

UNITEDNOTIONS film presents

Stolen

A film by Violeta Ayala and Dan Fallshaw
HDCam, 52 & 77min – Australia 2009
In English, Spanish and Hassaniya with English subtitles

Website

www.stolenthedoc.com

Facebook

<http://www.facebook.com/STOLENTHEDOC>

IMDB

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1446178/>

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International Premiere

Official Selection 2009 - Toronto International Film Festival

European Premiere

Official Competition 2009 - International Documentary Festival Amsterdam (IDFA)

Festival Awards

Best Feature Documentary 2010 - Pan African Film Festival, Los Angeles

Grand Prix 2010 - Art of the Document Film Festival, Warsaw - Poland

Best Film 2010 - Festival Internacional de Cine de Cuenca, Ecuador

Golden Oosikar for Best Doc 2010 - Anchorage International Film Festival

Best Documentary 2010 - African International Film Festival, Nigeria

Best International Feature 2010 - Rincon International Film Festival, Puerto Rico

Best Film 2010 - Rivers Edge International Film Festival

Best Editing 2010 - Doc NZ, Documentary Edge Film Festival

Special Jury Mention 2010 - Doc NZ, Documentary Edge Film Festival

Silver Olive 2010 - XV International TV Festival Bar, Montenegro

Special Mention 2010 - Ojai Film Festival, California

Audience Award 2010 - Amnesty International Film Festival, Vancouver

Audience Award 2010 - One World Human Rights FF, Bratislava

Best Film about North Africa 2012 - Amazigh International Film festival, Morocco

Festival Screenings

Documentary Finalist 2009 - Sydney Film Festival (Unfinished preview of the film)

International Competition 2010 - It's All True Film Festival, Brazil

Standing Up Competition 2010 - Cleveland International Film Festival

Right to Know Competition 2010 - One World International Human Rights Film Festival

Right to Know 2010 - One World Film Festival, Bratislava

Official Competition 2010 - Raindance Film Festival, London

Official Competition 2010 - Films From the South, Norway

Official Competition 2010 - Foyle Film Festival, Ireland (Finalist)

Official Competition 2010 - Anchorage International Film Festival

Official Competition 2010 - Festival de cine de Bogota, Colombia

Official Competition 2010 - Makedox, Macedonia

UNITEDNOTIONS film

Finalist for the Best Andean Doc 2011 – Documenta, Venezuela
Official Selection 2009 - Melbourne International Film Festival
Official Selection 2010 - Seattle International Film Festival
Official Selection 2010 – Amnesty International Film Festival
Official Selection 2010 - Singapore International Film Festival
Official Selection 2010 – Accra International Film Festival
Official Selection 2010 - Docaviv, Israel
Official Selection 2010 – Cascade African Film Festival, Portland, US
Official Selection 2010 - 7th Amakula Kampala International Film Festival, Uganda
Official Selection 2010 - Mid Atlantic Black Film Festival, Virginia
Official Selection 2010 – Internazionale a Ferrara, Italy
Official Selection 2010 – Internazionale a Roma, Italy
Official Selection 2010 - Zanzibar International Film Festival
Official Selection 2010 – DocuFest, Atlanta
Official Selection 2010 – Aarhus Film Festival, Denmark
Official Selection 2010 – Films Fra Sor, Norway
Official Selection 2009 - Watch Docs Human Rights in Film, Poland
Official Selection 2010 - Norwegian Short Film Festival
Official Selection 2010 - Glasgow Film Festival
Official Selection 2010 - Doc Point, Helsinki Documentary Film Festival
Official Selection 2010 - Guth Gafa International Documentary Film Festival, Ireland
Official Selection 2010 - Victoria Film Festival, Canada
Official Selection 2010 – Kansas International Film Festival
Official Selection 2010 – Vermont International Film Festival
Official Selection 2010 - Docville, Belgium
Official Selection 2010 - EDOC, Ecuador
Official Selection 2010 - Revelation Film Festival, Perth
Official Selection 2010 - Byron Bay International Film Festival
Official Selection 2010 – Flagstaff Mountain Film Festival
Official Selection 2011 - Reframe Film Festival, Canada
Official Selection 2011 – New York Africa Film Festival (Closing Night)
Official Selection 2011 – Montreal Black Film Festival
Official Selection 2011 - Addis International Film Festival
Official Selection 2011 – Sebastopol Documentary Film Festival
Official Selection 2011 - Bermuda International Film Festival
Official Selection 2012 – 2nd Annual Global Film Festival, CUNY, New York
Official Selection 2012 – Amazigh International Film festival, Agadir, Morocco
Special Screening 2010 – Cinema Politica, Canada
Special Screening 2010 – Frontline Club, London
Special Screening 2010 - Edinburgh's Film House
Special Screening 2010 - Doc Lounge Lund Sweden
Special Screening 2010 - Kino Sodran, Lund Sweden
Special Screening 2010 – OzDoxs
Special Screening 2010 – FOMM, AFTRS
Special Screening 2010 – National Film & TV School, London
Special Screening 2010 – IDFA Special, Amsterdam
Special Screening 2011 – Stranger Than Fiction, NY
Special Screenings 2011 – 2012 – Norwegian Film Club, Norway
Special Screening 2012 – Doc Watchers, Maysels Cinema, NY

