




“Not wanting to see it is hypocrisy, it's denying what is obvious”: Far-right discriminatory discourses mobilised as common sense

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Abstract

The far-right recently entered the Portuguese parliament with the election of André Ventura, leader of the political party Chega. Since 2019, Chega has grown exponentially and has become the third political force. This study aimed to explore how Ventura represents different members of Portuguese society. We examine what meanings are reproduced to configure social representations about different category groups, adopting Critical Discourse Analysis tools to explore how they were mobilised as legitimate. We analysed 253 posts shared by Ventura on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram from the 22nd of December 2020 to the 22nd of January 2021, a month before the 2021 presidential elections. Our analysis suggests that Ventura represents a reality in which only he can save the “good Portuguese” from the threats of three main enemies: Roma people, Black people, and so-called “antifascist” activists. We discuss how those representations relate to what has been found in other contexts and their implications for the promotion of discrimination and marginalisation of these groups in Portugal. We also point out the potential benefits of integrating Critical Discourse Analysis methodological tools for the development of the Theory of Social Representations. Please refer to the Supplementary

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1 | INTRODUCTION

In several countries, Far-Right Political Parties (henceforth FRPPs) have more than tripled their support in the last decades (Bos & Van der Brug, 2010; Müller, 2017). Portugal was considered for a long time an exception to the success of far-right political parties in Europe (Mendes & Dennison, 2020), but in the 2019 Portuguese general elections, André Ventura, founder and leader of the political party Chega (Enough), was elected member of parliament. This election marked “a watershed moment in Portuguese democratic history” (Fernandes & Magalhães, 2020, p. 1038) as, for the first time in the country, an FRPP gained parliamentary representation. In 2021, Ventura was the third-most-voted candidate in the presidential elections, and in 2022 after legislative elections, 11 members of Chega joined Ventura as members of the Portuguese Parliament.

Because of this increasing electoral support for Chega, we consider it important to analyse how Ventura discursively represents minoritized groups. This is particularly relevant because Chega's electoral campaigns have been characterised by the defence of immediate deportations of immigrants and the representation of minoritized groups as outlaws (Fernandes & Magalhães, 2020). Despite the increased literature on the topic, to the best of our knowledge, social representations configured in the discourse of Ventura have remained unexplored. In addition, despite the impact the performance on online platforms has in the success of far-right politicians (e.g., Burke, 2018; Da Silva, 2018), there is still a lack of focus on how far-right leaders mobilise representations as being common sense to masquerade deeply discriminatory and xenophobic views of the world, particularly on social media. Although there is no unique method to explore social representations, by combining the social representations theory with a discourse analysis approach, this article shows how by drawing on methodological tools from Critical Discursive Analysis, it is possible to analyse the ways in which discursive strategies are used to mitigate potential accusations of extremism when mobilising social representations promoting and sustaining the marginalisation of minoritized groups.

1.1 | The rise of Chega and the far-right ideology

The far-right remained marginal in Portugal until very recently and it was unexpected that an FRPP would gain enough support to get a seat in parliament (Da Silva, 2018; Marchi, 2016). This trend changed in October 2019, when the then six-month-old party Chega obtained 67,502 votes in the general elections and its leader, André Ventura, was elected member of parliament (Comissão Nacional de Eleições, 2019). In October 2020, Chega guaranteed two seats in the parliament of the autonomous region of Azores; in January 2021, Ventura occupied third place in Chega's first presidential elections (Ministério da Administração Interna, 2021); and in 2022, Chega became the third political force in the country, with 12 members of parliament elected in the Portuguese general elections (Jones, 2022).

Chega's members define their party as the one that will defend Portugal's national traditions from what they consider a threat to the country: LGBTIQ+ rights and gender education, feminist organisations and the consolidation of hate crimes, and migration fluxes threatening the cultural identity of Portugal (Chega, 2019). Similar to other

FRPPs in Europe (see Figgou et al., 2011), there is a trend to equalise immigrants with criminals, presenting migration and security as inseparable issues.

