

Historical Context

On Wednesday, August 16th 2006, a human rights group and several Paraguayan activist groups meet for the inauguration of the Museum of Memory, Dictatorship and Democracy at the building popularly known as “La Técnica”, a former clandestine torture site during Stroessner’s dictatorship. Suddenly, news arrive: Alfredo Stroessner has died that same day. He died of natural causes aged 93, in his Brazilian exile, hiding from Paraguayan justice.

After World War II, politics in Paraguay became particularly unstable with several political parties fighting for power in the late 1940s, which most notably led to the Paraguayan civil war of 1947. A series of unstable governments ensued until the establishment in 1954 of the authoritarian regime of Alfredo Stroessner, who remained in power for more than three decades.

The dictatorship

Stroessner governed Paraguay with an iron hand from 1954 to 1989. He changed the **Colorado Party**, originally with a Social-Democratic tendency, turning it into an extreme right party. "Peace and Progress" was the slogan of the administration whose economic policy hid a network of nepotism and corruption that benefited close friends of the regime. Stroessner's strong anti-communist stance made him a friend of U.S. interests for most of his rule, participating in Operation Condor and even offering to send troops to Vietnam. Alfredo Stroessner's human rights track record was one of the worst on the continent. His regime is accused of torture, kidnappings and corruption, proven by **the "terror archives"**, discovered in 1992.

All in all, thirty-five years of systematic human rights violations, with an estimated 3,000 to 4,000 murders and more than 500 disappeared people, thousands of political prisoners and more than a million people living in exile.

Paraguay Today

For the first time in 61 years, the Colorado Party lost a presidential election in Paraguay. The 2008 presidential elections were won by **Fernando Lugo**, a Roman Catholic bishop whose duties have been suspended on his request by the Holy See.

The Paraguayans have erased certain things from their memories, others have been shut away and hidden, or are only evoked whispers, off the record. The greatest torture was silence, being forced to keep quiet. Even today, Paraguayans do not complain, they do not hold street demonstrations and they do not use public places. People have been so repressed that even after fifteen years of democracy they are still afraid to go out. Nobody has been processed for the crimes that occurred during the dictatorship. Everything has been silenced and condemned to forgetfulness.

The “108” Lists

The witch-hunt began with the Aranda case and continued with the Palmieri case. In both murders, the suspects were homosexuals. Stroessner ordered the creation of "blacklists" of homosexuals, which were distributed and affixed in visible places in the city's companies, districts and universities with the aim of punishing them. The presumption of innocence was not even contemplated. This episode is popularly known as “**the 108 list**” because the first one contained 108 names. Many were dismissed from their jobs, stigmatized, discriminated, rejected by close friends and family.

Stroessner created the idea in the collective consciousness that “homosexual” is synonymous with “assassin.” If before people had already believed that homosexuality was a disease, after the list episode, they were convinced that it was also dangerous..

Time passed. Now few people in Paraguay remember the name of Aranda or Palmieri, but "108" is used as a common insult and everybody knows that it is a **synonym of "queer"**. In hotels in Asunción, it's still common to find that there are no bedrooms with the number 108: clients didn't want them. The same thing happens with car license plates or lottery numbers ending in 108, which people never buy.

Rodolfo Héctor Costa Torres was number 41 in one of the public lists of homosexuals.