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**Discourse about Family and Gender Relations
on Religious Television Channels in Romania
Institutional and Discursive Analysis**

Summary

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Introduction

The thesis “Discourse on Family and Gender Relations in Religious Television Channels in Romania. Institutional and Discursive Analysis” investigates the way in which religious television channels produce, organize and legitimize representations of family, couple and gender roles. The research follows the relationship between the institutional structures of authority, community practices and the audiovisual forms through which these acquire public presence. The family constitutes a privileged space of this relationship: through discourses on intimacy, moral expectations are formulated, responsibilities are distributed and the forms of life recognized as legitimate are delimited.

The research problem concerns the relationship between the diversity of voices and the distribution of the right to define meaning. The biography of the individual and the public story of the community meet in television programs: private experiences are reinterpreted through reference points concerning family, belonging and faith. The analysis follows how this encounter produces relational models, preserves hierarchies or allows their negotiation. Participation, familiarity and visibility are examined together with the effective possibility of formulating a problem and modifying the interpretation.

0.1 The Isomorphism of Power and the Narrative Hierarchical Matrix in Religious Media

The central perspective of the research regards confessional television as an extension and reconfiguration of the stage of the religious community. The sermon, testimony, counselling, prayer and personal example are detached from the immediate congregational situation and reorganized into media formats (Hjarvard, 2013; Hoover, 2006). With this displacement, relations of authority are subjected to editorial selection, the rhythm of programming and the demands of visibility. The community becomes an extended stage, in which certain persons define meaning, others translate it into recommendations, while others support it through narrated experience or through conduct presented publicly.

The concept of the isomorphism of power describes the correspondences between institutional organization, the structure of discourse and models of family relationships. These correspondences do not imply a mechanical reproduction of the same hierarchy. Authority is adapted to the format, negotiated between actors and legitimized through different resources: religious function, professional expertise, personal experience or media performance. The

concept allows the examination of continuities between levels, as well as of situations in which mediatization introduces redistributions of legitimacy.

The continuity between community and television also concerns the familiarity of roles. In the evangelical environment, leading a community, coordinating young people, teaching at Sunday school, testimony and leading worship offer a repertoire of participation that can be recognized in media formats. The moderator who explains, the guest who testifies and the person who leads the prayer occupy intelligible positions in relation to this repertoire. Familiarity can also be supported by the circulation of persons already known or established in community networks; television takes over the repertoire of the leader, witness, guide and participant, giving it a wider circulation.

0.2 The Conceptual Model of the Research

The narrative hierarchical matrix designates the differentiated organization of voices and registers through which the discourse on family is constructed. The diversity of themes and participants can coexist with the concentration of the right to establish the interpretative framework. In this architecture, visibility and authority do not fully overlap. A person may occupy an important place in the unfolding of a television program without being able to modify the premises within which their own experience is interpreted. The distinction is particularly relevant for female participation and for the relationship between the recognition of women's contribution and their access to defining norms.

From this perspective, the position of the woman can be analysed as "minority" in a relational sense: her access to defining the norm or the hierarchy may be more conditioned than male access, even when the presence on screen is numerous. The term allows the investigation of positions in which authority must be justified through expertise, experience, service or the relationship with an instance of validation. It is precisely the variation of these conditions that makes female participation particularly revealing for the organization of power.

Female versatility is approached as a variation of the positions available in the corpus: cultural moderator, expert, spiritual interpreter, prayer leader, witness to suffering, conversation partner or supporter of the conjugal story. The research follows what each intervention does in relation to the general course of the program: whether it confirms the framework, translates it into experience, nuances it or calls a practice into question. These functions can coexist in the same appearance and can signal the increased professional or relational effort that a woman must make

within the media framework in order to distinguish herself/remain in the programming schedule and to influence the script or its conclusions.

0.3 Objectives, Questions and Hypotheses of the Research

The objectives of the research concern the institutional context of the television channels, the types of family discourse, the distribution of symbolic authority and the intensification of these processes in moments of public mobilization. The hypotheses follow the predominantly normative character and hierarchical effect of the representations, the influence of institutional organization on media production, the hierarchization of narratives and media actors, the regulated inclusion of participants and the restriction of interpretative pluralism in the campaign of the 2018 Referendum. The approach examines both the stability of these mechanisms and the differences between channels, audiovisual formats and the positions occupied by actors.

CHAPTER I

Research Methodology

1.1 Research Design

The research adopts a qualitative, interpretative and comparative design, situated at the intersection of media studies, the sociology of religion and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995, 2003; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Television channels are approached as organizations that produce meaning within a determined institutional framework, through specific formats and communication relations. The unit of interest goes beyond the isolated statement: the meaning of an intervention is examined in relation to the role of the speaker, the orientation of the moderator, the succession of exchanges and the audiovisual organization of the situation.

The comparison operates both between institutions and within each of them. The first level makes differences in mission and organization visible; the second identifies variations that the confessional label might conceal. A teaching program, a conversation with a psychologist and a couple's testimony may belong to the same channel, but may distribute initiative very differently; through the articulation of these levels, the research can explain why a woman exercises authority in one format and receives a supporting position in another, without transforming these situations into permanent gender statuses. From this perspective, the audiovisual becomes an electronic pulpit: a contemporary platform that preserves and protects the

core of confessional values, but ensures their perpetuity by transposing them into the dynamic codes of popular culture.

1.2 Institutional Analysis of Religious Television Channels

The institutional analysis uses interviews conducted in 2022 with representatives of the television channels, as well as self-presentation materials and information about the organization of programs. The interviews follow the history of the projects, the mission, the imagined audience, content selection, editorial decision-making and resources. The materials were transcribed and analysed thematically.

The interview situations are also relevant through the interactions and modes of access that they make visible: while some interlocutors could be approached directly, others provided official responses by email, sent voice messages or chose to participate in dual formulas, such as interviews conducted simultaneously with the general director and the program director. These dynamics – together with the distribution of explanations or the intersection between family and professional roles – provide valuable indications about internal hierarchies and the authority exercised within the organization.