FRPPs are often characterised by sharing and promoting social representations that sustain nationalism, nativism, and authoritarianism (Mendes & Dennison, 2020). Many scholars argue that the leaders of FRPPs promote exclusionary chauvinist discourses that encourage the idea of a homogeneous nation (Bos & Van der Brug, 2010; Wodak & KhosraviNik, 2013), mobilising followers by creating and shaping the identity of the “good people” they claim to truly and prototypically represent (Haslam et al., 2011; Moffitt, 2016; Reicher et al., 2005). “Good people” is a common term in populist discourses that far-right politicians have adopted to refer to the categorical group they affirm to represent their nation, whilst those excluded from that group are signified as a threat (Chauhan & Foster, 2014; Müller, 2017). Although anyone can be configured as a threat (Wodak, 2015), far-right politicians tend to point to minoritized people and hold them accountable for socioeconomic problems (Jay et al., 2019; Merino et al., 2021).

Previous studies on the far-right in European countries have shown that ethnicity, religion, and birthplace are usually emphasised to dichotomise society between “good” and “bad” people (Phelps et al., 2012). Assigning negative meanings to minoritized groups is defined as discursive discrimination (Boréus, 2013), a practice that may encourage the marginalisation of people who are being discriminated against (Lozada, 2004). For instance, negative representations of Romanies have legitimised their dehumanisation and symbolic exclusion from national memberships across Europe (Kende et al., 2021; Tileagă, 2006).

Although the number of immigrants in Portugal increased between 2015 and 2019 (Reis et al., 2020), immigration is often not considered a main concern in the country (Eurobarometer, 2020). However, previous research focusing on how supporters of far-right parties oppose immigration identified that representations of immigrants as “guests” who threaten the country's traditions and receive more benefits than those defined as natives were marginally reproduced in Portugal (Fernandes-Jesus et al., 2022). Once in Parliament, Ventura brought such representations into the public sphere, something that had been unusual in Portugal's democratic history.

1.2 | Far-right discursive strategies mobilising discriminatory representations

When confronted with unfamiliar situations, such as the emergence of an FRPP (Orfali, 2006), people make use of the meanings reproduced in their cultures to make sense of the strange and turn it into a familiar object (Jodelet, 1986; Moscovici, 1988). These sets of meanings configure what is theoretically known as *social representations*, the contents of common-sense knowledge (Jodelet, 1986). Consequently, examining meanings that are being reproduced in a particular context allows us to explore the social representations that are being configured.

Social representations are constantly co-elaborated and negotiated through the use of language (Kilby, 2016; Marková, 2000), emerging in argumentative contexts whether to maintain or challenge existing understandings (Howarth, 2006). Discourse analysis is thus deemed an appropriate approach when studying how certain representations are upgraded upon others.

Despite there have been different proposals to integrate the Theory of Social Representations (TSR) and Discursive Psychology (Batel & Castro, 2018; Gibson, 2015), in this study we use Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as an analytical tool to examine how social representations configured by politicians are mobilised through discursive strategies. CDA is a theoretical and methodological approach concerned with the way inequalities and oppression are constituted and legitimated in language (Wodak, 2001). Furthermore, we draw on Amer and Howarth (2018), who used CDA tools to examine how white British Muslims are represented as a threat in the public sphere. We seek to build on this work and explore further the potential of integrating CDA methodological tools when exploring the way politicians configure social representations that legitimise discrimination and marginalisation as common-sense.

Politicians tend to mobilise different meanings in their utterances to establish what should be understood of particular identities and events (De Cillia et al., 1999). It is through language that far-right politicians shape exclusionary identities, and it is through discursive strategies that they appeal to their audiences to adopt their views (Capdevila & Callaghan, 2008; Durrheim et al., 2018; Staerklé & Green, 2018). Discursive strategies are understood as plans of action employed to position a particular representation of something above others (De Cillia et al., 1999). Far-right politicians tend to present themselves as victims of other people's actions to appeal to public support for discriminatory policies (Van der Valk, 2003). Metonymies or referring to things that stand for the whole (e.g., mentioning a country instead of particular people) have been used to promote nationalist identities (De Cillia et al., 1999), whilst metaphors have been employed to naturalise processes that perpetuate social inequalities (Koller, 2020). Strategies such as authorisation (referring to social authorities), and actor description (how the way someone is described reflects membership to social categories) are often used by FRPPs to legitimise marginalisation (Amer & Howarth, 2018). Marginalisation is understood as the socio-political process in which certain people are made vulnerable by being excluded from dominant, central experiences of their society (Hall, 1999).

