

# THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE CHARACTER 'ANDRÉ VENTURA' IN THE PORTUGUESE PRESS: the politician's profile in Revista E



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**ABSTRACT** – Bearing in mind the narrative nature of journalism (Mesquita, 2003; Motta, 2013; Lits, 2015) and the potential to construct reality (Tuchman, 2002), the study focuses on one of the main categories of narrative (Reis, 2006, 2018). Therefore, we will analyze the character's construction of 'André Ventura' in a particular journalistic genre: the profile. The goal is to unveil whether his figuration reflects and/or exacerbates characteristics of a populist leader, based on four categories of analysis: typification, discourse, characterization and lexicalization (Marques, 2016; Peixinho & Marques, 2016). The focus of the narrative was his career as a politician and the different procedures for characterizing the character demonstrate that the protagonist possesses and shares typical characteristics of a populist leader (Zúquete, 2022), such as aggressiveness and demarcation in relation to 'corrupt elites'. The conclusions support the ambivalent role that journalism can play by covering politicians and populist phenomena.

**Key words:** Character. Populism. Profile. André Ventura. Messianic.

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## **A CONSTRUÇÃO DA PERSONAGEM 'ANDRÉ VENTURA' NA IMPRENSA PORTUGUESA: o perfil do político na Revista E**

**RESUMO** – Partindo da natureza narrativa do jornalismo (Mesquita, 2003; Motta, 2013; Lits, 2015) e do potencial para construir a realidade (Tuchman, 2002), o estudo versa sobre uma das categorias centrais da narrativa (Reis, 2006, 2018). Assim, analisaremos a construção da personagem 'André Ventura' em um gênero jornalístico em particular: o perfil. O objetivo é desvendar se a sua figuração reflete e/ou exacerba características de um líder populista, partindo de quatro categorias de análise: tipificação, discurso, caracterização e lexicalização (Marques, 2016; Peixinho & Marques, 2016). O foco da narrativa foi o seu percurso como político e os diferentes procedimentos de caracterização da personagem, que demonstram que o protagonista possui e partilha características típicas de um líder populista (Zúquete, 2022), tais como a agressividade e a demarcação em relação às 'élites corruptas'. As conclusões suportam o caráter ambivalente que o jornalismo pode desempenhar na cobertura de políticos e fenômenos populistas.

**Palavras-chave:** Personagem. Populismo. Perfil. André Ventura. Messiânico.

## **LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DEL PERSONAJE 'ANDRÉ VENTURA' EN LA PRENSA PORTUGUESA: el perfil del político en la Revista E**

**RESUMEN** – Partiendo del carácter narrativo del periodismo (Mesquita, 2003; Motta, 2013; Lits, 2015) y del potencial para construir la realidad (Tuchman, 2002), el estudio se centra en una de las categorías centrales de la narrativa (Reis, 2006, 2018). Por eso, analizaremos la construcción del personaje 'André Ventura' en un género periodístico particular: el perfil. El objetivo es develar si su figuración refleja y/o exacerba características de un líder populista, partiendo de cuatro categorías de análisis: tipificación, discurso, caracterización y lexicalización (Marques, 2016; Peixinho & Marques, 2016). El foco de la narrativa fue su carrera como político y los diferentes procedimientos para caracterizar al personaje demuestran que el protagonista posee y comparte características típicas de un líder populista (Zúquete, 2022), como la agresividad y la demarcación en relación con las 'élites corruptas'. Las conclusiones respaldan la naturaleza ambivalente que puede desempeñar el periodismo al cubrir a políticos y fenómenos populistas.

**Palabras clave:** Personaje. Populismo. Perfil. André Ventura. Mesiano.

### **1 Introduction**

Published in 2021, the journalistic profile<sup>[1]</sup> written by the journalist Vítor Matos stands out for going beyond the content and the interviews that have been conducted with Chega's leader, André Ventura. The profile *Entre Deus e o Diabo* [Between God and the Devil] was published in Revista E, following a resignation and the subsequent politician's candidacy for re-election as the party leader. After having achieved third place in the Portuguese presidential elections of 2021, with 11.90% of the votes, André Ventura promised to make his position available. His re-election as the leader of the party he founded in April 2019 took place on March 6, 2021.