1.3 Critical Discourse Analysis and the Media Corpus

The main corpus comprises 127 programs from A7TV, Alfa Omega TV, Credo TV, Speranța TV and Trinitas TV. The methodology of the thesis delimits the period 2018–2026, and the materials are selected from the archives available on YouTube. The selection follows relevance to family and gender relations, the diversity of formats and, in the case of certain testimonies, digital visibility. The corpus is purposive, appropriate for qualitative comparison; the number of views indicates the circulation of the material, without demonstrating in itself persuasion or a change in the audience's behaviour.

The audiovisual dimension follows scenography, proxemics, the positioning of actors, framing, editing, music and the rhythm of interaction. These elements are interpreted together with verbal discourse (Goffman, 1974; Hall, 1997). The analytical question concerns the way in which image and sound support credibility, exemplification, emotionalization or the closure of meaning.

Capturing implicit asymmetries requires the correlation of several indicators: who initiates the themes, who formulates the questions, who interrupts, who validates the response and who closes the sequence through a conclusion (van Dijk, 2008). For the representation of women,

what matters is whether their intervention introduces a problem of their own, modifies the explanation or remains illustrative. The possibility of disagreement, the attribution of responsibility for conflict, the distribution of care and the presence of solutions that protect autonomy are also followed. The indicators acquire value through recurrence and context, not through the interpretation of an isolated gesture.

1.4 The 2018 Referendum for the Definition of the Family as a Case Study

For the study of the referendum, a grid adapted to campaign discourse is used. The definition of the problem, the attribution of responsibility, the construction of threats and the justification of action are followed (Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1974). The materials of the television channels and conservative platforms are placed in relation to messages of contestation and boycott. This comparison allows the identification of competing framings and reframings and of the differences between the television stage, the broadcast conference and the short digital intervention.

The research produces a contextual interpretation of the materials and of their mechanisms of legitimation; it does not imply an experimental measurement of the effects on the audience, nor an exhaustive observation of the life of religious communities. The transfer of community mechanisms is argued through institutional connections, discursive roles and mediatized practices. The internalization of norms, the experience of guilt or the modification of viewers' conduct require a distinct reception study. This delimitation allows conclusions to be formulated about the organization of discourse, while keeping open the question of its impact on the public.

CHAPTER II

Religion and the Discourse on Family: Theoretical Frameworks of Mediated Religious Authority

2.1 Religion in the Public Space: Pluralism, Legitimacy and Regimes of Truth

The theoretical framework articulates the sociology of religion, theories of mediatization, the analysis of symbolic power and perspectives on gender and performativity. Religion is analysed as a participant in the public definition of values and in the legitimation of interpretations of social life. In a plural space, religious authority negotiates its presence in relation to expertise, rights, individual experience and secular institutions (Casanova, 1994;

Habermas, 2008). Television constitutes one of the sites of this negotiation, in which doctrinal vocabulary is translated and combined with languages accessible to different audiences.

Pluralism raises the problem of the criteria for validating statements. Scripture, psychological vocabulary and the life story can support the same interpretation or can come into tension. The research follows who arbitrates between these sources: when the experience that contradicts the rule receives only explanations that protect it, the plurality of voices remains subordinated to a stable authority.

2.2 Televangelism and the Reconfiguration of Religion in the Post-Communist Media Space

Mediatization modifies the forms of recognition of authority. Religious function can be strengthened through visibility, but it is also compelled to adapt to rhythm, personalization and conversational formats. Televangelism offers a reference point for understanding the combination of preaching with testimony, spectacle, mobilization and the solicitation of audience participation (Bruce, 1990; Einstein, 2008; Hoover, 2006). In the Romanian post-communist space, these models are adapted to different institutional and confessional histories, without producing a uniform field.

The performative dimension of religion, already present in ritual and community life, acquires increased visibility and circulation in media modernity (Couldry, 2003; Hjarvard, 2013). Faith is expressed through presence, biography, lifestyle and the capacity to offer the audience a recognizable example. Televangelism intensifies this connection between the message and the person who embodies it. The functions of guidance, moral interpretation and counselling can also be assumed by moderators, experts or media couples. The laicization of certain clerical functions designates here this redistribution of roles, which does not automatically imply the disappearance of religious authority or its equalization.

Television can also be read as a site of translation between relatively closed community cultures and popular space. Closure designates here the density of shared reference points, the familiarity of roles and the control of legitimacy, not absolute isolation. Beliefs intelligible within the community must be reformulated for viewers who do not share the religious premises. The language of vocation and obedience meets the vocabulary of success, authenticity and well-being; traditional authority comes into contact with the expectation of accessibility and dialogue.

2.3 The Discourse on Family in Religious Media: Collective Illusion and Matrix of Meaning

The family appears as a moral institution, an affective refuge and a guarantee of community continuity. It concentrates promises of stability, belonging, healing and fulfilment, becoming a reference point through which individual experiences are evaluated (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Berlant, 2011).

The notion of “collective illusion” is used in the thesis to examine the construction of a coherent symbolic universe, without reducing faith to falsehood or presupposing deliberate deception (Chomsky, 1989). The issue is the way in which the family ideal organizes what can be recognized as a desirable life.

In the interpretative extension of this framework, the family ideal can be placed in relation to the imaginary of lifelong love and soulmates, cultivated in numerous Hollywood narratives, as well as to the promise of success through personal effort associated with the American Dream. These cultural reference points do not constitute a separate corpus of the thesis; they make intelligible a structure of promise: fulfillment would become accessible through assuming the appropriate script and through perseverance (Berlant, 2011). When failure is explained exclusively through the individual deficit of faith, love or effort, the social limits of the promise remain outside the framework.

The story of the family and marriage distributes main male and female roles. Both partners can obtain identity, public image, community functionality, inclusion and security through mutual recognition. The relationship can become a resource of moral and emotional continuity. The existence of benefits for both does not, however, imply equality of decision-making rights: the costs of maintaining the story and the possibility of modifying its script can be distributed asymmetrically.

This structure of promise acquires an explicit political and legal dimension in the context of the Referendum for the amendment of the Constitution. The initiative reflects an attempt by the religious environment to transform the traditional family model from a confessional option into a universal, immutable and exclusive truth. Through this mobilization, religious discourse tends to claim for itself a form of ownership over the terms, monopolizing the meaning of the concepts of “family,” “normality” or “morality.” A major consequence of this strategy is the symbolic delegitimation of realities that do not align with the canonical norm, making any other form of cohabitation appear not only as an alternative configuration, but as a deficit of moral substance or a threat to the community.