Synopsis

Filmmakers Ayala and Fallshaw follow Fetim Sellami, a Saharawi refugee, to North Africa for a reunion with her mother. Mother and child were separated when Sellami was a toddler. But the UN-sponsored reunion reveals a secret which spirals the film into a dark world the filmmakers could never have imagined. The black Saharawis start talking about a forbidden subject...their enslavement.

The filmmakers recount moments of terror when their lives were in danger as well as the extreme hardships in getting the footage across borders. Perhaps most disturbingly, it becomes difficult to distinguish who are the good guys, as the 'good guys' turn bad and the 'bad guys' appear to do good.

Protestors have demonstrated against the accuracy of the film. The Polisario, the movement running the camp flew Sellami to the Sydney Film Festival to deny being a slave and that slavery exists in the camps.

Stolen is a compelling, modern-day, real-life cloak-and-dagger thriller.

Origins of Stolen

We were in Mauritania making our first film together. It's the next country south from Western Sahara, which is the territory at the heart of "STOLEN". In a little town called Chingetti, a woman approached Violeta and told her in Spanish that she hadn't seen her family for 30 years because of the conflict between Morocco and the Polisario over Western Sahara. She came from refugee camps, just to the north in Algeria. It sparked our interest, so we researched the conflict and found out the UN organised family reunions for the refugees and thought this would be a good way to tell their story.

For 100 years Western Sahara was a Spanish colony. In 1975 when Spain left Morocco took over and half the population fled with the Polisario Liberation Front to refugee camps in the Algerian desert. The Polisario, a nationalist organisation backed by Algeria, have been disputing control of Western Sahara with the Kingdom of Morocco for the last 34 years. A war lasted from 1975 to 1991, since then the conflict has remained in stalemate.

Since 2004, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees has organised family reunions for refugees in the camps and their families from the Western Sahara. There are 27,000 names on the UNHCR waiting list. For a family to be reunited it's akin to winning the lottery. These reunions are carried out by air, there is one flight per week and the reunions only last 5 days.

In September 2006, with the co-operation of the Polisario, we went to the camps to make a film about a family reunion. After 10 days of being introduced by Polisario officials to women who were to take part in a UN Family Reunion Program, we met Fetim, a black Saharawi that belongs to a minority group. The majority of the camp residents are of Arabic/ Berber descent.

Fetim has a teenage daughter, Leil, who speaks fluent Spanish. Fetim told us about being separated from her mother when she was 3 years old. We felt compelled to tell her story and asked her if she would like us to make a film, Fetim answered 'I would like that very much'.

A year and three trips later we discovered something we couldn't have imagined, that slavery was still affecting the lives of the black Saharawis. They trusted us with their stories, they risked their lives because they don't want to continue living in slavery. We knew at that moment, we had to do everything to take their story to the world.

Filming Stolen

At first, making the film seemed straightforward. We had permission from the Polisario to go to the refugee camps and visas for Algeria. Then, the day we arrived in Algiers, two bombs exploded outside our hotel. The first two trips to the camps went smoothly but when we discovered slavery on the third, everything changed.

