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Constructing the "good Portuguese" and their Enemy-Others: The Discourse of the Far-Right Chega Party on Social Media

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CIÊNCIAS SOCIAIS
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Abstract

The election of André Ventura, leader of the Chega party, as a member of parliament in 2019 marked the history of democracy in Portugal. It was the first time that a far-right party gained political representation. Far-right political parties promote a discourse that defends the ideal of the "pure people" that is threatened by enemy-Others, and only the party can save them from the menace. The purpose of this research was to explore the social representations of the "good Portuguese" and the enemy-Others that are reproduced in Ventura's discourse on social media networks. This study integrates the Social Representations Theory and Critical Discourse Studies and focuses on the meanings and the discursive strategies used by the leader of Chega. Therefore, the 253 publications shared on his Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts during the last month of the 2021 presidential campaign were analysed. It was found that Ventura refers to the "good Portuguese" as Europeans and hard workers that are threatened by two enemies. On the one hand, the Roma community, Afro-Portuguese people, and anti-fascist protesters, who are all seen as criminals and exploiters of the "pure people". On the other hand, the traditional parties were represented as corrupt and traitors for not privileging the "good Portuguese". In this context, Ventura appears as the strong and unstoppable hero destined to save Portugal. Based on these results, the implications of his discourse in the configuration of social representations that promote polarisation and social exclusion are discussed.

Keywords: Far-Right Populism; Social Representations; Critical Discourse Analysis; Social Polarisation; Political Processes & Political Issues; Linguistics & Language & Speech.

Resumo

A eleição de André Ventura, líder do partido Chega, como membro do parlamento em 2019 marcou a história da democracia em Portugal por ser a primeira vez que um partido da extrema-direita obteve representação política. Estes partidos promovem um discurso que defende a ideia de que uma parte da população, definido como o verdadeiro povo, está ameaçado por um Outro inimigo, e só o partido poderá salvá-lo. Assim, o propósito desta investigação foi explorar as representações sociais dos "portugueses de bem" e dos Outros-inimigos que são reproduzidas no discurso de Ventura nas redes sociais. Portanto, foram analisadas as 253 publicações feitas nas suas contas de Facebook, Twitter e Instagram durante o último mês da sua campanha presidencial em 2021. Seguindo uma integração da Teoria das Representações Sociais com a Análise Crítica do Discurso, foram analisadas as significações e estratégias discursivas utilizadas pelo líder do Chega. A análise sugere que Ventura representa os "portugueses-de-bem" como europeus e trabalhadores árduos, mas que são ameaçados por dois tipos de inimigos. Por um lado, a comunidade cigana, as pessoas com origem africana e os detratores do Chega, que são vistos como criminosos, agressivos e exploradores do verdadeiro povo. Por outro, os partidos tradicionais, representados como corruptos e traidores do povo por não privilegiar os portugueses-de-bem. Neste contexto o Ventura aparece como o forte e imparável herói destinado a salvar Portugal. Com base nesses resultados, são discutidas as implicações do seu discurso na configuração de representações sociais que promovem a polarização e a exclusão social.

Palavras-chave: Populismo da Extrema-Direita; Representações Sociais; Análise Crítica do Discurso; Polarização Social; Processos Políticos e Questões Políticas; Linguística & Linguagem & Discurso.

Index

Index of Tables

Index of Figures

Introduction

During the last decades, European far-right populist parties have more than tripled their support, challenging the established political order across the continent (Bos & Van der Brug, 2010; Müller, 2017). In some countries, these parties have moved from the margins and started to occupy positions in parliaments and cabinets (Horowitz, 2020). As exemplified by Lewis et al. (2018), far-right parties representing above 20% in national parliaments went from 2 to 15 countries between 1998 and 2018, and their presence in cabinets went from 2 to 11 during the same period. Such is the case of Hungary where the anti-immigrant discourse of the Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, elected in 2010, has echoed in the neighbouring countries Poland, Bulgaria, and Czech Republic (Hervás, 2020). In Germany, in 2018, *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) became the first far-right party since World War II to enter in every state parliament and currently holds 89 seats in the Federal Parliament (Deutschen Bundestag, 2020; Eddy, 2018). In France, the National Rally (RN) had its best results in the last elections for the European Parliament, and post-fascist parties in Italy are becoming popular while the stigma towards Mussolini's racial policies fades (Horowitz, 2020). In the European Parliament elections in 2019, the far-right group Identity and Democracy secured 73 seats, compared to 36 in 2014 (European Parliament, 2019). In Portugal, the election of members of the far-right party Chega in national and regional parliaments (Fernandes & Magalhães, 2020) is aligned with the increasing power of far-right political parties in the European context.

This rise of the far-right populism in Europe is interpreted by some authors as a response to the retrenchment of the welfare state, the increase level of immigration, the recent economic crisis, and social and cultural fragmentation in Western societies (Betz, 2017; Müller, 2017). Related to this, Van der Bles et al. (2018) found that the collective dissatisfaction with the perceived "decline of society", tends to increase the popularity of extreme parties.

Many scholars have argued that far-right populist parties are promoting exclusionary chauvinist and nativist discourses, that opposes to immigration and integration, and encourage anti-system and anti-establishment attitudes (Bos & Van der Brug, 2010; Ignazi, 2017; Wodak & KhosraviNik, 2013). These parties seek to preserve the status quo pursuing the ideal of a homogeneous nation and opposing globalisation and mass migration (Pelinka, 2013). Likewise, they accuse particular social groups of being "foreigners" (whether they are migrants

or not) and hold them accountable for the negative events in the country, while defining and defending the existence of a single national identity (Pelinka, 2013).

Further, far-right leaders promote discourses that may increase intolerance and diminish the possibilities of diverse political communities (Merino et al., 2021). According to Fernández (2020), far-right recent success is in part due to the hate speech that has infected public and social democratic debates, manipulating social sectors to stand against others. Jiménez (2020), as a war reporter, expressed that all the conflicts he covered had a common factor: the presentation of the political adversary as a threat, and those who thought differently as an enemy. Previous literature on social and political psychology has identified that far-right parties tend to divide society by rhetorically constructing certain sectors as a threat, while others are configured as vulnerable victims (Burke, 2018). Similarly, when some sectors of society are associated with criminal behaviour, as minority groups often are, those who feel threatened by the so-called "criminals" may react by excluding them (Chauhan & Foster, 2014).

Besides, far-right populist leaders have gained followers by sharing fake news and conspiracy theories through social media (Carbajosa, 2020). Blaming imaginary enemies of all problems, promoting social polarisation, and manipulating emotions in social media have contributed to increasingly frivolous and irresponsible political tensions (Jiménez, 2020) that constitutes a risk for European democracies (Bennhold, 2020). Social polarisation has spread through social media platforms, in which far-right leaders incite hatred and intolerance (Campos, 2020), desensitising sectors of society with regards to those who constitute the target of the extremist discourse (Merino et al., 2021).

In 2018, Portugal and Malta were the only EU countries where far-right parties had not won elections (Lewis et al., 2018). However, in the 2019 Portuguese general elections, the far-right populist party Chega ("Enough") marked a "watershed moment in Portuguese democratic history, as for the first time an extreme-right populist party has gained representation in the country" (Fernandes & Magalhães, 2020, p. 1038). Also, the popularity of its leader André Ventura, whose much of his political campaigns are done in social media (Mendes, 2020), has increased exponentially. In the last presidential elections, in January 2021, Ventura was the third most voted candidate and recent polls show Chega as the third political party in the country (Sá Lopes, 2021).

The far-right ideology has been studied from different disciplines, such as political science, history, sociology, criminology, anthropology, and psychology (Ashe et al., 2021). Studies

focusing on far-right political parties in European countries have also been increasing, but there is still little research on Southern European countries, (Alonso & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2015; Mudde, 2016). In the Portuguese context, it is particularly relevant to understand the ways in which Ventura, as leader of the Portuguese far-right party, socially represents the Portuguese reality and its different social actors. Therefore, this research follows a socio-psychological approach to explore what social representations about the Portuguese people, and Others are being constructed through the discourse of Ventura on his social media platforms. Specifically, we analysed 253 posts shared on his Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts during the month prior to the presidential elections.

In terms of structure, this dissertation is organised as follows. First, it is introduced a review of literature on how far-right parties have adopted a populist style and used social media platforms to increase their political influence, create fear and promote exclusion. It is also described how far-right discourses (re)configure social representations that may boost discrimination and social inequalities. Secondly, it is presented the emerge of Chega in the Portuguese context. Next, it is described the approach followed in this study, explaining how critical discourse studies were employed to analyse social representations. Finally, the analysis and discussion of the information collected is presented, as well as the conclusions of the study.