2.4 The Emotional Economy of Moral Discourse and the Governance of Intimacy in Religious Media

Gender relations highlight a structural tension between declared reciprocity and the effective distribution of obligations. Complementarity can designate cooperation, but it often legitimizes an order in which the man is assigned decision-making, and the woman adaptation (Bourdieu, 2001; Connell, 2005). In such situations, responsibility for the harmony of the relationship is separated from the right to define its rules. The languages of care and sacrifice symbolically valorize the female contribution, while at the same time maintaining the limits of its decision-making recognition.

Within this framework, the instrumentalization of suffering becomes an analytical problem when personal experience is mobilized to validate a norm. Testimony can open a discussion about responsibility and the protection of the vulnerable or can concentrate attention exclusively on the patience of the one who suffers. The way in which questions and obligations are distributed tips the balance towards one of these perspectives, often fixing moral attention on the woman when the dynamic is contested within the couple.

Although media discourse urges the individual towards reflexivity and the conscious management of the relationship, the stable family remains the recurring normative reference point (Giddens, 1991; Illouz, 2007). The research follows the points at which self-knowledge allows a renegotiation of obligations and the areas in which it directs change only towards self-adaptation. When a tension appears between the stability of the family and the interpellated actor, the analytical framework directs moral attention primarily towards the individual and towards the way in which they manage their vulnerability, in a manner similar to that directed towards the woman when the relationship is put to the test.

The valorization of care and sacrifice distributes moral recognition, but does not automatically equalize decision-making rights. In the analysed formats, male sacrificial love and female submission are presented as complementary obligations, the stake of the analysis being to understand how this recognition relates to the authority to define the relationship and to the possibility of contesting the predetermined role.

2.5 Moral Panics and Identity Mobilization: The Discourse on Family as an Instrument of Collective Action

The analysed mechanism takes on an additional, collective dimension in moments of social mobilization, when the definition of a common threat closely links emotion to belonging

and political action, while moral indignation strengthens the identity boundaries of the community. In this context, the family can become the symbol of a threatened identity, while the protection of children and of collective continuity gives urgency to mobilization (Cohen, 1972; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). The study of the referendum follows the crescendo transition from legal argumentation to dramatization and moral delimitation.

The common threat supports confessional convergence, while counter-framings contest both the definition of the problem and the legitimacy of the actors who formulate it, the process culminating in the transposition of intimate convictions about family into normative arguments for public order.

2.6 The Narrative Hierarchical Matrix of Mediated Religious Authority

The narrative hierarchical matrix designates the way in which the hierarchy of actors is articulated with the hierarchy of discourses in the media organization of religious authority. Participants are entrusted with different positions: some formulate the norm, others explain it, confirm it through experience or embody it through personal example. Thus, the right to speak about one's own life does not automatically imply the authority to establish its moral and religious meaning.

The selection of guests, the moderator's questions, the distribution of interventions and the audiovisual construction contribute to this differentiation. The presence of women, young people, parents or vulnerable persons can create the image of a community that represents itself in its diversity, while the right to define the common framework remains unequally distributed. The matrix therefore allows the examination of the relationship between visibility and authority: under what conditions particular experiences legitimize the community order and when they acquire the power to nuance, negotiate or contest it.

CHAPTER III

Religious Television Channels in Contemporary Romania: Institutional and Media Profile

3.1 A7TV – The Entrepreneurial-Performative Media Model

A7TV is analysed as an entrepreneurial-performative model, in which the identity of the project is closely linked to the presence of the founder and to the professionalization of communication. Spirituality is integrated into formats close to generalist television, through conversation, expertise, entertainment and life story. Authority is constructed through media

versatility, familiarity and the capacity to transform personal experience into a convincing public message.

The institutional conclusions of the thesis distinguish between the recurrent presence of Cornel Dărvășan, the participation of his wife, Ramona Dărvășan, in the public representation of the couple and the strategic level of support for the project, associated with Simon Maurer. This configuration is relevant for the interpretation of gender: the visibility of the partners can support the image of a common construction, without indicating, in itself, an equal distribution of authority. The role of Ramona Dărvășan must be analysed both through her own contribution and through her relation to the public figure of her husband and to the story of the couple.

If visibility does not exhaust authority even in the case of central male figures, the extensive presence of women cannot by itself constitute a measure of their power. The analysis thus follows the relationship between public representation, control of the format, access to editorial decision-making and the possibility of defining the orientation of the project.

At the same time, the thesis observes a more standardized televised femininity at the level of appearance and expressiveness than on the other channels. This aesthetic dimension can contribute to the media capital of female presenters, but it also introduces additional criteria for evaluating female presence. The authority of a female moderator and the performance of her public image can mutually support one another. Their separate analysis allows the observation of situations in which the woman effectively leads communication, as well as those in which the value of the appearance is predominantly linked to the attractiveness and coherence of the channel's story.

3.2 Alfa Omega TV – The Missionary-Evangelical Media Model

Alfa Omega TV configures a missionary-evangelical and interconfessional model, in which the couple Tudor and Mirela Pețan occupy a central position in the leadership and representation of the project. The conjugal partnership is articulated with the institutional mission, while the history of the family and the trajectory of the television channel mutually support one another in public presentation. Prayer, testimony and the interpretation of events are integrated into a project of spiritual transformation.

The institutional interview also highlights an eschatological horizon: the approaching return of Christ grounds the urgency of preparation and mobilization. The repetition of programs

thus supports the continuity of the message and religious vigilance, according to the logic of the mission assumed by the channel.

The programming schedule documented in the thesis shows a numerically limited female presence, concentrated in a few figures, but with an important contribution to the mission of the channel. Mirela Pețan produces *The Power of Prayer* and exercises a spiritual authority linked to prayer, testimony and guidance. Her participation in the founding couple thus includes a domain of intervention of her own, relevant to the identity of the television channel.

In joint appearances, this contribution is articulated with Tudor Pețan's role in formulating and validating the missionary direction. The couple expresses an active complementarity, within which female initiative coexists with the differentiation of positions of authority. The case thus separates numerical weight from functional centrality: a woman can occupy a major place in televised spiritual practice, while the majority of teaching programs and doctrinal authority remain male.

