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LOS ANGELES LATINO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

'Our Disappeared' revisits a dark chapter in Argentina's history

The documentary takes a haunting and disturbing look at the era when a military junta was in control.

By Reed Johnson
September 12, 2008

There's no body of written evidence, no realpolitik smoking gun, to directly connect Henry Kissinger with Ines Kuperschmit.

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But the former U.S. foreign policy mastermind and the Argentine-born Los Angeles attorney both play intertwined, supporting roles in Juan Mandelbaum's haunting and disturbing documentary "Our Disappeared" (Nuestros Desaparecidos), one of 132 films that will be screened during the 12th annual Los Angeles Latino International Film Festival, which starts tonight.

Kissinger, who was secretary of State at the time, appears very briefly in "Our Disappeared" in a late-1970s Buenos Aires television news clip, declaring U.S. support for Jorge Rafael Videla, head of the brutal right-wing military junta that ruled Argentina from 1976 until 1983. Although several of the military leaders were put on trial after democracy was restored, those years remain a dark chapter in the nation's history that many Argentines still refuse to confront.

"The task of remembering is not easy," said Mandelbaum, who has lived in the United States for decades and owns a documentary production company in Boston. "I think countries are more tempted to leave things behind than dealing with them."

Although Kuperschmit's personal story is only one of those recounted in the movie, it's as unsettling and emblematic as any other.

Born in 1975, Kuperschmit was only an infant when the coup took place. But her parents, both members of the radical left-wing Montoneros group, were among thousands of Argentine students, trade unionists, opposition politicians and others who were rounded up by the military and "disappeared," a euphemism for torture and murder.

When Kuperschmit's mother saw government agents approaching her while strolling with Ines through the Buenos Aires zoo, she instantly abandoned her daughter and walked straight toward the agents so that Ines wouldn't be "disappeared" along with her. An elderly couple later found the baby girl lying on the grass and crying.

Although the aunt who adopted her never talked about what happened, Kuperschmit said that even as a child she guessed the truth.

"I was never tortured, I was never detained, I don't know what it's like to have a cold gun against my head," she said, switching between Spanish and English during an interview at her midcity Los Angeles home. "But I have the consciousness."

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