Chapter 1. Far-Right Populism: Defining the "Pure People" and Excluding "Others"

Previous scholars have argued that "the contemporary success of the far-right is based on its ability to become populist" (Pelinka, 2013, p. 12). On the one hand, far-right political ideology is characterised by nationalism, nativism, authoritarianism, and the defence of the status quo (Mendes & Dennison, 2020). Far-right parties tend to position themselves as an antagonist of traditional politics, arguing that the society has been broken by specific groups, such as the country's elite, bankers, immigrants, or supranational bodies (Van der Bles et al., 2018). Nonetheless, some far-right political parties prefer to use EU membership (a supranational body) to emphasise their European identity as a distinctive feature (Vasilopoulou, 2017). On the other hand, populism is a political style in which an arbitrary constructed group of pure and homogeneous members of the society stands against two enemies: diversity and elites (Moffitt, 2016; Müller, 2017). Populism also defends that the "pure people" should govern themselves through a unique leader who legitimately represents the "popular will" (Müller, 2017; Pelinka, 2013). But, as "the people as such do not exist, populists are those who create a virtual image of the popular will" (Eco, 2007, p. 130), in accordance with their interests. Therefore, when far-right political parties employ the populist style, they are called "far-right populist" parties (Pelinka, 2013).

Far-right populist parties foster a sense of social, political and cultural crises that ease the legitimation of their ideas and the demand of immediate actions (Moffitt, 2016; Müller, 2017; Vasilopoulos et al., 2019). They promote fear and anxiety within societies by escalating any social problem to the level of national emergency (Mazzoleni, 2003; Wodak & KhosraviNik, 2013) and point to those who do not belong to "the pure people" as the culprits of the so-called crises (Pelinka, 2013).

Furthermore, these parties accumulate so many discursive strategies to differentiate and exclude (Staerklé & Green, 2018) that "anybody can potentially be constructed as the dangerous 'Other'" (Wodak, 2015, p. 4). In particular, they instrumentalise minorities, immigrants and asylum seekers as scapegoats, presenting them as responsible for all the existing social problems, criminal activities and economic deprivations (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2007; Ivarsflaten, 2008; Jay et al., 2019; Merino et al., 2021; Wodak, 2015). In the discourse of the far-right, these instrumentalised groups are presented as realistic (e.g., physical safety, economic) and symbolic (e.g., cultural) threats, able to harm but also to affect

the values and worldviews of others (Stephan et al., 2016). Consequently, reactions toward immigrants from non-European countries have increased considerably (Stockemer et al., 2020; Triandafyllidou, 2000).

Also, far-right populist parties appeal to the celebration of the nation (Bos et al., 2011) by referencing a non-specific glorious past that reflects the idea that there was a time in which the nation was independent and able to thrive on its own (Capelos & Katsanidou, 2018; Jay et al., 2019; Pelinka, 2013). Xenophobia and veiled racism are expressed as a manifestation of a resentful sentiment for the loss of the glorious past described in far-right parties' discourses (Capelos & Katsanidou, 2018).

Thus, the sharp dichotomisation of society, the promotion of autochthony beliefs and anti-immigrant sentiments, the hardening of boundaries and the exclusion of those who are different characterise far-right populist parties (Durrheim et al., 2018; Wodak & KhosraviNik, 2013). Besides, these parties tend to claim that people's capacities to exercise their collective power is constrained by the constitutional checks and balances (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012b). Democratic systems associated to free and fair elections, popular sovereignty and the protection of minority rights are considered obstacles to the exercise of the "popular will" (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012a). Hence, traditional parties are presented in the discourse of the far-right as traitors for limiting the free rule of the majority (Moffitt, 2016) and for threatening the national identity by defending multicultural policies (Jay et al., 2019).

Another distinctive element of the far-right populism is the personalisation of politics, focusing on and organising around a leader who overshadows the political issues and represents the party's demands (Bos et al., 2011; Moffitt, 2016; Pelinka, 2013). This leader tends to be the one who performs populism, represents "the pure people", attracts followers and becomes the target of opponents (Moffitt, 2016). Further, much of the media coverage of far-right populists parties is done via reporting on its leaders (Stewart et al., 2003), who largely determine the image of their parties (Bos & Van der Brug, 2010).

Far-right political leaders keep a hierarchical and authoritative structure within their parties and exploit their personalities and media savvy to gain popularity and media attention (Mazzoleni, 2003; Wodak, 2013). They tend to introduce themselves as someone who has a direct connection with "the pure people", using a simple and strong language, referencing social crises, and employing frontstage performance techniques that are common in celebrity culture (Bos et al., 2011; Müller, 2017; Wodak, 2015). Likewise, they perform as if they

embody “the pure people”, knowing what they want and understanding what they need better than anyone (Moffitt, 2016).

Also, the leaders are often perceived by their audiences as messiahs who will save and protect the “pure people” (Bos & Van der Brug, 2010; Moffitt, 2016; Nijs et al., 2019). When they are perceived as strong and charismatic, they are more likely to receive support (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2007; Bos & Van der Brug, 2010). Social media platforms have been playing a key role in the dissemination and approximation of far-right populist ideas and discourses among society (Bos et al., 2011; De Vreese et al., 2018).

1.1 Far-Right Populism and Social Media

The rise of social media transformed the ways in which information and opinions are produced, received, and consumed (Harel et al., 2020). Since politicians started to use their social media accounts according to their political interests, especially during electoral campaigns, social media platforms have gained a determinant role in political communication dynamics (Sánchez et al., 2013).

Furthermore, the choice of users to consume only the content that interests them creates “echo chamber” spaces in which other points of view are excluded (Jost et al., 2018; Valentino et al., 2009). Thus, social media influence how users structure their perceptions about political contents, providing “evidence” for their own ideological frames (Sánchez et al., 2013). These homogeneous bubbles can be harmful for democratic processes. They allow the embeddedness in a “like-minded” social network which can lead to negative predispositions toward others (Schmuck et al., 2020).

Far-right leaders started to use social media to speak directly to and for “the pure people” in very effective and novel ways thanks to its many performative functions, such as connectivity, user-interactivity, and affordability (Moffitt, 2016). Social media platforms provide their users with “the flexibility to present powerful visual imagery such as pictures and video without the expensive production costs” (Maratea, 2008, p. 148). With the rise of social media, it has become easier for far-right populist parties to upload and disseminate their own messages, to portray a sense of immediacy in accordance with their performance of crises, to demonstrate closeness and foster the feeling of community and belonging (Moffitt, 2016; De Vreese et al., 2018).

In addition, social media also offer a global dimension that allows the promotion of ideas beyond borders (Pedahzur & Weinberg, 2017), which facilitates far-right international alliances. According to Da Silva (2018), "social media has thus been used by right-wing populist parties across Europe to influence citizens in believing in their causes and voting for them" (p. 3). Hence, the success of these parties, besides press and television, depends mainly on their performance strategies on social media (Wodak, 2015).

Previous research has shown that far-right populist parties are able to attract supporters and develop political campaigns through their social media accounts (Burke, 2018). Marine Le Pen in France, Geert Wilders in Netherlands or Nigel Farage in the United Kingdom are some of the far-right populist leaders in Europe who used social media to captivate and attract their voters, using emotional messages and controversial posts that sparked debates among society (Da Silva, 2018). Moreover, in election times, those politicians accompanied their campaigns with mostly implicit xenophobic and racist propaganda adapted to their respective nation (Wodak & KhosraviNik, 2013). Hence, it is particularly relevant to study the discourse of the far-right on social media platforms to understand the way in which far-right leaders present themselves and Others.

1.2 The Representation of Others in the Discourse of the Far-Right parties

Through their discourse, far-right parties configure common-sense knowledge and meanings that determine social situations, identities, and relations between social groups (De Cillia et al., 1999). The group of meanings and reference systems related to common-sense knowledge and the contents of everyday thought are known as social representations (Jodelet, 1986). The function of social representations is to make the strange familiar, allowing people to apprehend, make sense of and take position about social objects in accordance with the values, beliefs and categories existing in the culture (Blanco & Cárdenas, 2004; Jodelet, 1986; Moscovici, 1988; Pereira & Soares, 2003). In other words, social representations allow the creation of a shared vision of reality (Banchs, 2000; Knapp et al., 2003; Moscovici, 2003). Additionally, since people invest in their construction during everyday interactions, social representations are active phenomena, rather than a passive transmission of knowledge (Kilby, 2017).

Likewise, as culture, beliefs and knowledge are carried and shaped by language (Studer, 2013), the contents of social representations are constantly elaborated, modified, and shared through everyday communicative interactions (Jodelet, 1986; Marková, 2007; Pereira &

Soares, 2003; Rodríguez, 2003; Vala & Castro, 2013; Vergara, 2008). Social representations are understood as being "co-constructed, negotiated, dynamic forms of social knowledge that are powerfully realised through language" (Kilby, 2016, p. 231). It is through discourse that the collective creation and diffusion of representations occurs (Cerrato, 1996), determining how people signify and construct their realities (Moscovici, 1988).

