



## **Communication from the Graduate Program in Social Anthropology of the National Museum, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (PPGAS/MN/UFRJ)**

This year, we commemorate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Brazilian National Museum and the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Graduate Program in Social Anthropology (PPGAS/MN/UFRJ) housed in this institution.

On Sunday, September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2018, however, a fire broke out in the Museum's main building, the old Imperial Palace in the Quinta da Boa Vista, São Cristóvão, Rio de Janeiro. Spreading quickly, it consumed the building and almost everything in it, thrusting our Program and the Museum itself into a new and unexpected phase of existence.

The staff of the National Museum has long been aware of the many risks the priceless heritage it preserves is subject to. The institution was mostly housed in a building constructed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which had never been planned to shelter the lively and diverse activities it contained. Aside from its public exhibit spaces, the Imperial Palace held laboratories, libraries, classrooms, educational department offices, bureaucratic offices and, of course, immense storerooms for enormous collections of Brazil's most important cultural, historical, and biological treasures. For this reason, the Museum has struggled for decades to obtain annexes which would allow us to shift most of these activities out of the Palace and into modernized, protected areas, permitting us to undertake necessary structural reforms on the old main building itself.

Initially, the Museum procured structures in nearby neighborhoods, many of which are owned by the Federal Government and would thus be relatively easy to acquire. When these initiatives did not meet with success, the Museum invested in the construction of a series of annexes in the Arboretum, along the southern border of the Quinta da Boa Vista. A modern facility for the Central Library was built there and, later, facilities

for the Vertebrate and Botanical Departments. At the same time, emergency repairs were begun on the Palace, especially its roof, which was almost entirely retiled a few years ago.

Much aid came from Petrobrás, which was the only Brazilian corporation able to meet the Museum's needs and was authorized by PRONAC and the Ministry of Culture to do so. However, with the limitations placed on Petrobrás funding in 2008, the Museum was obliged to change strategies and seek out new partners in order to continue with its institutional program of repair and reform. With the aid of the Association of Friends of the National Museum (SAMN), legislators began to be actively lobbied and, in 2013, Congress passed a bill with a rider that allocated 20 million reais (7 million U.S. dollars) to the Museum. Unfortunately, these funds were never actually written into any budget.

The failure of this attempt led to a series of negotiations, beginning in 2015, between the BNDES, the Museum and SAMN. Overcoming immense bureaucratic barriers, an agreement was finally reached and the BNDES approved aid of around 21 million reais for a series of projects that would recuperate and expand the Museum's physical plant and revitalize it as an institution. An important and integral part of this plan was the installation of a modern fire prevention and anti-panic system, a long overdue necessary improvement which would protect the priceless collections and structure of the old Imperial Palace.

This agreement was signed on the Museum's 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary: June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2018. The resources it liberated are scheduled to begin to flow this October, following our national elections. As an integral part of the Museum, PPGAS would have been an immediate beneficiary of the improvements set out in the plan. We would move into a larger, congruent, and modernized space in the reformed Central Library building.

Before any of this could start, however, a spark was struck somewhere in the Imperial Palace on the evening of Sunday, September 2<sup>nd</sup>. The flames spread and PPGAS' classrooms, offices, holdings, and library were completely gutted, along with the rest of the old building.

Throughout the long process described above, PPGAS has consolidated itself as first rate educational and research program, receiving the highest possible grades from our national academic evaluation agency, CAPES. With over 800 theses and dissertations defended within its walls and a wide variety of collective and individual research and extension projects undertaken by its staff of educators and researchers, the Program has made

a reputation for itself as one of Brazil's premiere human science institutions. Our hundreds of alumni are spread throughout Brazilian and foreign universities, reproducing the patterns of academic excellence in which they have been trained. Our prestige and that of our graduates extends throughout the world in a network of collaboration and exchange that contains the best Brazilian and foreign anthropological and sociological institutions. The scientific journal that we founded in 1995, *Mana: Estudos de Antropologia Social*, quickly obtained the best CAPES rankings, increasing the Program's prestige and scientific influence. The Francisca Keller library contained one of the best collections of anthropological books, journals, and documents in the country and was the center of a specialized library science community, holding more than 37,000 items in its collection.

Since its beginnings, PPGAS has received students, researchers, and professors from all over the world. Its training of international students, especially from other countries in Latin America, has allowed the Program's influence to expand well beyond local and national boundaries. We maintain regular and close contact with undergraduate and graduate programs throughout Brazil and around the world, a fact that greatly contributes to the quality, creativity, and renovation of the anthropology that we practice.

The knowledge produced by or through PPGAS has made relevant impacts on debates and upon the formulation of public policies, both in Brazil and abroad, particularly with regards to the securing of the rights of many different social groups. Since its creation, PPGAS has not only inaugurated or participated in active fields of research that have become part of the foundations of Brazilian anthropology (as is the case, for example, of peasantry studies, urban anthropology, and ethnology, among many others), it has always been open to social transformations and to demands for rights involving the most varied themes, groups, and social movements.

Most recently, PPGAS has been participating in the important process of expanding and diversifying access to graduate studies through the implementation of affirmative action policies. With these, we have reinforced our commitment to the idea that excellence in producing and disseminating academic knowledge is and must be eminently public and democratic. At the same time, the Program and UFRJ, like all public institutions in the areas of science and education in Brazil, has suffered from brutal budget and resource cuts. This precarious situation will only worsen with the continuation of the effects of Constitutional Amendment

95, which caps public spending in society's most vital areas for the next 20 years.

The Museum has now been mutilated by the recent fire and the consequent loss of its precious historic, cultural, bibliographic, and scientific patrimony. It is now working towards rebuilding its academic and scientific vitality. PPGAS is accompanying its host institution in this endeavor, investing in the uninterrupted continuity of its research and teaching activities and social commitments. The destruction of our library, for example, is temporary: numerous initiatives seeking to reconstruct its archives have already been systematically launched.

The Program is now mobilizing to construct a formal network of alumni through affiliation with the Society of the Friends of the National Museum as a means of maintaining constant and active communication with its greatest resource: the academics and professionals that learned to think critically about and work creatively in anthropology within the walls of our institution. In this sense, both the history we have built over these last 50 years as well as the future that we continue to construct are inseparable from our commitment to the production of knowledge through public, high quality universities. The manifestations of aid and solidarity that we have received from hundreds of institutions and individuals worldwide have strengthened the will of our docents, staff and student body to produce a painful but energetic rebirth. We will rise from the ashes produced by the carelessness and disdain for culture of those Brazilian political leaders who seem to want to reduce or destroy the National Museum and PPGAS.