From the moment the Polisario realised we were filming material they didn't like, they tried to stop us. They detained us and UN military officers came to negotiate our release. We hid our tapes in the desert, hoping that someone else could smuggle them out to a neighboring country. The Australian Embassy in Paris negotiated our release from Algeria, one of the most dangerous countries in the world. While trying to retrieve the tapes we were drawn into a political arm wrestle between the Polisario and Morocco. We had Moroccan spies following us and in Morocco twenty hours of footage was stolen and swapped for blank tapes.

For 18 months it was just the two of us, our little cameras and no back up, with the Polisario and Morocco breathing down our necks. It was an absolute miracle "STOLEN" was finished. We faced so many obstacles, during the shoot, to post-production and even after the film was finished and the opposition it has attracted because it deals with slavery. The Polisario and their supporters started a misinformation campaign against us in Australia and other countries and they even brought Fetim to the premiere in Sydney to protest against the film and this pressure hasn't stopped. On the more positive side since we made STOLEN, the Moroccan Government has criminalized slavery and The Polisario has changed the law so a slave can marry without a master's permission. Both countries keep denying the existence of slavery. Our hope is that STOLEN will be the beginning of the end of slavery in North Africa.

We believe it is important for people to understand when using the word slavery, the most common image is that of black slaves in shackles. Slavery in the camps is different and dates back to the Old Testament. Slaves are usually born slaves rather than captured and remain with the same master. Slavery is so entrenched in the mind of the slave that violence isn't necessary to keep it alive. The familiar relationship between master and slave makes it difficult for outsiders to identify or even understand.

Within the refugee camps there are two groups, those who call themselves Beydan that literally means "white Arabs" and make up 90% of the population, the other 10% are descendants of black Africans stolen from sub-Saharan Africa but the difference is that many black people continue to live in slavery to this day. The black people in the camps describe slavery as: having no rights over their children, possibly given as gifts to friends or family of the master; being the sexual property of the master, the child born of a slave mother is a slave; not being allowed to decide whom you marry; having a slave name and bearing the master's surname; serving the master by tending animals, working or doing household duties without payment.

Selected Reviews

"It's compelling to watch. You really have to see it to believe it. It's like a spy story."

ABC MOVIE TIME

"Pacy, exciting and hugely engrossing. Guaranteed to spark intense debate about the relationship between documakers and their subjects wherever it's shown."

Richard Kuipers, VARIETY

"The cinematography is stunning, the characters are compelling, the interviews are intimate and the story is as gripping as a good spy thriller." **Jennifer Merin, ABOUT.COM**

"The storytelling process, as it unfolds on camera, is at once fascinating and alarming"

Cynthia Fuchs, POP MATTERS

"Riveting stuff. The film moves into political thriller territory when the filmmakers are made suddenly aware that the conversations they have taped put the lives of their subjects in peril, and they themselves have become prey to sinister political and cultural forces."

Greg Quill, THE TORONTO STAR

"The morality issue at play in the film Stolen is Manichean in its clarity—slavery is unarguably one of the most abhorrent crimes that humanity can perpetrate against itself. But as filmmakers Dan Fallshaw and Violeta Ayala discovered, the politics of sharing the stories of slavery they encountered in Polisario Front-run refugee camps in Algeria proved to be much more complicated. Stolen perhaps raises more questions than it answers, but does so in the tradition of the best sort of political art. As always, it remains to the viewer to decide exactly where the truth lies." **Raul Chadha, STRANGER THAN FICTION – NEW YORK**

"It is noteworthy that the film regardless of the attempts either from Morocco or Polisario to serve its political agenda, has a high level of professionalism" **AL ARABIYA**

"Stolen is a dramatic and complex exploration of modern slavery, not to mention a fascinating study of the perils of documentary filmmaking."

Jenny Punter, THE GLOBE AND MAIL

"A controversial exploration into the world of the Saharawi refugees"

Peter Knegt, INDIWIRE

"Suspenseful, scary, and displaying personal bravery by Ayala and Fallshaw, this exceptional film is a searing testimony to man's continued inhumanity to man."

SEATTLE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

"The thing about making documentaries is that you never know what you're going to get. In few cases is that more remarkable than in this one. There's no denying that it's fascinating, or that what it reveals is tremendously important."