Discourses transport the knowledge that forms social consciousness, introduce meanings that configure identities, and exercise power by supporting the actions that structure or transform social relations (Barreto et al., 2009; Fairclough, 2003; Jäger, 2001). Social representations can thus have different levels of sharedness and re-enforcement in society: they can be hegemonic, emancipated or polemic (Moscovici, 1988). Hegemonic representations are consensually shared and remain stable and undisputed among all the members of a highly structured group of society (Batel & Castro, 2018). In turn, emancipated representations are constructed within certain subgroups of society due to the exposition to new information but are not incompatible with the hegemonic representations of the broad group (Batel & Castro, 2018; Ben-Asher, 2003). Finally, polemic representations are representations not shared by most of the members of the group and express a rivalry or incongruity with the hegemonic representations (Ben-Asher, 2003; Moscovici, 1988). Public discourses by politicians and other social actors, for instance, are a type of discourse that have a greater influence in the formation of social representations because they appeal to their hegemony (Van Dijk, 2004). Discourses, then, may be used to create or keep their hegemony, but are also able to challenge hegemonic social representations (Amer & Howarth, 2018; Howarth, 2006), as they emerge in argumentative contexts (Barreto & Borja, 2007; Castro & Santos, 2020).

Far-right populist parties adopt different discursive strategies to construct, perpetuate, or transform representations that define and promote a national identity while Others are demonised (Barreto et al., 2009; Capdevila & Callaghan, 2008; De Cillia et al., 1999). Discursive strategies are discursive plans of action employed when doing representation work, emphasising sameness or differences between groups (e.g., positive self-presentation, victimisation, polarisation) (De Cillia et al., 1999). For instance, previous studies have found that far-right parties promote fear to make and sustain hegemonic the representation of the "pure people" and the dangerous Others (Mahendran et al., 2021; Staerklé & Green, 2018). Sensales et al. (2021) identified how Matteo Salvini, leader of the Italian *Liga Nord* party, uses polarisation strategies to construct polemic representations of immigrants.

Discursive strategies such as mythopoesis (telling stories), authorisation (to refer social authorities), number games (to objectify the abstract through the use of numbers and statistics), and evidentiality (to anchor representations as "truth" claims) are often used by far-right parties to legitimise the exclusion of immigrants and minorities (Amer & Howarth, 2018; Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999). The positive presentation of the own political party and the reversal between the roles of victim and perpetrator (in which far-right politicians present themselves as victims) have also been employed by far-right parties to appeal the public support for their discriminatory policies (Van der Valk, 2003). Polarisation discursive strategies are used to divide society into "we the good ones" and "they the bad ones" (Van Dijk, 2006). Metonymies, that is, referring to something that stands for the whole (e.g., mentioning a country instead of the people living in it) have been used to promote nationalist identities (De Cillia et al., 1999; Koller, 2020b). The reproduction of metaphors in political discourses has been used to persuade and elicit emotions and to present "social processes as natural and common sense, thereby creating and maintaining unequal power relations" (Koller, 2020a, p. 82).

The analysis of the strategies employed in discourse allows the identification of the representations of "us" and "the Others" (Van Dijk, 2006). Symbolic boundaries such as ethnicity, religion or nationality may be highlighted in public discourse to "construct or define similarities and differences between majority and immigrant minority groups" (Phelps et al., 2012, p. 189). According to Castro and Santos (2020), individuals and groups can create semantic barriers when representing certain social actors as different. Semantic barriers are the meanings that are used to set up a border between the views of the own group and those of Others (Gillespie, 2020). In far-right discourses, barriers are used to polarise and dichotomise the perspectives and identities of social actors between the "good" and the "bad" ones (Batel & Castro, 2009). That is, the representations of the own group and the Others are kept separate, which makes them polemic representations (Castro & Santos, 2020). Such processes may lead to social polarisation, which consists in a critical fissure that arises when a group assumes the negative representation and consequent rejection of other groups (Martín-Baró, 1983, 1993).

Previous literature has identified that social polarisation often leads to discrimination in discourse (Lozada, 2004). Discursive discrimination refers to the unfavourable discursive treatment that people receive because of their categorization membership (Boréus, 2013). Discriminatory discourses are common among far-right parties to highlight similarities among "us" and what differentiates "them" (Wodak, 2001b), as populist leaders do when defining who

are the “pure people” and who are the enemies (Moffitt, 2016; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012b). This kind of discrimination is a process that may lead to the dehumanisation of Others through disparaging names, slurs or hate speeches that encourage exclusion, aggression, and violence (Barreto et al., 2009; Gibson et al., 2020). Besides the construction of common-sense knowledge, social representations also influence social practices (Howarth, 2006; Sensales et al., 2021). Thus, when politicians try to construct representations employing discriminatory discourses and hate speech that “evokes suffering among targeted groups” (Bilewicz & Soral, 2020, p. 7), they legitimise and justify violence (Pulido-Escobar et al., 2020).

Nationalist discourses, for instance, legitimise the marginalisation and discrimination of minorities (O’Doherty & Augoustinos, 2008), usually associating them to social pathologies, such as criminality (Triandafyllidou, 2000). In Austria, for example, Wodak (2001a) identified that the negative connotation of Others was made through dichotomous portrayal of the “pure and responsible national people” versus “the illegal, criminal, and culturally alienated foreigners”. Similarly, Phelps et al. (2012) found that the use of symbolic boundaries (e.g., ethnicity, nationality, etc.) has contributed to the exclusion of immigrants in Norway. Thus, the discourses of the far-right parties seek to construct representations that legitimise racism, i.e., system of domination and exclusion that creates social inequalities between different ethnic groups (Van der Valk, 2003).

In order to avoid the label of “racists”, far-right politicians justify that since what they say is “truth” and “common sense”, then it cannot be racist (Capdevila & Callaghan, 2008; Durrheim et al., 2018). Far-right polemic representations about minorities are presented as the most veritable ones, persuading people to adopt the same point of view and thus appealing to hegemonic representations (Orfali, 2006). In this regard, Triandafyllidou (2000) stated that far-right populists tend to represent themselves as impartial and non-discriminants, while immigrants are accused of dishonesty and corruption, legitimising the prevalence of racism.

Nowadays, one of the main places where social representations are created and disseminated is on social media. On these platforms, political discourses containing hate speech have increased considerably in recent years, due to the anonymity and deindividuation (Bilewicz & Soral, 2020). Considering the role of social media in the spread of far-right discourses, Aladro and Requeijo (2020) analysed the discourse, key signifiers, and the communicative strategies employed by the Spanish far-right populist party Vox during the general elections in 2019. Based on discourses shared on Instagram, the authors identified

several symbols and messages related to nativism and traditionalism, the use of emotions and fear toward social enemies, and an emphasis on the rule of law and order (e.g., demands for a strict criminal justice system) (Aladro & Requeijo, 2020).

In sum, past literature has demonstrated that the discourse of the far-right populist parties aims to create social representations that promote discrimination, exclusion, social polarisation, and violence against specific groups of society (Barreto et al., 2009; Gibson et al., 2020; Martín-Baró, 1983, 1993; Triandafyllidou, 2000; Wodak, 2001b). Hence, the discourse of the far-right constitutes a serious threat to democracy (Harel et al., 2020).

Therefore, considering that social representations are always embedded in a local context (Wagner et al., 1999) and new ones are constructed when a political party emerges (Orfali, 2006), it is important to look at the Portuguese context and Chega's contribution to the construction of social representations of the "pure Portuguese" and the enemy-Others.

Chapter 2. Portugal Unlocks the Door to Far-Right

Contrary to the rest of the EU members, the far-right had not developed in Portugal until very recently (Da Silva, 2018) and it was not expected that a far-right populist party would gain enough support to get a seat in parliament (Marchi, 2016). Nevertheless, the formation of peripheral movements and parties gives clues that the far-right discourse existed marginally. In 1985, the National Action Movements [NAM] (dissolved in 1991) introduced an ethno-nationalistic discourse, defending racial homogeneity against the risks of immigration and miscegenation in Portugal (Marchi, 2016). In 2000, a group of far-right wing supporters constituted the National Renewal Party (Partido Nacional Renovador [PNR]), which recovered the ethno-nationalist extremism from the NAM (Marchi, 2016). However, all far-right political initiatives remained powerless in Portugal, until the 2019 general elections.

Da Silva (2018) argued that far-right political ideas were unsuccessful in Portugal mainly for four reasons: a) the relatively high levels of identification of the Portuguese population with the EU; b) the low immigration rates, associated with the fact that most of the immigrants are from Portuguese-speaking countries; c) the existence of two other parties that already received protest votes; and d) the lack of communications skills of the far-right candidates during electoral campaigns. Other scholars proposed similar reasons and for many years Portugal was considered a notable exception in Europe (Carvalhais & Fernandes, 2018).

Nevertheless, the presence of the far-right in Portugal radically changed in 2019 with Chega. On 6 October 2019, six months after its official recognition by the Constitutional Court, Chega received 67,502 votes in the general elections and its leader and founder André Ventura was elected deputy (Comissão Nacional de Eleições, 2019). A year later, in October 2020, Chega guaranteed two seats in the regional parliament of Azores, one of the Portuguese autonomous regions (Público & Agência Lusa, 2020). More recently, Ventura was a candidate for the 2021 presidential elections, receiving 496,773 votes and occupying the third place (Ministério da Administração Interna, 2021). Even without winning, the number of votes received demonstrates that Chega has become an important actor within the Portuguese political realm.

