



Recent history: 12th International Conference on Cancer, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1978

Historia reciente: XII Congreso Internacional del Cáncer, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1978

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ABSTRACT Using the approaches of history of the present, this article recovers the discussions surrounding the 12th International Conference on Cancer carried out in Buenos Aires in 1978, in reaction to which Georges Périès organized a “counter-conference” in Paris. In order to understand this discussion, the political situation of the time is described, as is the state of human rights at the time in Argentina, the role of the media – in particular the newspapers *La Nación* and *Clarín* and the magazine *Gente* – and the institutional position adopted by the National Academy of Medicine, as expressed in a letter sent to the presidents of the primary scientific societies of the world. The letter is reprinted in this text as a documentary source, taken from *Memoria: Año 1978 (Presidencia de Dr. José E. Rivarola)* [Acta: Year 1978 (Presidency of Dr. José E. Rivarola)]. The framework of the discussion makes reference to science’s social policy versus science’s supposed neutrality and the role of scientific societies.

KEY WORDS History, 20th Century; Genocide; Science; Ethics, Institutional; Communications Media; Argentina.

RESUMEN Desde los enfoques de la historia del tiempo presente, este artículo recupera la discusión en torno al XII Congreso Internacional del Cáncer realizado en Buenos Aires en 1978, que provocó la realización en París de un “contracongreso” por iniciativa de Georges Périès. Para ello se describe el escenario político de la época, la situación de los derechos humanos en Argentina, el rol de los medios de comunicación, en especial los periódicos *La Nación* y *Clarín* y la revista *Gente*, y la posición institucional adoptada por la Academia Nacional de Medicina, plasmada en una carta enviada a los presidentes de las principales sociedades científicas del mundo, que se reproduce como fuente documental, tomada del libro *Memoria: Año 1978 (Presidencia de Dr. José E. Rivarola)*. El marco de la discusión remite a la política social de la ciencia versus su presunta neutralidad y el rol de las sociedades científicas.

PALABRAS CLAVES Historia del Siglo XX; Genocidio; Ciencia; Ética Institucional; Medios de Comunicación; Argentina.

INTRODUCTION

In the mid-1980s, memory studies reached a turning point in the cultural field, “in contrast to the privileging of the future that was an integral part of the discourse of modernity,” and also in terms of the traditional study of the past carried out by historiography (1 p.224).

The studies of the present are an instrument of criticism and self-criticism on which societies can rely to address the problems of the present (2). According to Julio Aróstegui, “the perception of a *historical present* is not a discovery from our time. On the contrary, it is an ancient philosophical discovery, although positivist historiography rejected it for a long time” (3 p.21) (*Italics in original*). That rejection, in François Bédarida’s words, is related to “the sacrosanct notion of ‘distance’ (*recul*) that appeared as the sign and the indispensable guarantee of objectivity” (4 p.23). The action of recovering the past through the articulation of particular situations allows the past to become a memory, thus avoiding oblivion (5).

This approach, which incorporates the recent past and even the immediate past, has been named in different ways, such as “history of the present” (2, 3), “history of the present time” (4) or “recent history” (6), among others. In Latin America, these studies have focused, in general, on analyzing the effects of State terrorism during dictatorships, as well as recovering the voices of indigenous peoples (1).

The policies of State terrorism adopted by the last dictatorship in Argentina were supported by an intricate web of complicities. Within that framework, this article recovers the discussions surrounding the 12th International Cancer Congress carried out in Buenos Aires in 1978, and as a part of that web of civil and military complicity, we analyze a document from the National Academy of Medicine, and the involvement of the newspapers *Clarín* and *La Nación* and the magazine *Gente* in the coverage of that conference and the “counter-congress” organized in France that denounced the violation of human rights in Argentina.

The social and political situation: 1976-1983

Between 1976 and 1983, Argentina was governed by a military dictatorship known as the Process of National Reorganization [*Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*]. During that time, numerous human rights violations were committed. These violations were officially recorded in the report *Nunca más* [Never again], written in 1984 by the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons (CONADEP) [*Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas*], once democracy was reinstated (7). The stealing of newborn babies and children, the forced disappearance of persons, kidnapping and torture were human rights violations that resulted in approximately 30,000 missing people, 500 appropriated children and deep emotional scars in the victims and their families.

