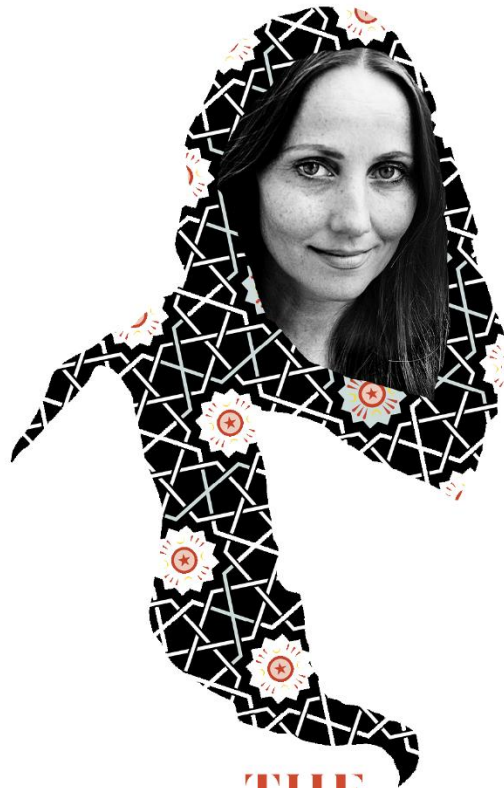


Strategic communication and social function of documentary films: a study case of *The Reformist – A Female Imam*



THE Reformist A FEMALE IMAM

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Abstract

More and more frequently documentary films aim to be part of the public conversation, covering a role that goes beyond the purpose of mere entertainment, thus incorporating a social function and attempting to convey it through practices of strategic communication. At the same time, documentaries are the result of the filmmakers' artistic expression and the communication tool by which the latter express their perspective and ideology on given situations and historical events. By addressing the dichotomy between these two ways of conceiving documentary films, this paper analyzes the launch campaign of *The Reformist – A Female Imam*. In this regard, it presents the film's message and entailed impact, and how they were carried out for and during its promotion. Using qualitative research methods and contextualizing the launch campaign in the landscape of Danish society and media, the thesis provides an overview of its accomplishments. From the promotion perspective, the film raised some issues related to the controversial subject and main character. On the other hand, the film's representation of such burning issue qualified it to be part of the religion program in the Danish schools.

Acknowledgments

I dedicate this thesis to my mum, who never stopped encouraging me to move to Denmark and start this master program, even during the last days of her life. For this reason, I cannot thank enough my family that cherished my mum's will. In a moment when home was the place they needed me the most, they helped me to start a new chapter of my education and life in Copenhagen. Despite living far away from them, they have constantly manifested their support and pride in all my achievements; hence, without them instilling me motivation and self-confidence, I probably would not have completed this master program.

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I want to say *tusind tak* to all the people of the Danish film and documentary industry who took part, both directly and indirectly, in my research. Among them, my ex tutors at Nordisk Panorama, where I did my previous internship, merit a special mention. They in fact provided me with great suggestions, besides passing me down the passion for documentary films and introducing me the great people behind them. Above all the industry, I want to express my gratitude to the people at House of Real, who gave me the chance and the access to pursue this investigation. Without the position they offered me, I could have never written this thesis.

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Introduction

In January 2020 I started my internship at House of Real as an assistant Producer in order to pursue an ethnographic research of a production company of documentaries for my master's thesis. In this sense, my intention was to investigate the processes of communication involved in a documentary from its production to the release, meaning how the intentions and vision of a director are translated into daily actions in a production company, and ultimately communicated when the film is completed and thus promoted.

Through my internship I could observe and actively contribute to the wide variety of tasks necessary to produce and eventually release a documentary film. Everyday work at the office, as part of the production managing staff, involved logistics, financial reports, organizing, research tasks, applications and other ad hoc assignments. This meant that there were really few interactions with Directors and the same Producers, who are normally more dedicated to the creative process and its implementation. Moreover, as most of the projects I was working on were still in a development phase or did not involve a huge communication campaign, I started paying attention to the past documentaries produced by House of Real.

The latest company's film that involved external collaborators and extra funds was *The Reformist – A Female Imam*. In fact, the documentary's release gained an exceptional momentum in the media, also thanks to its selection as opening film at CPH:DOX 2019, where it world premiered March 20th. The media coverage and resonance that invested the documentary film made me curious about how it is possible to build a communication campaign out of a film message. In fact, my ordinary tasks at the production company did not involve something similar, neither the company itself was undergoing in such film's release process.

For these reasons, I shifted my investigation's focus on the relationship between the strategic communication of a documentary - ultimately aimed to achieve huge publicity - and the film itself – the filmmaker's artistic as well as ideologic expression. As such, this relationship is specifically explored through the study case of the documentary film *The Reformist – A Female Imam*.

The documentary, directed by Marie Skovgaard and produced by Jesper Jack, follows Sherin Khankan's mission to set up the first mosque for women in Copenhagen led by herself, a female imam. In 2015 Kankan's vision comes true, and she founds a mosque that differs from traditional Islamic gender hierarchy, by reinterpreting the Quran from a feminist perspective and where

women's leadership is contemplated and encouraged. However, since then she has to face challenges on two fronts. On one hand, islamophobia is on the rise; on the other, Khankan's Femimam projects collides with a wall of resistance from the Muslim community, who do not believe that she can find any support for her mosque and ideas in the Quran. Resistance and discord arise even among Khankan's own supporters, bringing up discussions and disagreements on how progressive she and the mosque can feasibly be. Interfaith and homosexual marriage are two particularly divisive issues, leading some of the initial supporters to eventually leave the mosque. In the film are thus recorded the first three years of the women's mosque, witnessing its struggle to promote a modernized interpretation of the Quran with greater focus on women's rights. It offers a portrait of a controversial female leader whom some accuse of being a dangerous radical and burner of bridges, while others applaud her as a new figure of hope of Islam (House of Real, 2018).

As the documentary witnesses an historical moment and addresses burning issues regarding Islamic religion and gender equality, a whole communication campaign was built around and for its release. This was possible thanks to the Danish Film Institute's funds allocated to the promotion and launch of a film, which are provided according to its potential to create impact. For this reason, an Impact Producer, Mette Bjerregaad, and a PR Consultant, Freddy Neumann, were hired by House of Real to develop and implement the launch campaign of *The Reformist* and thus create an impact out of its message. The latter is that men and women are equal and as such should have equal rights. Consequently, Bjerregaad's and Neumann's strategy was focused on making visible and influencing the gender equality debate within Islam as well as showing a nuanced picture of it, through the display of religion's complexity and practice. Following the open expectations of the launch, *The Reformist* falls in the category of film campaigns aimed to more broadly inform, by reframing a problem and thus finding relevant publics that identify with it or, more simply, are willing to discuss it (Nisbet & Aufderheide, 2009).

Moreover, the launch campaign of *The Reformist* was especially built around its world premiere at CPH:DOX, on March 20th 2019, where the film was chosen for the opening of the documentary festival. As such, the strategy designed by the hired collaborators was based on the experience and theories of the so-called "Impact Distribution". The latter combined targeted places and channels used to distribute the film with correlated impactful activities, in order to increase efficiency and results in both areas of effort (House of Real, 2018). In this way, the Impact Distribution strategy designed for *The Reformist* adopted the features of a new media practice

referred as strategic impact documentary (Nash & Corner, 2016). In fact, the film became one among other communication practices - such as Social Media ads and posts, free community screenings and production of teaching materials – used to spread the message of gender equality and activism.

Nonetheless, being *The Reformist's* a documentary film, it represents the Director's artistic expression and product, as well as her reflection of truth. In this regard, her motivation behind the production of the documentary was originated by the meeting with Sherin Khankan. The latter's personality and charisma kind of hypnotized Skovgaard, who, after discovering about the imam's vision and determination to found a women's mosque, felt the need to tell her story. Moreover, Skovgaard's identification with Khankan's project and activism, due to her past experiences in Syria, led her to develop an interest about the apparent impasse between Occidental values and Islamic religion. This interest turned into the Director's intention to tell a story able to overcome such impasse. Hence, by following Khankan's project to promote a network and a religious congregation based on feminist Islam, Skovgaard saw the possibility of presenting a film aimed to undermine the prejudices about Islamic religion and the related Western narrative about oppressed Muslim women (Petersen, 2019).

In the light of these brief considerations about documentary films as strategic communication versus their definition as artistic and ideologic expression, in this paper I analyze the "Impact Distribution" strategy developed and implemented for *The Reformist – A Female Imam*". As above-mentioned, the launch strategy made the film gain a remarkable momentum in the media during its release for multiple reasons. The latter are thus presented and explored, by relating the data gathered with relevant theories of film and communication scholarship.

Indeed, this paper's aim is to investigate the documentary's launch campaign in order to pinpoint how the impact entailed in the film itself was carried out through practices and actions proper of strategic communication.

The analysis of the communication strategy behind the impact distribution of *The Reformist* is therefore led by the following research question:

how was the impact entailed in The Reformist carried out and communicated in the launch campaign?

The latter generates the following sub-questions: *did the launch campaign reflect the Director's intentions and vision for the film? Which challenges did the PR agent and Impact Producer face when implementing the impact distribution's strategy?*

In order to answer these questions, the paper is divided into five chapters aimed to present different papers and theories as well as qualitative research methods that will successively be combined and related in the discussion.

As such, the first chapter consists of the background of this thesis, which presents previous empirical research aimed to contextualize the launch of *The Reformist* in Denmark.

The subsequent chapter is formed by the literature review, which includes a multidisciplinary theoretical framework. The latter is organized in different sections entailing communication and film scholarship as well as anthropological and pedagogical papers.

The qualitative research methods conducted to solve my research question are firstly introduced in the third chapter along with the archival data analysis and participant observation; whereas ethnographic interviews entirely compose the following chapter.

The last chapter presents the discussion, which is based on the comparison between the data gathered and the theories and studies previously presented. This process is aimed to elaborate an answer to the research question, that will be ultimately summed up in the conclusion.

Chapter 1: Background

Since this paper aims to analyze how the impact entailed in *The Reformist* is developed and implemented in the film's launch strategy, it is useful to present general aspects, studies and practices around both the film industry and media in Denmark. Therefore, this chapter presents a broader context of the cinema industry's relation with the audience and how Mariam mosque and its leader are represented by/in the media.

Firstly, it is presented a study regarding the relationship between the Danish cinema industry and the audience, which is the result a collaboration between the Danish Film Institute and a consulting agency. Successively, tasks and role of PR Consultants are explored in order to get a deeper insight into the work needed for a film's launch campaign. The final section of this chapter, instead, focuses more on the subject portrayed in *The Reformist* - Mariam mosque. It thus presents the studies of Jesper Pedersen, a Danish scholar, around the mosque and its media coverage.

The relationship of the cinema industry with the audience: the report of the Danish Film Institute

Contextualizing *The Reformist* in the overall landscape of the Danish film industry is necessary to start a discussion around the position of the documentary and the strategy behind it. Indeed, The Danish Film Institute, which financed the whole launch campaign of the documentary, recently published a study on audience awareness in the Danish film industry (Will & Agency, 2020). The report is the result of a collaboration with Will & Agency, a consulting firm, that pursued an anthropological research aimed to understand how people of the industry are working with audiences.

The study starts from the concept elaborated by the economist Richard E. Caves, the so-called "no-body knows property" (Caves, 2001 in Will & Agency, 2020). This definition is used to refer to all the creative industries that need to constantly address an uncertain and unpredictable demand. The economist's concept is thus applied to the Danish film industry, which has always had an interest in finding the right combination of artistic originality and audience appeal. The questions that led the research concern how the audience is understood and involved in the production by Danish filmmakers, whether it could constructively contribute to the launch of films and if so, which methods could possibly enhance it. The hypothesis is that a film's communication and positioning can benefit from a stronger look at context, relevance and timeliness. In order to find the answers,

the consulting firm conducted 14 individual in-depth interviews with different professionals of both the documentary and fiction genre, such as screenwriters, directors, producers and distributors. Successively, the anthropologists from Will & Agency selected some claims from the different interviews and formed a working group of 16 participants that had to discuss them during three different workshops. Among the key findings of this research, one of the most evident is that there is a lack of common understanding of audience, in the sense that the industry often targets a “false audience”. This means that when the idea of a given film is developed, the actors of this industry tend to think about an audience composed by the same people of the industry or family and friends. A potential paying audience is thus taken into account at a very late stage.

The “false audience” issue is the result of the industry’s difficulty in engaging with the real audience, since the filmmaking process is pretty difficult to understand by outsiders. However, actors of the industry agreed on the importance of audience’ involvement during the project’s development, as it is more open and responsive to external creative inputs than other stages of the production process, which require more artistic tranquility and independency. The goal should be expanding and developing the understanding of the audience’s reactions to turn them into a creative input in line with the others that the industry already uses. However, in order to achieve a better and more meaningful insight of the audience, it is necessary to create a common language and clear dialogue between the film’s industry various groups. Indeed, the research pointed out the discrepancy of the interpretation of widely used words such as positioning, launching and audience by the different participants. And even the word audience, for some it refers to cinema guests only, for others it covers viewers and recipients overall. The in-depth interviews also revealed that is felt a great gap between creatives and distributors: although both sides share a great passion for the film medium, the conversation between them is not deep and effective enough to be fully exploited and benefit both sides yet. It is acknowledged and proposed though, that more frequent meetings between creatives and distributors can foster their relationship and its effectiveness.

The gap between distributors and creatives does also manifest itself in the definition of film *positioning*, which is interpreted differently. So, the Film Institute proposed a clarification of the term, presenting the following formula: insights of the film + insights of the audience, market and trend = movie positioning and campaign. The different actors of the industry supported this definition, agreeing that the positioning is also dynamic, as it evolves and can be revisited during

the development, production and before the launch. For this reason, strengthening the understanding of this key concept can bring a film to achieve a better position in the market:

“Positioning is the DNA of the film’s communication [...] Positioning highlights, reinforces and prioritizes – for the audience – particularly appealing or unique aspects of one’s movie such as the plot, theme, genre, context, credentials, relevance and emotional resonance.”
(Danish Film Institute’s bid for definition)

Another issue that emerged between the different industry actors concerns the launch phase of the film: the work is usually left for PR and distributors, while filmmakers shift their focus to new projects. For instance, the launch work is referred to as a “pølsefabrik” [sausage factory, ENG], which follows the same formula and lacks innovation.

The final remarks of the report, instead, offer an insight into the concrete measures and methods - already existing and those which are still to be developed - aimed to create and implement a better audience awareness. For instance, the Danish Film Institute does already provide funds for the launch of films, even during the development or production stage. However, this is not clearly communicated, as most of the participants were not aware that it is possible to access these funds in the early stages of a project. For this reason, film professionals suggested that the elaboration and test of new methods are needed to get closer to the audience as of the development phase. They in fact proposed that the Film Institute should create a targeted fund for this specific purpose.

In conclusion, the report presented a detailed insight into the Danish film industry and its way of working with the audience. It especially underlined the need of supporting the involvement of the audience’ taste and preferences in much earlier stages of production, so that promoting and launching the final film becomes easier, enhancing it to reach an adequate success and a competitive position in the market.

PR consultants’ role and relation with documentary films

In the previous section it has been presented how the audience usually comes to be relevant and play an important role right before the launch of a film. For this reason, in a lot of cases and when funds are available, Public Relations consultants are asked to step in a project and handle its communication way before the release. Generally, the main goal of PR consultants’ work is publicity, i.e. spreading information, persuasion and opinions to the public across different types of media on behalf of their client – with the ultimate scope of achieving a film’s effective promotion, in this case.

Hence, networking, relation-building and news production are among the key activities that PR agents undertake in their job routine (Larsson, 2009).

However, as pointed out in the report of the Danish Film Institute, PR consultants' job within the film industry – and especially within the documentary genre - is becoming more and more relevant not only before the launch of a film, but also in earlier stages. The PR agents working with documentaries are thus trying to get involved in the projects even when the creative process is still not finalized. They thus cover a role that goes beyond the spread of information and promotion of the film, starting a continuous conversation with the directors and giving them consultancy and advices. For instance, the PR work with documentaries is not only concerned with the achievement of mere publicity. Most of the times, instead, it aims to set the documentary as part of a larger effort to spark debate, mold public opinion, shape policy, or build activist networks (Nisbet & Aufderheide, 2009).

In this regard, I tried to better understand the PR consultants' role and job routine through semi-structured in-depth interviews to two of them, who have been working with several and different documentaries, directors and production companies in Denmark. Hence, this section presents key insights into the general tasks undertaken by Freddy Neumann – who worked in the launch of *The Reformist* – and Lars Hansen, another PR consultant¹. It is important to remark though, that although their job title is the same and they both have a journalistic background, their way of working is different.

During his interview, Neumann stressed more times how it is crucial for him to receive and get involved in a project since its development, as his priority is to understand if there is any impact in the film's DNA. For this reason, he first clarified what does it mean impact for him:

What is impact? Is it impact the awareness or is it impact, actually, what comes up out of awareness? [...] Impact is much more, is how do we actually create change in society, or in the mindset of our audiences. And that's also in the film's DNA. The idea and intention of the impact, the idea of "I want to change the mindset of my audience or I want to change the society or whatever it is".

After clarifying the concept of impact, he explained how he explores the potential of impact entailed in a film and why it is important to him to intervene since a very early stage:

I always start asking, why should I care? Why is this film important to you? Why should it be important to me? And if the director is not able to answer that question, then he has got a

¹This is a pseudonym to preserve the anonymity of the person interviewed

problem. That I mean, it might be that the reason is actually that he doesn't know how to pitch his own film. Or the reason is just the film is not done or it's not even developed. So, it's my job to bridge and actually create and try to push that developing process in the right directions, so that I create a need for the film. So I'm actually able to bridge an awareness from the audience to the film and from the film into the audience. And the awareness is very much recognized as relevance. Now the question is: is this relevant? And it's up to the director to actually explain to me, why is it relevant.