Previously, Ventura was a member of the right-wing Social Democratic Party, and he was even a candidate for mayor of a municipality in the district of Lisbon. During this time, he gained prominence by defining social minorities as groups that ignore the laws (Del Barrio,

2019). The campaign for the Parliament elections in 2019 was also characterised by far-right populist demands, including the immediate deportation of all illegal immigrants, the suppression of gender quotas for public offices, more severe sentences for corruption cases, the chemical castration for sex offenders and the elimination of income taxes for small business owners (Fernandes & Magalhães, 2020).

Currently, as an elected member of parliament, Ventura employs anti-corruption discourses, attacks minorities and stands for policies against what he calls "the massive invasion" from Southern Mediterranean countries. He also defends permanence in the European Union as long as it does not imply the dilution of the national identity or the loss of the national sovereignty (Câncio, 2019; Sánchez, 2020). Through his interventions in Parliament and on social media platforms, Ventura usually adopts a communication strategy that consists in outbursts that he then softens, dismisses, or contradicts (Del Barrio, 2019; Sánchez, 2020).

In Chega's *Founding Political Manifesto* (Chega, n.d.-d), it is presented as a saviour party that will return the country to the Portuguese, protect it from threats, and defend the attachment to "centennial" national values and traditions. The party claims to have been created because Portugal needed a political force able to break with the installed powers and solve the perceived existing "security, justice, and immigration" problems (Del Barrio, 2019). Chega is also defined as a national, conservative, liberal, and personalist party and describes Portuguese people as sharing the same blood, land, property, destiny, history, culture, and language. Consequently, Ventura presents himself as the guardian of a true moral, a leader who fights against those who advocate for the rights of the minorities (Ribeiro, 2020).

Regarding the anti-pluralism stance, Chega (2019) expresses that the country has its own cultural identity, which is considered a "finished product" that must be preserved against the migration fluxes (Chega, n.d.-c). Moreover, the Party establishes that immigrants must assimilate and adopt the Portuguese culture (Chega, n.d.-a). The party proposes the abrogation of hate crimes, the inclusion of nationality and origin in crime statistics, and defines migration, security and justice as inseparable issues, equalising immigrants with terrorists. Chega also defends the abolition of residency permits based on humanitarian reasons and the limitation of the number of asylum applications received.

In regard with its anti-establishment stance, Chega conceives that traditional parties are corrupt, responsible for the loss of national culture, and incapable to deal with economic,

sociological and ethic challenges. Ventura also proposes to make amendments to the Portuguese Constitution, as he believes that the current one allows what he named of "the dictatorship of both the elite and social minorities".

Chega tries to demonstrate that it represents the will of the Portuguese people to build a new Republic (Chega, n.d.-b). In the official documents of the party various types of enemies are mentioned, such as the traditional parties, the Social State policies, countries with a non-European culture, diversity and multiculturalism, gender ideology, the United Nations Global Compact on Migration, and immigration.

As it has been common in other European far-right populist parties, Chega and Ventura have constituted ties with similar parties abroad, stating that they have good relations with Vox party in Spain (Del Barrio, 2019) and direct support from Matteo Salvini of Lega Nord in Italy (Ralha, 2020) and from Marine Le Pen of the National Rally in France (Agência Lusa, 2020).

Overall, the far-right party has guaranteed presence in national and regional parliaments and has received enough support to be considered a serious political contender (Fernandes & Magalhães, 2020; Mendes & Dennison, 2020). Therefore, it is crucial to explore how the discourse of Ventura socially represents the Portuguese reality, especially through the publications shared on his social media accounts. As Merino et al. (2021) stated, studying the discourses that facilitated the success of the far-right is necessary to strengthen democratic practices and to transform or reverse those discourses that promote discrimination, inequalities, and social polarisation.

The focus of this study was on the constituent aspect of the social representations, on the way they were constructed and shaped through discourse (Banchs, 2000; Moscovici, 1988; Vala & Castro, 2013). By focusing on the social media posts produced and shared by André Ventura, this study had two specific goals. The first goal was to identify which social groups and actors were represented in Ventura's discourse. The second goal was to analyse the discursive strategies employed by Ventura and how these strategies appeal to social polarisation.

Chapter 3. Method

Considering that the contents of the far-right messages tend to intensify during election times (Song & Boomgaarden, 2017), this study looked at the posts shared by André Ventura on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram during month prior to the presidential elections, that is, from 22 December 2020 to 22 January 2021.

A total of 294 posts were collected. From these we excluded those that only had information about places and times of events (e.g., "Daqui a pouco!" [Shortly!] (4 January 2021). Additionally, as the focus of this study was on Ventura's written discourse, posts that shared images or videos without any accompanying written text were also excluded.

The final corpus under analysis was composed by 253 posts. As can be seen in Table 3.1, 113 posts were published on Facebook, 116 on Twitter, and 24 on Instagram. The collection of posts was carried out daily during the whole month before the elections and the number of interactions, comments, and shares in each post was registered after 48 hours of its publication.

Table 3.1.

Number of Interactions, Comments, and Shares Made on the Posts Published by André Ventura.

	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram	Total
Posts	113	116	24	253
Interactions	423,000	76,416	62,114	561,530
Comments	84,332	17,799	6,533	108,664
Shares	25,085	20,399	NA	45,484

3.1 Analytical Procedure

The exploration of the social representations reproduced by Ventura was carried out from a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA have been used to investigate the expression, constitution and legitimation of social inequalities and polarisation through the representations of "us" and "them" reproduced by language (Wodak, 2001b; Van Dijk, 2001). By focusing on Ventura's discourse, we expect to identify the meanings that configure social representations, the content in which people (collectively) make sense of the world (Gibson, 2015). CDA

favours a micro-level understanding of the role of power in the configuration or contestation of hegemonic social representations (Amer & Howarth, 2018).

According to Koller (2020b), to analyse discourses it is important to adopt a linguistic methodology. Therefore, in this study, each text/post was divided into different propositions. A proposition is the clause that carries one of the meanings that can be present in a sentence (Van Dijk, 1996). To illustrate this, consider the following text: "The yellow house is under attack by the evil birds". From this example, it is possible to extract at least four propositions: "The house is yellow", "The house is attacked", "The birds are evil", "The birds attack the house". It is also possible to identify two actors in the given example, i.e., the house and the birds, who seem to be in conflict ("under attack").

After dividing each of the 253 posts in simple propositions, the analysis was developed in two phases, a descriptive and an interpretative one. Firstly, in the descriptive part it was identified what social actors appeared, how they were mentioned, and what kind of actions they were involved in. This was done by considering the socio-semantic taxonomy, an approach developed by Van Leeuwen (1995) to describe the diverse forms in which social actors can be represented in discourse. In the example provided above, it is possible to observe that "the yellow house" was individualised while the "evil birds" were collectivised. Likewise, we looked at the discursive strategies employed by Ventura (Van der Valk, 2003; Van Dijk, 2006). Finally, in the interpretive phase, an analysis of the meanings attributed to social actors and their role in the social context was carried out.

Chapter 4. Analysis

Of the 253 publications, 57 posts were only published on one of Ventura's social media accounts: 18 on Facebook, 21 on Twitter, and 18 on Instagram. 89 posts were shared on both Facebook and Twitter, and other six were shared on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram platforms. Additionally, 147 posts included news headlines, 85 included pictures, and 18 posts included videos. Three were just text. Also, 180 posts were news, pictures or videos created by others, while 73 were shared as own creation.

From the identification of the social actors that were referenced in Ventura's discourse, four major categories were generated for the analysis (see Figure 4.1). The first category, "The unstoppable saviours of the pure people", includes Ventura's self-presentation, as well as the presentation of his political party and his supporters. The second category, "The victimised good people", addresses who are being constructed as the "good people". In the category "The enemies among the Portuguese", those who remain outside the imaginary construction of the people are presented, namely, the Roma community, Afro-Portuguese people, and antifascists protestors. The last category, "The corrupt and traitor political elites", focuses on the construction of the political system as oppressor, the left-wing parties as traitors, and the right-wing parties as "covert" left-wing parties. The content of each category and subcategory is presented and discussed in detail in the following sections.

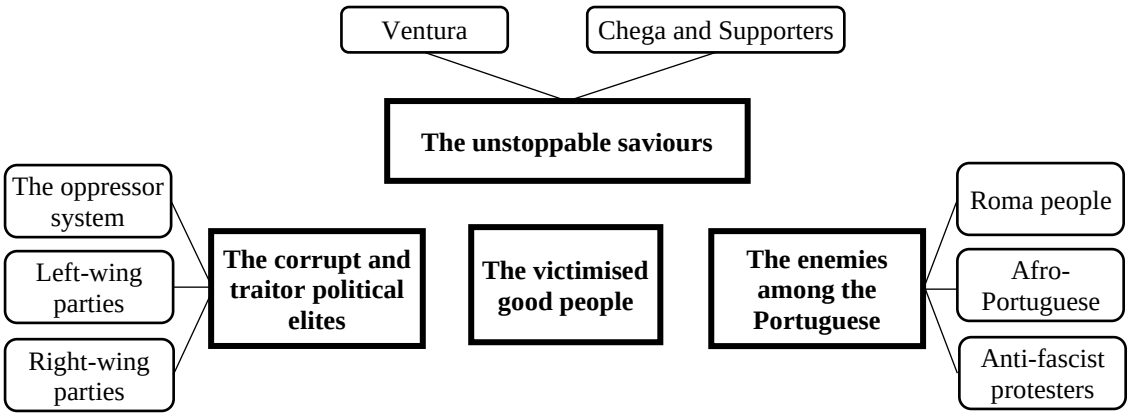

Figure 4.1. Categories generated from the social actors present in Ventura's discourse

4.1 Ventura, Chega and supporters: "The unstoppable saviours of the pure people"

Of the 253 posts published on Ventura's social media accounts, 90.1% included at least one reference to himself, or to Chega, or his supporters. Mostly, Ventura and Chega were represented as the ones who will inevitably save "the pure people".