In 1978, the guerrilla was militarily defeated and the targets of repression were now civilians. From that year onward, the Military Junta grew concerned regarding the international pressure caused by reports of human rights violations made by organizations such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) of the Organization of the American States (8) the United Nations (UN), and other human rights organizations like Amnesty International (9), as well as about the growing pressure exerted by the government of the United States during the Carter administration (10). For the military dictatorship, those pressures – and others carried out by political organizations from other countries and by Argentines in exile – produced a distorted image of Argentina. It was therefore necessary to develop, through the media, a strategy to create a positive counter-image. The main threat was no longer considered to be inside the country, but outside of it (11). In this way, on September 28, 1978, the newspaper *La Nación* published declarations of the Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs, Gualter Allara, about “the Argentine image”:

As is widely known, Argentina is facing an audacious campaign organized from outside of our country that aims to plunge us into discredit and isolation. The campaign centers on, or more exactly, appears to be motivated by human rights concerns [...] This circumstance

- Allara added – has prompted the subversive forces to focus their efforts on the external front of the Republic and to from there orchestrate a campaign in which they have achieved conscious and unconscious participation from the international press, some Western governments afraid of confrontation with terrorist groups, and non-governmental organizations acting in an advisory capacity, presumably steered by humanitarian purposes. [...] That is why - he concluded - the defense of the Argentine image outside of the country cannot simply be the work of government men but rather of the community as a whole. (11)

METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS

To reconstruct the official discourse as transmitted by the media, we searched for articles published in the newspapers *La Nación* and *Clarín* and in the magazine *Gente* (a) between October 3rd and 12th, 1978, which mentioned the 12th International Cancer Congress and the “national image” of Argentina in foreign countries. For that purpose, the Newspaper and Periodicals Archive and the Microfilm Room of the Library of National Congress as well as the Newspaper and Periodicals Archive of the National Library were consulted. The material was photographed and then classified by date, title, author, page number, publication name, and article hierarchy.

Similarly, we recovered a letter from the National Academy of Medicine of Buenos Aires, included in the book *Memoria: Año 1978 (Presidencia de Dr. José E. Rivarola)* [Record of 1978 (Presidency of Dr. José E. Rivarola)] (16), in which the Academy’s institutional position regarding the Conference is conveyed.

THE INTERNATIONAL CANCER CONGRESS AND THE COUNTER-CONGRESS

In June 1978, Argentina hosted the Soccer World Cup, and months later, in October, the City of Buenos Aires hosted the 12th International Cancer Congress. Both events were met with

resistance worldwide. In that scenario the Committee for the Boycott of the World Cup in Argentina and the International Cancer Counter-Congress were organized in France.

The 12th International Cancer Congress opened in Luna Park stadium with more than 8,000 attendees (half of whom were Argentines). It took place between October 5 and 11, under the executive presidency of Dr. Abel Canónico, and with Dr. Roberto Aquiles Estévez as president of the scientific committee (17). Days before the opening of the Conference, Vice-Admiral Julio Juan Bardi, who was head of the National Ministry of Social Welfare, issued a statement regarding the scientists that took part in the conference:

...[That] they chose Argentina as the place where they could meet in peace to discuss scientific and technical aspects [...] [is] the staunchest repudiation of so much defamiation, and the highest proof that the actions of the detractors no longer have a place in a world that, since the recent World Cup, has understood that Argentina is the safest, freest and most cordial of countries, when it comes to receiving guests that come here to work for the well-being of humankind or to express themselves in favor of spirit and youth. (18)

The opening speech was delivered by the dictator Jorge Rafael Videla, who affirmed:

...focused on the preservation of human life, on the relentless fight against one of the cruelest evils that threaten it, you are the sacred custodians of the science that constructs and saves, not destroys and kills. (19)

The speech circulated widely through the media, but it was not limited only to those channels. A special bulletin edited for the Conference by the laboratory Roemmers reproduced the speech on its cover page, followed by news and information from the Conference (20).

The event sessions took place in the Sheraton Hotel, the Argentine Industrial Union, the Plaza Hotel, and the Military Circle. The closing took place in the Colon Theater, and during the Congress, participants were invited to a reception

at the Rural Society (21,22). The government issued a postage stamp in commemoration of the event.