It thus becomes important to Neumann to collaborate in the multiple stages of the creative process, starting to explore the market since the pitch of a director's first ideas and then continuously bridging and representing the audience throughout the whole production. He therefore showed me how this ongoing collaboration and conversation with a director is necessary for him to position and *brand-build* a film in the market (figure 1 in Appendix A).

Indeed, according to him:

whenever anyone starts pitching a project, whenever it is the very first pitch towards a consultant or whenever is the very first pitch to a producer, he's actually doing marketing. Marketing is about convincing, about selling and about taking a position and space in the market. [...] So if you're creating a film without any kind of relevance and without caring about relation to your audience, you have absolutely no chance to get a position in the market.

Hence, Neumann explained how bridging the intentions and vision of a director to the society is his main role and mission, as a fresh and a more objective perspective on the subject/topic portrayed is needed.

sometimes [they need to, ed.] to open their mind and realize that this becomes relevant because this is what is going on in the society, right now. So bridging that part of the film into that part of the society that knows better than the directors what's going on out there. Because they become "snowblind" [during the process, ed].

And about more practical tasks about public relations, Neumann added:

half of my time is being spent in teaching the director to talk about his or her project. Most directors do not know how to pitch, they do not know what their film is about. They do not know why it's relevant for kind of audience, but they know exactly how it was working on it or how they found that story. But not why they are telling you that story. And that's my job.

As stated before, there are many differences between Neumann's and the other PR consultant way of working. The latter, for instance, usually gets involved in the latest stages of production, when a rough cut of the documentary is already available. This is simply because most of the times producers have the resources to hire a PR consultant after receiving the funding for the launch campaign from the Danish Film Institute.

we work with the DFI and the producers do an application and get some money for the whole launch of the documentaries. That means that they're getting money for trailers for APK clips from the film. [...] Fiction has a lot more money in their launch. So a lot of times they have money to buy big ads in newspapers and billboards and all that. We don't really have that much money in documentary film, so we are very much depending on the PR work and the outreach and a lot of times on SoMe.

When asking about his career, he explained why his job is so important. For this reason, he also clarified why the documentary genre is crucial to create impact - and its communication even more.

I wanted the film to do more than just entertainment. I wanted the film to make a difference in our society. I wanted the film to be able to change the way we think and work around the people or the topics of the films. So that the themes or all the topics of the films, I thought they would actually have that effect, if they were combined with journalism.[...] And I always say I do believe that, if you are affected emotionally, like if you if your heart is moved, if your heart is open, then as human beings, our brains immediately open. So if you have a film that can actually get in touch with your emotions, then all of a sudden you are interested in knowing more about this topic. All of a sudden you are interested in the numbers: How many people are affected this way? How many, you know, what do we do about it in our society, all that. So all of a sudden, that combination of me being a journalist being able to, like look into the film and say, Okay, how, what do I see in this film, but what can this film do?

So, his background as a journalist helps him to carry out the *impactfulness* of a story and it does reflect in his approach when looking into a film.

I start out by watching the film, of course. And I write down what I see in the film that could be interesting for the press. And what do I find interesting as a journalist, is there anything in the story that I could tell is interesting? [...] then usually, I will talk to the producer obviously first, and then we'll have a meeting with the director. It's very important for me to find out what does the director want out of the film.

Regarding the relationship of this PR agent with the directors, he underlined how it is important following and reflecting their intentions and ideas when developing a reach out strategy:

We have to be totally in sync. I talk to my directors every day. Every day, even though I have 10 directors in a film festival. [...] I always get very into Who are they? What are their strengths? What are their weaknesses, you know, what's going on their private life, how they communicate? [...] So, if I sell a story to a press, I pitch a story to the press, I need to be absolutely certain that I'm not saying something that they don't want. So, the strategy is something that I make after I've listened to the director, the producer and the participants.

Indeed, in some cases the PR agent did also step in during the production. At this stage, he is able to give his advices to the directors and talk with the participants of the project as well.

When I take over, I do the communication with the participants and it's very nice for the directors because they can get, you know, tired of each other. If you've been filming for five

years, a lot of times they're to the point where they kind would like to kill the director at the end. [...] So it's nice that there is a new person stepping in with new eyes fresh, new way of seeing things. And for the directors, it's nice as well, because, you know, they feel the pressure is taken off their shoulders.

Despite the differences with Neumann, Hansen also stressed the importance of giving another perspective on a filmmaker's project, as the director may be so involved in his/her project that lose an objective point of view around a certain topic.

I think I take their intentions and I expand them even further. And I say, well, let's go this way. I think these are the strengths about the film. How do you feel about that? [...] A lot of times I hear directors saying "well, wow, I didn't even think that my film had that in it, you know, until you came along and said: well, I see this". Because they've been working with the same topic for so long and become kind of blind. So, I think that the whole team effort in filmmaking and film launching is probably the reason why it can be very successful... Because if more minds think about the same thing, it gets better. So, it's very much a team effort.

Regarding the concrete public relations' tasks that Hansen needs to undertake, he explained further the communication work done when reaching out to the press and media, giving the context of what channels and connection are important in Denmark. Indeed, establishing the right connection with the media is crucial for a successful PR work. This means creating a trustful relationship with journalists, knowing what do they cover and how do they work in order to design information according to their profile (Larsson, 2009).

It's our job to get the film's reviewed. That's, that's one thing that's very important. [...] I'm just like, would this be interesting for this particular media? Or is there something that would be more interesting for them? So I would say that to be good at doing PR you have to be able to talk to a journalist and being able to know what the media is about. [...] It's something that I'm branding myself on being very good at also. In some cases, it's very important that you can't just send any journalist, you know, into an interview. let's say with a child that has gone through the horrors of, you know, having to escape the country, being a refugee or whatever. You can't just say, Okay, any journalists can just do an interview with this person. You have to pick and choose the right journalists.

According to Hansen, regarding the work with the media, is not only important the relation with the journalists, but is also about preparing the filmmakers or participants of a project to talk and do an interview.

I think a good journalist is always someone that, you know, understands that the interview will get better, for instance, if the person is prepared. [...] So, I understand if they're getting sick and tired of it when it's a politician, because it gets too much spin on it, but they can appreciate it, if it's someone that's never been the media before. [...] I drive my directors around, I drive my participants around, I will pick them up at home, talk in the car, get to the interview, they'll do the interview and when they come out, I give them feedback: "Well, next time maybe do this a little bit differently. That was really good. That worked a lot better than

last time bla bla bla". I'm trying to get them better. So, they will do better interviews, be more prepared, more directed in their answers, more interesting to talk to.

Hence, for both Freddy and Hansen part of the PR work is also training directors to be able to communicate not only through their film, but also through different types of media. However, regarding the themes and topics of a documentary, their influence constitutes a blurred line, especially when their intervention starts in early phases of production. Regarding this, both wanted to underline that is not part of their job to "play co-director" (Hansen) or "harm the directors' integrity" (Neumann). But at the same time, they did admit that "I will never ever change a story. But I might help it, I might help the way it's being told, or the way it's being explained" (Neumann). Also Hansen stated that "it's not my job to tell them how to make their film or whatever. I think my job is to let them know that this could be a problem maybe later on or that could be a problem. My job is to give them advice."

So, although the PR consultant's role involves a lot of work with and across different types of media, when it is applied to documentaries, it requires a deeper work with the customer itself, the filmmaker. This means exploring and knowing by heart a director's intentions and will, in order to set up a particular outcome and goal the film should reach. By doing so, the PR agents do their research and try to find a link between what is said in the film and what is actually relevant and important in the society. In fact, whether the goal is to spark a debate or lead the audience to a specific set of actions through a film, their ultimate goal is still to promote the film itself. And it is this last process that will be further analyzed in the specific case of *The Reformist*.

Sherin Khankan and Mariam mosque: the religious context and media coverage

In order to start a conversation about the communication and impact of *The Reformist*, it is necessary to have an adequate understanding of the subject portrayed as well. The documentary in fact wants to open a conversation about gender equality, by giving access to new Islamic customs and practices pursued at Mariam mosque and led by the imam Sherin Khankan. In this regard, it is thus useful to present what do the mosque and its leader represent, the religious context, and how they are portrayed by Western media.

A study of Jesper Petersen, a scholar of history of religions and religious behavioral science, identifies Mariam mosque as a "pop-up" one (Petersen, 2019a). The researcher uses this term to refer to "the temporary conversion of an other-purposed space into a mosque, which is used for

Islamic rituals such as Friday prayer and marriages.” Indeed, Mariam mosque is an apartment located in the center of Copenhagen that is converted into a mosque for the Friday prayer once a month. The author himself coined this term, as the existing definitions of what a mosque is and its type – according to the religious functions practiced in it – do not include this kind of space.

According to the Petersen (2019a), historically, the pop-up mosque is the result of a religious demand that cannot be totally fulfilled due to limited economic resources. However, nowadays, these kinds of mosque are increasingly used by marginalized segments of Muslim communities, such as the feminist and LGBTQ+ ones. Mariam mosque is labeled as such, since its congregation meet in that specific place on a regular and stable basis. The frequency and stability of the congregation’s gatherings qualify that space and its internal organization to be comparable to the structure of a traditional mosque. This implies that Mariam mosque’ members also identify a leader among them – Sherin Khankan in this case – legitimizing the term imam when they refer to her. In this way, Petersen explains how the pop-up mosque can produce an imam as well – a female one in the case of Mariam mosque.

Along with the lack of a permanent building for the religious functions, the pop-up mosque is also characterized by the Social Media *adhan* (the Islamic call to prayer), which usually communicates the place and time of the religious gathering. In the case of Mariam mosque’s opening, the *adhan* was mainly effective due to the great media coverage the mosque had in the news. When the first Friday prayer took place, then an effective network of Muslim women was formed. However, during his study (2019a), Petersen observed that Mariam mosque’s *adhan* did not receive a lot of interactions on the Social Media - such as shares, comments or likes to its Facebook’s posts. In this regard, he points out a certain reluctance from the members to associate themselves with the mosque publicly. This occurred for different reasons: some of them to avoid eventual discussions with members of their families or friends, others to not personally expose themselves for the cause. Nonetheless, the routine gatherings and conversion of the same apartment into a space for a religious congregation, plus the SoMe *adhan*, make Mariam mosque one typical pop-up mosque, according to Petersen. Consequently, it is also thanks to its non-traditional structure and organization that the raise of a female imam as a leader of the group is possible.

Another study of Jesper Petersen, instead, draws attention to how the phenomenon of female imams has become an interesting and popular subject for the production of media

narratives. In the article “*Media and the Female Imam*” (2019b), he exposes how the figure of female imams is often related to a re-claim of Islam by Western media, therefore leading some female religious leaders to dissociate from this narrative and to refuse the identification as imams. According to him, this is the result of a problem occurring when translating meaning from an Islamic context to a non-Islamic mediated one. For this reason, among other cases, he explores in depth the case of Mariam mosque’s media coverage.

First of all, Petersen (2019b) argues that media production companies have an interest in framing female religious leadership in an ongoing struggle for the emancipation of Muslim women, in order to make this topic appealing to media consumers. It thus implies that it becomes difficult for a woman leading a Muslim congregation to not become a statement within the debates about Islam. Indeed, a lot of times women leading a Muslim community that go public are asked to talk about topics – e.g. terrorism, social control or forced marriage – that are not relevant for the personal faith. It is according to this context that the public image of Sherin Khankan is analyzed by Petersen.

In the media, Khankan has been referred as an imam since the very first moment she expressed her will to attend a mosque led by a woman, even if it is a title that she did not claim initially. Many female religious leaders, indeed, refuse this kind of categorization: although they lead the Friday prayer and deliver the *khutbah* (the sermon that usually opens the Friday prayer), they do not want to cover any symbolic meaning with their role, nor to make it a feministic struggle. However, Khankan’s engagement with the media required a more fixed term to address her, so she eventually claimed the title herself when nobody else in Mariam mosque stepped forward for it. But it is for this reason that Sherin Khankan appeared as an imam in the media before the actual institutionalization of Mariam mosque. Indeed, in her case the Danish media had a crucial role addressing her this title.

Sherin Khankan’s discourses and opinion around the idea of female imams start back in 2001, and in the few following years her arguments were published on some Danish newspapers. However, it is only in 2014 that she started developing the idea of Mariam mosque, a Muslim congregation led by female imams - even though at that point she was not considering to become an imam herself yet. In fact, in that year she gave a speech about Islam in a conference in Istanbul, where among different things, she was paving for the rise of a place of prayers that included also female imams. And at the beginning of 2015, when she was invited in a public debate around what

happened in the terroristic attack to Charlie Hebdo, she publicly exposed her plan to open a mosque. Opening up about her intention made Khankan appear in the front page of the two most important newspapers in Denmark – *Information* and *Politiken* - where she was thus addressed as the new female imam. As result, she received a lot of requests of interviews, panels, lectures, etc. from international and different kind of media. In this occasion, she also signed contracts with two production companies that covered her journey towards the opening of Scandinavia's first women's mosque. Nonetheless, it is only in 2016 that Mariam mosque finally opened, and her first Friday prayer received a huge media coverage. This led Khankan to appear in the BBC' list of 100 inspirational and influential women 2016, be the host for a tea with the French President Emmanuel Macron and receive several awards.

By reconstructing Sherin Khankan's project and consequent media coverage, Petersen wants to draw up the intersection between her desire to maximize her impact and the demand of commercials media of her as a compelling narrative. He therefore argues that the latter generated a huge symbolic value out of the figure of the female imam, which is further developed by Petersen when related to its *spreadability*. Here, the scholar quotes a term coined by Henry Jenkins et. al (2013, in Petersen 2019b) that refers to a narrative that *spreads* when used in another context than the original one. In this regard, Petersen's article presents three cases that illustrate how the image and role of Sherin Khankan is used in different narratives.

The first example sees Sherin Khankan quoted by Breitbart, a far-right news website, to support Trump's narrative about radical Muslims – published in 2016, during US Primaries. In this article, Khankan is portrayed as an opponent of radical Islamists and thus protected by the Danish State for her women's mosque project secretly conducted. This narrative does not come out of nowhere though. Petersen argues it is the result of wrong assumptions originated by Khankan's interview with *Information*, when she announced the opening of the mosque but did not disclose any information about the address. In that case, however, the reason was simply to preserve the will of the place' donor, as it was a private concession and not a space paid by the State.

Another example of *spread* of narrative, is represented by three Danish politicians from Det Konservative Folkeparti [Conservative People's Party, ENG] that framed Sherin Khankan as a radical Islamist and a supporter of Sharia law – which led her to sue them for libel. For this reason, they proposed to cut public funding allocated to her NGO *Exitcircklen*, an association run by the same Khankan and aimed to help women who are victim of violence. This episode made the headlines of the Danish newspapers throughout the fall of 2017. The claim of these politicians, however, is based

on an episode occurred 15 years earlier, when one of them, Naser Khader, was in the same political party as Khankan. At that time, they stood on either side in a vote on condemnation of sharia in relation to a story about a Nigerian woman who had been convicted of adultery and thus faced stoning. While Khader voted for a condemnation of sharia in toto, Khankan condemned only the stoning.

And meanwhile Khankan was addressed as a radical Muslim in Denmark, the narrative of her fighting Islamic patriarchy spread in France. In fact, the opening of Mariam mosque received huge attention by French media, and her fame culminated with her being invited at the Élysée Palace for a tea with Emmanuel Macron at the beginning of 2018. In this context, the female imam's narrative played a role in the French domestic politics, with Macron associating himself with a moderate Islam, and thus getting positive exposure. However, also in this case, Khankan's old declarations that referred to Israel as a terroristic state – due to the bombing of Gaza in 2014 – were used to criticize the meeting between her and the French President and caused an internal debate in France.

The cases presented by Petersen (Petersen, 2019b), thus provide some examples of how Khankan's image as imam is not only merely reported by media, but also framed in different discourses and put within ongoing national/international debates that do not relate with the religious faith per se. This is even more evident when looking at the attention that Khankan's mosque project received by the media in Denmark. It is thus pointed out how its media coverage exponentially increased after the terroristic attacks that occurred both in Europe and Denmark in 2015 – on February 15 a man pledging alliance to the Islamic State shot two men in front of a Synagogue in the center of Copenhagen. In this way, Sherin Khankan's Quran's interpretation and vision to open a women's mosque matched the media's demand for counter-narratives and pressure on Muslims to reform and modernize Islam.

However, Petersen underlines again how media use limited linguistic frames available within public discourses and therefore are not able to report the whole complexity behind certain practices. By one hand, media frame female imams in an antagonistic position and not within the Islamic context: Sherin Khankan actually positions herself as part of the Muslim community – not in opposition – and she thus defends some religious practices that may be defined as “conservatives”, since for her the degree of emancipation is relative to a woman's own beliefs.

By the other hand, the media gave low significance to Khankan's announcement of performing interfaith marriages, due to the difficulty of non-Muslim journalists and audiences to see its

symbolic meaning. Whereas interfaith marriages constitute a huge debate and a lot of critics within the Muslim community, even among female imams and Mariam mosque's members.

As *The Reformist* and its launch campaign aimed to reach the Danish audience primarily, the background here presented contextualizes the release of the documentary from more perspectives. Industry wise, the anthropological research of DFI pinpoints the ongoing relationship between the cinema industry and the audience, meanwhile the interviews with the PR consultants provide a deeper understanding on how to bridge and create appeal with a documentary to reach the media and thus the audience. Finally, the studies of Jesper Petersen sum up Sherin Khankan's project and its media coverage, providing an overview of her and Mariam mosque from the perspective of both Islamic religion and Danish media.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

As this paper focuses on the communication mechanism and processes of *The Reformist*, the discussion that will be successively developed is based on a heterogeneous literature, which mainly concerns film and communication theories, besides mentioning anthropological and pedagogical ones as well. For this reason, the chapter is divided into four sections that gather the theories considered according to the field they belong to.