Jennie Kermode, EYE FOR FILM UK

"The existence of modern slavery has been detailed in books like Kevin Bales's Disposable People, but rarely has it been covered on film as intimately as in Stolen."

Thom Powers, TORONTO IFF

"A controversial film, that surprises you at first, shocks you in the middle and angers you by the end" **Michael Oliveira, ROLLING STONE BRASIL**

"The film elicits a strong emotional response from viewers and deals with serious racial, social and economic divisions in Africa and the controversy it has generated will likely bring attention not only to the film, but also to the issues it film highlights."

Msia Kibona Clark, ALL AFRICA US

UNITEDNOTIONS film

Filmmaker Quotes

'Totally fascinating. A great piece of work'

KEVIN MACDONALD, *Touching the Void, The Last King of Scotland (One day in September, Academy Award Winner 2000)*

'Stolen is much more than a film about modern slavery: it is a description of the crime that seems to follow humanity until it's end, the crime of ignorance. Congratulations to your work Ayala! It's useless to say, I could relate to most everything in it, to the characters in the desert as well as to you as filmmakers. I feel like i've been in and out of North Africa with you two people for some years. Your film is stronger than the stupid attempts to discredit it.'

HUBERT SAUPER, *Darwin's Nightmare (Academy Award Nominee 2006)*

'Exciting film. In the Sahara, there is neither justice nor poetry'

ANDERS ØSTERGAARD, *Burma VJ (Academy Award Nominee 2010)*

'Having seen so much of the footage, I can tell you that the filmmakers did not lie to or manipulate their subjects. They went to do one story but upon the realization of the issue of slavery, the film changed. The Polisario do not want this story out because it makes them look bad. And I believe they are using all means to discredit the filmmakers.'

DEBORAH DICKSON (Three time Academy Award Nominee)

'Violeta and Dan went to make a film about refugees, but soon realised there was a bigger story right under their noses. An important, hidden story that needed to be told to the world. The ordeal they went through to bring their raw material home in the teeth of opposition was extraordinary, and no less arduous has been the task of piecing it all together into a powerful and moving document. They have my complete admiration.'

BOB CONOLLY (Academy Award Nominee)

'Dan and Violeta told us the truth as they saw it and people risked their positions, trusted them to tell that truth hoping it might help. They were following a time-honoured tradition of being truly independent filmmakers. When the same slavery accusations proved true of the opposing side – the Polisario's enemies, the Moroccans, Violeta and Dan also exposed that.

They discovered early in their careers what it took me decades to see: the Left is just as capable of 'devouring its own babies' as the Right. Rather than facing the music and moving to right an ancient feudal custom, the Polisario have battered down the hatches and brought on board well intentioned but naïve PC supporters who out of a blind loyalty have done their best to undercut the veracity of *Stolen* and thus continue the practice of slavery in the refugee camps. This is a classic case of shoot the messengers.'

DAVID BRADBURY (Two time Academy Award Nominee)

Human Rights Experts

FREE THE SLAVES, Prof. Kevin Bales - President

'I have carefully reviewed the film *Stolen* with a view to assessing whether it is reasonable to accept the assertions of the film that instances of slavery exist in the refugee camps in the Western Sahara... The patterns of family relationships involving long-term enslavement described in the film match precisely those I have found just to the South of the Western Sahara, and which persist in Mauritania to this day. The nature and pattern of work done by black individuals in the film, the nature and pattern of their interaction with "white" families and individuals, the description of their treatment under informal rules of social participation and interaction, and the description of expectations of control by white individuals and families over black individuals and families, even when emancipation documents have been issued, all match patterns of interaction and hereditary enslavement I have observed and documented within the region. It is my opinion that the film *Stolen* portrays a situation of enslavement within the refugee camps of the Western Sahara, one that is not out of character with prevailing social patterns within the region.'

Prof. Bales book 'Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy' was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize, and published in ten languages. Desmond Tutu called it "a well researched, scholarly and deeply disturbing expose of modern slavery".