The media coverage of the event is rather surprising considering that it was a scientific conference. *Clarín* and *La Nación* newspapers provided ample coverage of the Conference (a total of 66 articles: 32 in *La Nación* and 34 in *Clarín*, in a time frame of 10 days), occupying very important spaces on the front pages of the newspapers on both the opening and closing days (Figure 1 and Figure 2), in addition to daily news stories throughout the conference and leading editorials under the title "The International Cancer Congress," in which the political situation is clearly addressed. The editorial published on October 6, 1978 in *Clarín* reads:

Behind us now are all the insidious maneuvers orchestrated from abroad to hinder the success of the event. In that sense, the response seen in

the number and scientific quality of the participants bars more minute considerations. (23)

As for *La Nación*, on October 5 the editorial highlights:

Finally, there is no convincing explanation for the behavior of the French government, who officially sponsors, with the presence of a minister of their cabinet, the realization of the so-called "counter-congress," organized explicitly in an attempt to ruin the conference about take place in Buenos Aires. (24)

At the same time as the conference in Buenos Aires, the International Cancer Counter-Congress on was also taking place. The Counter-Conference was held on October 5 and 6 at the initiative of Georges Périès, researcher of the Hôpital



Figure 1. Front pages of *Clarín* newspaper (October 5 and October 12, 1978) mentioning the International Cancer Congress.



Figure 2. Front pages of *La Nación* newspaper (October 6 and October 12, 1978) mentioning the International Cancer Congress.

Saint-Louis of Paris. The venue chosen was the Faculty of Pharmacy of the Université Paris-Descartes and was presided over by the Nobel Prize winner in Medicine André Lwoff. Among its main promoters were cancer specialists such as León Schwartzberg (France), Henri Kaplan (USA), and Van Bekkum (Holland), who traveled to Argentina before the Conference to familiarize themselves with the situation in the country (25). On their return to France, they issued numerous reports to the French press that were then published in newspapers such as *Le Monde* and broadcast on television, accompanied by the Minister of Health of France, Simone Veil. These complaints were branded by *La Nación* as an “advertising campaign for the boycott”:

[these] attitudes that advocate for human rights have caused and continue to cause damage to the international personhood of

the country. It would seem that Buenos Aires has not found a suitable way to counter the types of campaigns we are mentioning. (25)

Expressions of the “counter-image” of Argentina that the dictatorship was trying to build reached the International Cancer Congress, occupying much space in the media:

A few months ago, the organization of a sports competition, the World Cup, served to show the good people of the world the senselessness of a tenacious campaign based in sectarianism and sponsored by the most treacherous and despicable delinquency. The International Cancer Congress will set a new example. (24)

Upon hearing the unanimous opinion of the members of that organization [Argentine Academy of Surgery] about the international

campaign that attempts to smear the reputation of the Nation, its institutions and its society, the honorable president of the Nation would like to express his gratitude [...] The explanatory attitude adopted by that Academy before its foreign peers evidences the determination and Argentine spirit that characterizes its members. (26)

The organization of this Conference constitutes a triumph for universal science, despite the *obstacles that motives of an ideological nature attempted to place in its organization*. The medical vocation, dedicated to the preservation of life, relies on events of this type to enrich its humanitarian mission. (27) (Italics added)

Gente magazine, in its October 12, 1978 edition, published several pages dedicated to both conferences; among them the caption “The cancer ‘counter-congress’ in Paris, organized by subversive groups,” preceded by the headline “Few people and little science” (28) stand out.

The activities of the military dictatorship involved a clandestine structure that reached George Mandel Avenue in Paris, where the headquarters of the “Pilot Center” of the Operation Condor were based. Former Navy captain Alfredo Astiz (b), using the false name Alberto Escudero, attended the meetings of the Cancer Counter-Congress (Figure 3).

THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF MEDICINE AND THE INTERNATIONAL CANCER CONGRESS

The first academies of science were created in the 17th century in Europe (Italy, Prussia, England, France) at a time when scientific discoveries were booming. Some of the oldest academies are the *Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei* (1603), the *Académie française* (1635), the *Deutsche Akademie der Naturforscher Leopoldina* (1652) and the Royal Society of London for Improving



Figure 3. Alfredo Astiz in the meetings prior to the International Cancer Counter-Congress. Paris, 1978.