In recent years, far-right leaders have used social media to develop their campaigns (Merino et al., 2021; Moffitt, 2016). In the Iberian context, this has not been an exception. For instance, the Spanish FRPP Vox makes use of social media to mobilise nativism, traditionalism, and national unity (Aladro-Vico & Requeijo-Rey, 2020; Ramón-Antón & Baptista, 2022). Likewise, Chega promoted a sense of insecurity on its Twitter account during the campaign for the last legislative elections (Ramón-Antón & Baptista, 2022).

Discourses promoting discrimination and marginalisation do not belong exclusively to political parties categorised as far-right. However, FRPP politicians tend to be the ones setting the agenda and mobilising representations that end up being adopted by mainstream parties and the media (Brown et al., 2023). Therefore, in this study, we have decided to focus exclusively on the discourse of the leader of Chega.

Chega has guaranteed an official voice in national and regional parliaments and has received enough support to be considered a serious political contender (Fernandes & Magalhães, 2020; Mendes & Dennison, 2020), which makes the rise of an FRPP a contemporary issue in Portugal. Since most of Ventura's political campaigns have been done through social media (Mendes, 2020), in this article, we explore the social representations of different categorical groups that are reproduced by the leader of Chega on his social media accounts, along with the discursive strategies that help mobilise those representations whilst avoiding negative accusations.

2 | METHOD

Considering that people tend to pay more attention to the discourse of politicians during election periods (Song & Boomgaarden, 2017), we collected all the posts Ventura shared on his Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts from the 22nd of December 2020 to the 22nd of January 2021, the last month of the political campaign before the presidential elections the 24th of January. We collected a total of 294 posts. To gain access to more restrictive platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, an account was set up with the only purpose of being able to see Ventura publications. Since each social media has its particular architecture and functionality (see Alhabash & Ma, 2017), we focused on the texts—*captions*—that accompanied Ventura's publications as they were the common factor among the three platforms. Posts that did not include a caption were excluded, along with those that only announced dates and times of political rallies, leaving a total of 253 posts for analysis: 113 from Facebook, 116 from Twitter, and 24 from Instagram. None of the posts were a reply to other publications. All the captions were translated into English by the authors.

Meanings reproduced in a particular context have the potential to configure social representations and shape the ways in which people understand certain realities (Gibson, 2015). To explore the meanings of different categorical groups mobilised by Ventura and the social representations they configure, we started by breaking down each of the 253 captions into its different clauses. A clause is defined as “the basic [linguistic] unit in expressing meaning”

(Sriwimon & Zilli, 2017, p. 138). Take for instance the caption: “You can protest, but you won't be able to stop this movement. The good Portuguese are waking up!” (11-01-21). Considering that the news headline shared with the caption allows us to understand “You” as Roma people, at least five clauses can be identified in these two sentences: Roma people protest Ventura; Ventura is the target of protests; Ventura (and Chega) are unstoppable; the good Portuguese are becoming aware; and Roma people are not part of the good Portuguese.

After breaking all the captions down, the clauses were coded and grouped according to the subject or group membership they mentioned. Following this process, three categories were generated for the analysis. Considering the meanings associated with the subjects of each category, it was possible to explore what social representations were configured about them. It was only after the analysis of the representations mobilised by Ventura that we named the three categories as (a) The saviour of the good people, (b) The victimised good Portuguese, and (c) The enemies of Portugal.

Adopting Critical Discourse Analysis as a methodological tool, we proceed to look at the way discursive strategies, such as metaphors and victimisation, reduce negative repercussions when mobilising common sense to legitimise discrimination and marginalisation.

3 | ANALYSIS

We generate three analytical categories (see Figure 1) in accordance with the categorical groups identified in Ventura's discourse. The first category includes elements related to Ventura's self-presentation. The second category addresses the group constructed as the “good people”. The third category includes representations of those configured as a threat to society. The meanings reproduced for each category and the discursive strategies used to mobilise their representations are presented and discussed in detail below.

3.1 | “The saviour of the good people”

Ventura represented himself in many ways. First, he presented himself as a leader who truly understands people's concerns and seeks the political change that, he claims, everyone expects: “[...] the desire for change that rages in the heart of every Portuguese person” (29-12-20). Along with his portrayal as the national leader desired by every Portuguese person, Ventura is portrayed as embodying not everyone but the *good Portuguese* exclusively “[...] The Government will have to be for the good people” (26-12-20); “[...] my conviction is unshakable, and I will continue to fight for the good Portuguese!” (16-01-21). Whilst the reference to all Portuguese highlights that Ventura is the one who truly understands the desire of the entire nation, the reference to the “good Portuguese” appears as an exclusionary device as it implies that the Portuguese nation is made up only of those defined in that way. Affirming that the government should be only for “the good people” attempts to normalise and make it acceptable to discriminate against those who remain outside of this categorical group.