3.3 Trinitas TV – The Institutional Media Church Model

Trinitas TV represents the model of television anchored in institutional ecclesiastical authority. The programming schedule, the centrality of liturgical practices and the privileged position of clergy organize a space of continuity of tradition. The family, understood as a “little church,” is integrated into the relationship between faith, community and the national imaginary.

Domestic life thus acquires a spiritual meaning: relations between spouses, the education of children and solidarity between generations are presented as forms of transmitting faith and perpetuating the community order. The audiovisual gives this model concreteness and familiarity through personal histories, everyday examples and figures of religious and cultural life recognized at the national level.

The liturgical rhythm of the programming schedule establishes a symbolic centre in relation to which the other programs are organized. Doctrinal authority remains linked to clerical status, while programs about family, education and culture translate religious reference points into experiences and recommendations.

Women have an important journalistic and professional contribution in this mediation. In the examples analysed, however, their interventions tend to confirm the established family model, associating femininity with care, patience, affective responsibility and the maintenance of relationships. The female contribution thus becomes relatively predictable through convergence

with institutional expectations, even when it is supported by expertise and formulated in contemporary language.

The visibility of women can thus contribute to the presentation of the patriarchal order as an experience shared and validated from within, while the possibility of redefining its principles remains more restricted than the space granted to explaining and illustrating them.

3.4 Speranța TV – The Institutional Confessional Media Model

Speranța TV combines confessional affiliation with a communication model oriented towards health, education and holistic well-being. Medical, psychological and religious expertise constructs a continuity between physical, emotional and spiritual life. The general director is a pastor appointed by the denomination, which ensures the connection with the structure of the Adventist Church, but editorial organization also involves professional deliberation, collaboration and the distribution of responsibilities. Pastoral authority is thus integrated into formats that require its adaptation to conversation and to the logic of specialization.

Female presence in the programming schedule is distributed between social debate, education, family counselling and the mediation of biographical experiences. Women moderate conversations, formulate specialized explanations and organize the interpretation of narrated experiences. Their participation thus covers both the affective and testimonial register and positions of professional authority.

Cristina Ișvan provides a concrete reference point for institutional and media female authority: program director and editor-in-chief during the period analysed, she also moderates *A doua opinie* [*The Second Opinion*], a debate format on sensitive topics. Her position associates on-screen visibility with access to agenda organization and editorial decision-making.

This distribution coexists with the centrality of doctrinal programs and with the stability of the Adventist value framework. The particularity of the channel consists in the articulation of pastoral authority with a female participation that includes expertise, initiative and editorial responsibility, beyond the affective representation of the community.

3.5 Credo TV – The Community Media Model

Credo TV is analysed as a community model, close to a mediated agora. Debate, argumentation and interaction between different confessional sensitivities constitute resources of legitimacy. Institutional organization is characterized by framework management: the leadership

remains discreet at the media level, but establishes the general orientation and the conditions of participation.

The collaboration between management originating from the Pentecostal environment and editorial responsibility associated with the Baptist environment supports a balance between pluralism and normativity. Authority is exercised through selection, coordination and the stabilization of common reference points, without concentrating the entire project around a dominant on-screen personality.

The relationship with the evangelical diaspora, especially with Romanian communities in the United States, contributes to this configuration through financial support, collaborations and the circulation of preachers and audiovisual productions. Television thus connects geographically dispersed communities, maintaining familiarity with persons, histories and forms of religious expression.

The presence of established figures can also activate a nostalgic dimension: they become reference points of community memory and of the continuity of models of faith and life. Conversational openness thus coexists with attachment to already recognized authorities and experiences, to which familiarity gives a particular symbolic weight.

Within this framework, argumentative competence and the capacity to formulate positions of one's own allow active female participation in defining meaning and a certain fluidity of roles. The description of the channel as a mediated agora must, however, be related to the variation of formats: the analysis identifies both autonomous female interventions and convergent conversations or complementary distributions in which women confirm the male story or the established family model.

3.6 Comparative Analysis of Religious Television Channels in Romania

The five models indicate that the organizing principle of television simultaneously becomes an editorial reference point and a criterion of legitimation: media performance, mission, national tradition, holistic health or argumentation. These principles influence who appears, in what role and with what right of interpretation, the programming schedule constituting an organization of attention through which certain practices, persons and themes acquire recurrence.

The religious community is thus reconfigured through institution and programming before the message is formulated in a particular program. This translation takes different media forms,

and the differences show how each channel makes its culture recognizable externally and what internal criteria it retains for the validation of interlocutors.

The variation of female roles makes visible the ways in which authority is distributed and legitimated: cultural mediation at Trinitas, editorial responsibility at Speranța, managerial and spiritual participation at Alfa Omega, argumentative and spiritual initiative at Credo, and professional-media affirmation at A7TV. These emphases do not delimit exclusive categories, but indicate particularities of female recognition in each project, the relative uniformity of male positions functioning as a reference point of continuity that more clearly highlights the diversity of female roles and the conditions under which women are recognized as having authority.

These results allow a distinction to be made between configurations in which authority is more concentrated and configurations in which it is distributed among several actors and domains of competence. Concentration concerns the capacity of a central instance to establish the orientation of the project, the criteria of legitimacy and the recognition of the contributions of others. It goes beyond relations between women and men, organizing the position of guests, the status of expertise and the importance accorded to programs and stories.

At Trinitas, the institutional and symbolic centre of validation remains linked to the ecclesiastical hierarchy and to the figure of the Patriarch; at A7TV, the presence of the founder and legitimation through media performance produce a more personalized centrality. Institutional distance and media familiarity thus represent different ways in which central authority manifests itself.

The distribution of authority becomes visible where the professional, editorial or spiritual contributions of participants carry weight in orienting the activity. At Credo, discreet framework management leaves room for legitimation through argumentation; at Speranța, professional competence and procedural organization support the differentiation of responsibilities.

The general director's appeal to Cristina Ișvan's expertise in the institutional interview provides a concrete indication of the recognition of female professional authority. At Alfa Omega, the recurrent presence of the Pețan couple coexists with a facilitating role: the two solicit the contribution of guests through questions, while their interventions concentrate around spiritual mission, prayer and community life. Media centrality can thus also support the participation of other voices while retaining control of the framework.

