

MARIE GILLESPIE:

Did you think at the time that the depiction of refugees was very much as victims or villains – and was that a consideration in pitching to the BBC?

WILL ANDERSON:

Definitely, yes. This is something we have done at KEO films a lot, to try to get people to rethink about the stereotypes of various communities around the world.

Being able to go a little bit further than traditional current affairs reporting on this issue allows you to go beyond where people tend to, by necessity, get boxed into certain categories, simply because you don't have so much time in current affairs reporting and the news to actually develop a relationship with those people themselves.

So, what we wanted to do was to humanise the phenomenon, and to try and go behind those headlines a bit, and find a way to tell the real human stories of the people who were making these journeys.

We thought that if we could do that in a sympathetic way, then that would encourage people to think about the whole thing a bit differently.

MARIE GILLESPIE:

How would you describe your approach to documentary filmmaking?

WILL ANDERSON:

Well it has been innovative, I suppose, and interesting. One of the things our colleague found when he went to Morocco is that a lot of these young guys were using phones and were filming themselves anyway. That was the kernel of this idea that although we might not be able to follow them the whole way – and there would be places we couldn't go because it was too dangerous... The fact that they were already filming themselves... Just like the rest of the developed world is filming themselves the whole time, uploading it all to Facebook and Social Media. It was a revelation to us that the migrants were doing the same thing. And so we felt that that was probably the way of unlocking the story, in a new way that hadn't been done before. And from that spark came this idea that if we handed out camera phones, people could tell their story in a much more immediate way than there has otherwise been possible.

MARIE GILLESPIE:

And did it work out like that?

WILL ANDERSON:

Well, you'll have to judge from the programme.

MARIE GILLESPIE:

From your point of view.

WILL:

From my point of view, yes it's been hugely successful, I think that the User Generated Footage that we've got is unique and I don't think anybody else has got it in quite that way and I think it fills in a lot of the story that you know otherwise hasn't been seen, I haven't seen anything else of people actually on those boats crossing from Turkey to Greece. I've seen shots from news crews going alongside boats but actually being on the boat itself when the water starts coming in, it's a terrifying moment.

So I think it brings you much closer to the story and the unexpected consequence of it all which we didn't plan at the beginning was that we realised that we needed to do interviews with people as well in order to cover some of the gaps in the User Generated Content so that emerged during the filmmaking process, that actually they weren't filming entire sequences, they were just filming bits of their journeys.

And that editing, that was quite difficult without something else to glue it all together so we started doing these interitron interviews with them as well and I think they've been a really valuable part of the series as well because they provide, I think, some status and dignity to the contributors that traditionally again you don't normally get.

You tend to see those very nicely lit interviews with politicians sitting in studios or with film stars or celebrities talking about things and I think it's quite unusual to take people who are normally just seen in the back of current affairs footage you know without much personality and actually get them to talk a lot about where they have come from in depth.

MARIE GILLESPIE:

So what were the main ethical challenges that you faced in planning and making the film?

WILL ANDERSON:

Yeah, we had to be very careful of course that people understood what we were trying to do and that they willingly agreed to take part, they understood the consequences of what they were doing, so we had to have very careful compliance conversations with all of them that we'd discussed with the BBC before we started production. And there are big legal implications as well in that anybody can be prosecuted for aiding and abetting the illegal entry of people into Europe under European law and had we done anything that aided or abetted their entry legal or illegal we will be due to be prosecuted... you know there is that threat.

So we had to explain that we weren't going to ask them to do anything that they weren't otherwise doing, we weren't going to alter their behaviour in any shape or form, we didn't want them to do anything just because they were being filmed by us that they wouldn't otherwise do, we weren't going to share information that we might have which became an issue. We were hearing from other people that there was a good route up through Eastern Europe, that something had opened up there, that other contributors were moving fast but even telling that to other contributors could've been construed as aiding or abetting their passage so we had to be very careful about not influencing in any way at all, their journeys and that was the main thing I think.

MARIE GILLESPIE:

So what's your hope for the film?

WILL ANDERSON:

I hope lots of people watch it. I hope it gets people talking and thinking about these people's lives in a different way. It's obviously an incredibly, politically and ethically complicated issue and I don't think there is necessarily an easy solution to the migration problem and we're certainly not suggesting what that is, but I hope that when people watch it, they begin to understand the human imperatives that some of these people have to make the journeys in a more deep way and that will foster better understanding with migration, the migrants themselves.