Metaphors drawing on natural and religious discourses were common discursive strategies that reinforce as factual the representation of the leader of Chega as being an unstoppable saviour: “A hurricane that will fill the Portuguese with hope [...]” (31-12-20). These metaphors shift the argument to an ontological level, whether because Ventura is “A force of nature” (29-12-20) or “A sign from heaven” (10-01-21) rather than a regular political leader.

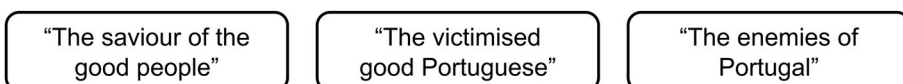


FIGURE 1 Categorical groups represented in Ventura's discourse.

Drawing on Christian symbolism in a country in which 84.77% of the population define themselves as Christians (Statistics Portugal, 2021) works in reinforcing Ventura's representation as the messiah who will save the Portuguese people. This representation echoes what has been identified in previous research, in which leaders of FRPPs portray themselves as the saviours of the people (Bos & Van der Brug, 2010). Consequently, Ventura appears as the chosen force who is inevitably destined to triumph and lead Portugal, leaving people with the decision to choose between an inevitable winner or the loser candidates.

Ventura also represented himself as embodying the Portuguese people and traditional values. He defined himself as being a responsible, honest, humble, and hardworking person who always tells the truth, respects the law, and loves his country: "The only candidate against corruption [...]" (22-01-21); "Portugal needs a new hope, someone who believes and loves their country. I humbly hope that the Portuguese will give me that opportunity!" (18-01-21). Defining himself in this way strengthens his representation as "the living embodiment of the nation" (Reicher et al., 2005, p. 557), mobilising the idea that everything Ventura says or does is on behalf of and in accordance with the "good people". Moreover, similar to what Hagelund (2003) identified in other contexts, the strategy of representing himself as a good and decent person serves Ventura as a moral shield when introducing discriminatory political proposals.

Ventura also represented himself as a victim who is constantly attacked, pursued, silenced, and boycotted, elevating the sanctions he receives to national issues. In response to a fine from the Commission for Equality and Against Racial Discrimination because of discriminatory publications on social media against the Roma community in 2017, Ventura posted: "WHAT A DISGRACE! How to solve the problem with minorities? Give Ventura a fine!" (22-12-20). The roles of victim and perpetrator are also frequently reversed: "[...] freedom of expression is worth very little when it comes to pursuing an opposition political leader" (22-12-20). Sanctions for hate speech are reframed and presented not only as a matter of political persecution, which positions Ventura as a victim but also as an attack on a human right (freedom of expression), implying that everyone should be offended and thus be on Ventura's side. Through the discursive victimisation strategy, Ventura claims the moral high ground, and by generalising his experiences as being those of the people, his representation as the leader who embodies the nation is reinforced.

The representation of Ventura as the only candidate who embodies a renovated hope implies that Portugal is in despair whilst others have failed. Equally, stating that there is a need to fight for "the good Portuguese" implies that this constructed group is under attack. This reality in which the country appears submerged in a crisis and good people is being attacked provides the rhetorical conditions that make it possible to represent certain groups in the country as responsible (see "The Enemies of Portugal" section below).

3.2 | "The victimised good Portuguese"

The imaginary group Ventura claims to embody is referred to as *the good Portuguese*, those who recognise Ventura as the politician who truly understands the people, or will eventually do so. They are signified as victims of a government that does not privilege them and acts against their well-being: "[...] a special word for agriculture, the countryside and the food and beverage industry, which the Government has completely abandoned" (19-01-21); "[...] we have to maintain rationality and avoid absurdities that are destroying jobs, companies, and killing the Portuguese for reasons other than Covid-19" (04-01-21). This representation of the "good Portuguese" as victims positions them as in need of a political leader that will save them and put them at the centre of the Government's privileges; in other words, this representation serves to provide the rhetorical conditions that allow Ventura to be represented as the people's saviour.

