

THESES AND DISSERTATIONS COMPLETED  
AT THE CENTER FOR RELIGION STUDIES FROM UFRGS:  
CURRENT SITUATION AND PRELIMINARY  
QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the setting up of the Center for Religion Studies (NER) at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), in Brazil. NER is a research group composed by scholars and students of religion sociology and anthropology. It is part of a wider historical context in which religion is viewed as a social fact to be studied *in loco* and mostly analyzed from the perspective of social anthropology. The establishment and consolidation of NER has enabled its associate researchers to supervise a number of theses and dissertations and hence contributed to a recent increase in the number of studies on religion.

**Keywords:** research groups, religion, Center for Religion Studies (NER/UFRGS), academic work.

In Brazil, scientific research is currently financed by a three-pillar model which serves as the basis for government policies on science and technology. The first pillar is *Curriculum Lattes*,<sup>2</sup> an open database of curricula vitae of researchers, scholars and students. Secondly, there is the *Directory of Brazilian Research Groups* which gathers information on academic production, research lines and associate researchers. The third pillar is an assessment system coordinated by the Brazilian Commission for Improving the Qualifications of Academic Staff (CAPES)<sup>3</sup>, which evaluates the quality of all Brazilian postgraduation courses. This system assigns a score between zero and seven

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<sup>2</sup> In honor of César Lattes, a Brazilian physicist.

<sup>3</sup> All acronyms included in this paper are abbreviations of their respective Portuguese names.

to all courses certified by the Ministry of Science and Technology and is used as a guideline for establishing government policies on education and for allocating federal resources.

This structure for evaluating Brazilian researchers is part of a more general institutionalization process which shifted charismatic personalities and scholars from the center of the scientific scenario and replaced them by research groups. This model which sees research groups and their academic production as protagonists of scientific progress was implemented in Brazil only recently. This was only possible due to the advent of internet and the compilation of shared electronic databases via computer networks.<sup>4</sup>

This essay focuses on a research group based in Rio Grande do Sul, the southernmost state of Brazil, far away from Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo where scientific production is most intense (these two states are also the main economic poles in Brazil). Rio Grande do Sul is bordered by Uruguay to the South and by Argentina to the West. The Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) is based in Porto Alegre, the capital of the state.

Here, our object of study is the Center for Religion Studies (NER), a research center hosted by the Institute of Philosophy and Humanities (IFCH) at UFRGS. It is also one of the centers that takes part in the university's Post-Graduation Program in Social Anthropology (PPGAS). Our goal is to offer a brief description of the context in which this research group was set up and its course of development. We also aim to examine some peculiarities of its scientific production. The discussion is restricted to the peak moment of the local expression of academic production, that is to say, the completion of PhD theses and master dissertations.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The data from *Curriculum Lattes* and from the *Directory of Research Groups* are interconnected and available at the website of the *Brazilian Commission for Research and Development* (CNPq), <<http://www.cnpq.br>>. The scores assigned to post-graduation courses can be accessed at CAPES website (<<http://www.capes.br>>).

<sup>5</sup> Here, it is important to draw attention to the differences between titles across countries. According to Campello: "In Brazil, the term *dissertation* is used to refer to a Master's degree

I have been part of this history since 1997, when I joined the center as a volunteer research assistant for Dr. Carlos Alberto Steil. At that time, he was the coordinator of a research project on peregrinations and religious tourism in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. This was the first project I took part and since then I have had a close relation with the social space created by room 215 in the 43311 building. This is where I worked for four years assisting my supervisor and other members of NER in their activities and where I discuss my work. This essay is therefore far more than an academic paper. It is the result of a researcher's biographic work, an expression exercise, data analysis and affective memory. In my opinion, it may also serve as the first retrospect on the history of the group within eleven years of its foundation.

#### PRELIMINARY FINDINGS ABOUT OUR UNIVERSITY CONTEXT

The Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul was initially composed of different education institutions. The first was the School of Pharmacology and Chemistry, which was established in 1895. The School of Engineering was founded in 1900 and has since remained in the same building in the city center. According to Pesavento, most members of the School of Engineering were former members of the Military School of Porto Alegre. They were influenced by positivist ideas and defended the "rationalization of the industry in the state of Rio Grande do Sul".