Note: Former captain Alfredo Astiz can be seen standing in the upper left corner. In the upper right—also standing—is Georges Périès, one of the organizers of the counter-congress. The picture is part of a family archive of historian Gabriel Périès, son of Georges Périès (32), and was first made public by Horacio Verbitsky (33).

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por la Academia de Humanidades, por el cual solicitó su inclusión en el Régimen de las Academias Nacionales. Informó la Comisión de Interpretación y Reglamento.

9- Comando en Jefe del Ejército.

Solicitó realizar el estudio y crítica correspondiente al trabajo "Estudio epidemiológico de la patología bucal en la República Argentina". Fueron designados para este estudio los señores Académicos Dres. Guillermo Ries Centeno y Joseba Kelmendi de Ustarán.

10- Poder Judicial de la Nación - Cuerpo Médico Forense.

Solicitó información sobre el término "Acupuntura", como especialidad y sobre la calificación científica y/o deontológica del mencionado quehacer. Informó la Sección Medicina y Especialidades Médicas, conjuntamente con el señor Académico Dr. José C. Delorme.

11- Oficios remitidos en consulta por los Juzgados.

Se han contestado la cantidad de 9 solicitudes de Juzgados.

12- La Academia Nacional de Medicina, en su deseo de colaborar con el Estado, ante la campaña de versiones tendenciosas promovidas en el exterior, dió amplia difusión a la siguiente nota, que fué enviada a los Presidentes de Academias y principales Sociedades Científicas de los distintos países:

Buenos Aires, junio 12 de 1978

De nuestra consideración:

La Academia Nacional de Medicina de Buenos Aires, que agrupa 35 Académicos de número, incorporados por sus méritos indiscutibles, constituye la Institución de mayor jerarquía médica de la Argentina.

Esta Academia está preocupada por la difusión dada en el exterior de versiones tendenciosas según las cuales, hechos lesivos de los llamados derechos humanos, persecuciones personales a científicos y un clima general de inseguridad pública, harían inconveniente la concurrencia y participación de científicos extranjeros al Congreso Internacional del Cáncer.

Al respecto, esta Academia cree su deber manifestar a la comunidad científica que usted dignamente representa que:

Figure 4. Letter of the National Academy of Medicine of Buenos Aires. June 12, 1978.

Source: *Memoria: Año 1978 (Presidencia de Dr. José E. Rivarola)* (16).

Translation:

Buenos Aires, June 12th, 1978

To Whom It May Concern,

The National Academy of Medicine of Buenos Aires, made up of 35 Academics who were incorporated owing to their indisputable merits, is the highest-regarded medical Institution in Argentina.

This Academy is concerned about the circulation abroad of biased rumors according to which actions harmful to human rights, personal persecutions of scientists, and a general climate of public insecurity would make it ill-advised for foreign scientists to attend and take part in the International Cancer Congress.

In that regard, this Academy understands that it is our duty to explain to the scientific community which you respectfully represent, that:

1) En ningún momento los Miembros integrantes de esta Academia o el personal científico, técnico o auxiliar que integran los Institutos de la misma (más de 200 personas), han sido lesionados en su libertad o actividad profesional por autoridades o individuos aislados.

2) En los últimos años las actividades científicas de la Academia y sus Institutos han recibido el apoyo del Estado, sin ningún compromiso o solicitud de adhesión, pública o privada.

3) El clima de seguridad pública ha mejorado sustancialmente, habiendo desaparecido los secuestros de personalidades y funcionarios, realizado por los terroristas. Se puede así afirmar, sin distorsionar la verdad, que Buenos Aires como todas las ciudades Argentinas no es menos segura que cualquier gran ciudad de Europa o los Estados Unidos.

4) Las Universidades e Institutos de Investigación son actualmente sitios de trabajo tranquilo y fructífero, en contraste con la agitación, el activismo y las persecuciones a Profesores e Investigadores, que a menudo significaron agresiones personales, tan frecuentes ante de marzo de 1976.

En la seguridad de que esa Institución hará llegar esta información a sus distinguidos miembros y colegas, favoreciendo así la mayor concurrencia al próximo Congreso Internacional del Cáncer y reuniones similares, los saludamos con la consideración más distinguida.