In accordance with the authoritarian characteristics common within far-right populist political parties (Mendes & Dennison, 2020), Ventura was the most referenced actor in the posts. He appeared 156 times, mostly by speaking in the first person: "Tinha ou não razão quando disse que é a candidata cigana???" [Was I not right when I said that she is the Gypsy[1] candidate???] (7 January 2021). Also, he often used possessive pronouns as another way of referring to himself, such as "my candidacy for the Presidency", "my election campaign", or "my voice". There were other posts in which Ventura remained excluded by keeping the statements impersonal: "A verdade que tem de ser dita!" [The truth that must be told!] (16 January 2021). Still, his presence in these cases of exclusion remained backgrounded (Van Leeuwen, 1995) since it was possible to infer it in the headlines or pictures shared.

The pronoun "we" was the second most frequently employed. While Ventura was clearly included in "we", this plural pronoun was used to also refer to the party Chega, like when he talked about police officers who bought their own vests: "Fomos sempre nós que denunciámos esta vergonha, mas não é politicamente correto aceitar e resolver. É melhor deixar andar!" [We have always denounced this disgrace, but it is not politically correct to accept it and solve it. They think it is better to let it go!] (27 December 2020). In other posts, the "we" also included the party supporters: "Vamos vencer toda a esquerda e ter a segunda volta mais espetacular da história da nossa democracia" [We are going to defeat the entire left and have the most spectacular second round in the history of our democracy.] (9 January 2021).

Therefore, two subcategories were created to illustrate the actors who represent the "saviours of the people". The first "André Ventura: 'the martyr who will save the people'" relates to his presentation. The second "Chega and Ventura's supporters: 'the unstoppable force of change'" includes references to the party and Ventura's supporters.

[1] Despite the term "Gypsy" commonly refers to members of the Romani people in the Portuguese context (even though it is a term that is starting to be criticised) – in this extract it is used as an offense, which fits better with Ventura's intention when describing his political rival.

André Ventura: "the martyr who will save the people"

Through social media, André Ventura presented himself in different ways. First, as the sole leader of the opposition, as a politician who protests against the status quo, and the only one truly representing a system change: "Ontem os portugueses puderam ver que existem dois projetos alternativos claros para Portugal: manter tudo como está ou romper de vez com o sistema!" [Yesterday, the Portuguese people could see that there are two very different projects for Portugal: keep everything as it is or break with this system for good!] (7 January 2021). Moreover, Ventura emphasised his anti-system stance by arguing that the political system is corrupted, presenting himself as the only politician who is outraged about it. Likewise, he presented himself as someone who will never privilege certain social groups. But, at the same time, he proclaimed that he would only represent the "pure Portuguese", i.e., the native and hard worker people. This apparently contradiction reflects how Ventura's discourse was organised differently, according to the context, to achieve the same end (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) of excluding certain social groups.

While Ventura presented himself as the only one against the status quo in Portugal, he also repeatedly mentioned the support from public personalities (e.g., a national actress, a catholic priest), and even international political leaders (e.g., Marine Le Pen, Matteo Salvini). Presenting political and religious leaders as social authorities on his side favours the appeal of the audience (Amer & Howarth, 2018).

Another recurrent topic was related to Ventura's presentation as an ordinary person. Ventura stated several times to be an honest, good, responsible, grateful, and hardworking politician who always tells the truth and that can be trusted. He highlighted his love for the country and his proximity to the people across the country. Importantly, Ventura also remarked that he is loved and desired by many Portuguese people. Furthermore, he presented himself as a good citizen, someone who always respects the law, who is on the right track, who respects the security forces and keeps devotion to the national symbols of a glorious version of the history of the country: "Portugal precisa de uma nova esperança, de alguém que acredite e ame o seu país. Espero humildemente que os portugueses me dêem essa oportunidade!" [Portugal needs a new hope, someone who believes and loves their country. I humbly hope that the Portuguese will give me that opportunity!] (18 January 2021). This representation as a decent person may serves as a shield when introducing his political proposals (Hagelund, 2003).

Besides, Ventura presented himself as a victim who has been constantly under attack, pursued, harmed, silenced, conditioned, boycotted, and hated: "VERGONHA! Como resolver o problema com as minorias? Multar o Ventura!" [WHAT A DISGRACE! How to solve the problem with minorities? Give Ventura a fine!] (22 December 2020). Despite his presentation as a victim, Ventura also presented himself as someone who do not give up: "Tudo o que o Parlamento puder fazer para prejudicar e condicionar a minha candidatura presidencial, vai fazê-lo. Desistir? Nem pensar. Os portugueses darão a resposta no dia 24 de Janeiro." [The Parliament will do everything to undermine and condition my presidential candidacy. To give up? No way. The Portuguese will give the answer on the 24th January] (14 January 2021).

Accordingly, Ventura denounced that others are labelling him as fascist because he is against the political system and corruption. As it has been identified as a common feature in fascist discourses (Labrador Méndez & Gaupp, 2020), Ventura tried to empty and twist existing concepts. For instance, by arguing that that he is called a "fascist" because of his stance against the system, he directs people's attention away from his discriminatory statements against minority social groups. Further, he expanded the label of "fascist" to all the people who agree with the change of criminal laws he proposes, in an attempt to normalise the new meaning of fascism he tries to introduce in society.

Despite this self-victimisation, Ventura defined himself repeatedly as being unstoppable, unshakable, and persistent in his purpose to rescue the "pure Portuguese" and reconquer Portugal. He reinforced this by reproducing an authoritarian representation, presenting himself as someone with a "strong fist" to give strict orders. He also described his actions against other politicians using combat-related terms, expressing that he is prepared and "cannot wait to finish them", to "sweep" others, and "hit them hard, with pleasure". Hence, he presented himself as the hero who will save the country and the "pure people", showing no mercy to the enemies.

Finally, Ventura's presentation as a winner was built from the messages in which he announced that he was the only candidate whose number of supporters was increasing, ensuring that he will be in the second round, win the elections and be president of Portugal. The strategies of 'evidentiality' and 'number game' were common to achieve this "winner" presentation, employing them to illustrate his opinions as real facts. Ventura also reinforce the "winner" presentation by using metaphors to present himself as a hurricane, as a sign from heaven that will fill the Portuguese with hope, an "unavoidable" force of nature and the chosen one by God: "Um furacão que vai encher os portugueses de esperança em 2021" [A hurricane

that will fill the Portuguese with hope in 2021] (31 December 2020); "Um sinal do céu que quer transformar Portugal!" [A sign from heaven that wants to transform Portugal!] (10 January 2021).

In summary, Ventura presented himself in different ways depending on his purposes. He described himself as an honest, polite, patriotic and hardworking man who truly represents the aspirations of the Portuguese people to transform the system. Ventura also presented himself as the one who will fight against all the enemies to save and protect the "good Portuguese", which ultimately makes himself a hero. And, as Ventura is the only one able to defend and save the "good people", he presented himself as being victim of the attacks of dangerous Others, which also makes himself a martyr.

Chega and Ventura's supporters: "the unstoppable force of change"

Chega was presented as the only party against corruption and injustice and thus the only one called to produce the greater revolution in the political system. It was presented repeatedly as the strongest political movement that ever existed in the history of Portuguese democracy: "Este não é só o movimento político mais forte da história de Portugal. É também o que tem as melhores pessoas!" [Not only this is the strongest political movement in the history of Portugal. It is also the one with the best people!] (15 January 2021). Coherently, Chega was described as "the new light" that will become the main opposition in the country.

Regarding its political stance, Ventura positioned Chega as a popular-right party (instead of far-right), as a party truly close to the people, which understands the concerns that exist in the "heart of the Portuguese" and seeks the change that people are waiting for. The representation of Chega as a popular rather than a far-right party is a key factor of its success, as it helps avoid of the stigma of being an extremist (Van der Valk, 2003). According to Mendes and Dennison (2020), this avoidance is particularly relevant in the Portuguese context since none far-right parties had previously been represented in parliament.

The supporters, as an extended in-group of Chega, also appeared in Ventura's discourse by employing the pronoun "we" or its respective possessive (e.g., "our voice", "our force"). Both the Chega and supporters were presented as being part of a huge family, composed of the "best people", those who care about the country and are on the right side of history. Thus, they were represented as the people who will help with the transformation of the political system.

Additionally, as Ventura, Chega members and its supporters were represented as victims and heroes, while the number of followers was shown as being in continuous growth, illustrating polls results as an evidence that Ventura will achieve his goal on Election Day.