The documentary genre and the communicative constitution of reality: key concepts and issues

This paragraph presents key concepts and issues entailed in the documentary genre that are relatable to the case of *The Reformist*. At the same time, the latter is also seen as the communicative mean by which the Marie Skovgaard expressed her beliefs and ideas, so it is addressed according to Cooren's theory on communicative constitution of reality.

Documentary is a mediated storytelling genre and communication practice shaped by the creative freedom, alongside aspects of the research, reporting practices, and outputs of journalism. Its appeal consists of making the audience see timely issues in need of attention (Borum Chattoo, 2018). In order to do that, the combination of sound recording and cinematography are used to show and propose perspectives on historic issues, processes and events (Nichols, 1991). The latter may be represented in different ways and thus different strategies of filmmaking arise. Among different periods and movements that have characterized documentary films throughout the years, in *Introduction to Documentary* (2001), Nichols identifies six basic modes of filmmaking: the poetic mode, expository mode, observational mode, participatory mode, reflexive mode and performative mode. The first three modes normally do not show the filmmaker her/himself, meanwhile the last three listed include his/her own engagement in the story. In *The Reformist* the audience is engaged in the story through the observational mode, i.e. that the filmmaker observes the subject's everyday life through an unobtrusive camera. Nichols provides a more detailed explanation of this mode in *Representing Reality* (1991), which stresses the non-intervention of the filmmaker. According to him, the sense of an exhaustive observation comes from the ability of the filmmaker to record both revealing and ordinary moments, so that the film unfolds also events or situations of no narrative significance. The sounds and images used are usually recorded while filming and there is no voiceover, producing an intimate atmosphere and making the observational film ideal to address contemporary issues/situations. Recurring images and locations help to foster a "reality effect",

anchoring the film to a precise time and place and underlining their centrality. In addition, this mode has also a lot in common with ethnographic methods, since it requires a nonjudgmental, empathetic and participatory observational approach. In this regard, the aim of observational cinema is thus to let the viewer live and experience others' life through his/her perspective and interpretation.

In general, viewers tend to have certain expectations toward documentaries, that differ when they watch fiction: the images seen are assumed to be originated by the historical world and thus they have the impression that what is recorded would have occurred in the same manner as if the camera would not have been there. However, Nichols draws attention to the false objectivity of documentaries, as they do not reproduce reality, they are actually reflecting it. Documentary films are in fact referred as the tangible representation of pleasures and power, ideologies and utopias, subjects and subjectivities of a given filmmaker (Nichols, 1991).

Following the concept that a filmmaker communicates his/her own representation of reality through the documentary, it is possible to relate Nichols' claim to Cooren's theory about the communicative constitution of reality. In "Communication Theory at the Center: Ventriloquism and the Communicative Constitution of Reality" (2012), Cooren conceives communication as a metaphorical form of ventriloquism. According to him, "a variety of forms of agencies are always in play in any interaction", i.e. when people speak for or in the name of specific beings - values, principles, ideologies, organizations, etc. - to which they are attached, they are actually ventriloquizing them. At the same time, speaking in the name of these abstract beings means claiming the attachment to them, so that they animate us, leading us to say/do something and turn into the "dummies". In this way, Cooren's constitution of reality consists in these abstract beings – structures, ideologies, societies – materializing themselves in and through people's interactions, where they can always be questioned and negotiated. As such, "preoccupations, realities and situations get expressed and translated in what we say and write" or produce – in the case of documentary films.

Hence, returning to Nichols' considerations (1991), a given documentary is the tangible representation of a filmmaker's beliefs and ideas that get expressed through his/her film and animate the same filmmaker in the creative process contemporarily.

For instance, the distinctive perspective of a given filmmaker corresponds to his/her own voice among others, and the latter is the mean by which a particular point of view is communicated to us, the audience. Hence, "the voice of documentary is the specific way in which an argument or

perspective is expressed” (Nichols, 2001) and is the rhetorical tool, which seeks to convey a filmmaker’s outlook persuasively. The voice is thus composed by technique, style and rhetoric and expresses a given argument, while the perspective and commentary provide a position within the arena of ideology. The documentary invites the viewer to take a position in that arena, qualifying him/her to do so through the knowledge provided by the text’s argument and the rhetoric entailed in its subjectivity. For this reason, the reference to the world and knowledge presented by documentaries is not “innocent”. It is therefore important to remember, that like any other form of communication, also the documentaries require the filmmaker - the communicator – to make choices about what portraying on the screen and what leaving out (Bernard, 2010).

What is left out and thus escapes from the narrative and exposition is defined by Nichols as excess (1991). History is excess and as the referent of documentary, it is what stands outside the text. However, excess is not a simple matter of exclusion: is the impossibility of reaching a proper congruence between text and history, due to the impasse between discourse and referent. It is the representation what imperfectly bridges that deadlock, by turning the reality into a narrative based on a dominant concept. In the documentary genre the excess is thus represented by the references to history, and it is usually caused by the exotic, local, sacramental and complex. The exotic remains different and beyond familiarity, whereas the local eludes a more general contextualization. In the local the main individual portrayed is chosen for its representativeness, however its depiction and the its usage to reveal socially representative practices always results in excess. The local may also include the cultural, geographical, institutional, linguistical or economical context, which thus constitute a “reticulated web of complex interrelationships” that even visible evidence cannot exhaust them. The sacramental consists of all those events or practices that are not what they seem, and as they imply a double perspective, excess is an unavoidable consequence. Complexity, instead, leads to excess when a certain matter is simplified in a film, as it would not be possible to include it in all its facets. Hence, the documentary genre exceeds all the strategies of containments, constantly carrying an historical excess (Nichols, 1991).

Despite representing excess, Nichols (1991) underlines that historical events produce familiarity and provide the documentary films referential power; they are portrayed through a set of conventions and norms referred as realism. The latter in fiction is used to make plausible events and situation and it is a matter of aesthetic, whereas in documentary it makes an argument persuasive and supports rationalism. In this regard, also Sheila C. Bernard (2010) pinpoints how

documentaries appear honest and reliable through a narrative based on facts presented in a nuanced and compelling form of storytelling - which, following Nichols' discourse, results from realism. In addition, the latter produces also an illusionistic mode of reception and aligns with a pleasure in knowing - epistophilia.

Documentaries as part of strategic communication

The launch campaign of *The Reformist* involves features and methods of strategic communication applied to the documentary genre. Hereby are therefore exposed relevant papers that propose an investigation of this matter academically. It has to be pointed out though, that only in the last few years academia started to research documentaries' impact and communication campaign. In this regard, Nisbet & Aufderheide (2009) write the introduction to a symposium, aimed to set a research agenda on forms, functions and impacts of documentary. They claim that a lot of issues are still not deeply explored by the scholarship, thus proposing some questions that could lead to further academic research regarding this new way of conceiving the role and functions of documentary films.

More and more frequently, the documentary genre is aimed to be part of the broader and public conversation, with the function of sparking debate, molding public opinion, shaping policy, and building activist networks (Nisbet & Aufderheide, 2009). However, before starting an inquiry about documentary films' impact and their social/political/cultural context, Nisbet & Aufderheide make an important distinction between the advocacy work and film campaigns designed to more broadly inform. Advocacy films are referred to be designed to "mobilize and agitate a like-minded and ideologically intense public to take a specific set of actions." Meanwhile, films with the purpose of informing and provoking a public debate, usually reframe a problem, so that "it connects to a wider set of values and thus can be addressed differently". *The Reformist* belongs to this kind of films, which are sort of open-ended in their expectations, while still aiming for a re-shape of the public conversation and topic agenda. Despite using different kinds of strategies, forms or approaches, they offer tools to engage people to become active citizens, by offering new perspectives in ways easy to understand – e.g. Skovgaard's documentary does not deeply dig into theology or Islam. Hence, relevant publics are created, thanks to individuals across communities that discover to share common problems through a film, and thus find a way through it to articulate their interests and concerns.

As above-mentioned, research on the impact of documentary films has been pursued only in the few last years and have typically been guided by a quite narrow “individualistic model” of impact, assessing a finished film’s impact on individual citizens and within the dominant public discourse (Whiteman, 2004). Nonetheless, Whiteman’s paper attempts to draw up a coalition model that embeds the documentary film in a larger activist campaign, where the effects of the film and correlated launch activities are seen as a whole, and thus difficult to separate. For this reason, the combination between documentary storytelling and strategic communication has brought to the rise of a new transmedia practice, referred as strategic impact documentary by Nash & Corner (2016). Their study, though, does not aim to find a direct relation between documentaries and social change. It is in fact difficult to measure and demonstrate it and there are still ongoing attempts to formulate a coextensive framework for the evaluation of their impact academically. Moreover, this matter has been almost entirely investigated by organizations so far - such as Fledgling Fund, the Knight Foundation, Doc Society, etc., who provide impact assessment initiatives (Clark & Abrash, 2011). The purpose of Nash & Corner’s paper, instead, is to review and pinpoint key features of the production and communication process of the impact documentary, by merging communication and film scholarship with guidelines and case studies presented by Doc Society [in the article quoted with the former name BRITDOC Foundation, ed.] and The Fledgling Fund.

According to Nash & Corner’s study (2016), the impact of a given project is the result of the team’s work during the entire making process, not something that simply happens. In this way, impact is intended as the film’s capacity to meet planned targets - like individuals, communities, organizations or policy makers - and goals - e.g. awareness, behavior, policies. In addition, the documentary film becomes one among other communication practices and media: the campaign that precedes and follows the launch of a given documentary may involve online activities (like websites, SoMe strategies and promotion), written products (such as information and educational packs) and face-to face communication as well (e.g. public events and debates). The planning and coordination of all the online and offline activities, that together with a film aim to create change, have generated an increased professionalization around the production and distribution of documentaries lately - such as impact producers, campaign strategists, PR consultants, distribution experts, organizations/companies specialized in the development of reach out strategies (Salehi & Schneider in Nash & Corner). All these professions “engage in the development, dissemination, and assessment of communications on behalf of organizations and causes” – documentary films and ascribed impact in this case (Hallahan, et al., 2007).

Conforming to the definition of strategic communication stated by Hallahan et al. (2007), its essence consists in purposefully use communication to fulfill the mission of a given corporation, organization or social movement. To do so, organizations make strategic decisions about the level and nature of resources they will devote to an effective communication, which is ultimately aimed to get attention from the intended public. Such decisions are generally ascribed to certain professional fields, which are management, marketing, advertising and public relations (Hallahan, et al., 2007). Although Hallahan et al.'s article dwells on the strategic communication implemented by each of these disciplines, in *The Reformist's* launch campaign they are all handled by the Impact Producer and PR consultant; hence, not by a large manpower distributed in different departments, as usually occurs in large corporations/ organizations. Moreover, all these professional fields eventually entail common steps when implementing strategic communication, as they ultimately share the same purpose, and thereby objectives and strategies result similar, differing only in the tactics (Hallahan, et al., 2007). In the case of documentary films, strategic communication is usually implemented through the following steps: issue analysis, identification of key publics; articulation of goals and objectives; strategy development that drives key messaging; and selection of tactics and evaluation (Nash & Corner, 2016).

Relationship building plays a crucial role during the development of the strategy and selection of tactics, as it aims to reach the right network of people, who can spread a given message and help enacting change. In addition, alternate screening experiences enhance a compelling story to build engagement through emotion. Forum and community screenings are in fact a chance to create issue-networks in order to motivate more immediate actions, besides being an opportunity to collect measurement of impact (Nash & Corner, 2016).

Finally, it is necessary to evaluate the impact according to the goals set in the strategy, even if most of the times methods of evaluation are based on the media exposure received – e.g. attendance at screenings, reviews. However, it is underlined the importance of improving impact measurement, as the latter is required by investors and funders of the campaign and thus functions as a “coin of exchange” (Nash & Corner, 2016).

Nash & Corner (2016) specify though, that including the documentary genre within the frame of strategic communication and addressing it as a tool to produce social impact, may cause a clash with part of its notion, since a documentary is still the result of a filmmaker's artistic expression. This implies that there may be differences between the filmmaker's vision and the one of the

communication team in charge of developing and implementing an impact strategy. However, the authors of the paper unfold that this matter has not been explored by the scholarship yet.

The (social) documentary from an anthropological perspective

As mentioned in the introduction, in “The Reformist” the director follows Sherin Khankan, the meetings and the people involved in the mosque for three years. Even if the ultimate scope of her shootings was to produce a film, it is still possible to relate her “recorded observations” with the ethnographic research method.

Thanks to technology, new methods of collecting data have become more and more available, so that moving pictures and video have improved or simplified ethnologists’ fieldwork (Mead, 2003). In Margaret Mead’s section within “*Principles of Visual Anthropology*” (2003), it is exposed a brief excursus about the introduction of videos and cameras versus the traditional preference of texts in the anthropologic field. With the purpose of pinpointing the perks of introducing new instruments in the fieldwork, Mead presents how recording data actually improves the quality of the same ones. If before ethnologists had to rely on their notes and memory, now they can just re-watch and analyze the recorded material over and over again, since replicating the phenomena observed is impossible most of the times. The only thing required is that the ethnologist trains enough to be able to load a camera, set it on a tripod and start it, besides knowing a bit how to set distance and exposure. Mead therefore concludes that filming and taping data properly and systematically can “illuminate our growing knowledge and appreciation of mankind” (Mead, 2003).

By categorizing *The Reformist* in the social documentary genre – as aimed to create a social and cultural impact – Luc Powels’ article becomes relevant when comparing social documentaries’ methods with the ones of social visual essays. In “The visual essay: affinities and divergences between the social scientific and the social documentary modes” (1993), the discussion starts by exposing how the same word “social”, when related to photography or visual material, carries some ambiguity. The term does not have any specific criteria when used to qualify a given footage– that could be its potential to bring change, its usefulness to portray a situation, or its type of subject matter/approach - nor considers the importance of the spectator’s interpretation. Nonetheless, Powels admits that within certain contexts some images can raise awareness and enhance social change. In this way, his discussion moves on by introducing documentaries and the issue about their non-objectivity: despite the usual opposition of this genre to the fiction, they are still characterized by “filmic means and narrative conventions”. Nonetheless, the documentary’s

approach and modes of production do exert some kind of influence on the use of imagery within the field of anthropology/sociology, albeit criticized for their tendency to stereotype the phenomena studied. Although documentaries represent a rich source of anthropological /sociological studies, it is important to contextualize the what, how and why they produce images. According to Powels, the main difference between them is the following: while the social documentary's imagery is used to create a compelling story to successively show it to an audience, the anthropological/sociological one comes as a result of a specific set of scientific ideas and is thus used as part of the methodology. Powels thus collects few recommendations that could possibly qualify the production of images as "scientific": an appropriate theory base to use as reference during the whole production process; the researcher's awareness that every choice made when recording images has epistemological implications - which must be justified and reported according to the technical nature of his/her reporting; extra attention to unintended/uncontrolled influence due to the camera's presence; a constant effort to contextualize the subject recorded/photographed also with information gathered through different source and/or techniques. Nonetheless, it is emphasized how these guidelines should be considered as such and not as fixed rules. Successively, Powels quotes a specific exhibition and photo book of the photographer Marrie Bot, in order to display when the similarities between social documentary and anthropological research occur. From this example emerges that features of this kind of photographic work suit visual social science' methods, such as: a thoughtful theoretical background prior to the images production, complementary data about the subject portrayed, the adaptation of ethical standards during the project and a very sober and functional style. The example is thus used to claim that images' production with no scientific purposes – in some cases - can foster arguments that would not be easily understood with the mere use of words. Hence, Powels concludes that, despite some remarkable differences, social documentary work and social/cultural science research can mutually benefit by looking at each other's approaches in the imaginary production. Eventually, they both entail the impasse of representing reality and consequent impossibility of being completely objective, as there is always a decision-making process that leads to include/exclude some phenomena, or rather, images.

Another article that deals with the similarities of the documentary genre and the social-scientific research is the one written by Vittorio Iervese (2009). In his article he claims that there is no distinct differentiation between documentary production methods and the ones of social research. He therefore quotes Pasolini's essay, "*Empirismo Eretico*" [Heretic Empiricism, ENG] (1972),

when stating that both documentarists and researchers have to confront, mix and contradict themselves in order to effectively dig into whatever kind of reality. Indeed, Iervese argues that if the documentarist selects certain scenes and not others to include in his/her film, so does the social researcher with the phenomena observed, since the approach used consists of an “interpretative bricolage [...]” that “stress how social experience is created and given meaning” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003 in Iervese). In the end of the article, Iervese pinpoints the main common aspect between documentary and research, which is the gathering of all observations in a meaningful way. However, their difference lays on “how” the observations are successively organized and processed. The scientific approach aims to use and relate them in/to a precise context, meanwhile documentaries presents them in all their complexity: it is up to the spectator to interpret and elaborate them.

Even if *The Reformist* is set in Denmark, part of the film’s topic - the Islamic religion – does not properly belong to Western subjects yet. It is thus useful to consider Ken Nolley’s article (1997), which presents implications and representational strategies when Western filmmakers portray non-Westerns subjects. According to him, starting from the documentary film *Nanook*, documentary films have tended to portray native subjects from a Western perspective, fostering the Western dominance over non-Western cultures. However, Nolley quotes three projects - respectively of Pasolini, Trinh and Watkins - that adopt a “reflexivity strategy”, which overcomes the traditional Western perspective. The strategy is aimed to explicitly show that the film is the representation of his/her own view, so something that cannot fairly speak for the subject portrayed. In this way, the audience is more aware of this “biased” perspective and can thus recognize the existence of alternative discourses besides the one represented.

Hence, this paragraph about production of imagery - and ascribed approach - in social sciences does offer a solid starting point for a discussion about the one used by Marie Skovgaard’s in *The Reformist*.

