

## Symposium Cultural Festival Studies

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### María Carrión

María Carrión is a journalist and human rights activist, and currently the Executive Director of the Western Sahara International Film Festival (FiSahara). She has worked in human rights documentary film (The Back of the World, Granito: How to Nail a Dictator, Condemned to Die). She was Senior Producer for Democracy Now!, an independent news program based in New York City, and contributor to The Progressive, BBC-Radio, EL PAIS, TVE and other media outlets. She was communications advisor to Amnesty International USA and its International Secretariat.

### Can film and media help liberate a people from occupation? The case of FiSahara

This lecture will explore the role that film and media can play in raising international awareness about one of the world's most forgotten conflicts: the struggle for self determination in Western Sahara. Specifically it will tell the story of how a film festival and film school in a refugee camp in the heart of the Sahara Desert are helping to amplify the voices of one of the most vulnerable and voiceless populations in the world and reach deep inside the corridors of power. As one of the world's last remaining colonies, Western Sahara, occupied by Morocco since 1975, is home to a range of human rights violations. Yet, due to strict limitations and controls imposed on the press, foreigners, and human rights monitors by Moroccan authorities, very little documentation exists to bring them to light. On the other side of the 2700 km-long Moroccan separation wall, in Algeria, live the refugees forced to flee the brutal occupation, but their plight is practically unknown to the world. The film festival and school they created are helping to reach new international audiences needed to report on their situation and pressure the UN to complete the decolonization of Western Sahara.