To summarise, the members of the party Chega and the supporters of Ventura were represented as being "the best people" in Portugal, an unstoppable and constantly growing group. They are considered the warriors of Ventura and are described as the Portuguese who could see that the country needs to be saved and who are prepared to defend their leader.

4.2 The pure Portuguese: "The victimised good people"

In this category we describe how Ventura constructed the imaginary group of the "pure Portuguese people" which he claimed to represent. The number of posts referring to this group was 120, which constituted 47.4% of the total shared during the period of time considered in the study. Two trends relating to the discursive representation of this actor were identified. On the one hand, Ventura referred to the Portuguese people as "the good Portuguese": "Podem protestar, não vão conseguir parar este movimento. Os portugueses de bem estão a acordar!" [You can protest, you will not be able to stop this movement. The good Portuguese are waking up!] (11 January 2021). On the other hand, Ventura referred to them by employing the second person plural "vocês" [you]: "Foi uma campanha dura mas fiquei com a sensação de dever cumprido. Dei o meu melhor por Portugal! Agora é convosco! Obrigado por não me deixarem caminhar sozinho!" [It was a tough campaign, but I got the feeling of accomplishment. I did my best for Portugal! Now it is up to you! Thank you for not letting me walk alone!] (22 January 2021).

Furthermore, Ventura employed metonymies in his discourse by mentioning Portugal or some specific regions (such as Porto, Algarve, Santarém, Setúbal, Viseu) to include in his statements all the people living in the place instead of referring to a particular group (Koller, 2020b). The actions of a group of people were generalised to all those who were in the mentioned place. Ventura also resorted to *agentisation* strategies, which consist in attributing agent characteristics to a thing instead of subjects (Ayala, 2008): "Levanta-te Portugal! É tempo de salvarmos o que resta da Pátria: os portugueses" [Get up Portugal! It is time to save what is left of the homeland: the Portuguese] (30 December 2020).

The references to the pure Portuguese people in Ventura's discourse highlighted their representation as being "the good people". Being a "good Portuguese" was associated with

being a hard worker, a representation that was repeatedly illustrated through their functionalisation, i.e., referring to the Portuguese people by mentioning their professions (Van Leeuwen, 1995): teachers, nurses, fishermen, small merchants, restaurant employees, and farmers. Moreover, the "good Portuguese" was defined as Catholics and Europeans, as those who have the legitimate right to be in European land. Also, in accordance with Ventura's authoritative stance, police forces were recurrently illustrated as being part of "good people", often described as "Guardian Angels" (employing a catholic metaphor).

Then, Ventura stressed a social division between those who are considered the good ones and the others defined as bad people: "Em Coimbra, ajoelhei-me perante o túmulo de D. Afonso Henriques e prometi lutar até ao meu último dia por Portugal e pelos portugueses de bem!" [In Coimbra, I knelt before the tomb of D. Afonso Henriques and promised to fight until my last day for Portugal and for the good Portuguese!] (11 January 2021).

Similar to Chega supporters, the "good Portuguese" were signified as being harmed and abandoned, whose lives and health were disrespected and, during the pandemic, were left to die. That is, they have been betrayed and insulted over the years. Because of this, they are presented as being tired due to the frustration they have been accumulating. And in representation of the whole people, Portugal was described as being on the wrong track, lost, and destroyed, personalising the country to express that it is being assassinated: "Hoje tive o Castelo de Guimarães atrás de mim e senti a imensa responsabilidade de reconquistar Portugal ao socialismo e à corrupção que está a matar a nossa Nação" [Today, I had the Guimarães Castle behind me and I felt the immense responsibility to win back Portugal from the socialism and corruption that is killing our Nation] (17 January 2021).

The pure Portuguese were also presented as if they were "waking up" or "defending themselves" from the lies they have been subject to over the years. That is, Ventura presents than more and more "pure Portuguese people" recognise him as the best political option, even when they are not active supporters. Likewise, the good Portuguese were represented as Ventura's priority, as those who will be defended from all the threats that are harming them.

Overall, the "pure Portuguese" are represented by Ventura as a group of good people, Catholics, Europeans, hard workers, who are victimised by two enemies that are destroying the country. Both are presented in the following sections.

4.3 Gypsies, Afro-Portuguese and anti-fascists: "The enemies among the Portuguese"

The references to the people who do not belong to the "good Portuguese" appeared in 22,9% of Ventura's posts. Roma people, Afro-Portuguese people, and anti-fascist protesters were named as enemies and threats to the Portuguese society. When not mentioned directly, it was possible to infer the presence of these groups because they appeared in the headlines shared or because Ventura used terms with which he had previously associated them.

Many of the meanings associated with the Roma community were related to the anti-fascist protesters. Both were often mentioned in the same posts: "Se os subsidiodependentes, os acomodados e a extrema-esquerda pensam que me desanimam, estão muito enganados. Só me dão mais força para lutar pelos portugueses de bem. Amanhã lá estarei em Setúbal, terra de gente boa e trabalhadora" [If the state aid dependents, the accommodated ones and the extreme left think they discourage me, they are very mistaken. They only give me more strength to fight for the "good Portuguese". Tomorrow I will be there in Setúbal, land of good and hardworking people] (20 January 2021).

Afro-Portuguese people were the least referenced actors in the analysed publications, and they remained backgrounded (Darics & Koller, 2019): "Marcelo esteve ao lado de bandidos e de criminosos, deixou até palavras simpáticas a todo o tipo de gente menos recomendável. Foi incapaz de condenar uma tentativa de agressão a um adversário presidencial. Muito mal!" [Marcelo was at the side of bandits and criminals, he even left sympathetic words to all kinds of people who were less recommendable. He was unable to condemn an attempted assault on a presidential opponent. Very bad!] (22 January 2021).

The Roma community: "The privileged abusers of the good Portuguese"

Ventura represented the Roma community as a minority ethnic group that constitutes a problem and that is an enemy of the "good Portuguese". He supported this representation using two arguments. Firstly, Ventura repeatedly described Roma people as lazy who do not like or want to work and live at the expense of the work of others and live on benefits. Because of this, Ventura labelled them "the privileged ones" in the country. This reversal of roles in which the victims became the perpetrators has been a common discursive strategy used by far-right parties (De Cillia et al., 1999). For far-right politicians, the welfare measures directed toward the most vulnerable social groups are seen as discriminatory and racist toward the "pure people" (Hagelund, 2003). Also, with this reversal of roles, the fact that the rights of members

of the Roma community have historically been violated in the country is hidden. (Agência Lusa, 2021).

The other way in which Ventura signified the Roma community was by associating them with criminals and aggressive people who attack the "pure Portuguese", including the Police and himself. For instance, Roma people were described several times as the ones who attack, pursue, try to boycott, and protest Ventura. Consequently, since he represented himself as the defendant and representative of the people, Roma community members were, by all ends, enemies of the "good Portuguese people".

Notwithstanding, Ventura illustrated how he was supported by two members of the Roma community (one of them later admitted that he was not Roma). These two were described by Ventura as hardworking people who, unlike other Roma people, pay their taxes. Although they were used as evidence against claims of racism towards Chega, Ventura still ended up emphasising that they were different from the rest of the Romani people. This constituted a practice of tokenism (Hunt, 2004), as Ventura chose and used two members of the Roma community to create the appearance of diversity, inclusion, and, consequently, avoid the stigma of fascism.

In sum, the members of the Roma community were presented as aggressive criminals who attack and live at the expense of the "good people" without doing any work by themselves.

Afro-Portuguese: "The outsider criminals"

Regarding the representation of Afro-Portuguese communities in Ventura's discourse, it is interesting to note that they were never mentioned explicitly. Instead, Ventura referred to Afro-Portuguese people by mentioning a neighbourhood that is known to be inhabited by Afro-Portuguese communities and because of a photograph that accompanied the text. Ventura represented them as bandits, criminals and as "the less recommendable type of people".

Moreover, he explicitly expressed that Europe must be for Europeans, those who inherited a Greco-Roman tradition and have the legitimate right to be there. Consequently, being outsiders and invaders were meanings associated with Afro-Portuguese. This discursive discrimination is consistent with what far-right parties have done in other contexts, focusing on those defined as ethnically different and linking them with an increase in crime rates (Hagelund, 2003). Hence, the meanings reproduced in Ventura's discourse reflect Chega statements in which the party strongly associates migration with criminality and insecurity,

reinforcing the representation of those who are pointed out as outsiders as terrorist and a threat (Chega, 2019; Chega, n.d.-c).

Overall, the Afro-Portuguese people were represented as bandits that do not have a legitimate right to be in European territory.

Anti-fascists protesters: "Lazy people satisfied with the system"

Those who protest against Ventura were described as "mentally retarded" and labelled as "antifascists". They are thus not part of the "pure people" neither they are "good Portuguese". Similar to the Roma community, protestors were presented as lazy people who choose not to work. They were pointed out as being accommodated and satisfied with the current system, willing to do anything to avoid the social and political change advocated by Ventura.