Documentary Films as educational tool

The Reformist is included in online teaching platforms for secondary education’s students in Denmark and is quoted by the Syllabus of history of religions used in the Gymnasiums as well. Nowadays, media are used to support teachers’ work more and more frequently, especially when the topic covered may be controversial. In this regard, documentaries are one of the most used

media products and their involvement for educational purposes has been explored by scholars, who investigated issues and perks of their usage in schools.

Jeremy Stoddard's articles are thus useful to understand how documentaries are usually used as teaching tool and what should be avoided and achieved through them. In an article, written with Alan S. Marcus (Marcus & Stoddard, 2009), it is exposed their usage during history classes in secondary education. They argue how all of history teachers use - more or less often - documentary films as a supplement to textbooks or other class' readings, however in some cases the same teachers do not introduce them as a representation of a value-laden perspective, but as an objective source of information. Moreover, when looking at the Secondary history student's reception of documentaries, almost all of them considered them as a trustworthy and accurate source of information, even "more than Internet, the government or other fellow students" in some cases. In order to avoid these incidents, Stoddard and Marcus write this article with the purpose of illustrating the real goal of supplementing teaching material for history classes with documentary films – especially when it is about controversial issues - and thus draw up some potential strategies to exploit their educational potential. In this regard, documentaries are considered the ideal resource to present all those controversial issue and nonmainstream perspective that most of the textbooks ignore, but only if the teachers do not ignore or downplay the filmmaker's perspective, and actually ask the students to pinpoint it and critically reflect on it. Indeed, in another study, Stoddard presents the ideological implications when teachers use documentary films as an objective and neutral source (Stoddard, 2009). The paper offers a deep insight into the tension that teachers face when attempting to use democratic pedagogy and promoting particular values at the same time through documentary films. In this regard, it is argued by Stoddard that the same teachers' selection of films – and what is controversial according them – has an influence on students' understanding of history, e.g. presenting a particular issue over others may also affect students' perception of what is it important.

Hence, once again Stoddard underlines the importance for teachers to explicitly identify and present documentary films as a value-laden perspective in order to not let students be biased or affected by the same teachers' ideology.

However, an article by Jeff Frank (2012) aims to overcome Stoddard's epistemological issues and challenges in using documentaries as a teaching tool, by expanding their educational significance. Frank criticizes Stoddard's reductive consideration of documentaries for educational

purposes, arguing that identifying them as a mere object of reflection, do not really differentiate them from other teaching tools and says too little about what they actually are. To support his argument, Frank quotes Bill Nichols (1991) as well, underlining that what “differentiates documentary from other nonfiction film genres is that it is a highly self-conscious genre that demands that its viewers ask difficult questions about the relationship between what is shown on screen and representativeness.” Frank argues that a documentary should not only be engaged antagonistically, i.e. by constantly questioning its claims – as it is proposed by Stoddard. Instead, the viewer should enter in a “elaborated transaction” where he/she tries to let the film communicate in its own terms, while remaining a critical viewer. By accepting the filmmaker as a representative of his/her own experience and seeing this as an education for us, we might see the other’s perspective as our own representative. What is communicated in a film thus becomes representative for us, the spectators. Hence, according to Frank, claiming that a documentary becomes useful only if presented as perspective-laden information tool, does not say anything significant to the experience of watching this kind of films. The documentary genre is in fact interesting because aims to create a public from a given perspective, albeit acknowledging that the latter is limited. In this way, the public is created through the presentation of a space where a filmmaker’s position is made manifest – not through a direct argument – and where the viewer can engage in a process of letting herself/himself learn from the film, whether the film is considered (somehow) representative of (some part) of her/his experience of the world. Frank concludes that we should certainly test the truthfulness of a film’s claims and be aware of its creators’ perspective. However, we should also consider that the learning process occurring while watching a documentary involves an elaborate transaction where matters of representativeness are always in play. The latter are thus useful for teachers to pass down the students how the representation of multiple experiences in a film “can serve as the groundwork for a new sense of community” (Frank, 2012).

To sum up, the literature quoted in this section is thus useful to analyze *The Reformist* and its launch campaign using a multidisciplinary framework. Documentary films were thus conceived as one among different communication tools, by which the director – and, in general, many other actors such as organizations, communities and people - conveys her personal beliefs and intentions. As such, communication and film scholarship was combined to pinpoint issues and concepts that

the representation and description of reality imply. Meanwhile, marketing/distribution wise, offline and online communication activities became a whole with the film, as the latter aimed to create an impact. As such, the second section of this chapter presented the papers investigating the relationship between documentary films and strategic communication.

Successively, anthropological studies concerning social scientific production of images were quoted to pinpoint the affinities and divergences with the documentary genre's ones. In this regard, they offer a theoretical reference to discuss Marie Skovgaard's approach in the shootings and with the participants. Finally, literature concerning pedagogical and didactical issues when using documentary films at school was quoted, as part of the discussion will also focus on how *The Reformist* is used as a teaching tool.

The next chapter, instead, will present the actual actions and work done by the Director and collaborators in order to define and present how *The Reformist's* message, and ascribed Director's intentions, was carried out through the launch campaign.

Chapter 3: Methods & Data

Research Design

The literature considered is based on theories and narrative data that concern different aspects of documentary films overall and their communication to the audience. In addition, papers and previous preliminary research presented in the background provide a deeper insight into the context of *The Reformist*. However, it is necessary to include the perspective of the people who worked in the film and its launch in order to start a discussion about it. Hence, this chapter presents qualitative data about the launch, which are based on direct participant observation and archival research.

I hypothesize that the impact strategy implemented in the launch campaign of the film avails of similar practices proposed by the literature concerning impact documentaries (Nash & Corner, 2016). The research methods adopted for the analysis of the launch campaign of *The Reformist* are the following: participant observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, opportunistic sample, and archival research of the film's documents. Using this combination of different qualitative methods allowed me to obtain more effective and holistic results (Bernard 2006).

The above-mentioned research methods were chosen because of my participation and involvement at House of Real as an intern. My internship constituted my fieldwork to pursue participant observation, allowing me to establish rapport and learning (Bernard, 2006). In this way, my colleagues could go on with their work, while being aware that I was conducting my thesis' research as well. As such, I was an insider participant observer, taking notes of the aspects of work in a production company of documentaries, thus getting an insight into daily practices and internal organization of a production company of documentaries through direct observation. Being an insider allowed me to access the documents saved about *The Reformist* as well, leading me to pursue a sort of archival research into the documents and reports of the latter. The field notes gathered while working at House of Real helped me to contextualize the work done with *The Reformist's* launch and understand why it represented something exceptional from the other routine tasks undertaken.

The observations conducted are ascribed to the period from the end of January to half March, due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Therefore, the actual participant observation took place between January 21st and March 13th, before the country's lockdown led the Producers to make us all work from home. During the observation, I took the field notes directly in my laptop, which I

was using for my internship as well. In this way, I could keep working and write down some field jottings at the same time. The latter were reviewed at the end of the day at home.

Regarding the archival research, I selected the documents regarding the launch and distribution of *The Reformist* saved on the drive of House of Real. In this regard, there are no confidentiality issues, as the launch was financed by the Danish Film Institute and the documents are therefore public knowledge. Moreover, I also contacted the producer, Jesper Jack, and DR, the Danish public Broadcaster, in order to get the teaching material they produced out of *The Reformist* for secondary education.

The qualitative data gathered thanks to the semi-structured interviews occurred both face-to-face and by email. However, I do include the interviews conducted via Skype to the face-to-face interaction. Indeed, thanks to technology that facilitates co-presence and interactivity, I did not experience any significant difference while pursuing my interviews (Maddox, n.d.). The same mundane conversational format allowed me using everyday communicative practices as well as asking the questions I had planned in advance. In addition, nowadays and in this field, online meetings via Zoom, Skype or similar platforms are so common that their usage did not affect my communication flow with the interviewees.

By adopting semi-structured interviews, I followed a script prepared before the meeting scheduled with the interviewed. Semi-structured interviewing was ideal, as I only had one chance to interview the people chosen, who are accustomed to efficient use of their time and are really difficult to get in touch with (Bernard, 2006). For the same reason, I used convenience sampling when getting to know the PR consultant's job through the semi-structured interviews presented in the background chapter. All the interviews, both the ones via Skype, call and in person, were recorded and successively transcribed, using the help of the online software Otter.ai. In addition, I asked all the interviewees the permission to use their real names when transcribing the interviews and all of them agreed. I chose myself to anonymize one though – Lars Hansen's interview –, due to potential confidentiality issues, as the interviewed requested to not publicly share information about his job.

All the data gathered through direct participant observation, ethnographic interviews and archival research were successively analyzed at home. I therefore pursued a qualitative data analysis; more specifically, a grounded-theory text analysis based on inductive "open" coding. The latter consisted of underlining and selecting the most important parts of documents, transcribed

interviews and field notes, successively used as exemplar quotes and thus constituting my text analysis method (Bernard, 2006).

Limitations

As participants were interviewed only once and following a script, it could have been better to have more chances to meet them, so that a more informal interview would have been possible. Were the research to be repeated, I would follow closely the job of PR consultants, in order to not only get information through their claims and opinions, but also by their daily actions. However, this was not possible due to the lack of availability of the cinema's industry people. Indeed, when I started contacting them, it was late January and the most important festivals were going on – Academy Awards, Berlinale, CPH:DOX -, barely leaving some time to the PR consultants to answer to my questions. Besides the ongoing festivals in that period, important people from the cinema industry, as well as in other fields, are generally not so easy to reach by people outside their network. Other scholars had my same difficulty when conducting a research that involved the participation of people from this industry: in a study about network-based career, the same author reported some difficulty in obtaining an interview from them. In this regard, he stated that getting a meeting with a Producer required him at least 20-30 phone calls. According to Jones, this does happen because they give access to the industry according to a person's persistence and motivation (Jones, 1996). Following this advice, I have tried to be a little bit pushier as well. I might have clashed with Danish customs and approaches though, which are definitely different from the American ones adopted by Jones. Indeed, I was not able to get a face-to-face interview (not even via Skype or normal call) with Mette Bjerregaard, the impact Producer hired for the launch of *The Reformist*. However, by sending her the questions via email, I got few useful answers.

Moreover, COVID-19 pandemic reduced any chance to pursue face-to-face interviews personally for the whole month of March and April. In fact, isolation measures to contain the spread of the virus led me to conduct my research at home, as I could not go to the office of House of Real. For the same reason, as above-mentioned, also my observations in the fieldwork lasted until mid-March 2020. From that point the interactions with the Producers and the rest of colleagues have been pursued online, through emails and weekly meetings on Google Hangouts. Although the pandemic represents a limitation for qualitative research methods, it is not the biggest one to my investigation. Thanks to video-call tools and other technological means, I was able to pursue my interviews, regardless the physical presence of the person interviewed.

Regarding the data gathered through the documents found, instead, the language barrier constituted a real limitation when reviewing the relevant documents about the launch campaign. Indeed, due to their length I had to use Google translate to understand the papers considered, as almost all of them are written in Danish.

Direct Participant Observation

I started my internship at House of Real on January 21st 2020, with the purpose of getting a better understanding about the tasks and practices pursued in a production company of documentaries for my master Thesis. Besides the academic scope, I also wanted to get more experience in the cinema industry for my own future career.

I got to know House of Real through my previous academic Internship at Nordisk Panorama, where I could see *The Reformist*. The production company focuses on documentaries and new media products that challenge and explore nonmainstream topics and events, by offering a different perspective. The company is a collective of produces, however, Anna J. Ljungmark and Jesper Jack are the main ones and founders of the firm.

In my first weeks of the internship, me and the other Intern, Sonia, did not have a Production Manager to refer to. The latter was in fact changed at the end of January, being thus present only for our first week. Without somebody tutoring us about our role and related tasks, our main occupation was making everything ready and tidy in the office and organizing/archiving some documents. In the meantime, we also started getting an overview about the company's projects - both finished and in different stages of production - by looking at the folders saved in the Google Drive. The lack of a precise structure in the storage of documents made the process a little bit difficult, making this task frustrating and time-consuming at times.

Once that the new Production Manager came in, the tasks concerned more the management of the company's SoMe platforms and editing and tailoring projects' information for festivals' or funds' applications. The latter were still the results of a research pursued by us, the interns. In the meantime, for what I could see and assume, the producers were handling the contracts of the people working in a film, drawing up budgets, negotiating salaries and/or compensations, and other bureaucratic/financial tasks.

The workload between me and my colleague Sonia was divided according to the Producer we were assigned to. The projects that I was handling though, which were mainly the ones of Anna J Ljungmark, did not present any peculiar aspect that I could further analyze for my research, since

I wanted to focus more on the communication process required for a documentary's release. Moreover, as interns we mainly got the tasks assigned by the Production Manager. As such, we were not involved in the whole workload of the Producers, who shared information regarding the projects' status only during the weekly meeting, held every Tuesday.

For these reasons, I started my archival research by looking at the documents and actions taken by House of Real for the launch of *The Reformist – A Female Imam*. Seen the subject and the media coverage it received, I found it interesting and resourceful to analyze. I therefore started going through film's folder on the Google Drive in order to get data and information about its release process and the collaborations involved. The last ones were eventually explored by contacting the people who worked in the film and launch, who is presented in more detail in the next chapter.

Archival Data & Analysis

As mentioned before, my role as a direct observant at House of Real allowed me to access and see the files saved on Google Drive regarding *The Reformist*. This part of the methodology thus presents the papers and documents taken in consideration. After a brief introduction on the production of the documentary, are reported key parts of the launch strategy and its evaluation. Moreover, it is also presented the material used as a teaching tool for schools – from DR skole and Clio platform - in order to pinpoint the film's usage for educational purposes.

Through an application to the Venice Gap Financing Market made in 2017, I could find the Director's plan and statement about *The Reformist* while it was still in production. At that time, the title was still *Femimam*. In the document is stated the goal of the project, which was documenting Mariam mosque's first year of existence, examining the efforts and providing the duties and challenges of female imams. Moreover, the application clarifies the filming approach adopted, aimed to produce a "observational character-driven feature with exclusive access is the first account story of the Femimam group behind the mosque". The Director's statement clarifies the reason why portraying Sherin Khankan and the mosque on screen. Marie Skovgaard thus wrote:

my protagonist's life has been about reconciling opposites, and advancing understanding. I can relate to Sherin's passion for bridging cultures as I have spent four years working in and around Syria at the start of the uprising and during the civil war.

(*The Reformist* application to Venice Gap Financing Market 2017)

When she discovered Khankan's plans to open a mosque in Denmark, she immediately felt the desire to follow her with the camera. Besides portraying a charismatic character, Skovgaard's desire was to make a film aimed to encompass issues on gender equality, prejudice against the Islamic

religion as well as to portray a safe space for conversation. The finale scope of these themes' representation was meant to make female leadership within religious communities more visible.

Launch campaign application to the Danish Film Institute's fund

As mentioned in the introduction, the project followed the women's mosque during its first three years of existence. The film finally premiered at CPH:DOX in 2019 and for its launch and subsequent distribution applied to DFI funds, in order to get the collaboration of PR consultants as well as financial resources for promotional purposes. In the application it thus possible to see how certain aspects of *The Reformist* are highlighted in order to set precise targets and goals.

The application opens with the message entailed in the documentary, which is that men and women should be equal and have equal rights. Equality and ethnic minorities therefore become the focal point of the launch, reflecting the key partners. The ambition of the launch is thus to contribute to the gender equality debate within Islam and form the basis for important discussions, through the inclusion of the documentary in both the national educational program and in the EQUAL RIGHT campaign. Even though the launch strategy covers a national target, it is also predicted that thanks to the selection as opening film at CPH:DOX, the film could reach and start a conversation internationally as well.

The background of the strategy is based on the ongoing situation within Muslim communities in Denmark:

In a time when equality of some is considered a trifle and a non-issue in the public, they become Danish shelters sought by an increasing number of minority women. This is a very large over-representation - ca. half are of ethnic origin other than Danish - and most of them are Muslim. The Femimam project with Sherin Khankan at the helm has modified the original marriage contract, so the bride and the groom have equal rights. That is, the woman has the right to divorce on par with the husband, and that in the case of divorce, she is equally entitled to the children.

(House of Real, 2018)

In this context, Mariam mosque offers a space where the Quran is reinterpreted based on tolerance, equality and Islamic Feminism and the documentary becomes the tool to spread this initiative, bringing hidden problems of minority communities on the agenda and attempting to cause social change.

As such, the goals of the launch are the following:

- making visible and influence the gender equality debate within Islam, thus inspiring Muslims who want equality and real cultural change and contribute with insights that can be used by political decision makers in Denmark;

- showing a nuanced picture of Islam and bridging the understanding of the complexity of religion and the practice of religion;
 - the expected social and cultural changes should inspire internationally.
- (House of Real, 2018)

The audience is conceived as the broad Danish population, since the film was broadcasted on DR 1 as well. However, the special target is represented by: women and men in the ethnic environments, a native Danish audience engaged in political organizations or similar, and policy makers. For this reason, the launch strategy pinpoints certain organizations, institutions and people to cooperate with the promotion of the documentary. The latter are referred as ambassadors, as they should actively engage with the promotion of the documentary – e.g. through social media. In this regard, is mentioned Eva Kjer Hansen, Minister of Gender Equality of that year and face of the RIGHT TO EQUALITY campaign, who is thus seen as potential ambassador. It is indeed proposed that the above-mentioned campaign, launched by the Danish Refugee Council, could hopefully include the film, since they both share the same primary target group. Besides the ambassadors, among the potential collaborations listed there is a special focus on the libraries all over the country:

The Reformist is interesting to a discussion-minded audience, who is typically well informed and among other active in the country's libraries. We therefore have an ambition to organize film screenings and debate events at the country's libraries.