As can be seen in the last two posts, functionalisation appears as a common discursive strategy in which the Portuguese people are referred to in terms of their activities, occupations, or roles (see Van Leeuwen, 1995), such as teachers, nurses, fishermen, small merchants, restaurant employees, farmers, and police officers. Being a "good

Portuguese” is thus associated with being a hard worker. In addition, by claiming that Europe should be for Europeans (“We are already in Lisbon with Marine Le Pen, for a Europe of Europeans” [08-01-21]), Ventura represents the “Good Portuguese” as being heirs of a particular cultural tradition. Hence, the hard-working and the European representations, rather than opposing each other, appear as complementary: only those hard workers who are considered native Europeans belong to the “good Portuguese” category.

By stating that “[...] The good Portuguese are waking up!” (11-01-21) Ventura assumes that his views are widely shared, expecting them to eventually resonate with the whole population. This implies that the category “good Portuguese” does not only include Ventura’s supporters but also those conceived as hard workers Europeans who have not yet endorsed Ventura’s discourse. This way, the boundaries of the category group remain open and flexible to be applied beyond the current group of Ventura’s supporters. This flexibility, however, keeps some boundaries more stable in relation to certain groups than others, as we show in the following sections.

Referring to Portugal as an actor and invoking Portuguese cities rather than particular people, also contributes to mobilising the representation of the Portuguese people as in need of Ventura. Using metonyms, the actions of Ventura’s supporters are generalised to all those located in the mentioned place, depicting their support as an expression of consensus whilst excluding the voices of those opposing his discriminatory proposals.

Overall, representing the “good Portuguese” as a group of hard-working European people sets the categorical boundaries that divide them from those represented as a threat. This way, Ventura appears as an “entrepreneur of identity” (Reicher et al., 2005), constructing the group of “good people” in Portugal, establishing the boundaries of their identity, and creating a sense of belonging to the same group (Haslam et al., 2011). Moreover, representing the “good people” as frustrated reinforces Ventura’s representation as the leader who will deliver their expected change and save them from those represented as a threat.

3.3 | “The enemies of Portugal”

Roma people, Black people, and anti-fascist activists were represented in Ventura’s discourse as threats to Portuguese society.

The Roma community, historically one of the most discriminated groups across Europe (Kende et al., 2021), is represented as a problematic ethnic group. This representation is supported in two ways. First, Ventura defined Roma as lazy people living at the expense of social benefits and the hard work of others: “Those who have nothing else to do and don’t like to work chase my candidacy across the country. You can see: the privileges are ending!” (14-01-21). The headlines of the news accompanying Ventura’s captions allow us to interpret whom Ventura was referring to: “Go to work, to work! André Ventura shouted towards demonstrators, most of whom were Roma” (headline from *Jornal de Negócios*, 2021). Representing the Roma as exploiting welfare policies, Ventura reinforces a dissociation where “the hard-working good people” appear as victims of social neglect. Defining vulnerable groups as abusers in this way, which is a recurring discursive strategy of FRPPs (De Cillia et al., 1999; Hagelund, 2003), may contribute to their marginalisation and perpetuate the historical violation of Roma people’s rights in Portugal (see Silva et al., 2014).

Second, members of Roma communities are represented as criminal and aggressive people who constantly attack the “good Portuguese” and constitute a danger to society: “Fines and more fines for saying that it was people of Roma ethnicity who committed a certain crime (when in fact they have!!!) [...]” (23-12-20). The fines Ventura received because of his discriminatory discourses are signified as an attack on his freedom of expression, claiming that opinions about minoritized groups should be freely expressed: “I’ll say it again, no matter how many fines I get, we have a problem in Portugal [referring to Roma People]! Not wanting to see it is hypocrisy, it’s denying what is obvious” (22-12-20). Since people are constantly negotiating what should be considered the normal or commonsensical understanding of an event (Kilby, 2016), claiming to know the “obvious reality” or “what actually happened” constitutes a powerful discursive strategy to present arguments as factual, whilst portraying opposite views as

unreasonable. In addition, the repetitive use of exclamation marks works in mobilising people to recognise and accept the reality reproduced in Ventura's discourse (see Busch, 2021; Naidoo, 2015). The more exclamation marks, the stronger the sense of urgency in accepting the conveyed meanings about Roma people as factual.