Ventura repeatedly mentioned that "antifascists" pursued, insulted, attacked, and have organised noisy demonstrations against him and his supporters around the country. He claimed that the so-called antifascists protest the wrong causes, because they were instrumentalised by the "extreme-left" to act against "democracy". The "good Portuguese" are of right-wing ideology and, according to Ventura, the only truly right-wing party in Portugal is Chega, as it is presented in the following section.

4.4 The political system and traditional parties: "The corrupt and traitor political elites"

The posts shared by Ventura mentioning the political system and his electoral rivals constituted 58.9% of the analysed publications. The most referenced actor was "the system": "O sistema continua com a obsessão de tentar calar a minha voz e condicionar esta candidatura presidencial. São uns tristes, nem o povo português respeitam! Dia 24 de Janeiro terão a resposta!" [The system is still obsessed with trying to silence my voice and constrain this presidential candidacy. They are deplorable, they do not even respect the Portuguese people! January 24th they will have the answer!] (1 January 2021). By attributing the responsibility to "the system" instead of concrete persons, Ventura may achieve two purposes. First, as no member of the government was individualised in Ventura's discourse, anyone could be included as being part of the impersonalised actor that is "the system". Secondly, by doing that, any action made by a politician could be generalised and become the behaviour of all politicians. Similar process was found in the use of "the government" and "the State". Indeed, even when sharing a news headline mentioning specific political groups or politicians, Ventura

presented their actions as the actions of the system. However, "the system" was strongly associated with the left-wing:

> Estavam à espera que esta candidatura fosse para deixar tudo na mesma? Que fosse para deixar a esquerda sem confronto, como acontece há 45 anos? Habituem-se, eu vim para não deixar pedra sobre pedra deste sistema podre e corrupto que nos governa! [Were you expecting this candidacy to leave everything the same? To keep the left without confrontation, as it has been for 45 years? Get used to it, I came to leave no stone unturned in this rotten and corrupt system that governs us!] (3 January 2021).

As for the rival presidential candidates, Ventura treated them differently. They were mainly individualized, but sometimes he referenced them by mentioning their respective political party or they were all included as "the other candidates": "Os mesmos problemas que os outros candidatos dizem não existir em Portugal. Às vezes sinto-me envergonhado! Comigo o Estado de Direito não conhecerá excepções!" [The same problems that the other candidates say that do not exist in Portugal. Sometimes I feel ashamed! With me the rule of law will know no exceptions!] (27 December 2020).

"The oppressor leftist political system"

The current government of a left-wing party (Socialist Party) was represented discursively in the same way as the system, suggesting that for Ventura, the system is left-wing.

The system was signified repeatedly as corrupt, rotten, hypocritical, decrepit, and lazy. It was considered as the actor who disrespected and forgot the people, destroyed their jobs, and allowed clientelism without consequences. Further, the socialist system was made responsible for "killing" the "good Portuguese" and the country. In Ventura's view, the system is afraid to act and solve important social problems, such as the existence of Roma people in Portugal. Hence, like other far-right parties, Ventura constructed his political enemies as a genuine threat to democracy, and at the same time he also claims his "democratic" right to express discriminatory statements (Cammaerts, 2009).

The left-system was also accused of labelling Ventura as a fascist, in his view, an attempt to delegitimise his demand for a radical change in the political system.

The current Prime Minister António Costa was individualised in Ventura's discourse as the head of the system, being described as corrupt, unable to rule and responsible for taking the country to a fall.

As for the other candidates in the presidential campaign, Ventura signified all of them as corrupt politicians who do not respect the rule of law. Nevertheless, there were differences in the meanings that were associated to the left and the right-wing rival candidates in the presidential race, as is presented below.

Left-wing candidates: "The traitors of 'the good people'"

In the Presidential elections of 2021, there were three candidates from left-wing parties in Portugal: The Socialist Party, Left Block, and the Portuguese Communist Party. The entire left was signified by Ventura as being in power comfortably, without opposition, and conformed by corrupt rulers. In contrast with the representation of the system, the left candidates were represented as being inferior to Ventura. The candidates of the Socialist Party and the Left Block, Ana Gomes and Marisa Matias respectively, were individualised and called by their names. In addition to disrespecting the lives of the "good Portuguese", Ventura introduced them both as future losers on the Election Day, explaining that their sole purpose is to get more votes than him.

Gomes was delegitimised in Ventura's discourse by associating her repeatedly with the Roma community, both because she defended them and because the community supported her. "A candidata cigana assume - se finalmente! Ainda bem. Assim as coisas ficam claras!" [The Gypsy candidate finally comes out! Fortunately. That way things are clear!] (13 January 2021). Moreover, Ventura defined her as a hypocrite, especially when she showed herself close to the Police after having previously criticised police brutalities against minorities.

In the case of Matias and the Left Block, they were signified as being the "moralist extreme left-wing". According to Ventura, they represent a great danger to the country and the "pure people". Thus, as an act of self-defence, the representants of the "extreme left-wing" deserve to be hit, humiliated, and devastated by Ventura: "Sabia que vinha debater comigo, não vinha debater com o Rato Mickey. Teve azar hoje, porque eu vim preparado para acabar consigo! É lidar!" [You knew you were coming to debate with me, not with Mickey Mouse. You were unlucky today, because I came prepared to finish you!" Deal with that!] (7 January 2021); "Sem piedade hoje. Boa noite Portugal." [No mercy today. Good night Portugal.] (7 January 2021).

From a critical perspective, metaphors are relevant in the discursive construction of ideologies and the legitimation of social practices (Hart, 2020). Ventura repeatedly reproduced expressions of war in his speeches, creating a context in which relations with other politicians were based on struggles and combats. At the same time, his actions were presented as legitimate aggressions in defence of the people and in the "reconquest of the country". According to O'Connor (1995), this discourse of violence may promote and contribute to violent actions in the future.

Finally, João Ferreira and the Communist Party were signified as a group of liars and rude people who have no real political arguments and are nothing more than a disgrace for Portugal:

> O candidato João Ferreira cumprimentou […][2] o diretor da [nome de um canal de televisão nacional] e deixou-me de braço no ar quando o tentei cumprimentar. No final, saiu sem me falar do estúdio. Uma vergonha e uma tristeza!, não tenho culpa que não tenha argumentos para debate! [Candidate João Ferreira greeted […] the director of [name of a national television channel] and left me with my arm in the air when I tried to greet him. In the end, he left the studio without speaking to me. A disgrace and a disappointment! It is not my fault that he does not have arguments for debate!] (3 January 2021).

Overall, left-wing parties were represented as the only extremist parties in Portugal, whose members are corrupt, hypocrite and inferior to Ventura.

Right-wing parties: "The covert left parties"

Ventura's discourse positioned himself as the only truly right-wing candidate. For instance, the current President and candidate Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa (who suspended his membership in the Social Democratic Party for the duration of his presidency) was presented as being an ally of the Prime Minister and the protector of the "left-system". Moreover, Ventura described him as a dishonest person, someone who does not know how to rule, and whose bad decisions are destroying the country. In addition, his significance as a traitor was reinforced by presenting him as someone close and friendly with those who are not part of the "good Portuguese".

[2] […] = Material deliberately omitted.

The Social Democratic Party (PSD), the main opposition party, along with its leader Rui Rio were described as weak opponents of the government, traitors and allies of the system.

Regarding the candidate Tiago Mayan and is party Liberal Initiative (IL), which defends a neoliberal State (Liberal, n.d.), were re-signified in Ventura's discourse as leftists because of their concerns about social issues and the rejection of Chega's racists statements. Thus, Ventura defined them as a false right-wing party, arguing that its real name should be "liberal-left party". By doing this, Ventura associated them to the corrupted system:

> É isto que uma suposta direita contra o sistema tem para oferecer aos portugueses... atacar quem não tem medo de colocar o dedo na ferida e enfrentar a podridão do sistema. O Tiago Mayan está a disputar votos com a Ana Gomes e a Marisa Matias, não comigo. #esquerda_liberal" [This is what an alleged right-wing candidate against the system has to offer the Portuguese... attacking those who are not afraid to put their finger on the wound and face the rottenness of the system. Tiago Mayan is fighting for votes with Ana Gomes and Marisa Matias, not with me. #liberal_left] (6 January 2021).

Therefore, Ventura moved all existing political parties to the left-wing on the political spectrum, creating a scenario in which Chega is discursively constituted as the only right-wing party in Portugal. The current right-wing parties were presented as false due to their alliances with the left-wing parties and their worriedness about social issues.

Chapter 5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study was focused on the discourse of André Ventura, leader of the far-right Portuguese party Chega, on his social media accounts. The objective was to identify which social actors were represented in his discourse and in what way, and to analyse the discursive strategies he used and how they appeal to on social polarisation.

Based on our analysis, a core narrative was identified, and several discursive strategies were found. These strategies, that vary according to the representation that Ventura wanted to construct, were mythopoesis, positive self-presentation, evidentiality, number games, authorisation, victimisation, the use of metonymies and metaphors, agentisation, polarisation, and comparison.