The influence of this positivist philosophy, which was inspired by Comte and made public by various other authors, became the ideological foundation of a political party in Rio Grande do Sul. Early last century, the Rio-Grandense Republican Party (PRR) was composed by a well-educated young generation from urban areas who had been influenced by the defenders of the "religion

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in different countries. In Great Britain, *thesis* is usually employed to describe the entire genre, irrespective of the academic degree it refers to while, in the United States and Continental Europe, *dissertation* is the term more widely used".

of mankind". Borges de Medeiros and its successor Júlio de Castilhos were two important leaders of PRR. They dominated the political scene of Rio Grande do Sul for approximately 40 years, running a kind of "overt despotism" which has left profound marks at both political-ideological and educational levels.

Going back a little in time, it should be mentioned that the Catholic Church was separated from the National State short before the "castilhism" period and after 1889, when Brazil was proclaimed a republic. This later event was also influenced by the progressive ideology of positivism. The fact that Catholicism ceased to be the official religion in Brazil resulted in at least two long-term consequences. One consequence was the centralization of the roman pope power over Brazilian bishops and priests. Before the republic, they were paid as Royal civil servants to run civil registries. The other consequence was an increase in the number of missionary/Christian churches in Brazil, classic Pentecostalism in particular (Methodists, Baptists, Adventists, Mormons, etc.)

In Rio Grande do Sul, political and intellectual elites used to discuss their proposals to the State in terms of progressive and industrial policies. They established a kind of "laical tradition" which had an impact on the way schools were run. The young generation was introduced to positivist precepts and the conflict between faith and reason (which prevailed in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Europe) was urged upon the minds of this emerging *intelligentzia*. Human evolution relied on reasoning whereas political debate was related to state interventions in order to ensure industrial development and juridical organization. Religion was viewed either as less evolved than scientific reasoning or as an area that one should not intervene.

The establishment of UFRGS has gone through successive phases throughout time. It was initially run by the city council and later transferred to the State of Rio Grande do Sul. In 1950, it became a federal university and, as a result, there was an increase in the number of academic positions and in resources for research. The Faculty of Philosophy also became a federal school during the 50's. It was founded in 1940, having as a model the Federal Faculty of Philosophy, which had been established in Rio de Janeiro in 1939.

The Faculty of Philosophy from Rio Grande do Sul played an important role during the period of resistance to the Brazilian military regime (1964-1984). Two major changes took place during that period. It first became the Institute of Philosophy and Humanities (IFCH) due to a university reform carried out in late 60's. In 1977, it was transferred to a remote area of the city, the "valley campus", where it has been based since.<sup>6</sup>

During the 70's, social science scholars from UFRGS were very much influenced by Marxism, following the general tendency of social sciences in Brazil at the time. Given that Marxism viewed religion as some form of alienation, religion would again (like in Positivism) be put in a position of disadvantage as an object of study. Given that there was a gap between religion and intellectual reflection, the only alternative was to establish a study group of "religion" as "another" object of study, that is, as social anthropology. The idea was to place emphasis on the analysis of either contemporary temporal dimension or short-term history. In the context of religion studies, whenever emphasis lays on medium and long-term temporal analyses, by studying documents, religion is seen as a historical object of study. This is our conclusion after examining a number of PhD theses and Master dissertations carried out in the Post-Graduation courses offered by IFCH, as we shall see later.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF PPGAS/UFRGS

The Postgraduation Program in Social Anthropology of UFRGS started in 1974 as a specialization course. In 1979, a Master's degree in Social Anthropology was launched as part of the Postgraduation Program in Sociology and Political Science, in the period Kuhn Jr. names *associate masters' degrees*. This refers to the period when the three areas that made up the

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<sup>6</sup> The psychology course was initially part of IFCH, even though it was based close to the medical campus, nearer the city center. In 1992, it became the Institute of Psychology, with an independent administration. Thus, taking into consideration the present layout of UFRGS, psychology is closer to medical sciences than to humanities.

under-graduation social science course came together in order to satisfy some conditions established by CAPES.<sup>7</sup> All lines of research in anthropology which were developed within this joint program (PPGACPS – Postgraduation Program in Anthropology, Political Science and Sociology) were related to the research projects run by Dr. Pedro Ignácio Schmitz, Dr. Sérgio Alves Teixeira and Dr. Ruben Oliven. In December 1985, due to an internal crisis caused by the possibility of merging the three disciplines into one single Postgraduation course in Social Sciences, three independent programs were launched, separated in terms of both administration and scientific research.