ANTI-SLAVERY INTERNATIONAL, Romana Cacchioli - Africa Programme Coordinator

'In January, along with my colleague Mariela Gonzalez, we were very pleased to meet Violeta and Dan in Madrid. The purpose of the visit was to discuss and view the footage of interviews claiming slavery in the Tindouf camps and Laayoune, Western Sahara. I was particularly keen to learn more, as I have been assisting a Mauritanian girl in Spain who claims she is a slave of a Saharawi family from the Tindouf camps, and because although we have had for a long time, suspicions of slavery continuing to exist we have not been able to verify. I am therefore particularly grateful to the journalists for allowing us to view the footage and to share it with Asim Turkawi my colleague on the Africa Programme responsible for Horn and East Africa with particular expertise on Sudan and also an Arab speaker and therefore able to verify the translation. Asim and I are of the opinion that the practices described in the interviews are consistent with slavery as it is practiced in neighbouring Mauritania and that the interviewees are credible.

I have read with much interest the statement issued by the Saharawi Republic (Polisario), as you know slavery is a sensitive and particularly thorny issue for States. The denials are regrettably a fairly typical response consistent with those of States including Mauritania (in the past), Niger and Sudan. It is also a common practice for states to put pressure on victims to retract their statements.'

Anti-Slavery International is the world's oldest international human rights organisation and works exclusively against slavery and related abuses.

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, Eric Goldstein – Research Director of North Africa

'In Sum, credible sources testified to Human Rights Watch about vestiges of slavery that continue to affect the lives of a portion of the black minority in the Tindouf camps. The practices involve historical ties between families that involve certain rights and obligations that are not always clear. Being a slave does not necessarily preclude enjoying freedom of movement. The issue of slavery in the Tindouf camps deserves closer scrutiny than Human Rights Watch has been able to undertake. It bears mentioning that Saharawis in the Moroccan controlled Western Sahara told us that residual practices of slavery can be found there, as well.'

Human Rights Watch carried out an independent investigation and published a report in December 2008.

U.S COMMITTEE FOR REFUGEES AND IMMIGRANTS, Merrill Smith - Director of International Planning and Analysis

'*Stolen* is a surprising documentary. It starts as an intimate family drama in the admittedly heightened ambient tension of life in a refugee camp. The filmmakers many days of constant taping, however, eventually render them "hiding in plain sight," which allows the audience to

UNITEDNOTIONS film

be as a fly on the wall when an unexpected mystery begins to unfold. Sotto voce conversations caught off tape, the mute testimony of dry documents, the unspoken rationales of unyielding bureaucrats--all begin to accumulate to provide evidence, all the more credible for its banal circumstances and delivery, of what would otherwise be difficult to believe in the twenty-first century. Even activists who have been fighting against forced encampment (aka, human warehousing) as the all-too-often default fate of refugees for decades on end will be shocked. I thought I had seen it all. I hadn't.'

Filmmaking Team Bios

VIOLETA AYALA (Writer/Director/Producer/2nd Camera)

Violeta Ayala is an artist, writer and film director born in Bolivia. She studied Theatre and Journalism at Charles Sturt University in Australia, where her curiosity in filmmaking began and she made PROYECTO VILA-VILA a short film about the effects of cervical cancer on indigenous women in Bolivia. In 2006 Violeta began her collaboration with Dan Fallshaw in North Africa on BETWEEN THE OIL AND THE DEEP BLUE SEA, an investigative documentary about corruption in the oil industry distributed by Ronin Films. In 2009 her first feature documentary STOLEN premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival, was shown in more than 80 festivals worldwide, winning fourteen awards and will be broadcasted on PBS WORLD in the US in 2013. She is currently directing two feature documentaries; COCAINE PRISON (supported by the Tribeca Film Institute, IDFA's Fund, Fonds Sud Cinema, the Strasbourg Film Fund, Screen NSW, Screen Australia, the Norwegian Film Institute) and THE BOLIVIAN CASE (Supported by Puma Britdoc, NRK and NFI). Violeta is an alumnus of the Film Independent Documentary Lab, the Berlinale Talent Campus and a Tribeca Film Institute Fellow. She is regularly invited to give master-classes at the National Film School in London and the Edinburgh College of Art. Violeta is currently writing two screenplays EL COMUNISTA; based on her grandfather's life and COCAINE QUEENS; based on her three-year experience filming inside a Bolivian prison.