FDO: DR. JULIO V. URIBURU
Secretario General

FDO: DR. JOSE E. RIVAROLA
Presidente

Esta nota fué comentada muy favorablemente por organismos estatales y se recibieron notas de beneplácito del señor Presidente de la República, Ministerios y Embajadas, y tuvo éxito al concurrir al Congreso Internacional del Cáncer, numerosos profesionales extranjeros que dudaban venir a la Argentina.

ñ) OTRAS ACTIVIDADES

1- Círculo Médico de Córdoba

Informa que la citada Institución programó un homenaje académico al Prof. Ignacio Maldonado Allende y solicitó la adhesión de esta H. Academia. Se envió la adhesión de la H. Academia.

Figure 4. Continued.

Source: *Memoria: Año 1978 (Presidencia de Dr. José E. Rivarola)* (16).

- 1) None of the members of this Academy, nor the scientific, technical and auxiliary staff of the Institutes belonging to it (more than 200 people) have had their freedom or their professional activities restricted by authorities or by isolated individuals.
 - 2) During these last years, the scientific activities of the Academy and its Institutes have been supported by the State, with no obligation of or request for public or private allegiance.
 - 3) The climate of public security has substantially improved, as the kidnapping of public figures and government officials perpetrated by terrorists has ceased. It can be affirmed, without straying from the truth, that Buenos Aires, like any other Argentine city, is no less safe than any major European or American city.
 - 4) Universities and Research Institutes are currently peaceful and productive workplaces, in comparison to the unrest, activism, and persecutions of or even violence towards Lecturers and Researchers, so common before March 1976.
- We have every conviction that your Institution will spread this information among its distinguished members and colleagues, so as to foster the largest possible attendance at the next International Cancer Congress and similar gatherings.
- Our most distinguished regards,

SIGNED: Professor JULIO V. URIBURU, General Secretary
SIGNED: DR. JOSE E. RIVAROLA, President

This letter has received highly positive comments from state bodies and letters of appreciation from the President of the Republic, Ministries, and Embassies. The letter itself was a success, given the attendance at the International Cancer Congress of numerous foreign professionals who had had doubts about traveling to Argentina.

Natural Knowledge (1660). In the 18th century, nearly forty institutions of a similar kind were founded (34,35). The academies of science and scientific societies became centers of moral influence that gathered scientists together and that attempted to “trap nature” with their methods and instruments, abandoning the contemplative glance of the Greeks (36). According to Armytage, they were “groups of like-minded researchers, often furtive, often masking (as in the case of Freemasons) their real designs with some ritual” (34 p.45). That is how theory became hypothesis, and its success became truth. Following that logic, the rules of conduct and the new models of judgment were formulated (36). For Nietzsche (37), science took the place that religion once occupied; it became the new idol, with churches replaced by scientific societies. Science and its institutions will be seen by society as “neutral and apolitical” and, under the influence of instrumental reason (38), they will justify the assertion made a few centuries later by Heidegger that “science does not think” (39).

In Argentina, the National Academy of Medicine was created on April 9, 1822 by Bernardino Rivadavia, and it is the oldest academy in the Americas (40). Currently, it is defined as a non-profit civil organization that highlights its autonomy as an expression of professional freedom, “indifferent to political comings and goings, governmental influences and personal interests, focusing exclusively on science.” Among its objectives, it emphasizes the problems related to Public Health, and “fosters by all means within its reach a dedication to dignity and ethics in professional practice” (41).

The document reproduced in Figure 4, part of the book *Memoria: Año 1978 (Presidencia de Dr. José E. Rivarola)* (16), transcribes the letter sent by the Academy on June 12, 1978 to the presidents of academies and principal scientific societies from other countries. The letter evidences the Academy’s institutional position regarding the 12th International Cancer Congress and the political situation in Argentina. The short paragraph included after the signatures refers to the favorable comments made by ministries and embassies and the satisfaction the letter brought to “President” Jorge Rafael Videla.

DISCUSSION

The event analyzed in this article is not only inscribed in a particular socio-political context of Argentine history, but also responds to the dominant conception of the role of science based on the foundational precepts of scientific societies. This text questions the myth of the neutrality of science with a reflection about human values and science (42) and the abandonment of thought.