The PPGAS/UFRGS program has developed considerably over the years. At present, it hosts six research centers.<sup>8</sup> All members of the academic staff hold a PhD degree (many of them with post-doctoral research or doctoral degree carried out abroad). All six centers have outstanding academic production within the Brazilian context, which is confirmed by the vast number of papers published in national and international journals. The PPGAS journal – *Horizontes Antropológicos* – has become a reference source within the field of anthropology in Brazil. It has released various thematic issues and received contributions from several well known researchers. The progress made by the PPGAS program from the 80s up to date, endorsed by the IFCH, has achieved 6.0 score in the evaluation carried out by CAPES in 2005 (the highest score is 7.0).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Kuhn Jr. points out that, for CAPES, the main constraints was related to the limited number of researchers with masters' and doctoral degrees.

<sup>8</sup> PPGAS/UFRGS Research Centers: NIT (Center for the study of traditional and indigenous societies), NUPACS (Center for the Study of Body and Health Anthropology), NUPECS (Center for Contemporary Society Studies), NAVISUAL (Center of Visual Anthropology), NACI (Center for Citizenship Studies) and NER (Center for Religion Studies).

<sup>9</sup> We again resort to Campello in order to describe some criteria used in CAPES evaluation: "the impact of this course activities on society, the qualifications and academic production of the academic staff as well as its recognition by the international community and the number of theses and dissertations produced. The higher the score the greater the chances of the course obtaining financial resources from the government to promote post-graduation activities".

## THE INITIAL PERIOD: FROM 1984 TO 2000

NER was established in 1996, within eleven years of the creation of the Postgraduation Program in Social Anthropology. There had been no explicit project to set up a religion center before its actual creation. Dr. Ari Oro had previously conducted a research project about religious messianic belief in an indigenous tribe from the Amazon – Tükuna. During the 80's and early 90's, Dr. Ari Oro became famous for supervising a number of studies on ethnical minorities. However, his publications and supervisions of studies on Afro-Brazilian religions date back to late 80's. For Dr. Ari Oro, one fact that certainly contributed to a higher specialization of NER research projects was the admission by the PPGAS of a Uruguayan researcher, Dr. Oscar Agüero (who has already passed away). Dr. Agüero worked together with Dr. Oro in the supervision of several projects on indigenous tribes. His admission enabled the latter to devote more of his time to study Afro-Brazilian religions and pursue issues raised by the disciplines he studied during his PhD degree in France.<sup>10</sup>

The idea of creating a center for religion studies was probably consolidated when Dr. Carlos Alberto Steil joined the PPGAS/UFRGS. Dr. Steil had completed his doctoral research at the National Museum (in Rio de Janeiro), under the supervision of the anthropologist Dr. Otávio Guilherme Velho. The newcomer favored the idea of establishing a research center which would follow the same approach adopted by the Institute of Religion Studies (ISER), in Rio de Janeiro. Dr. Steil was a member of the ISER from 1985 to 1995.

Dr. Bernardo Lewgoy, a member of the Anthropology Department since 1993, was a PhD student in anthropology at USP (University of São Paulo) when he approached NER. Once NER had officially been set up, Lewgoy accepted Dr. Steil's invitation to join the group and soon after took part in the VI Colloquium in Porto Alegre. At that time, Lewgoy was writing up his doctoral thesis on spiritualism and erudite culture in São Paulo and hence he could not dedicate himself fully to NER before 1999.

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<sup>10</sup> See Reyes Herrera, 2004, p. 124.

The Colloquiums on Religious Alternatives in Mercosul held in Porto Alegre in 1996 were a key moment for the initial consolidation of the center. These Colloquiums were launched in Argentina in 1991 in order to bring together Latin-American researchers (Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil and Chile) and promote round-tables and thematic workshops. The Association of Religion Social Scientists of Mercosul (ACSRM) was created in 1994. However, it was only made official in Porto Alegre in 1996 and Dr. Ari Oro was made its president. In addition to the official foundation of NER, the event also consolidated the role of the center as a platform to promote communication among researchers from Spanish-speaking countries and other parts of Brazil. It is also worth pointing out that the interaction between NER and other Mercosul countries was reinforced when NER accepted students from Uruguay, Argentina and Chile.