Considering the last two captions, the claim of factuality achieves three different functions. First, by arguing that saying what is considered "truth" cannot be racist, Ventura mitigates accusations of extremism, which is an important discursive manoeuvre to maintain the party's success and achievement in a country where no far-right party had previously obtained official representation in parliament (Mendes & Dennison, 2020). Second, presenting Ventura's utterances as just stating "obvious" facts positions others as perpetrators for falsely accusing him of racism. Thirdly, since that version of reality must be understood as a fact, it serves to legitimise discrimination against the targeted minoritized groups.

Regarding Black people, they remain backgrounded in Ventura's captions, that is, despite not being mentioned explicitly, it is possible to infer their reference in two ways. First, a neighbourhood that is known for being inhabited mostly by Black people is mentioned. Second, the picture accompanying the captions, which is crucial to understand the context of the utterance (see Figure 2), portrays the political contender Marcelo de Sousa surrounded by seven members of an African-Portuguese family with the caption: "Marcelo was next to bandits and criminals, he even left sympathetic words to people who are not at all recommendable [...]" (22-01-21). Thus, Black people are represented as untrustworthy and as acting against the law, and a threat to the "good Portuguese". Contrasting that, Ventura



FIGURE 2 Ventura in the middle of the top half: "I prefer the good Portuguese. Vote for André Ventura". Source: Ventura's Facebook and Twitter accounts. Published the 22nd of January 2021.

positioned himself in the same picture surrounded only by white men, reinstating that Black people do not belong to the “good Portuguese”.

Moreover, stating that Europe should be for Europeans (see above), reflects the traditional fascist ideal of Europe being only inhabited by those defined as white Indo-Europeans (Von Eggers, 2021). Biological and cultural differences are emphasised in Ventura's discourse, representing Black people as a threat to the “good Portuguese”. This representation has been used to legitimise opposition to those who do not look like white, catholic Europeans in Southern European countries (Fernandes-Jesus et al., 2022). Thus, the historical representation of Portuguese society as living in multicultural harmony (see Valentim & Heleno, 2018) is problematised and stops being taken for granted.

The third group represented as an “enemy of Portugal” are those who criticise and protest against Ventura. They are defined as lazy people who are satisfied with the current state of affairs: “[...] those who prefer to do nothing and who are very happy with the direction of the country, have tried to damage my campaign again [...]” (18-01-21). Defining them as not having any critique against the Government establishes a category distinction that divides them from those who want a political change, that is, people wanting change should be supporting Ventura.

Interestingly, Ventura shared media headlines in which demonstrators were called “antifascists”, but when the media headline did not refer to demonstrators in that way, it was Ventura who employed the term: “Go work! That's what I'm going to say to all the antifas [...]” (14-01-21). If those protesting Ventura are “antifas”, therefore the same argument implies that Ventura is a fascist. Since the label of extremist has been resisted, then it would be expected that the label of “fascist” would also be resisted in Ventura's discourse. This tension of calling his opponents “antifascists” is solved by representing them as lazy people. Hence, both fascism and antifascism are re-signified into new and de-politicised categories, where being a “fascist” should be understood as being a “hard-worker patriot”. It is not political ideology that separates those groups, it is their engagement with work (or lack of it) that distinguishes the two.

Having represented the Portuguese context as being in despair and Ventura as the strong, authentic people's leader who will save the victimised “good Portuguese”, the rhetorical conditions were set to portray certain members of the Portuguese society as responsible. Roma and Black people were represented as exploiters and criminals. Furthermore, by claiming that those representations are factual descriptions of reality, these representations are mobilised as just reflecting people's common sense, shifting any responsibility for discriminatory utterances from the speaker onto the general public (see Burke & Demasi, *in press*, on how politicians appeal to common sense to manage accountability). Additionally, both Roma and Black categories appear as the only exclusion criteria from belonging to the “good Portuguese” categorical group, whilst those who protest Ventura are represented as fools who do not see, at least yet, the “obvious” reality he claims to know. The boundaries of the “good Portuguese” remain this way flexible for anyone in the country as long as they are not defined as Roma or Black.

4 | CONCLUSIONS

Considering that far-right politicians tend to mobilise representations promoting discrimination and marginalisation, this study aimed to explore how André Ventura, leader of the Portuguese political party Chega, represented minoritized groups and employed discursive strategies to mobilise those representations as factual on his Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts during the month before the 2021 presidential elections.