(House of Real, 2018)

Regarding cultural institutions, the strategy unfolds its plan to offer *The Reformist* as an educational tool for the schools, since the Ministry of Education already granted a fund for the development of such material. Moreover, being the film bought by SVT and YLE – the Swedish and Finnish Public Broadcasters respectively - *The Reformist* is planned to become the common frame of reference for students to discuss such a complex topic also outside Denmark. It is also stressed the importance of an agreement with municipalities, which should invite school pupils to the screening of the film in one of the public facilities right after CPH:DOX.

About promotion and distribution, the documentary Festival CPH:DOX plays an important role in the strategy, since *The Reformist* was chosen as the opening film. For this reason, in the strategy it is also mentioned a performance following the screening, with a lot of women from the minority community who talk about their challenges and dreams. For the subsequent screenings, instead, the launch predicted a meeting with Minister of Gender Equality, Church Ministers, writers,

philosophers etc., to enhance an important debate and interest towards the film.

For instance, the press effort – led by Freddy Neumann – is spread over in two periods: in support of the premiere at CPH:DOX, using all the mainstream media - newspapers, radio, television and magazines – and Prior to the film's TV premiere, planned for the beginning of May 2019. In this regard, the application unfolds Neumann's strategy to reach the press, which is based on deepening different film's angles:

- Sherin - A Living Fire Soul: In the movie, we follow her as one 'Fiery soul' who is ready to go through fire and water and who is struggling with his own lack of patience. Rarely do you encounter 'agitators' who burn so much and sustained for their cause, as is the case with Sherin and this is precisely the natural focus of one Interview angle.
 - The work of Sherin and brave Muslims: What started as an 'impossibility' has now developed into a popular mosque with three female imams;
 - Sherin and Women's League: By offering women Muslim divorce and allowing women to lead Friday prayer at the mosque, Mariam Mosque has managed to set the agenda;
 - Sherin and the project: At the heart of the Mariam Mosque and Sherin's life project are the nine tests that are formulated in the mosque manifesto;
 - Mariam Mosque as a Breathway: Mariam undoubtedly offers believing Muslims something they didn't before have had access to, but what does this mean for each believer?
- (House of Real, 2018)

In addition to the press effort, it is of course planned a SoMe strategy, where Facebook is aimed to be used not only to share clips, posts and photos about the film, but also as a potential forum of debate.

Internationally speaking, the strategy addresses Documentary and Film Festivals as a crucial opportunity for international sales, press coverage and reviews, and international recognition. Meanwhile, the sales for streaming services are not seen as a successful platform:

In terms of sales for streaming services, it is difficult to predict whether *The Reformist* will be addressed these platforms. The entertainment-based streaming services are typically listed, politically correct and very sensitive to interest groups and very careful not to bump anyone. Thus, *The Reformist* may be deselected for being "uncommercial".

(House of Real, 2018)

Therefore, in the same launch strategy is admitted that *The Reformist's* topic is potentially too divisive and controversial to be sold to international streaming platforms, and thus be part of mainstream narratives.

Launch evaluation

The launch evaluation, edited in the summer of 2019, offers an overview about the effectiveness of the strategy adopted, exposing the goals met and issues faced throughout the launch during the arc of few months:

The film's launch was specially built around the world premiere of CPH: DOX on March 20, when the film opened the festival. The launch has been an overall success and *The Reformist* was seen by 2997 people during CPH:DOX - and thus became the most viewed film at the festival in 2019. In relation to the PR and impact campaign, we had to early notice an inherent resistance and skepticism in several of the (immediate) obvious networks and organizations, just as we were also able to detect some maturity among several of the media where we expected a greater response. The explanation for this is partly to be found in internal conflicts / differences of opinion in the Muslim environment and that our protagonist (main contributor) has previously been heavily exposed in the media, which is why the film's strong and unique focus on both the case and the main character was not shared. The devised launch strategy has therefore been adjusted along the way - without having any negative impact on the marketing of *The Reformist - A Female Imam*.

(House of Real, 2019)

The eventual audience reached includes the broad Danish population, through the film's broadcasting on DR2, women and men in ethnic environments, staff working with integration, native Danish audience young and old – with an interest in society's issues and topics, and policy makers – land and municipal ones.

The outcome of the activities aimed to have an impact are successively mentioned more in detail, where it is stated the difficulty of selling the film to some of the potential partners because of their resistance or skepticism. Among the partners that did not want to cooperate are mentioned the Council for Ethnic Minorities and the Ministry of Gender Equality. The latter in particular did not include the film in the RIGHT TO EQUALITY campaign – as it was hoped before the launch:

It has been particularly surprising that organizations such as the Association of Facts, Ethnic Youth / RED Counseling, Mino Denmark and political departments such as SIRI, the Council for Ethnic Minorities and the Ministry of Gender Equality and the RIGHT TO EQUALITY campaign did not want to cooperate. There has been a longer dialogue with several of these actors, and it is clear that *The Reformist* is not just a documentary, but a film that is controversial and shares the waters. However, we have succeeded in establishing a wide range of partners who have held events with the film and / or contributed to the promotion of the film.

Despite this, it is confirmed the successful outcome to have the film used for educational purposes:

The Reformist - A Female Imam reaches out to the country's lower and upper Secondary education students with associated teaching material and in collaboration with the recognized teaching platforms: Clio, Gyldendal Education and via the Intermediate People's Teaching

Platform [Mellempfolkeligt Samvirkes undervisningsplatform, DAN]; Verdensklasse. In addition, DR School at Nordvision has presented a Nordic teaching material for the film, which from August 2019 will be distributed by DR School and the teaching platforms of the TV stations UR (Sweden) and YLE (Finland). In addition, the film becomes a regular part of the high school's syllabus for the next 10 years, as the film is included in a basic book for religion published by Gyldendal.

(House of Real, 2019)

The evaluation launch lists also the main event organized with the screening of the film and following debate that occurred in Universities, Libraries and other cultural institutions and organizations.

Regarding SoMe platforms, the evaluation refers to the role and participation of the ambassadors selected for the promotion of the film.

We have spent energy getting established a team of ambassadors and advisors from the minority community who were able to support the film and the Femimam project, thus Sherin Khankan and the other members of the mosque were not alone. But just as we have met with resistance from news media, interested organizations and associations, we have met with anxious contact with obvious ambassadors. Most people think the film and the case are incredibly important, but there were conflicts of interest in standing up and promoting the project publicly. For example, Katja Iversen, CEO of Women Deliver, also stated the importance of the film and the project as well as selected the film for the Women Deliver conference 2019, but did not want to be an official ambassador.

(House of Real, 2019)

Once again, the evaluation underlines the issues emerged when looking for partners, concluding how the burning issue addressed by the documentary was difficult to reconcile with the public image of selected partners.

The Reformist on Educational Platforms

In this paragraph are reported parts of the activities and questions related to the screening of *The Reformist* – the broadcast version - in Secondary Education classes. It is thus quoted and briefly analyzed the material presented by the teaching platforms DR Skole and Clio.

Clio is the most popular teaching platform used by public schools in Denmark. In the case of Clio, Niels Peter Nielsen and Jesper Petersen (2019) prepared the teaching material that includes *The Reformist* as part of the activities for the theme "Islamic Gender Roles". It targets students between the 8th and 10th class, so between 15-17 years old.

According to the learning objectives set for the screening of the film in class, *The Reformist* is used to show what Mariam Mosque is about and how different views on gender roles and religious texts are interpreted. The lesson proposed in fact opens with a brief background on the documentary's

topic and subject – Mariam Mosque. Before the vision of the film itself, the students are asked to answer to some questions that allow them to make some preliminary considerations about the documentary's themes.

What is an Imam?
How do Muslims perceive the Quran?
What are the hadith collections?
What does it mean to reform?
What is feminism?
(Figure 2 in Appendix B)

The subsequent task, instead, takes some quotes from the Quran to help the students understand what is actually written on it and how they can interpret the quote. The questions indeed ask:

What do you think the quote says about the relationship between the sexes?
How can the quotations be understood differently depending on whether the value of the *hadith* is greater or lesser?
(Figure 3 in Appendix B)

In this way, the students are provided with the theoretical framework to compare what they are going to see on the documentary and the original religious source – the Quran. Indeed, the film is presented only after the Quran quotes have been read and discussed. In addition, the screening of *The Reformist* is accompanied by the following questions:

From what different sides does Sherin Khankan encounter resistance?
In what areas might some Muslim women find that they have less freedom than men?
What specific changes is Sherin Khankan working for?
What religious arguments does Sherin Khankan use and which of her opponents use?
What dilemmas about love and relationships can Muslim women in Denmark experience?
(Figure 4, Appendix B)

The activity in fact focuses on the specific religious congregation that Sherin Khankan founded by opening Mariam Mosque. The purpose of this exercise is to lead the students to identify key parts of the film that can eventually start a broader conversation about Islam and religion overall. The subsequent task in fact aims to expand the themes of the documentary, by making the students discuss:

What are Muslim women fighting for and against?
Do they always fight for the same thing?
Are there more ways to be liberated?
How to create understanding and collaboration between divided groups in society?
Do you know other examples from the present or the past where love across religions or

classes can lead to problems?
(Figure 5, Appendix B)

In this way, the documentary becomes the tool and the conversation starter that enhance students to discuss and express their own opinion about the film's topic and ongoing society's debates. The ultimate goal in basing it on a reliable theoretical framework.

DR Skole is the other Platform that presents *The Reformist*, whose teaching material was edited by Amina Olander, professor at Aalborg university. Also in this case the online activity targets students between 15 and 17 years old. To the theme is attached a file for the teacher with some guidelines regarding the learning objectives of this activity, among which:

- dispose of an oral presentation of a religious subject matter and apply elementary religion terminology
- explain essential aspects of Islam, including formative and contemporary figures
- characterize and analyze diverse materials using the concepts of religion
(DR Skole Guidelines for teachers)

Indeed, DR Skole seems to focus more on the exploration of religious practices and related terminology, rather than the different perspectives and issues on religious texts interpretations – as proposed by Clio.

Moreover, DR teaching platform offers the broadcast version of *The Reformist* as well as different clips that underline some religious rituals pursued in Mariam mosque. Among these, the prayer, the role of the scarf and other themes are presented (figure 6, Appendix B).

For example, the Friday Prayer at Mariam mosque is presented by one short clip, whose content is investigated by some questions and compared with other sources. The exercise's questions, related to the Friday Prayer's clip, are the following:

Sherin's Friday prayer at the Mariam Mosque - Clip

Then read about the Islamic prayer. You can use your ledger and / or read this article on Islamic prayer: <https://www.religion.dk/det-vigtigste-vide-om-boen-i-islam>

What is the meaning of prayer in Islam?

What is wudu and what role does wudu play in a prayer as a ritual?

What is qibla and what is the role of qibla in decorating a mosque?

What do Muslims express in prayer?

Discuss, based on your knowledge of Islam, why it is controversial for a woman to lead the prayer?

What religious and cultural conditions may limit women's ability to lead prayer?

(figure 7, Appendix B)

Dr Skole, in this way, clearly identifies and selects relevant scenes of the documentary, thus proposing a guided analysis of these ones through a specific set of questions and theoretical frame

of reference. This task pinpoints the aim of the learning objectives of the lesson taught through *The Reformist*, which consists of recognizing religious practices portrayed in a real situation, or better, at Mariam mosque, to successively discuss them by using the right terminology.

Hence, the data hereby presented sum up the plans and actions displayed and implemented in the launch campaign of *The Reformist*. The observations gathered during my internship at House of Real briefly introduced the workload and ordinary organization of a production company of documentaries. Meanwhile, the actual archival research aimed to emphasize the unprecedented effort done to promote this particular documentary and its message. Therefore, specific strategies, tactics, implementation – e.g. the teaching material in the educational platforms – and evaluation were outlined and analyzed. The actual endeavor behind the latter is further explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Ethnographic Interviews

This chapter presents semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted to gain a better understanding of the work behind the production and launch campaign of *The Reformist*. As mentioned before, the launch campaign of *The Reformist* is the result of a collaboration and exchange of ideas between the Director - Marie Skovgaard, the Impact Producer - Marie Bjerregaard, and the PR consultant - Freddy Neumann. I therefore considered necessary to hear their opinion and have a clearer explanation about the effort dedicated to the film's launch campaign. If the documents analyzed in the previous chapter present the concrete actions and results of the film's launch, the interviewees' claims hereby reported help to reconstruct the process and work to get to the latter. In this regard, the sections of this chapter are divided according to the people - and ascribed role -interviewed.

Interview to the PR Consultant and Impact Producer

The interview with Freddy Neuman lasted almost three hours and was conducted face-to-face in his office in Fredriksberg on February 20th. With him I had the chance to hear about both his job overall – included in the background - and the work done with the launch of *The Reformist*.

Neumann's answers to my questions and opinions partially concern the launch's working process itself. He rather explained and elaborated more about the challenges and issues encountered while developing the narrative and its angles to catch media's and audience' attention, with the eventual purpose of bridging the film's message to the potential viewers. According to Neumann, the film could have had a better impact and outcome to reach the audience. Indeed, he mentioned the problem of not mapping the market since the development phase in order to bridge the audience with the topic of the film effectively.

Without knowing exactly who's gonna be our enemy, how are we actually gonna bridge her to the...to an audience? If we could actually have created that bridge in the developing process would have been much much easier to actually create an impact on that film.

In this regard, he referred also to part of targeted audience, namely the Muslim community and the multiple divisions within it.

the problem about that film is also that we cannot talk about The Muslim or her being Muslim, because they are, I mean, they are divided in groups and they are fighting against each other.

Meanwhile, for what concerns the work with the media, Neumann argued that Khankan's previous press and TV coverage for personal matters represented the main issue for him. In this case, he quoted the whole dispute between her and Naser Khader – explained in the background as well.

well, it was a bit problematic with her to be honest, to do the PR, because the film has got a goal and a mission of showing the femimam project creating a mosque for women. A person who wants to embrace and create a forum for women, not just women, but also creating a place and network for, let's say, more liberal Muslims. But the thing is that there are rumors saying that she's actually not liberal. So, let's say we had like a pop when we're trying to create a public image of her as a liberal. She, as imam, wanted to create this space that can embrace everybody. But at the same time, there were rumors of her being pro, let's say, orthodox, and that's really a problem. She was quoted for supporting Sharia. And that's why... I don't know if... I don't know if they dropped the case. But three politicians actually accused her for supporting sharia. But she said that she was wrongly quoted. And she brought them to court. So those, you know, stories going up there And then at the same time, there was this film trying to show another image of her.

In this regard, Neumann linked the media coverage of Sherin Khankan to a structural problem of the same story told in the documentary, which at some point, according to him, forgot to include the context of what was going on.

the thing is that they had an intention of telling a story. They had an intention of telling this story of this liberal imam and they are so focused in their own intention. And that intention became also an Image campaign. But they did not actually mirror the context into their intention. So we know that they are telling one story. But actually, there's something else going on out here. And what happens in the film is actually dependent on what is going on out there. But they're not telling us what is going on out there. [...] That's like, let's say fictional track, which is the one that the film follows. Because this is the director's intention. But it forgets that that something out there is something up.

In his opinion, the rumors and controversiality of Sherin Khankan not reflected in the film was also the reason why they had difficulty in getting more partners for the launch campaign.

I mean, we were fighting against, let's say, her public image as a very controversial person. So and so that was like, in reality, there was this controversial Sherin. Then there was, let's say, the fictional or the documentary film's Sherin. But it wasn't the same person. it was a clash between two different images. And that was a huge part of the publicity who just could not actually be convinced or who just wouldn't even watch the film because of her being controversial.

Moreover, Neumann underlined again the importance of the context, which allows directors to not disconnect from reality.

I also think is that most directors forget the context. Forget reality because they become so much a part of that subject. And they, they, I mean, they become blind. I mean, I used to say that they become "snow blind": they are standing in there, they can see everything, but they

can't see anything. And that's why they, they, they become so blind they forget themselves and they become too close to the subject. And that's exactly what I think happened to her [Marie Skovgaard, ed.] that she became too much a part of the project herself. [...]And that's the major problem about that. And it means also that there is a problem when you are building up your campaign. Because you will, you will see here that for me, there was a lot of noise out there. And I had to play very, very loud in order to actually play louder than the noise.

Hence, he linked this recurring issue to Marie Skovgaard's case, addressing it to her personal commitment to the mosque's project and participants involved.

Regarding Impact Producer's role and tasks, Mette Bjerregaard admitted some difficulties as well, especially when reaching some ambassadors - as reported in the launch evaluation. In her answers via email she did not elaborate a lot why some organizations or people did not collaborate, but she remarked the controversiality of Sherin Khankan.

Because this is such a controversial topic, maybe they were afraid of the consequences or maybe they didn't like Sherin as a person - due to previous critical articles about her. Sherin is a very modern woman within her religion and some are not ready for her viewpoints.

However, Bjerregaard worked to reach out possible partners for the editing of teaching material through the film as well, and that constituted a successful outcome.

We talked a lot in the beginning of the process (Freddy, Marie, Jesper and I) They all contributed with great ideas. Important to listen to the directors wishes for the film. Educational material was a big wish from Marie, so happy we included so many relevant partners to get the film out in Denmark's educational system.

Besides representing an effective result for the film's promotion and aspired impact, its introduction in the Danish schools is seen by Bjerregaard as a notable implementation of the Director's wishes. As such, the Impact Producer expressed her satisfaction for the successful combination between Skovgaard's will and the consequent documentary's impact distribution through the teaching material.

Interview to the Director, Marie Skovgaard

I interviewed Marie Skovgaard on March 19th via Skype, when social distancing due to Coronavirus was already mandatory since the week before. The interview lasted one hour and half, where I could ask the questions prepared and her openly answer them. In this regard, seen the extraordinary situation with a pandemic going on, the interview started with a small talk, where I also had the chance to introduce myself and the scope of the interview. Indeed, I wanted to hear the opinion and version of the Director herself about the launch campaign, i.e. investigating her

initial intentions and wishes for the film as well as their development and implementation by the hired collaborators from her own perspective. She eventually demonstrated to be fairly open regarding all the matters.