In 1996, the year when the center was founded, its organizing committee, together with Dr. Ari Oro's supervisees and other students who were interested in studying religion took on the responsibility to organize a major event – the VI Colloquium on Religious Alternatives in Latin America, whose main theme was “Globalization and Religion”. Those who worked for NER at that time recall this event as the first instance in which all members came together to achieve a common goal. All round-tables were later compiled in a book, organized and edited by Dr. Steil and Dr. Oro, under the title *Globalization and Religion*. This book has become a reference book in the field.

In the 1997 Colloquiums held in Buenos Aires, Dr. Oro and Dr. Steil launched the first edition of the journal *Debates do NER*. This edition included a paper by Oro in which commentators discussed the overt conflict between Neopentecostal and Afro-Brazilian religions. The event made the center's academic production public within the main centers of academic production in Brazil (Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo) and abroad. As a result, NER became a research center of excellence and the publication, which was initially occasional due to lack of regular funding, started to come out regularly.

In 1998, PRONEX (Centers of Excellence Program), a program run by CNPq (Brazilian Commission for Research and Development), approved a project entitled *Religious Movements in Contemporary World*. According to, the following centers of excellence participated in the initial phase of the



project: *The new religious movements* (National Museum/UFRJ), *Anthropology of Religion* (Institute of Philosophy and Social Sciences/UFRJ), *Religion in urban areas* (University of the State of Rio de Janeiro), the *Center for Anthropology of Religions* (Federal University of Santa Catarina) and the *Center for Religion Studies* (UFRGS). The project is still running today and brings together scholars and researchers from well-reputed institutions in Brazil. It organizes discussion forums among its members and finances research projects, publications and conference presentations.

A year later, NER started to interact with other Brazilian research centers in order to conduct surveys about religion. In 1999, we were part of a quantitative database for an international survey of over 3,600 questionnaires – the “International Study on Esotericism and Religion among Students”, coordinated by Professor Franz Höllinger (Institut für Soziologie Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz). In Brazil, it was coordinated by Dr. Deis Siqueira (UnB – University of Brasilia).<sup>11</sup> Soon after, NER was given the opportunity to organize a survey within the Brazilian context. The study examined religion among university students and the data was collected by six research centers.<sup>12</sup>

The events mentioned above show that NER’s activities go beyond the academic scope of UFRGS. They reflect the initial phase of the center’s academic production, from 1996 to 1999, when its identity was defined through the relationship between NER and various researchers who studied religion in Brazil and in Mercosul. The number of theses and dissertations produced during this initial phase reflects the focus of the center at the time. No significant increase in the number of studies was seen until the year 2000, when the first dissertations and the first theses whose objects of study were religions and/or religiosity were completed by NER students.

The various research lines currently conducted by NER associate members which are directly related to the theme of “religion” are listed in the chart below. It also includes papers, chapters of books, reviews, technical reports and coordination of several events. All books and journals edited by NER associate members have played a central role in the setting up of the center

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<sup>11</sup> See Siqueira *et al.* (2002) for a discussion on the results of this survey.

<sup>12</sup> The papers resulting from this joint effort can be found in *Debates do NER*, issue no. 2.

since they compiled research material from several Brazilian universities and hence related the center's production to a common effort to promote reasoning and scientific research.

Chart 1 – NER research members and books/journals published/edited by NER

Researcher	Research Line	Books/Journals
Ari Pedro Oro	Religion, politics and society.	Debates do NER 6: Religion and Politics: 2004 Elections in Porto Alegre ; Globalization and Religion .
	Afro-Brazilian religions.	As religiões afro-brasileiras do Rio Grande do Sul (Oro, 1994), Horizontes antropológicos 3: Religiões Afro-Brasileiras (1995).
	Transnacionalização religiosa no Mercosul.	Axé Mercosul: As religiões afro-brasileiras nos países do Prata (Oro, 1999).
	Neopentecostal Religions.	Pentecostal Progress and Catholic Reaction ; Debates do NER 1: Holly War (1997); Universal Church of the Kingdom of God: The new conquerors of faith ; Debates do NER 7. Exorcism in the Universal Church: Anthropology and discourse analysis .
Carlos Alberto Steil	Religious Peregrination and Tourism.	The highlands of pilgrimage . Horizontes Antropológicos 20: Anthropology and Tourism (Steil, 2003).
	Religious Movements in the Contemporary World.,	HA Religion ; Debates do NER 5: Catholicism ; Debates do NER 2: Religion and politics among Social Sciences students .
	Marian Apparitions and Charismatic Renovation in contemporary society.	Virgin Mary among living creatures: Theoretical reflection and ethnographies about Marian apparitions in Brazil
Bernardo Lewgoy	Sacred and writing: Religion, Reading and Erudite Culture in Contemporary Brazil.	Horizontes Antropológicos 22: Written Culture and Reading Practices .
	Religious Movements in the Contemporary World.	The Great Mediator, Chico Xavier and the Brazilian Culture ; Debates do NER 4: Revisiting the Evil .