The events described here attempt to rescue from oblivion situations like those found in the book *Memoria: Año 1978 (Presidencia de Dr. José E. Rivarola)* (16) of the Academy of Medicine which allow us to reveal a part of the history that began to be reconstructed in 1983. In that year, President Raúl Alfonsín ordered the trial of three of the four military juntas that led the military dictatorship in a process known as the “Trial of the Juntas,” ending in 1985 with the upper echelon of the military being sentenced in a case with a few precedents in world history. From 1984 onward, numerous court cases were brought against other army officers, police officers and civilians (c) that were involved in proven crimes against humanity, and in September of that year, the book *Nunca más, informe final de la Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas* [Never again, the final report of National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons] (7) was published. The book describes the methodology of kidnapping, torture, mass executions, disappearance of children and adolescents, the existence of approximately 340 clandestine centers throughout the country, and the transfer of assets by inventing or simulating transactions that never existed, among many other horrors.

However, in 1986, President Alfonsín, pressured by the armed forces, passed the Full Stop Law [*Ley de Punto Final*] No. 23492 and the Law of Due Obedience [*Ley de Obediencia Debida*] No. 23521 (44), which obstructed the prosecution of most of the criminals. From 1989 onward, President Carlos Menem issued a series of amnesty decrees that pardoned those criminals who were already prosecuted as well as all those outside of the scope of the laws mentioned above. As a whole, these have come to be known as “impunity laws.” In 2003, the Supreme

Court of Justice ruled the non-applicability of the crimes against humanity (Rulings: 327:2312) and the unconstitutionality of the Full Stop and Due Obedience Laws (Rulings: 328:2056); at the same time, the National Congress declared them to be null and void through the Law No. 25779 (45). These events, jointly with the clear political decision of President Néstor Kirchner on the matter of Human Rights, made it possible to reaffirm the continued importance of this history and to initiate the proceedings for trials against members of the armed forces connected to crimes against humanity and to start institutional reparations for the damage caused.

All these actions made it possible to unmask the web of civilian complicity in the coup d'état. The Secretary of Human Rights of Argentina intervened as plaintiff in some of the emblematic cases of corporate complicity in the organization of repression in places such as the Ledesma sugar factory in Jujuy; the Ford Argentina and Mercedes-Benz automakers; the companies Acindar and Siderca, on whose premises clandestine detention centers were installed; and the shipyard Astarsa. This serves as proof that what happened from March 14, 1976 onward was not the result of a closed military sect, but rather that it responded to ideological, political and economic interests affecting a large part of Latin America, related to the National Security Doctrine carried out through Operation Condor in the countries of South America.

On March 25, 2004 in the Navy School of Mechanics [*Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada*], 28 years after the coup, president Nestor Kirchner asked for forgiveness on behalf of the State "for the shame of having been silent during the 20 years of democracy" about the crimes committed by the Process (46).

The epidemiological dimensions "of the crimes of the Process" in terms of mortality indicate that, for example, in the City of Buenos Aires in 1976 the number of disappeared people between the age of 20 and 24 (233) was higher than the sum of all the causes of death (217) that occurred in the same year for the same age group. It also indicates that in the province of Buenos Aires, the ratio of the "disappeared" to overall deaths was 0.1 for people between 15 and 19 years, 0.3 between 20 and 24 years, 0.2 between 25 and 29 years, and 0.1 between 30 and

34 years. That is to say that for a person aged from 25 to 29 who lived in the province of Buenos Aires, the probability of being "disappeared" in 1976 was twice that of dying due to any other cause, including violent deaths. However, this data was never analyzed by the medical institutions concerned, according to their expressions, about the health of the population (47).

Numerous professional associations of hospitals and unions have been recovering the memory of disappeared workers; perhaps the best known case is that of the Profesor Alejandro Posadas National Hospital (48). Recently, some scientific societies have begun to put this topic in their agendas; such is the case of Argentine Society of Pediatrics, which in September 2011, in the year of its centennial, acknowledged that:

During the Process, more than two hundred doctors and health-care workers were reported missing; among them we identified 15 pediatricians, regarding whom we have been able to compile biographical sketches. We would like to remember those pediatricians, who were committed to childhood and to the society of the time in which they lived. Some of them were coworkers of those who today are 60 years old, and their memories will remain with us. We believe that they also deserve to be known and remembered by younger generations. (49)

The Society's president, Margarita Ramonet, affirms:

It is necessary to rebuild Argentina, not as an act of forgetting, but as an act of purification. Therefore, that is how the Argentine Society of Pediatrics includes memory, and the legal system, as essential instruments to strengthen every day the cry "Never Again!" (50).