DAN FALLSHAW (Director/Producer/Editor/DOP)

Dan is the lead producer, cinematographer and editor of UNITED NOTIONS FILM. He studied Visual Communications at the University of Technology in Sydney and St Martins College in London. Dan has worked in London and Germany as an Art Director and in Italy as a film editor. He made his first documentary in 1999 while at university, which looked at the lives of four women dealing with the consequences of chemotherapy. Prior to starting UNITED NOTIONS FILM in 2006 with Violeta Ayala, Dan was the main designer at SBS Television in Australia. He produced he and Violeta's first film together, BETWEEN THE OIL AND THE DEEP BLUE SEA in 2006, a documentary about corruption in the oil industry in Africa, distributed by Ronin Films. In 2007 Dan produced and directed A VEGAN IN THE MEAT AISLE a short drama selected for the very competitive, Tropfest. In 2009 Dan, co directed, produced, shot and edited the multi award winner STOLEN, financed through Screen Australia's special documentary fund. It has shown at more than 80 film festivals worldwide including Toronto and IDFA. STOLEN has garnered much press worldwide and will be broadcast on television in the US in 2013. Dan's current projects include THE BOLIVIAN CASE and COCAINE PRISON. Dan is a Tribeca Film Institute Fellow and an alumnus of the Film Independent Documentary Lab. He has participated on panels ranging from IDFA, Sheffield, Toronto, Films Fra Sor in Oslo, Latin Side of the Doc in Mexico, AIDC in Australia, Art Exit and Stranger than Fiction in New York. Dan received the Best Editing Award at the Documentary Edge Festival in New Zealand for STOLEN,

TOM ZUBRYCKI (Producer)

Tom Zubrycki is one of Australia's most respected documentary filmmakers and has an impressive body of work with more than 30 films. In 2008 Tom was awarded the Cecil Holmes Award by the Australian Directors Guild for his creative output, as well as for his contribution to the film industry, especially his mentoring of emerging directors. Tom's films have premiered at film festivals from Berlin to Toronto. He has won two AFI Awards, the highest award in the Australian Film Industry with THE DIPLOMAT and KEMIRA--DIARY OF A

UNITEDNOTIONS film

STRIKE and an international Emmy for producing EXILE IN SARAJEVO. Tom is also known for films such as MOLLY & MOBARAK, HOMELANDS, BILLAL, STOLEN GENERATIONS, MAKING VENUS, THE PRODIGAL SON, A FIGHTING CHANCE, MAD MORRO, WANJA, THE INTERVENTION and more recently STOLEN.

DEBORAH DICKSON (Producer)

Deborah Dickson is an independent filmmaker who has had three films nominated for an Academy Award: FRANCES STELOFF: MEMOIRS OF A BOOKSELLER; SUZANNE FARRELL: ELUSIVE MUSE (co-directed with Anne Belle) and LALEE'S KIN, co-directed with long time colleague, Susan Froemke and legendary cinematographer Albert Maysles. She is also known for films such as THE EDUCATION OF GORE VIDAL; RUTHIE AND CONNIE: EVERY ROOM IN THE HOUSE; WITNESSES TO A SECRET WAR; the CARRIER series and ANOTHER DAY IN PARADISE. Dickson's films have premiered at film festivals from Sundance to Berlin and been shown on PBS, HBO and other major networks. She has been funded by American Film Institute, Sundance Documentary Fund and ITVS. She is on the faculty of the new masters program of social documentary film at the School of Visual Arts.

JOHN MCDOWELL (Composer)

Film composer John McDowell achieved worldwide recognition with his soundtrack to the Academy Award winning documentary BORN INTO BROTHELS, winner of Best Musical Score at the Bend Film Festival. Subsequent film scores by McDowell include ORGASMIC BIRTH: THE BEST KEPT SECRET, WHO DOES SHE THINKS SHE IS? and A SON'S SACRIFICE.

McDowell is also a highly gifted pianist, percussionist, producer, commissioned composer and instructor. McDowell served as founder, artistic director and leader of several musical projects including The Born Into Brothels Ensemble, the world music band Mamma Tongue. His touring and recording credits include: the platinum selling band Rusted Root, Krishna Das, and Ram Das. His solo CD Speaking the Mamma Tongue is featured on Raven Records and he was commissioned by Gaiam to create a CD for health and healing called Reflections. He has recently begun a piano/violin duo with the young Canadian violinist and composer Emmanuel Vukovich, who is also featured on the film STOLEN.