THESES AND DISSERTATIONS ON RELIGION COMPLETED  
AT THE FACULTY OF HUMANITIES OF UFRGS (1984-2006)

This section presents some details about the theses and dissertations on religion carried out at UFRGS as a requirement for obtaining a PhD or MA degree in humanities. "Humanities" is understood here to mean all disciplines studied at IFCH/UFRGS (anthropology, political science, history and sociology). This therefore implies that the information presented here is restricted to the scope of the object of study. Studies other than the ones in question are mentioned whenever required.<sup>13</sup>

The time range analyzed here, from 1984 to 2007, includes two dissertations which have been completed prior to 1985 when the five post-graduation courses within Social Sciences at UFRGS were separated. These two dissertations (were regarded as part of the PPGAS. As shown in Table 01, studies in anthropology prevail over religion. Within the 63 theses and dissertations examined, 39 were completed in the PPGAS program (61.9% of all theses and dissertations) whereas, in history, a total of 15 studies were completed, four theses and 11 dissertations. It is important to point out that all 24 theses and dissertations in disciplines other than anthropology and the vast majority of historical studies on religion focused on specific topics, which usually involved the relationship between either "politics and religion" or "social movements and religion".<sup>14</sup> These studies fit in one of the following three research lines: new social movements, political elites or ecclesiastic elites.

The 1984-1999 data shows that, within the five courses in question, a total of 26 dissertations about religion were completed. From 2000 to date, 37 studies were completed: 14 theses and 23 dissertations.

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<sup>13</sup>I shall start by mentioning Ribeiro (2005a), a dissertation in languages completed in the Postgraduation Program from UFRGS. Dr. Oro was a member of the examining committee and this dissertation has served as an object of discussion for a paper published in *Debates do NER* No 7.

<sup>14</sup>The exceptions are Reyes Herrera's dissertation (1995) and thesis (2004) which were defended in the PPGS/UFRGS and Aydos' thesis which was completed in the PPCP/IFCH/UFRGS (partially published in Aydos, 2002).

Table 01 – Theses and dissertations about religion completed in the PPG – 1984-2007

Program/UFRGS	Completed	
	N	%
Social Anthropology	39	61,9
History	15	23,8
Sociology	6	9,5
Political Science	2	3,2
Languages	1	1,6
Total	63	100,0

If we calculate the number of theses and dissertations completed before NER (up to 1995) and from 1996 onwards, we find an increase in academic production in the latter. This also corresponds to an increase in academic production in general. In the case of all completed studies, we notice that 50.8% of all theses and dissertations on religion produced so far have been carried out under the supervision of either Dr. Steil or Dr. Oro (see table 02).

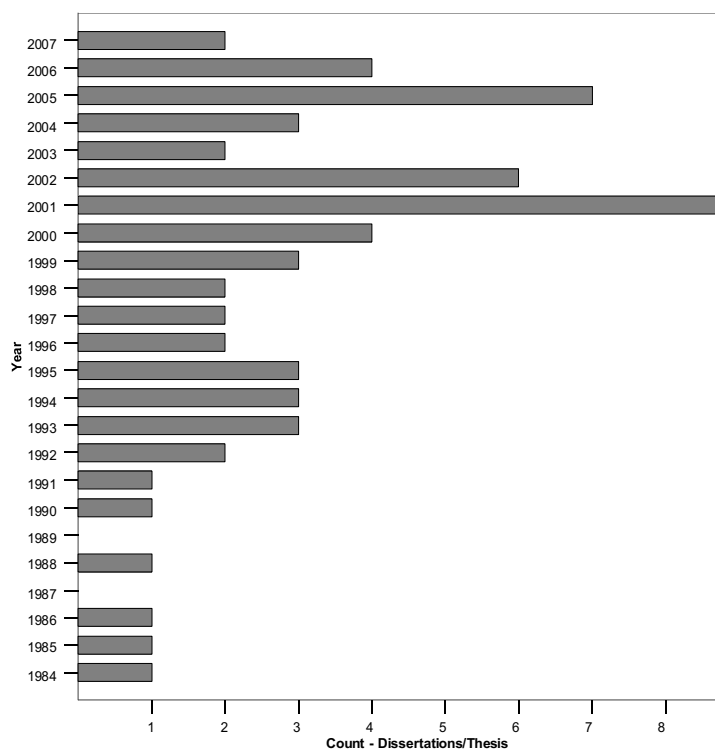
Nearly half of the research projects conducted before NER were supervised by lecturers other than Dr. Oro. Taking into consideration the period between the foundation of the center up to present, the proportion of research studies supervised by NER and non-NER members is strikingly similar. Another important point to highlight here concerns the category “others”. This category includes all studies on religion which have been supervised by non-NER researchers. However, in most of these cases, Dr. Oro, Dr. Steil and/or Dr. Lewgoy were within their examining committee.