The interview started by asking one basic question regarding the film, so how the idea of the documentary came.

I met her [Sherin Khankan] at this fundraising event that she was actually the host of, and just had a casual conversation with her and was very intrigued by her persona because she was, you know, extremely charismatic and had so much energy and was kind of crazy at the same time [...] And then actually Jesper [the Producer] told me that he read in the newspaper that she was going to start up this project with opening the first women's mosque. So I was just so, you know, curious about what that meant, and having someone like her... So I was like, okay, there might be a film here. So I contacted her, and I was not the only one who's been contacting her [...], I had competition and I had to convince them that it should be me. And yeah, I did it.

In this regard, she specified which questions and motivations behind led to the idea of a documentary film:

what fascinated me about the story, like from a storyteller perspective, was almost Sherin's character who, who represented a women's right film for me - of course was also about a group of Muslims dedicated to Islam, so a religious thing - but my way into the story was more activist. Like okay, these people are going against tradition and what has traditionally been practiced. And what does that mean? what does it mean to read the Quran from a feministic perspective? And Can you do that? So that was my approach.

However, she explained how her initial intention was different than what came out eventually. Hence, she clarified her approach to the story and how things developed differently as she expected:

"I want to stay as much present as I can when you have when you gather and have the meetings, etc. And then we'll see from that." So, from day one, it was a very close collaboration. And that's generally how I work. I always take pride in the places that I also document that means that you're not only observant, you know, you also, you know, take part in making the food or help building the place or something like that. So you feel like you become part of them.[...] Because in the beginning, I thought it was quite beautiful to make it into a group portrait that it was really what I wanted. Especially because the group was very diverse. And I shot it as a group portrait for the first year. And then it just became too complicated because people were not taking as much part of it in the project as Sherin. Plus, you know, two years in, a lot of them left the project. And that was before me having a film so I was like, Okay, I need to make it a one woman story with some strong characters around her

In fact, in the film it is possible to see that most of the initial group's members leave, which determined a huge shift of focus for Skovgaard's film as well. Regarding what happened in the religious group, the Director gave her opinion:

For me, it was a question about how they wanted to change, of course in the detail of interfaith marriage, [...] A lot of them wanted Sherin to shut up in public, they didn't want her to be public about what they were doing. They could do it. They believe that there was evidence in the Quran for doing it. But because it's such a controversial thing, they should shut up about it. And for me, that was question about how you create change. Do you do it very slowly and quiet and not speaking about performing these marriages - so you can help these very specific people get married, and hopefully have their families accepting the marriage - or do you do that and speak very loudly about it? [...] I think a lot of them wanted it to be a more shared project. But for me, it was very obvious that there would be a break at some point [...] It was too diverse, you know, there was too much conflicting of the people starting the project. So they would never be able on a democratic level to make any decisions for the project. And that meant that it had to be led by a strong leader, then you could disagree and leave the group. But you could also, if you didn't disagree, you could continue. and today, I think they proved that they were strong enough to survive, they're still there.

Even if it is evident that at some point Miriam mosque becomes more Sherin Khankan's project - supported by other strong characters - and not a group one, the Director still did not want to make a portrait about her, by including all the other aspect of the protagonist's life.

I didn't want to do the portrait of Sherin. For me, it's not a portrait, because then half of the film should also be about this other organization that is very interlinked, because some of the women in *Exitcirklen* - is the name - also come to the mosque and some of the women from the mosque also go to the, to the other groups.[...] I filmed a lot more in her house and stuff like that. But in editing, I cut it away because for me, I was mostly interested in that specific space, creating the space, a religious space for especially women. And trying to stay true to that narrative to simplify that. So that's also why I didn't make such a big deal out of which was a long story. I didn't go too much into Sherin's profile or into her past history.

Nonetheless, Skovgaard acknowledged that the film and the character of Sherin Kahnkan constituted something controversial to find ambassadors and other well-known people supporting and promoting it publicly.

So for me, it was like, Okay, we have to release the film, talk about women's rights, Muslim women's rights, and not so much about Sherin, you know, trying to downsize that part and trying to agree on the important subject of women's rights, divorce and women's rights to marriage. [...] A lot of them were like we totally supporter and we also support Sherin, But they were like "it will have too much consequences for us if we do it in public."

In this regard, the Director elaborated more about the launch campaign and her collaboration with Mette Bjerregaard and Freddy Neumann. About the latter she explained his role and intervention in the project:

Freddy watched some of the cuts, and gave his feedback, because he's good at it and I trust him. And I've listened to the parts... I can't remember, really, about his specific feedback, but we had trusted people that saw some of the cuts and gave feedback on that. And for me was also just important that he followed the development of the cuts so he kind of knew what kind

of film was coming out and could start planning for it. Yeah, and he is big in terms of the PR work. His most clear advice to me making this film was “don’t go into the theology in interviews” and “you have to distance yourself from the mosque”. Because you create friendships and you get very committed to the people. they become friends and, and everything suddenly can get very blurred. And that's something I'm always very honest about [...]. It's not my goal as a filmmaker to be objective, but the downside of that is that these lines get so blurred. So, then you are out speaking about your film, and suddenly, sometimes I hear myself speaking about the mosque, like I was part of the mosque myself.

Meanwhile, about the strategy of the launch campaign itself, Skovgaard added:

this community that we want to engage with the film, you know, primarily women but not only women. We're not targeting only women actually. Not at all. We really wanted to have the men in the cinema as well. But the PR agents were very much clear about that: this group of people is extremely difficult to get into the cinemas. They don't pay tickets to see this kind of films. So, we needed to find a way how We could collaborate with a lot of people already in contact with this community and host a lot of screenings that were primarily as much as we could for free.

Regarding this matter, the PR work of Mette Bjerregaard, according to the Director, became crucial. She was in charge of looking for ambassadors as well as reaching out to educational and cultural institutions, and the same Director admitted the related issues during the release of the film to the target chosen.

we had a lot of “why not more people bringing it to their community?”, “Why can't we get more ambassadors?” how to do this, calling networks, asking advice, stuff like that. Our strategy was [to avoid] the whole cultural appropriation talk and stuff like that. So that's why I think everybody agreed that when launching this film, I always had to do it with Sherin if possible, or someone else from community.[...]So she would be the one talking about everything related to the religion [...] And I was talking about the making of the film part. [...] We did quite a bit of meditative, extremely big job getting the film out to...in small communities, you know, after the festival, just having free screenings in web, where people with minority background lived in collaboration with a lot of organizers. So, I think we had, like 20, at least 20 screenings around the country. And that became just amazing in itself, thanks to Mette. but at the same time, it was extremely difficult even having people joining for free film screening. Because the people that worked on this were the were extremely dedicated, but we were always you know, kind of not depressed but like, why are there not more?

Regarding the issue of a white filmmaker addressing issues from the Muslim community and other minority communities, the premiere at CPH:DOX was a particular event that worked and constituted a success for the Director:

It was mostly saying we cannot make a film about... like me as a white filmmaker, about a lot of women with minority backgrounds, and then introduce it to a to a wide audience and to discuss it or to have that experience. If you really want to engage with the community, we have to flip it, which meant that a lot from the industry were not allowed into the opening, because so many tickets were given away to people not necessarily from the industry[...] So,

it was very overwhelming. And it was an extremely good way of getting the film going because those people went home and start talking about it. And that's the film. I think almost all of our screenings were sold out and we kept having screenings.

Another big success for the Director was the introduction of her film in the curriculum of religion in the public schools in Denmark. She thus explained how the idea came through the collaboration with Jesper Petersen, the scholar pursuing his sociological research regarding the mosque.

what I learned from him and his research was that there's a lot of stories connected to Islam that it have never been in the religion books. how it's being read about Islam in general, is very stereotyped, extremely stereotyped and, and lack a lot of basic information. [...]so that just became a very simple logical thing, which was apart from the film attracting some attention because it's happening in present time and it's in Denmark, etc. But then he developed together with some very clever schoolteachers a whole educational thing around the film. And I was not part of developing that or writing that at all. I know that they saw a very, very good opportunity because it was the right timing and the educational things for religion studies was extremely old. [...] So, I was just extremely lucky that so many people really needed that that specific time. And it's part of the educational plans for the next 10 years. That's just really what you wish for. Because, you know, as a filmmaker, there will be a drop of attention to your film after about a year, because now it's new films being talked about.

Moreover, Marie Skovgaard considered the film as the input and conversation starter to issues such as interfaith marriages and divorces that before were a taboo for all the other imams, bringing the same Mariam mosque in a democratic debate.

By releasing [the film], suddenly, some of the male imams started to speak in public about the issues of, of interfaith marriages, for example, which never happened before. So, when I think some of them felt, okay, now it's out there as a public debate, we need to talk about that and we don't think it's a possibility. So suddenly, they [the mosque project] went out in public, in public radio and, and said this, and for me, I was like, Yes, that's wonderful, because now they're part of a democratic debate.[...] which also meant accepting, not just ignoring the the mosque project, but starting to go into the actual discussion, which means you take your opposite partner, the mosque serious. [...] So she's just becoming part of all the other ones. Before she was special. Now she's becoming part of everyday life as a religious leader.

Despite all the positive consideration, when I asked Marie Skovgaard about the issues related to the media coverage and rumors about Sherin Khankan' private life, she actually admitted that these last ones may had caused some problems with the launch of the film. In this regard, she explained the whole conflict with the Danish politician Naser Khader, concluding that the rumors he started around Khankan probably affected people's perception of her and, as follows, her film.

I had an idea of including that on the film, but it was just such a different thing out of the film, so...plus it's still not settled [...] it could have done something with their [the audience] perception of her and and I don't know how people perceive that story. I perceive it very black and white because I think he's a crazy man. But that's also because I have all the backstories

so, you know, I can't be the judge of how an average person out there would receive it from just reading the newspapers. [...] Even though, if they believed or not believed him [Naser Khader], it was enough for them to start questioning her as a character. And that is a bad thing just before releasing a film where she is part of it. They say that there's nothing bad publicity, but I'm not quite sure about that.

Hence, the Director's considerations regarding the film's outcome and promotion resulted overall in line with her own expectations and intentions, despite acknowledging the difficulties of dealing with Khankan's rumors and media coverage.

Interview to Jesper Petersen, the Director's Religion Consultant

The last interview was conducted with Jesper Pedersen via a phone call. He is a PhD student that was pursuing his research on Mariam mosque during the production of *The Reformist*. Thanks to his knowledge on the matter, he was a useful source of advice and knowledge while the Director was shooting the scenes of her film. Always thanks to his expertise, he also provided his supervision for the inclusion of *The Reformist* in the educational material used on Clio Platform. Being him not involved in the promotion of the film and a reliable source about the subject portrayed, I found it relevant to get his opinion through an interview. In this regard, the questions directed to him aimed to have the issues encountered during the film's promotion explained from an "external" – but still informed - perspective.

According to Petersen, the film represents an overcoming of the typical narrative that Western media have about other cultures or communities, like the Muslim one.

Western media look for narratives that structure this power relation among brown people suppressed and this is produced again and again and again. She has broken away from that narrative, portraying more complexity. Marie is problematizing the idea of Sherin being suppressed by Muslims. She does not want to emancipate only within Muslim communities because in the movie you can see that she's also suppressed by other structures such as racism.

Another thing pointed out by the scholar was the difference between ambassadors/organization endorsing the mosque and the film but not promoting or associating with them publicly.

Even people attending the mosque or supporting the Femimam project did not publicly exposed their image to it. This is because it implies a social stigmatization. So you can't say that people not wanted to be associated with it do not support it. You can endorse it but not wanting to be associated with it at the same time. I refer to them as "free riders", they want to be part of this change, but they do not want to pay the price for it, by associating with it.

For this reason, Petersen argued how the introduction of *The Reformist* in the educational program is a whole other matter compared to the film promotion or inclusion in Political campaigns.

The education system is open to everything. It is always “hungry” for burning issues that are relevant for the present. [...] So what the education system does is to link theories and notions to new cases. The one of Sherin was a case that had a lot of media coverage and the documentary was easy to understand for Danish student as it was also in Danish. The educational material can have something political but is written by academics. So, we can write about something without endorsing it. Meanwhile it is different for someone who has a political career to associate with Sherin, who defines herself as an Islamist. That’s a political statement.

In this way, the Doctoral student underlined the difference between the promotional usage of the documentary and the descriptive function it invests when is screened to secondary education pupils during religion classes.

To sum up, the ethnographic interviews were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the actual work behind the launch campaign of *The Reformist*. The latter was thus exposed and investigated through the opinions and comments of the interviewees, who are nothing but the main people involved in the process. If the statements of the hired collaborators – Neumann and Bjerregaard – concerned more the issues encountered during the implementation of the impact distribution strategy, the Director’s interview unfolded her intentions and aims entailed in the film’s message, as well as her own perspective on the promotion and communication of the documentary. Meanwhile, Jesper Petersen’s perspective on the film and its communication served me as a more “neutral” and clearer explanation about the controversiality and issues related to *The Reformist’s* promotion.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The discussion hereby presented develops through the interpretation of the findings analyzed in the previous chapter according to the theoretical framework I disclosed in Chapter 2, which relates strategic communication with the various social functions of documentaries. Hence, qualitative data are exposed in connection to the theories and previous research displayed in both the background and literature review. The goal is in fact to identify how the Director's vision and intentions are carried out in the launch campaign of *The Reformist* and thus argue the challenges and issues of this process.

The Reformist: from the Director's intentions to its strategic communication

In a context where Islamic religion constitutes a huge public debate, especially in the political conversation, *The Reformist* addresses a burning issue. This implies that the documentary covers a matter of huge relevance according to the media agenda, despite presenting it with a new and different perspective. In fact, Sherin Khankan is represented in an ongoing conflict on more fronts: she is Muslim, and therefore an Islamist, but in contrast with some of the Quran's traditional interpretations, which are against her egalitarian and feminist ideals. Hence, in her film, Marie Skovgaard presents this new narrative, "portraying more complexity" than a story of oppressed "brown women", as argued by Jesper Petersen.

The willingness and intention to present this new perspective on Islam and women's right come from the Director's identification with Sherin Khankan's struggle, since she had the chance to experience the Muslim community both as an insider – when living in Syria – and outsider – because Danish. In this way, Marie Skovgaard wanted to tell a story about how to act according to personal beliefs and values – women's right to equality - in a society - the Danish one - and community – the Muslim one - anchored to prejudice and tradition. As such, she saw in Sherin Khankan's character the personification of women's right and activism and thus a story worth to be told. In this way, *The Reformist* is the mean by which Marie Skovgaard's represents her intentions and beliefs about activism and equal rights, thus *ventriloquizing* them through the film. And, at the same time, are her same opinions and ideas that *animated* and motivated her to tell this story (Cooren, 2012).

Therefore, *The Reformist* resulted in a combination of the Director's intention of telling a story about activism and equality with its timeliness and relevance in the public conversation. In this

way, the representation of Sherin Khankan's Femimam project represents an original and nonmainstream narrative on Islam that aimed "to change the mindset of the audience" (Freddy Neumann). Seen the potential of the film to "spark debate, mold public opinion and build activist networks" (Nisbet & Aufderheide, 2009), House of Real availed of the Danish Film Institutes' funds in order to create an impact out of *The Reformist's* message. In this regard, the launch strategy was designed to use *The Reformist* as an engaging tool able to inform and provoke a debate, thus re-shaping media's agenda and creating relevant publics (Nisbet & Aufderheide, 2009). As such, impact refers to the documentary's capacity to meet planned targets through the inclusion of other communication practices before, during and after its launch campaign (Nash & Corner, 2016). The application in fact set specific goals for the film, such as "making visible and influence the gender equality debate within Islam" as well as "showing a nuanced picture of Islam and bridging the understanding of the complexity of religion and the practice of religion". And in order to do so, Neumann and Bjerregaard developed an "impact distribution strategy" based on: online activities, e.g. promotion via SoMe platforms; written products, such as the production of teaching material; and face-to-face communication, i.e. public screenings followed by Q&A sessions (Nash & Corner, 2016).

Its strategic communication, for instance, was implemented through the same key points listed in Nash & Corner's paper (2016). The issue analysis is exposed in the beginning of the launch strategy, where a context about Muslim communities is given and is thus used to identify key publics. The latter are represented by the Danish population in general, with a special focus on "women and men in the ethnic environments, a native Danish audience engaged in political organizations or similar and policy makers". As such, relationship building covered a crucial role in the development of the launch strategy's tactics, which aimed to seek organizations and public figures that could spread the film's message as ambassadors – e.g. the ambition to include the film in the RIGHT TO EQUALITY campaign. In fact, the listed potential partners reflect the focus of the film on gender equality and ethnic minorities, as they all cover a consistent public exposure regarding these themes. Public institutions played another important role: thanks to their collaboration, the Impact Producer targeted public spaces, like libraries, all over Denmark to organize free community screenings. As also remarked by the same Director "this group of people is extremely difficult to get into the cinemas. They don't pay tickets to see this kind of films". For this reason, the public screenings were meant to take place in areas with a strong ethnic presence particularly, "such as Gellerup Parken and Tingbjerg" (House of Real, 2019). Besides better reaching

the targeted audience, free community screenings enhance the film to build a collective experience of emotions thus reaching a greater audience' engagement (Nash & Corner, 2016). This is why the premiere at CPH:DOX covered an important role in the launch strategy: the organization of the event was conceived to emphasize ethnic minorities as one of the main targets of *The Reformist's* key messaging. It was planned, for instance, a close collaboration with the festival, which besides using the documentary as the opening film, agreed with the PR agents to reserve most of the seats for the event for people with ethnic backgrounds. As such, they organized "a performance with a lot of women from the minority community who talk about their challenges and dreams" (House of Real, 2018). The Director herself pointed out the reason behind this choice: "we cannot make a film about... like me as a white filmmaker, about a lot of women with minority backgrounds, and then introduce it to a to a wide audience" composed by mainly white people from the cinema industry. For the same reason, Bjerregaard and Neuman warned her to avoid the cultural appropriation issue, by including the presence of Sherin Khankan - or somebody from the community - to the Q&A sessions planned for the launch of the film. It was therefore established how Islamic matters are a "no go" for the Director when presenting the film: "I think everybody agreed that launching this film, I always had to do it with Sherin if possible, or someone else from community" (Marie Skovgaard).