The distinction describes tendencies and levels of organization, without dividing the television channels into homogeneous categories. Authority can be distributed in the production

of programs and concentrated in establishing doctrinal limits. Conjugal cooperation or the plurality of participants can coexist with male validation and with predominantly confirmatory interventions. The criterion of comparison remains the extent to which the contribution of the other can influence editorial decision-making and modify the common interpretation.

CHAPTER IV

The Discourse on Family and Gender Relations in Religious Television Channels

4.1 The Institutional-Comparative Level of Discourse Analysis

The comparison follows how each institutional configuration organizes speech about family and women's access to authority. The function of the intervention, audiovisual construction and the possibility of modifying the interpretation are correlated.

4.1.1 The Personalization of Spirituality in Discourses on Family and Gender Relations at A7TV

The comparative analysis of the programs shows that the family is constructed through different combinations of norm, expertise and experience. At A7TV, intimacy is associated with reflexivity and personal reconstruction. Formats such as *Step by Step*, *Experți în sentimente* [*Experts in Feelings*], *Ce bine că ești* [*How Good That You Are Here*] and *Dă sens vieții* [*Give Meaning to Life*] translate relational problems into psychological, experiential and spiritual languages.

The individual is invited to know themselves and manage their relationships, within a framework that preserves the centrality of the couple, responsibility and faith.

The analysis of the A7TV programming schedule records a relatively balanced gender presence, but a functional segmentation: female presenters are more visible in relationships, personal development, culture and biographical storytelling, while men are more frequent in analysis, debate and current affairs.

In *Ce bine că ești!* and *E cu cântec*, testimonial analysis identifies the valorization of the mother as the affective and moral pivot of the family. These findings support the differentiation between visibility and type of authority, without excluding female moderators with initiative and centrality of their own. They do not justify reducing all women at A7TV to the function of supporting a man.

Spune-mi CUM!, moderated by Antonia Fudulu, nuances the distribution of roles at A7TV: the woman leads the format and organizes public address, within a programming schedule

that gives an important place to story and relationship. This authority must be differentiated from the roles attributed to female guests. The centrality of the female moderator can coexist with stories that confirm, negotiate or problematize the traditional family script.

4.1.2 The Family as an Agent of the Spiritual Mission in Alfa Omega TV Discourses

At Alfa Omega TV, the family is integrated into the spiritual mission. *Calea, Adevărul și Viața* [The Way, the Truth and the Life] defines the norm, *Puterea rugăciunii* [The Power of Prayer] mobilizes, *Redescoperind familia* [Rediscovering the Family] translates principles into conduct, while retrospectives integrate events into a spiritual story.

The analysis identifies the recurrent trajectory crisis–spiritual diagnosis–biblical norm–realignment–promise of restoration. The convergence of interventions produces a distributed monologue: registers and voices vary, frequently preserving the same interpretative orientation.

In *Puterea rugăciunii*, Mirela Pețan organizes the conversation and spiritual participation; female guests articulate expertise with personal testimony, while the final prayer transforms the dialogue into ritual action also addressed to the audience. Women are here participants in the production of religious guidance, not merely illustrations of a message formulated by someone else.

In *Alfa Omega în obiectiv*, Mirela Pețan’s activity is presented within the institutional framework organized by Tudor Pețan. The thesis describes a male visual centrality, peripheral female positioning and a narrative of calling that also legitimizes the woman’s activity.

The authority exercised within her own format becomes, in this second scene, the object of male validation and contextualization. The audiovisual participates in the change of status: from leading prayer to the presentation of an activity integrated into a strategy defined by the male instance. The case shows real female authority, but one dependent on the situation of enunciation.

4.1.3 The Socialization of Religion through the Family as a “Little Church” at Trinitas TV

At Trinitas TV, the family as a “little church” connects domestic life to religious order. Practical advice is anchored in a theological framework that gives stability to roles and sometimes limits the possibility of renegotiating them. The socialization of religion through the family gives intimacy a function of community and cultural continuity. The woman can have

professional and experiential visibility, while doctrinal authority remains linked to clerical function.

The differentiation of female roles becomes concrete in three configurations. In *Școala din familie* [*The Family School*], the warm décor, distributed framing and more balanced screen time bring expertise closer to everyday life, in contrast with the clerical centrality of *Cuvânt pentru suflet* [*Word for the Soul*].

In *Timpul reîntoarcerii* [*The Time of Return*], Mihaela Popescu enters the homes and workplaces of guests, while the mobility of the camera transforms biography and the reconstruction of family life into a visual argument.

In *Bunicii României* [*Romania's Grandparents*], Camelia Căpitanu mediates the encounter with the guests, while slow editing, objects and household activities give tradition a sensory consistency.

4.1.4 The Psychotheology of the Family as Restoration Therapy at Speranța TV

At Speranța TV, relational restoration is constructed through the encounter between psychology and theology. The language of health and communication makes intimate problems discussable, while expertise can introduce mutual responsibility and personal boundaries. Doctrinal formats can, however, preserve a hierarchical complementarity.

The psychotheology of the family reveals precisely this tension: the person is supported in the healing process, while the meaning of restoration remains attached to a predetermined family model.

In *Viața de familie* [*Family Life*], the face-to-face seating, central table, visible microphones and laptop configure a professional dialogue; the female guest's identification strip explicitly legitimizes her expertise. The woman is authorized to explain and formulate recommendations through her own competence. Medium shots and close-ups support proximity, while the format allows the female moderator–female expert relationship to organize meaning, without a present male instance to validate it.

4.1.5 The Traditional Model of the Family in Dialogical Intersubjectivity at Credo TV

At Credo TV, the traditional family model is discussed in an interaction that gives argumentation and experience a broader space. Dialogical intersubjectivity designates the participation of interlocutors in the construction of meaning, through explanations and responses that can mutually modify one another. Women can formulate themes and judgements of their

own, without this meaning a complete departure from conservative reference points. The conservatism of the content and the distribution of conversational authority thus constitute distinct dimensions.