Table 02 - Theses and dissertations on religion by period and supervision

Period/supervision	Completed	
	N	%
Before NER - Outros	11	17,5
Before NER - Ari Oro	8	12,7
After NER - Outros	22	34,9
After NER - Ari Oro	14	22,2
After NER - Carlos Steil	8	12,7
Total	63	100,0

The years 2000 and 2001 may be seen as a period of expansion of studies on religion since eight dissertations and three theses were completed, the overwhelming majority under the supervision of NER researchers (see Graph 01). Until that moment, the setting up of our research group had not yet had an impact on the number of theses and dissertations completed. The first PPGAS students who were interested in religions and religiosity concluded their Master's degree in early 90s. Some of them carried on and later defended a doctoral thesis. These students formed the initial basis of NER. During the 90s, other students, both post and undergraduates who were also interested in studying religious expression, joined the group.

Graph01 – Theses and dissertations on religion completed in the PPGAS, presented by year.



Taking into consideration the academic work produced in the PPGAS, 36 out of the 166 dissertations (21%) and five out of the 30 PhD theses completed so far have focused on either religions or religiosity. In the History Post-Graduation Program, 7% of all dissertations and 6% of all theses were in some aspect related to religions.<sup>15</sup> In addition, seven out of these eleven historical studies had either Catholicism or the Catholic Church as their object of study. So far, no study carried out in the History Postgraduation Program at UFRGS has focused on Afro-Brazilian or Evangelical religions.

<sup>15</sup>In other courses, less than 5% of all theses and dissertations related to religion.

By contrast, most research projects carried out in humanities concentrated on either Catholicism, Afro-Brazilian religions or Pentecostalism, both classic and Neopentecostal. These three research fields account for nearly 70% of all completed studies. Here, one could argue that this high percentage of studies is associated with the expertise of Dr. Oro and Dr. Steil. However, as we shall see shortly, such direct association may not hold true. The remaining 30% were divided into two main groups: the “remaining major religions” (Spiritualism, Judaism, Buddhism, and Islamism) and “other religion expressions”, which may involve the study of various religious beliefs which are inherent in popular religiosity (wizardry, healing systems, messianic belief), Positivism, indigenous religious systems, etc.

Table 03 – Completed theses and dissertations by object of study

Object of Study	Completed - All Post-graduated programs.		Completed only in the PPGASI	
	N	%	N	%
Catholicism/Catholic Church	23	36,5	11	28,2
(Neo)Pentecostal Church	11	17,5	11	28,2
Afro-Brazilian religions	11	17,5	8	20,5
Spiritualism	3	4,8	2	5,1
Judaism	3	4,8	1	2,6
Buddhism	2	3,2	2	5,1
Islamism	1	1,6	1	2,6
Other religion expressions	9	14,3	3	7,7
Total	63	100,0	39	100,0

In terms of scientific production, most discussions tend to focus on the object of study in question. Most authors concerned with epistemological issues argue that science cannot restrict itself to its empirical objects, but instead it should rely upon categories developed rationally. The well-known Brazilian anthropologist Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira has already drawn attention to the object fragmentations that the discipline has suffered since its introduction in Brazil. The author divides the discipline into two main

categories: the field of “indigenous ethnology” and the field of “anthropology of the national society”:

This means that this form of knowledge – which should highlight the nature of anthropological knowledge – has historically been subordinated to the nature of real objects (be them the indigenous, black or white population) and included the misinterpretations which this kind of positions are expected to create throughout the development of the discipline.<sup>16</sup>

As regards the religion expressions which have become object of study, we examined whether there was an association between the expertise of supervisors advising theses and dissertations on religious topic (such as Drs. Ari Pedro Oro and Carlos Alberto Steil) and the empirical object of their supervisees. A relation between the object of supervised studies and the expertise of supervisors could result in developing researchers who would be specialized in one or two religions only. As a consequence, contemporary religious diversity could not be said to have contributed to the diversification of the research conducted at the center.