Besides directly addressing and involving ethnic minorities, part of the launch tactics included Neumann's strategy to tailor *The Reformist's* key messaging for the media. In this regard, the content of the documentary was expanded and framed into different angles mainly focusing on the Femimam project rather than the character of Sherin Khankan. Therefore, the press effort aimed to get the debate around Muslim communities and gender equality in the center of the media agenda, with the ultimate scope of emphasizing the role of the film as a conversation starter. In this regard, also the Director mentioned the attempt to downsize Khaknan's character in the film's communication strategy, by focusing on the themes instead – "the important subject of women's rights, divorce and women's rights to marriage" (Marie Skovgaard).

Finally, the last step of the "impact distribution" strategy consisted of its evaluation. The latter's scope was to measure the impact - according to the goals previously set - as well as to provide an overview of the strategy's effectiveness to DFI as a "coin of exchange" for the funds received (Nash & Corner, 2016). In this regard, the evaluation sums up the tactics implemented before, during and right after *The Reformist's* release - at both CPH:DOX and on national TV on DR2.

For this reason, media reviews of the film and screenings' attendance constituted tangible impact's measurements. The selection of *The Reformist* as opening film at CPH:DOX turned out to be an effective collaboration, since the festival accommodated the launch's plans for the premiere's event. Accordingly, the Director herself claimed "many tickets were given away to people not necessarily from the industry [...] but it was very emotional because it felt like the majority of the audience were people not normally invited into the big cultural events." So, the PR agents' job of "seeking the right people" (Marie Skovgaard) and making it an event for and about minorities resulted successful, turning *The Reformist* into the film with most attendance during CPH:DOX Festival edition – 2997 in total as mentioned in the evaluation report.

However, as presented in the previous chapter, the launch evaluation mentions the issues arose with some of the ambassadors and key partners identified in the strategy. In the same evaluation the causes of this problem are thus admitted and addressed to both the internal conflicts in the Muslim community and the high media exposure of Sherin Khankan for other personal matters. *The Reformist* is indeed referred as controversial and difficult to be publicly endorsed and promoted.

Nonetheless, Mette Bjerregaard worked a lot to reach out educational platforms and schools that could include the documentary as teaching material for Danish secondary education, since she mentioned how "educational material was a big wish from Marie". And, eventually, the Impact producer's efforts represented a success and one of the Director's hoped achievements for her film: having *The Reformist* in "educational plans for the next 10 years. That's just really what you wish for" (Marie Skovgaard).

Hence, the launch campaign strategy developed and implemented by Mette Bjerregaard and Freddy Neumann essentially applied through online and offline activities the key messaging of the documentary, thus adopting principles and practices proper of strategic communication. In this way, the so-called impact distribution strategy reflected the Director's wishes and intentions for the film. Marie Skovgaard for instance expressed satisfaction and gratification for their effort in spreading her film and entailed message throughout different activities and media. As repeated multiple times in her interview, she relied totally on them for the launch and "Freddie, and his assistant Marie, and Mette, and another guy called Fahad, did a very, very good job for the launch".

Nonetheless, it is curious how the film caused so much controversiality and skepticism, even among targeted partners and audiences, whereas it was included in online teaching platforms for Danish students with no polemics. Therefore, these matters are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Excess, *spreadability* and controversiality

In the launch evaluation, as well as in the ethnographic interviews with PR agents and Director, are mentioned some issues regarding the collaboration with predicted ambassadors and the engagement with minority communities. This paragraph thus aims to identify and discuss the origin of these issues by referring to the papers presented in the background and literature.

The report of the Danish Film Institute offers a useful insight into what is the current *modus operandi* of the cinema industry overall in relation with the audience. It therefore problematizes the distorted and incoherent understanding that different industry actors have about a film's positioning and communication. As such, the research suggests that the latter can be improved through "a stronger look at context, relevance and timeliness" of a given film. The "false audience" is in fact one of the most common mistakes during the creative process and, most of the times, results in an eventual "difficulty in engaging with the real audience" (Will & Agency, 2020). This occurs because the creative process is difficult to be understood by outsiders, so most of the times the involvement of the audience is contemplated only right before the film's release. Hence, the hypothesis claimed in the report is: were the perspective of the final "consumer" incorporated during the creation of the "artistic product", its own positioning and launching would be easier as well as its outcome's predictability.

For this reason, it is more and more frequent the involvement of PR agents during early stages of production, aimed to improve a film's "context, relevance and timelines" (Will & Agency, 2020). *The Reformist*, for instance, availed of Neumann's collaboration from the production stage and during the editing part as well. However, the PR consultant claimed that creating a bridge between the audience and the film's DNA "in the developing process would have been much much easier". In fact, his hypothesis is that an earlier involvement could have had potentially removed some of the communicative obstacles encountered. In this way, it would have been possible ensuring a better film's positioning, through the consideration of the audience' perspective as of the elaboration of the Film's DNA. Consequently, were Neumann's being able to intervene earlier, he might have had prevented the Director to become "snowblind", guaranteeing a better inclusion

of “context, relevance and timeliness” (Will & Agency, 2020).

Nonetheless, as stated by Hansen, most of the times the DFI’ funds allow production companies to hire PR collaborators only in a later stage, so when the film’s DNA is already established and implemented through the first shootings – as in the case of *The Reformist*.

As emerged from both Neumann and Hansen’s interviews, dispensing advices and consulting to the filmmakers when their film is not completed yet, allows them to remove some obstacles they may encounter during the communication campaign. According to Hansen, a new and fresh perspective on a film is thus useful for the filmmakers, since his role is to “take their intentions and expand them even further”. Hence, stepping in a project when it is not finalized yet, helps him to provide the directors with some new and fresh perspective, since “they've been working with the same topic for so long and become kind of blind” (Hansen). By adding his point of view in earlier stages of production, he is thus able to better bridge the film’s themes with the media’s demand and topic agenda. Freddy Neumann described his role in an analogue way, although emphasizing the audience in particular: “I'm actually able to bridge an awareness from the audience to the film and from the film into the audience. And the awareness is very much recognized as relevance.” In *The Reformist*, it can be argued that the subject is relevant, as portrays themes and events that are part of a current and public conversation. However, Neumann claimed that the documentary’s relationship with the audience – or its lack of - constituted a problem during its launch campaign. This does not refer to the audience targeted in the launch strategy though, but to the people’s perception of the documentary’s topic and subject. The latter, in his opinion, was not taken in consideration enough in the development stage. It therefore resulted in representing “the fictional or the documentary film's Sherin” that clashed with the controversial one portrayed by the media. Once again, this is the consequence of directors becoming “blind” (Hansen), or, according to Neumann’s definition, “snowblind: they are standing in there, they can see everything, but they can't see anything”. In the case of Marie Skovgaard, for instance, he claimed that she was “too attached to the process or the participants of the film” forgetting “what's going on out there”. Despite declaring that is not “her goal as a filmmaker to be objective”, the Director herself admitted that her commitment to the mosque’s community made the lines between her active participation and role as an observer very blurred. Indeed, Neumann argued that her attachment to the mosque was not only reflected in the film, but also in the launch campaign. The latter faithfully mirrors her vision of “showing the femimam project creating a mosque for women”, albeit leaving out all “the

noise out there” regarding the main character. As such, the PR agent claimed that “had to play very, very loud in order to actually play louder than the noise”.

What is referred by Freddy Neumann as “noise” is Nichols’ excess (1991), ergo the historical references left out from the narrative and exposition of *The Reformist*. Being the impasse between history and text - the film in this case - impossible to overcome, the documentary of course relies on a main narrative based on the Director’s ideology. The narrative is the result of the *ventriloquization* of the Director’s intention, and it therefore invites the viewer to see Sherin Khankan and her project through her perspective. This means that the knowledge presented in the film is not “innocent” and its historical references are strategically selected in order to provide the documentary with realism and, as follows, persuasive power (Nichols, 1991). However, whether the latter is enough convincing, it is questioned by Neumann, as reported in his interview. When answering to my questions, he mentioned the main issues encountered during the launch strategy’s implementation, which are hereby related with different forms of excess.

The sacramental form is represented by the difficulty to effectively represent the meaning of the religious practices pursued in Mariam mosque. Some passages of the film, in fact, may not seem so revealing or relevant to an average and non-Muslim viewer - e.g. the first Friday prayer or Khankan’s arguments about the Islamic divorce.

Even if Neumann himself advised the Director to not get into theology in the film, the lack of a detailed description of the religious practices represented, along with the impossibility to do it in only 90 minutes, constitutes a complex form of excess as well. In fact, as mentioned in the study of Jesper Petersen (2019b), female imams and interfaith marriages are topics highly debated in the same Islamic community. Therefore, according to Neumann, the engagement of the Muslim community – in both the creative process and in the launch – has always constituted a problematic challenge. By one hand, Muslims are extremely divided among each other, due to the complexity of their religion and its different interpretations/application. As such, it is difficult to set a precise target among this community and consequently reaching out to it. By the other, Islam has a long tradition of a tolerant religion – even if not reported by the media. Considering the complex and sacramental form of excess, any kind of narrative about this matter would have constituted a problem for him. In addition, this could partly explain why the screenings organized in areas with a strong presence of minorities did not receive as much attendance as hoped.

Regarding the excess as a local form, Sherin Khankan, the main character, is chosen for her representativeness of activism for gender equality along with her ability to perform before the

camera (Nichols, 1991). However, this choice implies that aspects of her person and life – e.g. her NGO *Exitcirklen* – are necessarily excluded from the narrative. Moreover, Nichols (1991) ascribes to the local form all the material dimensions – e.g. society, culture, economy, linguistics, etc. - that constitute a “reticulated web of interrelationships”. The media exposure of Khankan therefore embodies the local form of excess, since it is an historical reference that the Danish society well knew. Khankan’s latest media coverage – before the film’s launch - was mainly related to her dispute with the Danish politician Naser Khader – matter quoted in all the interviews besides being explained in the background by Jesper Petersen. According to Neumann, the exclusion of this episode from the documentary, along with others, determined its “fictional track” – it has to be pointed out though, that the Director decided to not include it because the dispute between Khader and Khankan escalated in a lawsuit that is still unsolved. Therefore, in Neumann’s opinion, the cooperation’s denial by some of the potential film’s ambassadors was also due the clash between the media’s and film’s image of the protagonist. The latter, as stated by him, compromised the documentary’s intended impact among “a huge part of the publicity, who just could not actually be convinced or who just wouldn't even watch the film because of her being controversial”. For this reason, the Consultant’s press strategy focused on highlighting the narrative about the mosque and its surrounding community, in order to “play louder” than the rumors about Sherin Khankan and promote the film’s key messaging.

Despite Neumann’s arguments about the clash between the “real” and “fictional” Sherin Khankan in the story, her character still remains controversial. Were this angle to be included in the documentary, it might have had resulted in a stronger link between the reality represented and its context. However, it would still not have changed her public image and ambivalent representation in the media. The mixed opinions about her can be explained through Jesper Petersen’s paper “Media and the Female Imam” (2019) and his explanation of *spreadability* (Jenkins, et al., 2013). Indeed, the rumors about her persona come from all the media narratives that reported her actions/declarations using different frames – thus *spreading* them into other contexts than the original one (Petersen, 2019b). The repeatedly mentioned episode of Khankan’s conflict with the Danish Politician is in fact one striking example. But besides it, her quotes have been used to undermine or support different arguments multiple times, especially in political conversations. As such, the ambivalent use of her image and statements – at times associated to extremist Islam, while others related to Muslim women’s oppression – make her a complex and controversial character to be associated with. Consequently, people/organization with a certain public reputation feared a sort

of social stigmatization by publicly promoting the film and, as follows, her. The same preoccupation emerges to be felt by some of Mariam mosque's members as well, who e.g. avoid to explicitly interact with the SoMe *adhan* - through comments or shares (Petersen, 2019a). In this regard, the Impact Producer, in charge of reaching out to potential ambassadors, addressed the potential ambassadors' skepticism and resistance to the ambivalent and seriously *spreadable* media coverage of Sherin Khankan. As assumed by Bjerregaard, most of them "were afraid of the consequences" of being associated with Khankan's character, although admitting to support the mosque and the documentary. Such attitude, according to Petersen, qualifies them as "free riders", so people who implicitly support the mosque and Khankan's efforts to reform some Islamic practices, but do not socially "pay the price" for it. Hence, following the scholar claims, publicly supporting the documentary becomes "a political statement", which implies a huge risk and a lot of consequences for a public personality's reputation. As such, this could explain why it was difficult to gather enough ambassadors for *The Reformist's* launch campaign.

To sum up, in this paragraph emerged how the impact distribution campaign did reflect the Director's intention to talk about women's right (in relation with minority backgrounds), yet supporting the disconnection between story told and part of its context. The latter was thus addressed as excess and part of the obstacles encountered in the launch of the film were related to it. By one hand, *The Reformist* lacks a comprehensive representation of Islamic practices, besides addressing a topic that is already divisive and problematic within the Muslim community itself. By the other, even among people close to the mosque and Khankan's cause, associating to *The Reformist* implies making a political statement, which potentially leads to social stigmatization. This is mainly due to the high exposure of Sherin Khankan in the media, whose framing in equivocal narratives makes her questionable and thereby controversial. As such, some supposed partners did not want to risk compromising their public reputation by supporting *The Reformist*.

Nonetheless, the documentary found some fruitful partners, like educational institutions and schools, whose collaboration is further investigated in the next section.

The witnessing function and representativeness of *The Reformist*

Despite entailing a problematic excess, *The Reformist* still offers a representation of practices and new ways of interpreting the Quran in Mariam mosque. All this is witnessed through the

Director's "character driven observational approach" adopted while following Sherin Khankan and the mosque for three years, thus recording the meetings and religious practices occurring in there.

The approach adopted during the documentary's shootings has some points in common with modes of imagery production used in social sciences, such as a previous theoretical preparation about the subject portrayed – thanks to Jesper Petersen's consulting about religious behavior e.g.– and adaptation of ethical standards during the project (Powels, 1993). Moreover, the editing process performed "to make a sense out of the footage collected" – resulting in the film itself - is analogue to the social researcher's one when selecting the most relevant phenomena among the ones observed (Iervese, 2009). However, the definition of a precise methodology that can qualify visual production as scientific, still constitutes an ongoing debate among researchers of social sciences. In addition, the data gathered and analyzed offer few information about Skovgaard's – or the other cinematographers involved - in relation to the participants while shooting her film. Consequently, *The Reformist's* mode of production cannot be related nor discussed further in relation to the scientific one.

Nonetheless, both Powels (1993) and Iervese (2009) mention that the purpose of the imagery production pinpoints a clear distinction between the scientific and cinematographic one. The scientific approach aims to use the production of images as the mean to study and deeply explore a precise matter, giving a recognizable order and theoretical reference to the phenomena observed (Iervese, 2009). Plus, the usage of visual material should be the result of "a specific informed set of social scientific ideas" (Powels, 1993). Meanwhile, documentaries do not expect to provide an unequivocal point, being thus subjected to multiple interpretations (Iervese, 2009).

Despite *The Reformist* is open to different interpretations, as its goal is to spark a debate and be a conversation starter, some of the shootings and/or scenes inside the film can be correlated to some kind of scientific purposes. The latest ones are represented by the Director's connection with Jesper Petersen. In this regard, they found themselves in contact while she was producing her film and he was pursuing his sociological research about Mariam mosque. Indeed, he could not enter in the mosque during the Friday prayers, meant only for women, so she provided him with some footage of the mosque and religious practices conducted in there. At the same time, the Director relied on his consulting for certain religious matters. Therefore, both Skovgaard and the scholar benefitted from each other: he represented a solid source of theoretical framework regarding

religious behavior; she gave him access to the mosque's off-limits spaces through her clips, turning part of the footage produced into scientific visual data.

The dialogue with the scholar made the Director discover that the notions taught about Islam were outdated and stereotyped in the Danish religion manuals, and, as such, they were in an ongoing process of revision. This originated Skovgaard's wish to have the film included in the educational material as part of the launch's strategy. Since her film's purpose was to open a debate about Islam and its interpretations, she considered schools as an effective mean to do so. Hence, the Director's non-obtrusive observation, together with the historic/religious relevance of what was being recorded - the first women's mosque led by a female imam in Europe - qualified the film to be included in the teaching material for Secondary education in Denmark. The film's introduction in the teaching platforms (Clio and DR Skole) was indeed possible thanks to Petersen's collaboration and the right timing that made coincide the documentary's release with the need for an updated content about religion. For instance, as stated by Petersen himself, the educational system is always keen to present ongoing debates and burning issues to students. In this regard, *The Reformist's* usage as a teaching tool aims to offer the students a description of a contemporary reality among other currents of Islam. Describing such reality, however, does not result in the Danish education's endorsement and promotion of the documentary's message. On the contrary, the film's screening in the classes requires students to adopt a critical perspective, which is enhanced through the multiple questions asked in the related exercises designed by the teaching platforms.