It suffices to say that the 15 pediatricians that were remembered by the Argentine Society of Pediatrics were already murdered or had already been disappeared at the time of the 12th International Cancer Congress.

In the letter reproduced by the National Academy of Medicine, the Academy's self-acknowledgement as the medical institution of

greatest import in Argentina and the position taken regarding the situation of the country, in addition to the clarification added to the note *a posteriori*, are acts of the utmost severity for a government-funded institution (51). Unlike other institutions, in 30 years of democracy this academy has been unable to examine itself and reflect upon its own history and its institutional role in events as grave as those described in this article. This leads us to question the values upon which the institution is grounded. Let us just remember that during the

military dictatorship 250 healthcare workers were disappeared, 134 of which were doctors.

The aforementioned events corroborate that science is neither neutral nor objective, as many still think, and that health institutions do not always act in the defense of life. That is why we understand that recovering some events from oblivion to construct memories is also a part of the social politics of science, its institutions, its workers and its researchers.

END NOTES

a. The newspaper *La Nación*, founded by ex-president Bartolomé Mitre (1821-1906), published its first issue on January 4, 1870. With its conservative bent, it has historically been the outlet of groups related to the Catholic Church, the Armed Forces and the largest agricultural producers of Argentina. The newspaper *Clarín* was founded by Roberto Noble in August 1945. Its most distinctive characteristic was its support of developmentalist ideology and the ideology's representatives, a position it sustained until the 1980s. Both newspapers had close ties to the de facto government. In 1976, through Act 14, the Military Junta transferred in an irregular manner 51% of the shares of the company Papel Prensa S.A. (which holds the monopoly of the production of newsprint at a national level) "to the newspapers *Clarín*, *La Nación* and *La Razón* [...]" and where it is established that the remaining 49% must be transferred to regional newspapers inside the country. That requirement was later eliminated in the addendums I and II, and finally, that 49% was transferred to the State" (12). Presently, both newspapers are involved in a judicial court case for the irregular acquisition of Papel Prensa S.A. during the last military dictatorship. The court case was filed as "Magnetto, Héctor and others for crimes against public order which may only be prosecuted by government," in which the Financial Information Unit (UIF) [*Unidad de Información Financiera*] requested to act as plaintiff since "the newspapers in question have been favored by the 'spurious acquisition of the majority of shares' of the only newsprint-producing company in the country. In that way, they have been holding the monopoly of paper production for more than thirty years, with 71.5% of the capital share of Papel Prensa" (13). The magazine *Gente*, the full name of which is *Gente y*

la Actualidad, is a weekly publication belonging to the publishing house Atlántida. It focuses on celebrities and show business, and "it was one of the media outlets most involved in the communicational strategy of the regime established on March 24, 1976" (14) with a "tendency characterized by explicit collaboration with and support of the military dictatorship" (15).

b. Alfredo Ignacio Astiz, known as the "blond angel" and the "angel of death," is a former captain of the Argentine Navy that infiltrated human rights organizations as a spy during the Process of National Reorganization. He was a member of the task group based at the Navy School of Mechanics (ESMA) [*Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada*]. Among the crimes against humanity attributed to him are cases of great international repercussion such as the kidnapping, torture and disappearance of the two French nuns Alice Domon and Léonie Duquet, for which he was sentenced in absentia to life imprisonment in France (29), and of a young Swedish woman, Dagmar Hagelin (30). In Argentina, Astiz infiltrated the group "La Santa Cruz," where the first Madres de Plaza de Mayo used to meet and where the first founders of the organization (among them Azucena Villaflor de Vicenti) were kidnapped. In 2011, he was sentenced to life imprisonment and perpetual complete disqualification by the Argentine courts (31).

c. We should not forget that among those who committed crimes against humanity were healthcare professionals, whether witnessing acts of torture, attending captive/disappeared women in childbirth, or acting as accomplices in the subsequent concealment of the identities of the newborns.

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