So far, the figures (summarized in Table 04) seem to indicate that there is a balance between the cases with and without this association.<sup>17</sup> This claim is reinforced by the fact that our analysis is restricted to theses on religions or religiosity only. In addition, given that Dr. Steil and Dr. Oro also supervise projects on topics other than these, it becomes evident that they also supervise projects which are not within their most specialized and academically recognized object.

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<sup>16</sup>In the original: “Isso significa que este *modo de conhecimento* – que deveria marcar a natureza do saber antropológico – ficou historicamente subordinado à natureza dos objetos reais (quer seja o índio, o negro ou o branco) com todos os equívocos que posições deste teor geram no desenvolvimento da disciplina”.

<sup>17</sup>For the purposes of this paper, we assume that Dr. Oro is specialized in Pentecostalism and Afro-Brazilian religions while and Dr. Steil focuses on the study of Catholicism from various perspectives.



Table 4 – At NER, the supervisee's object of study follows the supervisors' object of study?

Segue...	Completed/NER	
	N	%
Yes	16	53,3
No	11	36,7
Partially	3	10,0
Total	30	100,0

In the case of NER, if a supervisor has a specialized empirical object, this does not necessarily mean an equally specialized supervision. In other words, even though a discussion around the relation between religious systems and society permeates across all studies, it does not constraint supervisions to specific religious or religiosity confession. The implications of such diversification can be seen in several publications of the group: the issues eight and nine of *Debates do NER* are a product of dissertations supervised by Dr. Steil. However, none focuses on Catholicism.<sup>18</sup> The seminal paper by Ribeiro (2005b) published in the issue seven derives from a thesis carried out within a Postgraduation Program outside IFCH. At present, Dr. Steil supervises three doctoral research projects, Dr. Ari Oro supervises a master's dissertation and five PhD students and Dr. Lewgoy supervises four master's dissertations.

This wide range of objects of study creates an equally diverse communication channel among students and researchers. This is clearly seen in the group's meetings which are held every fortnight. The primary objective is to discuss relevant papers by researchers other than the ones within the

<sup>18</sup>The issue number 8 of the journal *Debates do NER* focuses on the topic "Religion and Prison" and it is the topic of a MA dissertation by Alessandro Bicca. The issue number 9 discusses on Buddhists in Brazil and it is a product of the MA dissertations by Madalena Genz. and .

group as well as to give NER members the opportunity to present papers before they are presented in a conference or submitted for publication. The basic guideline behind these meetings is to reach a consensus on debatable points on a democratic basis, in which all members enjoy freedom of speech and criticisms and suggestions are freely accepted or rejected.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

The history of NER can be summarized as follows. In a first instance, the research group seems to have focused on gaining external recognition (by means of the PRONEX, ACSR and *Debates do NER*). This process is still running today and recent agreements have been celebrated with foreign universities. Paulo Freire and CAPES/FIPSE Programs can serve as examples. These programs encourage and promote a student exchange between students from UFRGS and the Federal University of Bahia and two American educational institutions coordinated by the American anthropologist Thomas Csordas.

Another line of action in the initial phase was the emphasis on debates and the development of new researchers, which resulted in an increase in the number of theses and dissertations produced between 2000 and 2001. The setting up of religion study groups has also helped raise the number of studies on the topic within other disciplines. However, these disciplines have relied on NER researchers to act as external examiners of their dissertations and theses. In addition, it is worth emphasizing that a considerable number of studies have been conducted within humanities. These can be divided according to three main research fields (Catholicism, (neo)Pentecostalism and Afro-Brazilian religions). We found that this high number of academic studies has not been influenced by the highly specialized orientation from NER supervisors.

One way of showing the various bibliographical influences throughout the years would be to present a qualitative analysis of the academic production of each NER researcher. This would also include discussions about papers by sociologists and anthropologists from the main poles of academic production

in Brazil and abroad. However, this is not the aim intended here. In future work, we also intend to present changes which may be currently under way. Such discussion goes beyond the scope of this paper.

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