Credo TV offers a particularly revealing internal comparison. In *Pentru noi, femeile* [*For Us, Women*], Rodica Baciú organizes a space in which the female guest occupies the centre of experience and interpretation. The close framing and calm rhythm support her exposition, while the moderator recognizes her right to produce meaning.

In *De Vorbă Podcast*, the triangular structure — moderator and guest couple — frequently favours the male story, while the woman provides affective memory and relational validation. The presence of the couple makes visible the complementarity that the account affirms.

In *Părinți perfect de imperfecti* [*Perfectly Imperfect Parents*], the domestic interior, including decorative accessories, and the positioning of the spouses face to face support the mutual adjustment of ideas. The thesis nevertheless identifies a recurrent distribution: the husband formulates the principle, while the wife makes it concrete and nuances it through experience. She contributes to transforming the norm into a livable practice, without this contribution necessarily meaning the contestation of the framework.

By contrast, in *Bătăliile inimii* [*Battles of the Heart*], the exclusively male dialogue between Raul Damian and Norian Munteanu formulates and validates the norm in the absence of a female voice. The variation of the woman's role reveals, within the same channel, different forms of organization of authority.

4.2 Towards a Possible Typology: The Plurality of Discourses on Family in Religious Media

The transversal level compares the testimonial, psychological, performative and normative-theological registers. They can alternate within the same program and fulfil different functions in the interpretation of experience. Pastoral guidance, mobilization and institutional promotion cross this typology, without constituting additional genres here. The analysis correlates the function of the intervention with the position of the person who supports it and with the audiovisual organization.

4.2.1 Testimonial Discourse as a Form of Symbolic Legitimation and Experiential Authority

Testimonial discourse constructs authority through experience, suffering and transformation. The comparative analysis highlights different functions of narration: in *Timpul reîntoarcerii*, biography supports the recovery of a family order perceived as authentic; in

Oameni și povești and *Pentru noi, femeile*, suffering organizes narratives of personal reconstruction; in *Puterea rugăciunii*, experience confirms the effectiveness of faith; while in *Ce bine că ești*, it is integrated into an idealized representation of the family.

The audiovisual organizes experience as public testimony. The selection of sequences, close-ups, pauses, music and the moderator's reactions give certain moments emotional weight and orient the interpretation of the biography. Suffering thus acquires symbolic value, while the person is presented as the bearer of a lived truth. The differences between discreet authenticity and pronounced dramatization show that the legitimacy of experience is consolidated through the visual and sound form of the narration (Couldry, 2003; Hoover, 2006).

Within this organization, a distinction is made between "small stories," belonging to ordinary people, which illustrate a particular experience, and "big stories," associated with established figures or couples whose biography intertwines with the history of a religious project. The distinction concerns the media scope granted to the narration: recurrence, familiarity and institutional position can transform a biography into a framework of interpretation for the experiences of others.

The hierarchy of stories intersects with the distribution of gender authority. Women can occupy the affective centre of testimony and can formulate meanings of their own, while the structuring and validation of interpretation remain, in the majority of formats, male.

4.2.2 Psychological Discourse: Emotional Management of the Couple

Psychological discourse explains family relationships through communication, emotional needs and conflict management. The thesis identifies a combination of psychological expertise with moral and religious reference points, in which the family appears as a reality that must be maintained and improved through conscious effort (Illouz, 2007).

Authority is constructed differently across formats. In *Școala din familie* and *Viața de familie*, specialized knowledge and practical orientation predominate; in *Părinți perfect de imperfecti*, experience and vulnerability support the legitimacy of the interventions; in *Bătăliile inimii*, psychological and religious competence are concentrated in a male dialogue. In *Experți în sentimente* and *Step by Step*, authority is negotiated between the expert, the moderator and the experiential voice.

In some of these programs, the audiovisual organization resembles a podcast: prolonged conversation, familiar address, camera proximity and the restricted setting create the impression

of access to a direct exchange of ideas. Specialized explanation is integrated into an accessible conversational relationship, in which questions, personal examples and the reactions of the interlocutors contribute to the construction of credibility.

The continuity of the frame granted to the expert supports their authority, while the alternation of shots makes agreement, hesitation or negotiation visible. This proximity makes the framework for discussing norms more flexible, although the association of the woman with emotional responsibility and of the man with the structuring of the family persists in modernized forms.

4.2.3 Performative Discourse of Couple Relationships: The Mediatization of Intimacy

Performative discourse constructs the family model through the presentation of the relationship as it unfolds. Gestures, looks, shared activities and mutual completions transform the couple into a public example (Butler, 1990; Goffman, 1974). The thesis distinguishes between the traditional-exemplary couple, the confessional-reflexive couple, the therapeutic-spiritual couple and the performative media couple, typologies that can overlap.

In *Bunicii României*, images of work and of the domestic space inscribe the relationship within a universe of continuity and faith. In *Anotimpurile familiei* and *De Vorbă Podcast*, the proximity of the camera and the organization of the conversation support the confessional presentation of biography. In *E cu cântec* and the Alfa Omega retrospectives, the relationship becomes a constitutive part of the media product, through the articulation of personal life with music or with the history of the mission.

The audiovisual gives reciprocity a perceptible form: editing, duets, family images and the reactions of the partners construct the continuity of the shared story. At the same time, the distribution of interventions can reveal asymmetries between the person who leads the narration and the person who completes it or validates it affectively; the represented harmony thus legitimizes an unequal complementarity, even in the absence of explicit prescriptions.

4.2.4 Normative-Theological Discourse: Stability and Univocality

Normative-theological discourse fixes the meaning of the family by reference to the sacred text, tradition and religious authority. Confessional specificity is also expressed in the audiovisual form of authority. In the Orthodox formats analysed, the sober setting, clerical clothing, religious symbols and the stability of the image support the continuity of the exposition

and the distinct position of the speaker. The norm acquires weight through solemnity and through the visible connection with the ecclesiastical institution.

In Neo-Protestant talk shows, the organization of the conversation can resemble church committees that discuss and establish the orientations of the community. Several participants, predominantly men recognized through religious competence, interpret problems, formulate recommendations and mutually validate the common reference points. This resemblance concerns the distribution of roles and the manner of legitimating conclusions. The plurality of interventions gives the norm the form of a collective, but hierarchical, deliberation.