The core narrative presented by Ventura was about the "good people" that are being oppressed and attacked by two groups of enemies: the bad people among the Portuguese (Roma people, Afro-Portuguese people, and anti-fascist protesters) and the political system. However, there was a hero who is deeply connected with the "good people" and who will risk everything to defend them: André Ventura. This type of heroic tale is an example of mythopoesis, a narrative commonly adopted by far-right parties to legitimise racist discourses (Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999).

As in other European far-right discourses (Hagelund, 2003), Ventura rejected accusations of extremism by arguing that he cannot be racist because he is only telling the "truth". Ventura also tried to reverse the "taboo on racism" and transformed it into a presumed "taboo on minorities" in Portugal, arguing that negative opinions about those considered as different should be freely expressed. This pattern of discursive discrimination is commonly used to justify and legitimise discrimination and has been identified in the discourse of far-right political parties in other contexts (Van der Valk, 2003).

Positive self-presentation was used to introduce himself as an honest man and as the saviour in the midst of the "chaotic Portuguese reality" that he describes. Likewise, to illustrate his growing political power, he deployed the discursive strategy of 'number games' with the results of the polls. The discursive strategy of 'evidentiality' was also used to illustrate Ventura's stances as objective and truthful through the news and posts shared and the reference of public "authorities" that presented their statements as facts.

The strategy of victimisation was also used to present himself as the target of the enemies' actions. This victim-victimiser reversal, in which vulnerable social groups became the perpetrators, has been a common discursive device among far-right parties (Burke, 2018; De Cillia et al., 1999; Staerklé & Green, 2018).

For the representation of the "good Portuguese", along with the positive presentation and victimisation, metonymies were used to generalise the actions of a limited number of people. Ventura presented the support of his followers as the expression of a social consensus, reinforcing the idea that he represents the will of the majority. Indeed, more than the real number of supporters who attended Ventura's campaign events, what mattered for the leader of Chega was how the event was presented to a wider audience through his social media accounts.

Besides, the presentation of the Portuguese reality as being in danger and in an "obvious crisis" allowed Ventura to introduce a new and unusual scenario for the Portuguese, generating fear and pushing people to rely on him as the strong leader who will save them (Van der Valk, 2003). The lack of awareness among society about the "current crisis" is illustrated by metaphors and agentisations (e.g., "Get up Portugal!", "Portugal is waking up!") that appeared many times in his discourse. Then, the need for people to act and take position was encouraged by transmitting a state of emergency and indignation. By arguing that "Portugal cannot wait any longer" and by using many exclamations points (even in the same spot) to highlight his denunciations, information and promises, Ventura reinforced the sense of urgency in his discourse and appealed to people to vote for him if they wanted to be saved. With the use of polarisation strategies, Ventura illustrated that there are only two options, being with him or against him. The complexity of society was simplified by Ventura by dividing it between two categories of oppositional nature: the good ones and the Others.

The boundaries between the pure Portuguese and the Enemy-Others were discursively determined according to the context and interests of Ventura to highlight and communicate the internal similarities and external differences of each group (Wodak, 2011). The boundaries can be arbitrarily positioned as wide or narrow as is convenient, based on different issues, such as cultural differences, countries of origin or political divisions. Thus, more than creating cohesion among equals, far-right populist social power is achieved by producing and highlighting differences through discourse (Labrador Méndez & Gaupp, 2020).

Regarding the enemies of the "good Portuguese", Ventura employed the discursive strategy of comparison, in which the Others were always represented in a negative way in contrast with his positive self-presentation. It was evident that those who have a non-European background or share a Greco-Roman tradition were represented as outsiders, criminals and as threats. As Hagelund (2003) explained, far-right leaders tend to introduce themselves as decent people, while their rivals are represented as their indecent counterparts. The way in which the Roma community and Afro-Portuguese are pictured and framed in the discourse of Ventura tends to create a fissure among the Portuguese, facing them against the "good people", legitimising social inequalities and exclusion (Martín-Baró, 1983, 1993; Skenderovic, 2007; Van der Valk, 2003). Any event that involves the so-called "enemies" is taken as an evidence of their negative intentions, while the opposite ones are considered isolated exceptions. Still, the Romani people were clearly the scapegoat of the country's problems.

However, when Ventura was sanctioned because of his discriminatory discourses, he framed those situations as a threat to his freedom of expression. In fact, Ventura, as other far-right populist leaders (Durrheim et al., 2018), used the accusations of racism to build popular support by developing alternative definitions of "racism" (i.e., "it is not racism if it is true") and claiming victimisation for not being allowed to state what he calls "the obvious" reality. Also, his presentation as the only honest and decent politician contributes to legitimise his subtle racism expressed in his discourses, a phenomenon that was identified in political discourses in Greece, Italy, and Spain (Triandafyllidou, 2000).

According to the Social Representations Theory, when faced with the new reality presented by Ventura, it is expected that people begin to make sense of it and try to turn it into something manageable (Jodelet, 1986). By using his social power as a political leader (Wodak, 2011), Ventura tries to explain "the way things are", offering the resources and solutions in which the people should make sense of how "things should be" (Da Costa et al., 2020). He also imbued the different social actors with meanings and representations that simplify reality into villains and victims, helping people to take sides (Jodelet, 1986; Moscovici, 1988). He then appealed to common sense and used diverse discursive strategies to mobilise those representations as if they are widely shared, "most obvious" facts of reality. The division of society and the established borders between the "good Portuguese" and the "bad enemies" are, then, the reflection of an objective reality and, therefore, cannot be refuted. What could be seen as polemic representations —such as racist and xenophobic discourse— were treated by Ventura

as if they were hegemonic and as basic facts of life that everyone must adopt (Moscovici, 1988), appealing to the normalisation of his far-right discourse (Kadianaki & Andreouli, 2015).

5.1 Limitations and implications

Considering that far-right populists discourses configure knowledge and meanings that influence identities and promote relations between social groups based on discrimination, inequalities, and social polarisation (De Cillia et al., 1999; Merino et al., 2021), it was pertinent to explore how the discourse of Ventura, as a leader of the far-right political party in Portugal, socially represented the Portuguese reality. Such a study is particularly relevant because it is the first time that this type of discourse has political representation in the country since the implementation of democracy.

This study is the first, as far as we are aware, focusing on the way in which the leader of Chega tries to impose representations about the "pure Portuguese" and the Others in society. Our findings show how and in what ways specific social actors are pointed out as the enemies who threat the "good people" in the country, raising tensions and legitimising exclusion and discrimination toward social minorities, such as Roma and Afro-Portuguese people.

We focused on the meanings that shaped the representations created and reproduced by Ventura regarding the different social actors that appeared in his discourse, and this allowed the illustration of how Ventura promotes social inequalities and domination over certain groups in Portuguese society. This study thus seeks to contribute to the strengthening of socio-psychological research showing that the discursive analyses of power relations between social groups foster the comprehension of the social representations that are being constructed in a particular context.

Regarding practical implications, understanding the discourses that legitimise, normalise and promote inequalities, discrimination, and social polarisation of those who are defined as different may be also relevant for the construction of alternative discourses that point towards more humane societies and strengthen democratic practices (Merino et al., 2021). Discourses can contribute to social change as they have effects on social structures (Iñíguez-Rueda, 2006). Symbols and images can also lead to changes in meanings, providing the ground for new social representations (Studer, 2013). Then, once the content of far-right discourses is identified, the purpose must be to introduce and defend different narratives (Koller, 2020a). One way to do this is through the dissemination of diversity and non-stereotypical representations in the

media, since the media discourse and the representations that put into circulation in society have been essential in the interpretation of social realities and the formation of social knowledge (Chauhan & Foster, 2014; Pardo, 2006). It would be expected that this will promote the construction of positive representations about the different social actors, while it will prevent the negative ones from becoming widely shared.

There are a few limitations that should be acknowledged in this study. First, this study did not analyse the images and videos that were shared during the month before the presidential elections. A multimodal study will be relevant to explore how the representations of reality that Ventura wants to impose are reinforced through other modalities of discourse (e.g., pictures, videos). Moreover, this study only looked at the posts shared by Ventura and did not analyse the comments received. While we initially planned to analyse the comments, after finding more than 108,000 comments and considering the time limit that we had to develop the study, we decided to focus only on the posts. Future studies should look the interaction between posts and comments to better understand how Ventura's discourse is contributing to the construction of new social representations. Additionally, a complementary study focusing on how the traditional media are reproducing the discourse of the Portuguese far-right populist party will be also important. Past studies demonstrated that traditional media have contributed to the success of far-right political parties (Bos et al., 2011; Mazzoleni, 2003; Wodak, 2013), but there has been no study focusing on the role of traditional media in Portugal.

It would be particularly important to look at the discourse of Ventura and Chega during a longer period of time and outside of the electoral campaign period. Since the data was collected during the weeks prior to the presidential elections, it was not possible to know if the identified representations of the social actors vary in intensity or remain the same.

Despite these limitations, this study shows that the critical analysis of Ventura's discourse constitutes an important approach to understand the configuration of the social representations he tries to boost and that tends to polarise society and legitimise discrimination and exclusion toward Roma and Afro-Portuguese people. Yet, taking into account that social representations are dynamic rather than static (Studer, 2013), the social representations identified in this study are context-specific, focusing on the themes through which Ventura intended to transform social knowledge.

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