

MARIE GILLESPIE:

This is quite a remarkable film in that you're attempting to track journeys from the refugees' perspectives. What particular kinds of challenges did it present for you?

JAMES BLUEMEL:

I mean there's lots of...it's been full of challenges this film. Finding people. At the beginning we wanted to find people as near to source, if not at source as possible, so film them leaving. You know in Syria that's quite difficult because it's a dangerous place to go and in other places which aren't war zones, theoretically it should be easier but there's lots of complications about finding people because people leave their countries under sort of secrecy, it's not well advertised. So to try and find those people is complicated.

Then once you've found them, keeping track of them across the borders is really difficult. Much more difficult than it should be. In the age of sort of having mobile phones where lots of these people do have a phone with them and are able to communicate, it's the SIM card in your phone that lets you down. So once you cross a border, it could be a border from Greece to Macedonia, any border, each country has their own telecom company that they prefer to use and that SIM card goes dead. So just trying to find people once they've crossed into new country is a nightmare. It's difficult.

MARIE GILLESPIE:

So it must've been quite tricky you filming and the refugees filming, how did that work out?

JAMES BLUEMEL:

When I'm filming, when I'm there and I'm filming it's pretty simple, there is no need for them to bother unless they want to film something to send to their friends, something like that and they know that I'm there to do my job and that's to follow them. It's when the, sort of, when you hand over to them to film something you can't film, that's usually because they've got to go and meet the smuggler or they've got to do something which your presence will put them in danger.

Then they have to decide where their line is about how far to push it and some people just don't want to do it and that's absolutely understandable and they won't film in that situation, why make your life harder, I can utterly appreciate that. And other people they

want to... will do it because they want to get this footage out, they want to show what they're going through and that's really you know that's a decision that they arrive to on a completely individual basis.

MARIE GILLESPIE:

There is some remarkable footage of Hassan for example under a truck and Ahmed within a trailer. Were you ever worried about them as individuals and about the filming?

JAMES BLUEMEL:

Well you know there's a sense that because I know Ahmed, we built up a relationship and I knew that he was getting into a truck to be smuggled across the channel and he'd communicated to me that he was about to get on it through text messages and then I didn't hear anything from him for three days and that was quite stressful because there is no way of communicating with him, his phone was dead.

The last message I got was I'm about to get on this lorry and then there's absolutely, you know, radio silence coming through and yeah you start to imagine all sorts of scenarios. Some of them can be quite bleak. And actually you're quite helpless in that situation so when eventually, in Ahmed's case, he did get back in contact and said that you know 'I'm in the UK I'm fine, I just didn't have any more charge on my phone', you kind of go 'Thank god for that!'

MARIE GILLESPIE:

You must get very close to the people you are following?

JAMES BLUEMEL:

Yeah you do. If you accompany them on this journey and you see what's at stake for them and they are sharing their thoughts and their sort of concerns and their emotions with you, that is a bond that builds quite quickly.

MARIE GILLESPIE:

And do you feel that this film is making an intervention in general way in which the so-called refugee crisis has been represented?

JAMES BLUEMEL:

No.

MARIE GILLESPIE:

No?

JAMES BLUEMEL:

No I don't think so. I don't think it's making an intervention.

MARIE GILLESPIE:

What's it doing?

JAMES BLUEMEL:

I think it's just presenting something from the point of view of the people making the journey. And in that sense it's quite open ended. People will either...when people watch this film I imagine that it'll shift their perception a little bit by putting them in the shoes of the people making the journey and that might create more empathy, that might create more sympathy, more understanding but you know that there is always a fraction, a certain population who will just have the opposite effect. You can never change everyone's mind. So it's not an intervention, it's just a presentation of what's happening from their point of view.

MARIE GILLESPIE:

And do you think it is from their point of view because in the editorial process one also imposes a structure, a narrative, a framing, but do you feel that because of the way that it was filmed and because of your close relationship with the characters that you portray, the people you portray, that it gets closer to the refugees perspective than other forms of filmmaking or news?

JAMES BLUEMEL:

I think so. I mean classically, sort of, our voice isn't heard, there is no voice over, everything is from interviews done with refugees so there's no, sort of, you know there's no attitude or manipulation coming at that level from the filmmaker. There is, inevitably whenever you make a film you know you can't but help see things the way you see things. You can't help but make a connection with someone based on a connection being real and you know I could've filmed thousands of different people but we filmed these people.

MARIE GILLESPIE:

Is it largely their story? As near as it could be?

JAMES BLUEMEL:

As near as possible, I would say yes I mean... Being truthful to your contributors is very important. The contributors will get their chance to see this before it goes out and have a say about if that's a fair representation of them and that's massively important too and in that sense you know as near possible to make a film from someone's point of view this film is trying to do that.