropriate the notion of autonomy to deal with public health.

3 Final Considerations

We employed data on the doctorate theses to outline a map of Spinoza’s research in Brazilian universities, using the Lattes curriculum base maintained by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq). We randomly separated a sample of thirty-eight doctoral theses to understand the subjects addressed and the influences on the training of the researchers. We found that most of the training and research on Spinoza in Brazil took place from the 1990s onwards. Isolated cases of previous research were not mentioned, except for Lívio Teixeira and Marilena Chauí, given the importance that both have in consolidating the University of São Paulo as the most prolific centre in Spinoza’s studies in the country. We also provide historical background on the presence of Spinoza before the research became more academic.

32 A future paper could investigate how much Spinoza is a philosopher present in the Brazilian public debate evoked by actors on the left as a response to the current theologisation of politics. See, for instance, Marcos Gleizer’s presentation at the 73th Meeting of the Brazilian Society for the Progress of Science, 18 to 24 July 2021, URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OaxKuQyNT4M.

33 There is a profusion of works from other areas of knowledge that mention Spinoza or have him as an object of study, often relating him to other authors. For example, Juliana Merçon, PhD in Pedagogy from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and professor at Universidade Veracruzana (Xalapa, México), makes similarities between the treatments given by Espinosa and Gilberto Freire on the notion of freedom. See Juliana Merçon, “History and freedom: the hope of Freire and Spinoza,” Educação e Filosofia 26, no. 52 (2012).
Training is concentrated in São Paulo, but the researcher’s professional activities are spread across nine of the twenty-seven Brazilian states. We also found that the researchers’ international network remains very connected to France (Paris) and, in the case of São Paulo, to Italy (Milan). Within the scope of university education, there is some relationship with the neighbouring countries of South America, and in particular a strong one with Argentina and the Córdoba Group. Finally, the sample revealed that most of the research carried out in Brazil deals with metaphysics and politics. We found no relevant differences between the places of education and work regarding French influence and thematic preferences. With seventy-one trained researchers, the literature on Spinoza is at its peak. However, the future trajectory seems to depend on the generation that was formed by the first professors in the second decade of the twenty-first century. The complete translation of Spinoza’s works into Portuguese and the publications on Spinoza has helped to increase accessibility beyond the domain of specialists. This allows for the incorporation of Spinoza’s thought into undergraduate studies and other fields besides philosophy, not to mention the public sphere. We did not carry out an analysis of Spinoza in undergraduate and master’s-level research, but it suffices to say that the number of masters in Spinoza studies is significant and deserves a future survey.

References


Gleizer, Marcos André. Presentation at the 73th Meeting of the Brasilian Society for the Progress of Science, 18 to 24 July 2021, URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OaxKuQyNT4M