The audiovisual dispositif makes this configuration visible through the arrangement of the participants, the distribution of speaking time and the alternation of shots between the person who leads the interpretation and those who complete or confirm it. Authority thus presents itself as a consensus among persons entitled to formulate the orientation of the community. The familiarity of the conversation and the collegial character of the interaction coexist with a hierarchical distribution of the right to define and interpret meaning.

4.2.5 Discursive Matrices of the Family in Religious Media: A Comparative Synthesis

The analysis of the four registers shows that confessional television actively participates in producing the legitimacy of the family model: the norm is defined theologically, explained psychologically, validated through testimony and embodied in the couple relationship. The audiovisual connects these forms of authority through image, editing, rhythm and the recurrence of voices, transforming prescription into a recognizable reality, presented as being confirmed by experience.

The convergence of the registers gives the family order the force of a consensus: what religious teaching states appears supported by expertise, demonstrated by biography and made visible through the harmony of the couple.

The contradictions between the ideal and lived life are integrated into scenarios of trial, adaptation and restoration, which can maintain the validity of the model even when experience calls its promises into question. Here the stake of the narrative hierarchical matrix becomes more precise: the plurality of voices does not amount to the equal distribution of authority. Voices and registers remain hierarchized through the differentiated right to define the norm, interpret it or illustrate it. The familiarity of the conversation and the diversity of participants make this order less explicit, but do not remove its stability.

CHAPTER V

5.1 The Media Architecture of the Campaign for the Family Referendum (2018): The Religious Dynamics of Conservative Mobilization

The case study of the 2018 Referendum examines the transformation of the family into a reference point of a campaign of moral and civic mobilization. The issue of the constitutional redefinition of marriage is articulated with themes concerning identity, the protection of children, religious freedom and the continuity of the community. Religious practices and networks provide organizational resources, while television channels and digital platforms select representative figures and stabilize public messages.

5.1.1 From Infrastructures of Mobilization to Infrastructures of Legitimation: Confessional Television Channels in the Referendum Campaign

The analysis distinguishes mobilization through the collection of signatures, conferences and local networks from the subsequent concentration of the media stage. Interconfessional cooperation did not imply symmetrical representation; the organizational contribution of certain communities coexisted with the symbolic centrality of other actors. The visibility of leaders, the recurrence of invitations and the positioning of television channels indicate the way in which the collective infrastructure was converted into a hierarchized public image.

The performative perspective of the thesis follows the moral scripts and the staging of legitimacy through the public rostrum, the crowd, the expert and the signature document, respectively how religious language was translated into civic terms, while public action was presented as community responsibility.

5.1.1.1 The Conferences of the Coalition for the Family: The Defensive Convergence of Confessional Pluralism

The conferences brought together different denominations in defence of the family, producing the image of an extended moral agreement. The common threat suspended differences without eliminating the hierarchy of representation: access to the rostrum and the recognition of expertise distributed authority unequally between the provinces and the capital, between Orthodoxy, to which symbolic visibility was assigned, and Neo-Protestantism, which constituted the main pillar of civic mobilization.

5.1.1.2 Trinitas TV: Hegemony and Monologue

At Trinitas, institutional authority, tradition and national identity support the interpretation of the referendum. Confessional plurality is integrated around a majority centre. The comparison between the convergence of interventions and the possibility of calling the premises into question shows the limits of dialogue.

5.1.1.3 A7TV: Between Simulated Deliberation and Discursive Negotiation

At A7TV, the plurality of conversation coexists with the stability of the normative framework. The analysis distinguishes simulated deliberation, which confirms an already fixed outcome, from negotiation in which arguments modify the definition of the problem. Moderation and the distribution of voices allow the difference to be observed.

5.1.1.4 Credo TV: Symbolic Mobilization and Attempts at Deliberation

At Credo, arguments concerning rights and freedom of conscience accompany the conservative orientation. Explanation, questions and objections broaden the conversation; openness depends, however, on the possibility of interrogating the premises of the campaign, beyond the variety of participants.

5.1.1.5 Alfa Omega TV: The Referendum as an Exercise of Faith and Mission

At Alfa Omega, the referendum is linked to mission, prayer and the threatened family. Participation becomes a public expression of faith, within a narrative of community responsibility. The political event thus receives a spiritual meaning and the character of a missionary exercise.

5.1.1.6 Digital Micro-Campaigns and Viral Spots in the Escalation of Conflictual Framings

Micro-campaigns and digital messages introduce different rhythms and forms of address. The materials associated with Prodocens and the conservative campaign offer explanations, responses to objections and calls for participation. The ACCEPT and MozaiQ campaigns and other civic interventions contest the definition of the problem through rights, self-representation, irony and intimate experience. The family thus becomes the object of competing interpretations, while the disputed actors claim the possibility of representing themselves.

The compression of the digital message can intensify moral opposition through irony, familiarity and personal story. Counter-framing changes the position of the person who speaks:

the person defined as the problem becomes the subject of their own narration and claims recognition.

5.2 The Referendum as a Space of Symbolic Competition and Discursive Escalation

Mobilization does not make the channels uniform: solemnity, urgency, deliberation and the appeal to experience outline distinct modes of legitimation, grounded in clerical authority, argumentation or personal example. Speranța TV is distinguished by informational restraint, approaching the referendum, in the materials analysed, at the level of news, without transforming it into a broad theme of editorial mobilization.

This option shows that confessional belonging does not automatically determine the same intensity of public involvement: the selection of formats and the extent of coverage can support mobilization or can keep the event within the limits of information.

In the context of the referendum, the family becomes a reference point of collective mobilization, while religious convictions are translated into legal and civic arguments. The discourses analysed the claim for the Christian definition of the family a universal validity, which goes beyond the community of believers and should be recognized by society as a whole.

Thus, a claim to authority over the meaning of the terms “family” and “marriage” takes shape: presented as designating realities instituted by God, they would have a meaning that must be defended, not socially renegotiated. The appeal to divine origin legitimizes the position of religious actors as guardians of the definition, while the referendum becomes an instrument for the legal consecration of an order considered to pre-exist democratic debate.