JUSTINE MOYLE (Associate Producer)

Justine Moyle has 10 years of radio and television experience worldwide. She has a degree in Media and Journalism from the University of Wisconsin, USA. In 2003 she worked for the BBC's radio 1 newsroom, covering the Iraq war with the world's best journalists. In 2004 Justine returned to Australia to produce TV commercials for Volkswagen, Carlton Breweries, QANTAS and Coca Cola. From 2005 to 2008 she worked with different production teams and produced Radio 2UE's morning and afternoon program, SBS's Pizza series, Australian Idol and Masterchef Australia. In 2009 Justine set up her own company, a creative consultancy specialising in film and music production. Stolen is Justine's first feature film as an associate producer and has been selected for the Toronto International Film Festival 2009.

ELLEN PECK (Associate Producer)

Ellen works as producer and creative/content advisor to documentary film, music and other projects in the arts associated with social and environmental issues, including the film and soundtrack for BORN INTO BROTHELS which garnered the Oscar for Best Documentary in 2005. She has worked with start-up non-profits and first-time capital campaigns, involved in both hands-on fundraising with individuals, corporations and foundations, and strategic planning for new initiative development.

STOLEN - Variety By RICHARD KUIPERS

The potential of documentaries to turn out very different from what was originally intended is controversially demonstrated with "Stolen." Begun by the Aussie team of Violeta Ayala and Daniel Fallshaw as a record of a feel-good family reunion in a Western Saharan refugee camp, the docu suddenly about-faces into an expose of slavery. Guaranteed to spark intense debate about the relationship between documakers and their subjects wherever it's shown, this compelling item is ideal for willing fests and pubcasters.

The main subject of the film, Faitim Sellami, has since denounced Ayala and Fallshaw, claiming they falsely portrayed her as a slave. She became front-page news Down Under when flown in by supporters to attend the docu's world preem at the Sydney fest, monitored by security guards and with police stationed in the lobby. Fiery post-screening Q&A drew roughly equal parts praise and condemnation.

Docu is all smiles at first. A Saharawi refugee who lives in a camp in supporter state Algeria, Sellami is about to be reunited with the mother she hasn't seen since Morocco's 1975 invasion of Western Sahara. Ayala and Fallshaw have been invited to cover events by Polisario, the Western Saharan independence movement responsible for administration of the camps.

Barely five minutes into the film, the good vibes turn bad. Sellami's 15-year-old daughter, Leil, says she has a "white grandmother" who lives with them. The woman in question is Deido, an Arab who brought Sellami to the camp and is said to have owned the family 30 years ago but has since liberated them. Statements by Leil and other family members and friends appear contradictory and leave no doubt they believe officially outlawed slavery continues here and elsewhere in the region.

Following the arrival of Sellami's mother, Embarka, and sister Fatma, the filmmaking duo bury what they've shot in the desert and hotfoot it out of the camp.

The second half plays like an espionage thriller. Detained briefly in Algeria by the Polisario, Ayala and Fallshaw fly to Paris, where Mohammed Reda, a mysterious Moroccan, sets up an operation to smuggle the buried tapes to Casablanca. The road also takes them to New York and Geneva to fire questions at the U.N. High Commission for Refugees.

Using news coverage of talks between Morocco and the Polisario to emphasize the delicacy of everyone's PR machines at the time (mid-2007), Ayala also fields a frantic call from Leil. She reports police have come calling, and she accuses the filmmakers of coming to do good but doing bad instead.

While most viewers will need to Google plenty of names, histories and official reports to get the bigger picture, what's onscreen is pacy, exciting and hugely engrossing. Ayala and Fallshaw have done the right thing by including a text statement outlining Sellami's objections.

Tech credits are pro.

Camera (color/B&W, HD), Ayala, Fallshaw; editor, Fallshaw; additional editing, Deborah Dickson; music, John McDowell; sound, Ayala, Fallshaw; sound designer, William Lawlor; associate producers, Justine Moyle, Ellen Peck. Reviewed at Sydney Film Festival (competing), June 11, 2009. (Also in Melbourne Film Festival.) Running time: 76 MIN.