

Exiled professor advocates equality, democracy



Catrina Rawson | COLLEGIAN

an jail was marked by torture, Riquelme said, and ended after a hunger strike that lasted 26 days and did irreparable damage to his stomach.

Prior to his final prison sentence, he finished his law degree and hoped to go to France to study and practice his second language. However, he had no offers to travel or study in France. But when he least expected, an offer appeared.

"While I was in jail, I got a response to an application I had almost forgotten about," he said.

Riquelme met with a "third way" delegation from the United States. The group was standing against both the United States' and the Soviet Union's interventionist policies during the cold war. He filled out, and forgot about, an application that would shape his life.

"While I was in jail my mother got a telegram to say I was approved."

He was given a safe conduct form, the equivalent of an exit visa, and was stripped of all other official identifications. He left for the U.S. in 1962 and would not return home for 20 years.

"I could not go back home because I did not have a passport, my passport was taken away from me," he said.

Having left one challenging situation, Riquelme soon found himself in another.

"I was coming to a country I had no feeling for. I didn't know English. I'd never thought about coming here," he said.

Riquelme adapted quickly, though. He took an eight-week English course in Washington, D.C., followed by earning a master's degree in political science at the University of Minnesota at Minneapolis and a

doctorate in sociology from the University of California at Santa Barbara.

After his student visa expired, and with nowhere to call home, Riquelme taught, studied and worked throughout Latin America.

In 1969, he arrived at the National University of Colombia in Bogata hoping to do research in the turbulent nation, but the Colombian government was less enthusiastic about his topic.

"I wanted to study social change in a violent country, but I was really quickly told that was off limits," he said.

After three years in Colombia, he taught in Puerto Rico for a year before moving to Brazil to work as a planning and evaluation officer for rural development at the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Children's Fund, which later took him back to Colombia.

In 1975, he found his home away from home, or at least another passport.

"I went to Mexico on my own, because Mexico is where all the people that were fighting the military dictatorships in Latin America ended up," he said. "We just went and met in Mexico. There were fellow exiles from Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Bolivia, Paraguay, Brazil."

Riquelme lived in Mexico from 1975-85, and the Mexican government issued him a passport. It was during his stay in Mexico that he went home for the first time.

The trip was in 1982, for a conference on urbanization. He was briefly detained at the border for not having proper identification, but Strossner's authoritarianism had loosened

since he left, and Riquelme was allowed entry. In 1987 he began returning regularly to his home country.

The first trip back to his homeland was an emotional one, he said, even though most of his family had fled to the surrounding countries to escape the Paraguayan government.

After the devastating Mexico City earthquake of 1985, he moved to San Diego, Calif., for his new job at the U.S.-Mexico Center, which had him teaching and researching in both San Diego and Tijuana, Mexico — a position which gave him an unusual view of the two countries' relationship.

"I had an incredible feeling for that type of thing, because I was crossing the border between the first and the third world every day," he said.

From there he went to Cornell University for a year, and in 1991, abandoned the Ivy League for the wheat belt and came to K-State as the director for the Center of Latin American Studies.

He's been here ever since, and one focus of his research, state-sponsored terrorism, has led him to some unexpected finds and some imposing barriers.

"We are talking about violence produced at the level of the state," he said. "[In the U.S.] terrorism is always some kind of an individual, evil group."

In 1992, the archive of Paraguay's secret police, known

as the "Archive of Horror," was discovered. The archive detailed the working of Operation Condor, the collaboration between South America's right-wing dictatorships cooked-up as an intelligence sharing operation to combat "leftists." The role of the controversial operation, though, soon expanded and became a cross-border operation at state-sponsored terrorism.

"There were exchanges of information, there were exchanges of prisoners and then there were executions," Riquelme said.

Riquelme said when examining the Paraguayan archives he found information not only on Paraguayans but also on citizens of other South American nations. He also found information on exchanges between the government of Paraguay and the American embassy. Along with the records he found the name of one U.S. Army officer, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Thierry, a man sent to build a detention and interrogation center named "La Técnica."

The search led him to the National Archives and Records Administration where he uncovered more evidence of U.S.-Paraguay relations during Operation Condor. But after coming this far he found an administrative brick wall.

"When I inquired they told me I could not see. Some things that were already in open files

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Antonio Riquelme, associate professor of sociology, teaches during his class last week in Waters Hall.

By Jonas Hogg
KANSAS STATE COLLEGIAN

Not many people know what it's like to be accused of being a subversive agent and banished from their homeland, but Antonio Riquelme, associate professor of sociology, knows the experience firsthand.

Of course, not many people can say they are suing the Central Intelligence Agency, but he's doing that, too.

Born in Asunción, Paraguay, Riquelme witnessed the military coup that began the 35-year term of authoritarian Alfredo

Strossner as president of Paraguay. Riquelme said at first the new boss seemed much like the old boss, but as Strossner grew more autocratic and less tolerant of opposition, Riquelme began what would become a lifetime of advocacy for equality, participatory democracy and peace.

"As I grew older, it was rough for (my family) and rough for me because I was active in university politics," he said. "I was, sometime, in jail, and the last time was the exact time I left the country."

His last time in a Paraguayan

RIQUELME | Associate professor researches social issues in Paraguay, state terrorism, Operation Condor

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are reclassified," he said.

Riquelme said about 260 documents were removed from the archives, and since then the CIA has issued a "Glomar Response" to many of his requests, which is an official statement that neither confirms nor denies the existence of the documents question.

Frustrated with the lack of response and continued defeats under the Freedom of Information Act requests, Riquelme did what no spanic has ever done — he led the world's largest intelligence agency.

All the work for the case is being done pro bono, or free of charge, by Richard Wilson of American University's Washington College of Law and a contingent of graduate students.

For all his hard work, so far his only reward is a mysterious increase in inspections and interrogations at U.S. airports, resulting in missed flights.

When not relentlessly pursuing government agencies, Riquelme continues his research. He currently is focusing on social issues in rural Paraguay and continuing his research on state terrorism and Operation Condor. In January he will begin phase retirement, where he will teach one semester at K-State and one semester in Paraguay, which is home once again.

"I continue to be a citizen of

that country," he said.

For those who work with him, Riquelme's experience and passion make him an indispensable asset.

"I think that he is a very important figure not only for the sociology department but for K-State," Daniel Aguilar, graduate student in sociology, said.

Aguilar, originally from Colombia, said Riquelme helped him with the information and application to come to K-State. He also said Riquelme's point of view, often different from many here in the heartland, has helped open dialogue.

"He's always open for a good

discussion," Aguilar said. "That's good from an academic perspective and for the students."

Additionally, Aguilar said Riquelme's teaching style makes occasionally difficult subjects accessible.

"(He can) explain it in a way that you say, 'Oh, now it makes sense,'" he said. "And that's special, not everybody has that."

Regardless of his location, Riquelme said he continues to

champion the causes that landed him in a dictator's prison — equality, peace, the environment, democracy and Latin American integration.

"I was not a combatant... I was a progressive scholar, and I continue to be that way," he said.

After years of traveling and two decades of exile from his country, he said the idea of home has changed.

"The term home could be redefined," he said. "Because I was not allowed to go home — home was Paraguay."

And although he never studied there, he finally went to France.