The audiovisual gives this claim distinct forms of credibility, through the solemnity of clerical authority, the convergence of interventions or the emotional involvement of testimony; the constitutional definition of marriage becomes linked to religious legitimacy, while the explanation of the legislative amendment shifts towards the dramatization of a decisive choice for the future of society.

Mobilization does not, however, make the channels uniform. Speranța TV is distinguished, in the materials analysed, by informational restraint, approaching the subject at the level of news, without transforming it into a broad theme of editorial mobilization. Confessional belonging thus coexists with different options regarding the intensity and form of public involvement.

Counter-framings contest the claim of a single instance to fix the social meaning of family and marriage. Their pluralism is expressed through varied registers — personal testimony, legal argument, irony and satire — which bring the autonomy of the person and the diversity of experiences to the foreground. Personalization makes concrete lives beyond the normative model visible, while civic argumentation and ironic distancing relativize the moral urgency of the campaign. Through these audiovisual forms, participants claim both public recognition and the right to interpret their own relationships.

The Referendum therefore highlights a competition for the authority to define the terms of common life. The consensus constructed within religious communities encounters a public space in which definitions are contested and subjected to democratic negotiation. The invalidation of the referendum indicates the limits of mobilization, without allowing a single motivation to be attributed to non-participation, and the research highlights precisely this distance between the certainty of the community norm and the possibility of its social validation, as well as the role of the audiovisual in supporting, dramatizing or contesting its claim to universality.

CHAPTER VI

Conclusions

6.1 Normativity and Pluralism in Religious Television Channels

The results support the predominantly normative character of the discourses on family and gender relations in the corpus, the norm being consolidated through the convergence of theological, cultural, psychological and experiential registers. Complementarity occupies an important place, but its meaning and degree of negotiation differ between programs. The family is presented as a reference point of stability and continuity, while the diversity of formats gives it accessibility and affective concreteness.

The comparison supports the relationship between institutional organization and the production of discourse. Mission, leadership, affiliation and resources influence the selection of actors and themes; this relationship is not deterministic: expertise, editorial practice and interaction can introduce redistributions of authority. The institution establishes the conditions of participation, while the format actualizes them and, sometimes, modifies them, and the continuity between these levels constitutes the interpretative core of the isomorphism of power.

The results indicate a hierarchy of registers and of the actors authorized to sustain them. The diversity of voices supports the effect of the community's self-representation, while editorial

selection and the direction of the conversation delimit the meanings admitted and highlight the mechanisms of hierarchization. Female participation reveals both these conditionings and the possibilities of negotiation generated by competence and experience.

The study of the referendum supports the hypothesis of the intensification of normativity in contexts of mobilization. Discourses tend to become more compact, defensive, to delimit threats more clearly and to orient participation towards a common objective. The differences between television channels and the existence of counter-framings show, however, that the public space is not closed by this convergence; the dominant framework can be contested, resignified or refused.

One interpretative result of the comparison concerns the difference between openness to social influence and openness to female authority. The two do not necessarily overlap: a modernized and personalized media project can include women mainly as support for the leader's image; a television channel with explicit confessional reference points can recognize more substantial female competences and initiatives.

The tendency must be evaluated at different levels — editorial, conversational and doctrinal — because the same institution can distribute authority differently between them.

6.2 Audiovisual Discourse and the Hierarchical Organization of the Media Space

The audiovisual distributes authority through the organization of public appearance. Scenography, framing, editing and the rhythm of interventions give different weight to speakers, while the programming schedule stabilizes these relationships through the positioning of programs and the recurrence of guests. Authority thus results from the relationship between institutional status, the role in the program and the form of on-screen presence.

In Orthodox formats, the sober setting and continuity of exposition support the solemnity of teaching. In Neo-Protestant talk shows, conversation among religiously authorized participants can resemble the deliberation of church committees: conclusions are collectively validated within shared premises. In psychological formats close to the podcast, camera proximity and familiar address make expertise accessible, while preserving the difference between the person who formulates the problem and the person who explains it.

The narrative hierarchical matrix captures the articulation of the hierarchy of actors with the status of the discourses entrusted to them. Some define the norm, others explain, confirm or

embody it. The right to narrate one's own life does not automatically imply the authority to establish its public meaning.

The diversity of participants can produce the image of the community's self-representation, while the selection of voices and the distribution of conclusions maintain differences in interpretative power. The variation of female roles makes these relationships visible, against the background of a relative continuity of male positions.

6.3 Confessional Television as a Large Stage of Authority

The general result highlights the constitutive role of the audiovisual: family and gender relations acquire legitimacy through recognizable persons, histories and interactions. Proximity and the diversification of voices can consolidate the existing order, but can also support autonomous contributions.

Confessional television functions as an extended stage of the community, on which preaching, counselling, prayer and testimony acquire new forms of visibility. Religious authority is articulated with expertise and experience, while familiarity, recurrence and personal example also legitimate persons without clerical functions, who become public reference points of faith and family life.

The economy of moral attention explains the distribution of this recognition: some participants define meaning, others illustrate or confirm it. Women can be valorized for care and sacrifice, but also for professional competence, editorial initiative or spiritual interpretation.

Media charismatization strengthens these positions through proximity and exemplary biography, without visibility automatically being equivalent to access to institutional decision-making.

The encounter between the individual story and the community story allows both the confirmation of the norm and its negotiation. Difficult experiences can be integrated into narratives of restoration or can ground demands for changes in community practices. The research follows this public construction of meaning, preserving the distinction between televised representation and private reality. The analysis of reception and digital circulation could clarify the way in which viewers use, negotiate or reject the proposed models.

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AUDIOVISUAL CORPUS

The main corpus brings together 127 programs from A7TV, Alfa Omega TV, Trinitas TV, Speranța TV and Credo TV, selected for the analysis of representations of family and gender relations. The methodological delimitation of the thesis covers the period 2018–2026. Testimonial, psychological, performative and normative-theological formats are compared, on the basis of the editions available in the digital archives.

The case study of the 2018 Referendum uses television programs, conferences, micro-campaigns and digital spots, including messages of contestation and boycott. The institutional interviews from 2022 complete the analysis of the conditions of production and the organization of authority.

The complete inventory of the materials, with identification data and the corresponding links, remains in the section of the same name in the thesis.