Our analysis illustrates how Ventura, making use of his social power as a political leader, represents a reality in which the “good Portuguese”, a group of hard-working European people, are being abused by three enemies: Roma people, Black people, and anti-fascist activists. But there is a hero who will risk everything to defend the “good people”: Ventura.

As previously found in other contexts (Aladro-Vico & Requeijo-Rey, 2020; Boréus, 2013; Phelps et al., 2012; Ramón-Antón & Baptista, 2022), stimulating a sense of emergency and insecurity was a common feature in Ventura's discourse on social media. Drawing on heroic tales that are typical of populist discourses, far-right politicians

represent reality as a story between “good” and “bad” people to entice their audiences to take sides and support their political projects, which generally include discrimination against minoritized people (Burke, 2018; De Cillia et al., 1999; Hagelund, 2003; Staerklé & Green, 2018; Van der Valk, 2003). Whilst Ventura presented himself in diverse and positive ways (a decent person, a strong hero, a martyr, a saviour, a politician who is close to those represented as the “good Portuguese”), Roma and Black people were exclusively represented as a threat and responsible for a so-called decline of Portugal. This exclusive attribution of negative meanings when representing Roma and Black people might promote their harmful understanding, which ultimately would lead to their marginalisation (Lozada, 2004).

In this study, we used Critical Discourse Analysis as a methodological tool to inform how social representations were mobilised using discursive strategies, such as victimisation, authorisation, actor description, and the use of metonyms and metaphors to mitigate accusations of extremism or fascism. In addition, mobilising representations as if they were common sense contributed to strengthening the stark distinction between the “good Portuguese” and their “enemies” as an objective undeniable reflection of reality.

Particularly, appealing to common sense and claiming to know the *ultimate* truth was a strategy often employed in the discourse of Ventura to legitimise the marginalisation of minoritized groups. We identified how his discourse makes the incorporation of different views unpalatable by mobilising rigid representations. *Semantic barriers* (Gillespie, 2008) are placed to avoid space for plurality and deliberation, both necessary features of a healthy democracy (Harel et al., 2020). Furthermore, associating “good people” with “good workers” shows how the discourse of the extreme right reproduces a neoliberal conception of citizenship, positioning people's value in the context of market relationships, which easily resonates in contemporary society (Santos et al., 2023).

Understanding representations legitimising discrimination and marginalisation may help to develop and reproduce alternative ones that point towards more humane and democratic societies (Merino et al., 2021). We also recognise that criticising discriminatory discourses in the public sphere carries the risk of reproducing and reinforcing their contents (Koller, 2020). So rather than replying directly to those negative representations of minoritized communities, we argue that mobilising different and positive representations can contribute to resisting such discriminatory views whilst legitimising humane relationships in society. This can be done in the media, for instance, since media contents have the power to reproduce social knowledge and influence the way people understand certain realities (Chauhan & Foster, 2014; Pardo, 2006).

For this study, we only focused on the captions of the posts and did not look at the engagement created by the posts. A multimodal study will be relevant to explore how the representations identified are reinforced through other discursive modalities. Future studies should also look at the interaction between posts and comments to better understand how the audiences receive or resist the meanings that configure representations about different members of Portugal society.

In sum, our analysis shows how Ventura, the leader of the increasingly popular Chega party, promotes representations that try to legitimise the marginalisation of Roma and Black people in Portugal by appealing to common sense. In our analysis, it was possible to see how relevant it is for far-right politicians to discursively depict society as being in an imminent crisis to mobilise negative representations of minoritized groups and hold them accountable. In addition, we aimed to illustrate how using Critical Discourse Analysis as an analytical device provides researchers with fruitful tools to explore how social representations are mobilised to achieve particular social ends. Concretely, we propose that discursive strategies identified in previous CDA studies can inform social psychological studies focusing on the way social representations are reproduced in a particular context. By adopting this approach, we see how social representations presented as “obvious” and common-sensical serve to mitigate potential negative repercussions when promoting discriminatory and marginalising discourses.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

No conflict of interest exists in the submission of this manuscript. For more information, please contact Daniel Garcia-Jaramillo at d.garcia-jaramillo@shu.ac.uk.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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ENDNOTE

¹ Content deliberately deleted for illustrating purposes.

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