The Reformist's controversiality constitutes an ideal source to present a new nonmainstream view on religion that previous textbooks ignored. The documentary "usefulness" in schools thus consists in making the students identify the different perspectives presented and critically reflect on them (Marcus & Stoddard, 2009). *The Reformist* usage is even more effective as it is integrated with other teaching materials. The film is in fact presented along with activities and questions that focus on its different aspects, mainly related to religious statements or practices. In addition, both Clio and DR Skole platforms recall textbooks as well as passages of the same Quran, so that the students can have a reliable frame of reference to do the exercises proposed.

In this way, the perspective-laden issue raised by Marcus and Stoddard (2009) is overcome by the teaching platforms through the multiple questions presented in each of the activities related to the film. These activities are in fact meant to spark multiple conversations in the class, that can be held in one-by-one or groups interactions. As such, also DR Skole's guidelines for teachers clearly state

that the purpose of showing *The Reformist* in class is to enable the students to apply and discuss the notions learned to a real case. Ergo, the documentary cannot be misused to support a teacher's ideology and influence the students' view on this matter (Stoddard, 2009), since its usage in the classes is aimed to enhance a critical and informed point of view.

Moreover, *The Reformist* is used to make the students enter in an elaborated transaction where the documentary becomes representative of the experience portrayed – Mariam mosque. Students learn new Quran interpretations and Islamic practices through the Director's perspective, which, albeit non-objective, offers them the chance to enter in that reality (Frank, 2012). The filmmaker's perspective is not only made manifest, but does also let the viewer – the students in this case - engage with the narrative presented, so that their learning process occurs thanks to different matters of representativeness that are in play in the film. Hence, identifying and acknowledging these last ones in Skovgaard's documentary, means recognizing and learning about the existence of alternative/nontraditional religious congregations. As follows, *The Reformist's* representation of multiple experiences aims to create “a groundwork for a new sense of community” as well (Frank, 2012). The latter is achieved when teachers manage to pass down to students not only new knowledge about different Islamic tendencies, but also the importance of learning from other's experiences - embodied by the characters' representativeness of activism for gender equality. In this way, *The Reformist's* key messaging is effectively vehiculated in the schools and matches its scope to create a debate, by adding new perspectives on Islam and hopefully opening the mindset of its viewers – the students.

In conclusion, this paragraph started by arguing that *The Reformist's* mode of production and ancillary purposes have some similarities with the ones ascribed to social scientific research. Skovgaard's film is undoubtedly the result of her artistic and ideologic expression; however, it can also be considered as a mean by which historical events – the opening of Mariam mosque - and religious practices are witnessed and documented. This last aspect of Skovgaard's documentary entitled it to be used as a teaching tool for secondary education in Denmark. In this way, controversiality - which partly undermined the film's promotion – serves as a useful input to let the students develop a critical point of view and learn about new perspectives through the film's representativeness.

Conclusion

To conclude, The Reformist's impact was carried out through the launch campaign developed and implemented by external collaborators, Freddy Neumann and Mette Bjerregaard. The latter, together with the Director, designed the so-called impact distribution strategy with the purpose of using the documentary as an engaging tool able to inform and provoke a debate as well as set a new media agenda and creating relevant publics (Nisbet & Aufderheide, 2009). This implied that offline and online communication activities related to the film became a whole with it, resulting in a trans-media practice referred as strategic impact documentary, which implemented principles of strategic communication (Nisbet & Aufderheide, 2009; Hallahan, et al., 2007). In this way, key partners and activities planned in the strategy reflected the key messaging of The Reformist, which aimed to promote a discussion around gender equality, especially within minorities, as well as spread a nuanced image of Islam.

However, being The Reformist the tangible representation, or rather, the ventriloquization of the Director's intentions and ideologies, it necessarily excluded from its narrative some aspects of reality (Nichols, 1991; Cooren, 2012). The latter were referred as excess and were partly related to Sherin Khankan's media coverage prior to the release of the film. This eventually resulted to be one of the main issues during the promotion of The Reformist, besides the internal division of the targeted Muslim community. Indeed, the film's controversial protagonist and topic, made it difficult for people to publicly support it without risking social stigmatization (Petersen, 2019a). Nonetheless, the historical events – the opening of Mariam mosque - and religious practices witnessed and documented by Skovgaard's documentary, combined with its controversiality, entitle the film to be an interesting topic to use for religion classes in Denmark. The idea was of Marie Skovgaard herself and was thus implemented by the Impact Producer's efforts of reaching the right partners. Hence, the launch campaign eventually resulted in the reflection of the Director's intentions: on one hand, it overlooked some contextual and controversial aspects of the protagonist – the same ones omitted in the film – during its promotion. On the other hand, by fulfilling her desire to introduce the documentary in the religion program, the goal of bringing attention to this topic and starting a discussion about it was achieved, thanks to the representativeness entailed in the film that offers new perspectives about Islam (Frank, 2012).

In order to answer to the main research question and consequent sub-questions, this paper presented and combined empirical studies, a multidisciplinary theoretical framework and

qualitative research methods. The background thus served to contextualize the release of *The Reformist* in Denmark from the perspective of the cinema industry, religion and media. The second chapter, instead, merged different theories, relating strategic communication with the various social functions of documentaries. In this regard, film scholarship – mainly quoted by Nichols' book *Representing Reality* (1991) – was combined with the communication theory elaborated by Cooren (2012), thus producing a new literature perspective on the description and representation of reality. Successively, relevant papers that include the documentary genre within strategic communication were summed up, as the concepts exposed were all relatable and noticeable in the study case of *The Reformist*. In addition, entailing the latter a social function, theories belonging to the anthropological and pedagogical framework resulted to be useful to investigate the documentary's modes of production and its eventual use as educational tool for religion classes.

Regarding the qualitative research methods adopted, respectively presented in chapter 3 and 4, they constituted the main source to analyze plans and actions implemented during the film's launch campaign, thus allowing me to formulate an answer to my question research. The participant observation at House of Real provided me with the access to the data concerning *The Reformist* and the chance to get an insight into the daily routine and internal organization of a production company of documentaries. Meanwhile, ethnographic interviews aimed to investigate opinions and thoughts of the main actors involved about the film and its launch.

The findings of the ethnographic research were finally related to the theories and studies considered in the previous chapter, culminating in a discussion that explored different facets of *The Reformist's* launch campaign from a communication perspective, along with some references to visual anthropology and pedagogy.

Although the international angle on the documentary's themes and distribution was not deepened, the topic and message of the documentary still involves aspects of globalization. These emerge through the narrative of *The Reformist*, which addresses intercultural issues, represented by the rise of a new religious congregation among a minority group - the Muslim one – in a Western society – the Danish one. In this way, displaying the documentary's theme and targets led this paper to somewhat contextualize Islamic religion in the Danish and Western society overall, partly inducing a discourse that combined communication concepts with intercultural matters.

However, being Denmark the primary focus of the launch campaign, *The Reformist's* international distribution was not mentioned in the thesis' discussion. It represents a resourceful aspect to explore though, whose potential is further elaborated in the following section.

Future research

Even if the launch campaign of *The Reformist* was mainly designed for its release in Denmark, the film was screened in other important documentary festivals around the world and was planned to be distributed in many other countries. For instance, its international premiere took place at Hot Docs in Canada and the distribution was handled by First Hand Films, nothing but the hired sales agent of the film. A further analysis about the reception of the film abroad, from both a festival and sales perspective, could be pursued in future research, by employing cross-cultural management theories for example.

As reported in the literature review, the measurement of impact has not been assessed and well defined by academia nor organizations from this industry yet. The study cases analyzed and published so far, mainly concern specific documentaries, thus resulting in a lack of a comprehensive literature that provides precise guidelines about impact. Nonetheless, the combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods could lead to a partial measurement of the impact that *The Reformist* had on its viewers. In this regard, the most difficult part would be gathering the actual spectators of the film; were a sufficient number be selected, a questionnaire about their understanding and perception of it could be sent out. Regarding a qualitative approach to this future research, a focus group formed by part of its audience could be organized, as well as the observation of the religion classes where *The Reformist* is screened and discussed – language and access wise permitting.

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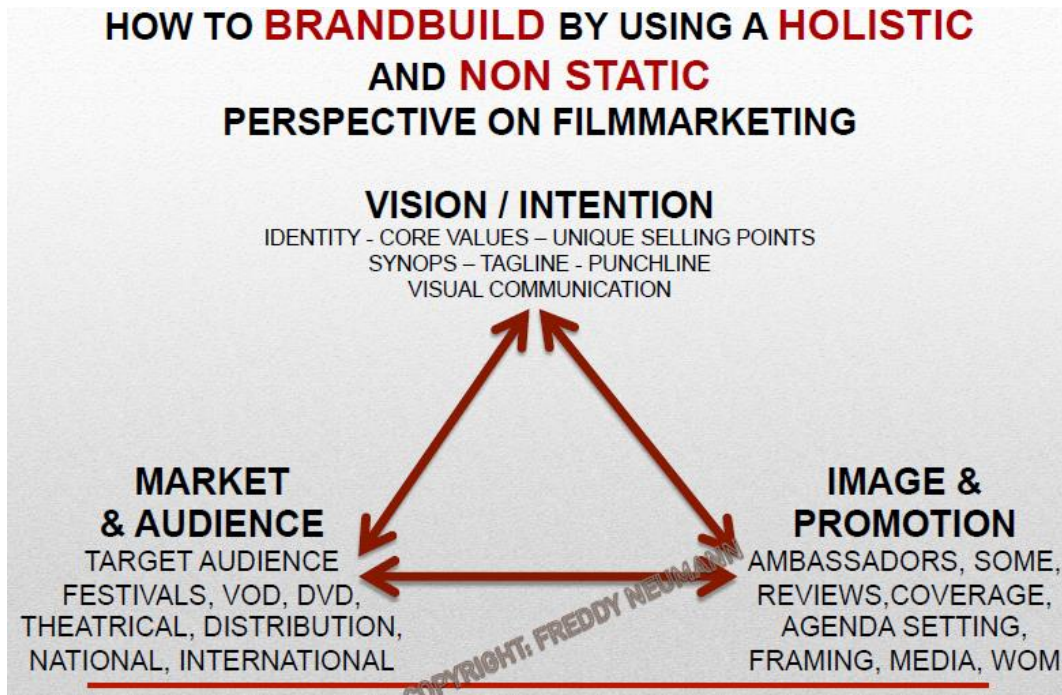
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Appendix A

Freddy Neumann's slide

Figure 1. Slide on how to brand-build. Copyright: Freddy Neumann



Appendix B

Exercises from the teaching Platforms

Figure 2. Task No.2. Copyright © Clio



1. Undersøg nogle af de begreber, som dokumentarfilmen "Reformisten" kommer ind på:
 2. Giv hver elev et bogstav mellem a og e.
 3. Fordel spørgsmålene imellem jer i klassen:
 - a. Hvad er en imam?
 - b. Hvordan opfatter muslimer Koranen?
 - c. Hvad er hadithsamlingerne?
 - d. Hvad vil det sige at reformere?
 - e. Hvad er feminisme?

Figure 3. Task No.3. Copyright © Clio

Da Gud sendte Satan ud af haven og placerede Adam i den, sov han alene i den, og han havde ingen at være sammen med. Gud tog et ribben fra hans venstre side og dækkede det med kød. Han skabte Eva af ribbenet. Da Adam vågnede, fandt han en kvinde siddende nær sit hoved. Han spurgte: "Hvem er du?" Hun svarede: "Kvinde". Han sagde: "Hvorfor blev du skabt?" Hun sagde: "Så du kunne finde hvile i mig"...

Kilde: al-Razi, *Tafsir* 3:2; Ibn Kathir, *Bidaya* 1:80, al-Tabarsi, *Majma al-bayan* 1:166.

3. Hvad synes I, citatet siger om forholdet mellem kønnene?
4. Hvordan kan citaterne forstås forskelligt, alt efter om man tillægger hadithen større eller mindre værdi?

Figure 4. Task No.4. Copyright © Clio

Se filmen



1. Se "Reformisten" i fællesskab i klassen. Mens I ser filmen, skal I hver især have et særligt fokus på et af spørgsmålene herunder. Vælg spørgsmål ud fra det bogstav, I fik tidligere.

- a. Fra hvilke forskellige sider møder Sherin Khankan modstand?
- b. På hvilke områder kan nogle muslimske kvinder opleve, at de har mindre frihed end mænd?
- c. Hvilke konkrete ændringer arbejder Sherin Khankan for?
- d. Hvilke religiøse argumenter bruger Sherin Khankan, og hvilke bruger hendes modstandere?
- e. Hvilke dilemmaer, der handler om kærlighed og forhold, kan muslimske kvinder i Danmark opleve?

Figure 5. Task No. 5. Copyright © Clio

🎯 Evaluering

Lærerguide 1/1 ▾

- Gå sammen i grupper a fem, hvor hvert "bogstav" er repræsenteret.
- Fortæl på skift om, hvad I fandt frem til. Byd gerne ind, hvis I har noget at tilføje til de forskellige spørgsmål.
- Diskuter til sidst følgende i fællesskab:
 1. Hvad kæmper muslimske kvinder for og imod?
 2. Kæmper de altid for det samme?
 3. Er der flere måder at være frigjort på?
 4. Hvordan kan man skabe forståelse og samarbejde mellem splittede grupper i samfundet?
 5. Kender I andre eksempler fra nutiden eller fortiden, hvor kærlighed på tværs af religioner eller samfundsklasser kan føre til problemer?

Figure 6. Clips in the website of DR Skole. Copyright © DR Skole

ARTICLES IN THE THEME

RELIGION | JUNE 14, 2019

The scarf



RELIGION | JUNE 14, 2019

Prayer



RELIGION | JUNE 14, 2019

Female priests in Denmark



Figure 7. Exercise on the "Friday Prayer". Copyright © DR Skole

Opgave 1

Se disse klip fra filmen:

Sherin beder Fredagsbøn i Mariam Moskéen

Læs derefter om den Islamiske bøn. I kan bruge jeres grundbog og/eller læse denne artikel om den islamiske bøn:

<https://www.religion.dk/det-vigtigste-vidt-om-boen-i-islam>

- Hvilken betydning har bønner i islam?
- Hvad er *wudu*, og hvilken rolle spiller *wudu* i bønner som ritual?
- Hvad er *qibla*, og hvilken rolle spiller *qibla* for indretningen af en moské?
- Hvad udtrykker muslimer i bønner?
- Diskuter på baggrund af din viden om islam, hvorfor det er kontroversielt, at en kvinde leder bønner? Hvilke religiøse og kulturelle forhold kan begrænse kvinders muligheder for at lede bønner?

Appendix C

Semi-structured interview guide to PR Consultants

Introduction:

Thank you for agreeing to participate to this interview. As mentioned in the email, I would like to have a better insight into your job and daily tasks for my master's thesis. The interview will take approximately one hour or even more, according to how much information you are willing to share. If you do not mind, I would like to record this interview to not miss any comment. You can choose whether you would like to be anonymized or not.

1. Let's start from a general question about your job:

- What do you do as a PR consultant?
- In which stages of the project do you intervene more often?
- How do you investigate the intentions of the filmmaker/director/producer?
- What kind of advice do you give? Do you have a pre-set kind of questions to do when you enter in contact with a project?
- Are these last ones really important and investigated to make the project "saleable" to the media/audience or do you focus more on the parts that according to your expertise you find potentially more interesting and engaging?
- If it is about contextualizing the director's idea of the director with the reality, is it like finding a match between what you think could be the expectations of the audience and the initial intentions/purpose of the filmmaker?
- Have there ever been some disagreements or misunderstanding when discussing with a Filmmaker about the PR strategy you wanted to adopt?
If yes, elaborate a bit and make an example on when the cooperation has been problematic

According to the previous answers, two possible ways to conclude the interview:

- In general, do you think that your work does have an impact, in the sense that can modify (slightly) the starting idea of the director/filmmaker etc.
- In General, do you think that your work does not really impact or affect the initial message, it just carries out its potential... yes, no...

2. Questions to Freddy Neumann about *The Reformist*

- When did you start working in the project?
- According to what you usually do in your job, in this specific case, how did you provide your consultancy?
- Which were the challenges/issues encountered to promote and create impact out of the film?

Appendix D

Semi-structured interview guide to the Director, Marie Skovgaard

Introduction:

Thank you for your availability to do this interview on Skype. Jesper Jack passed me your contact and, as I already mentioned you via email, I am writing my master thesis about the communication processes entailed in a documentary using your film *The Reformist* as a study case. With your permission, I would also record this interview.

Questions:

- How did you come up with the idea of this film? What did inspire you?
- Did you have any issues with the main character? Or, in general, how was your relationship with her?
- In which stage of the project you started getting advices from a PR Consultant? And what were these advices about?
- Any disagreement/discussion while working with Impact Producer or PR Consultant?
- In the launch evaluation some problems regarding ambassadors and controversiality about Sherin Khankan are mentioned. Could you elaborate a bit about these issues according to your point of view?
- Who did propose to use the documentary as a teaching tool and how did it come up?

Appendix E

Interview to Jesper Petersen, Doctoral Student in History of Religions and Religious Behavioral Science at Lund University.

Introduction

Thank you for being available for a call regarding *The Reformist* and Mariam mosque. Marie Skovgaard passed me your contact, suggesting that you may be willing to answer to some questions regarding your studies about the mosque and the film itself. I will record the call if you do not mind.

First of all, I would like to ask you some clarifications about the papers you wrote in regard to female imams and Mariam mosque:

- Why do you claim that Female imams overall are an attractive category of protagonists for the Western media?
- In this regard, how does the narrative of *The Reformist* become different and original than the mainstream one about this topic?

Regarding the documentary film:

- Define your relationship with the Director and your involvement – if we can refer to it in this way – in the production of the film.
- Regarding the development and creation of the digital material, could you explain in which way did you contribute to it?
- In your opinion, why did the film cause so much controversiality among potential partners during the launch and promotion of the film, but not for its introduction in school's programs?