Following the increase of the number of deputies from Chega in the Assembly of the Republic of Portugal, which, in 2024, after the legislative elections on March 10, reached 50 deputies, national and international studies (Antón & Batista, 2022; Dias, 2022; Mendes, 2021; Prior, 2022; Rivas-de-Roca et al., 2022; Serrano, 2020, 2022) about Chega and its key figure have multiplied. A reality that cannot ignore the international context set by the rise of various leaders and radical right parties (Mudde, 2020) to governmental positions of power – whose agenda Chega shares (Mendes, 2021) – has influenced the heightened academic, media, and political focus.

In the informative media, journalism and its professionals are still struggling to understand the formula (if it exists) to deal with these phenomena. In Portugal, there have been a lot of news, interviews, reports, and investigation works about the theme, such as *A Grande Ilusão*, coordinated by Pedro Coelho, a journalist from SIC, or even the journalistic investigations led by Miguel Carvalho, published in *Visão*. Therefore, the theme is also being studied in the theoretical field of Communication Sciences, from the mediatic representations to the analysis of their leaders' discourses until the political communication strategies of their parties (e.g. Cunha et al., 2022; Dias, 2022; Freitas & Simões, 2023; Heyne & Manucci, 2021; Marchi, 2020; Mendes, 2021; Novais, 2022, 2023; Prior, 2022; Ramos Antón & Baptista, 2022).

Thus, the present research follows an approach grounded in the theoretical framework of the media narrative studies “that focus on the potential and semi-narrative practice of communication and meaning production media, in their technical uniqueness, in the diversity of their languages and formats, and in the effects they provoke” (Reis, 2018, p. 132). To these theoretical frameworks, we will cross-reference the bibliography on populism and radical right parties as a starting point to understand the characteristics of the phenomenon and its leaders. After, we will focus our analysis on the construction of the character ‘André Ventura’ in the journalistic profile in *Revista E*.

By starting from the perspective of the narrative nature of journalism (Mesquita, 2003; Motta, 2013; Lits, 2015), which does not undermine its commitment to truth (Marques, 2016; Peixinho, 2014; Reis, 2018), as well as its potential to construct reality (Tuchman, 2002), the goal of this study is to understand whether the figuration<sup>21</sup> of the character ‘André Ventura’ reflects and/or exacerbates the

characteristics of a populist leader (Zúquete, 2022). We will start with four categories of analysis: typification, discourse, characterization, and lexicalization. (Marques, 2016; Peixinho & Marques, 2016).

At first, we will problematize the characteristics of journalistic narratives, as well as the role played by the characters in these universes. We will not forget also, the specificity of the journalistic profile as a genre, in which the character is the central figure. A focus on populism follows these reflections as a weak ideology (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017; Mudde, 2020), alongside the fundamental characteristics typified by its leaders. Finally, the empirical study of the construction of the protagonist in *Entre Deus e o Diabo*.

## 2 The role of the character in the journalistic narrative

When we read, hear, see, and/or interact with a narrative, regardless of its connection to reality, what captures our attention and compels us to follow the thread of that narrative world (Ryan, 2021a)? We would say that the answer, in our point of view, lies in what we consider the central category of the narrative (Marques, 2016; Peixinho, 2014; Reis, 2006, 2018): the character. After all, if the “narrative world is someone’s world, it is the world of the characters” (Ryan, 2021a, p. 205).

But what can we understand as narrative? Narrative is one term that, like media, runs through public discourse indiscriminately with polysemic uses. Its popularity was and is such “that it drastically diluted its meaning” (Ryan, 2021b, p. 33), which makes its conceptualization urgent. According to Carlos Reis (2018, p. 305), author of the most recent edition (2018) of the *Dicionário dos Estudos Narrativos*, which recovers the main contributions of classical narratology and incorporates new approaches from authors such as Monika Fludernik, “narrative is the representation of a world, centered on anthropomorphic entities (namely, characters) and anchored in temporal and spatial coordinates that guide certain actions towards an ending”. Marie-Laure Ryan points out that, although we can consider narrative as the result of the “combination of story and discourse ...), it can evoke stories in the mind that distinguishes the narrative discourse” (2021b, p. 35).

According to the same author, the different media do not have similar narrative potential (Ryan, 2021b). Consequently, the

author develops a scale of narrative based on its relationship with the universe of representation (Ryan, 2019, 2021b). The journalistic narrative fits into the epistemological category of strong factuality (Ryan, 2019), because of its close connection with the truth of the world that constructs and represents (Tuchman, 2002), and whose pact of veracity is set in the different deontological and ethical codes of the profession.

Gerard Genette (1990) defended the specific and independent study of factual narratives, overcoming the prejudice of the embryonic connection between narratology with literature and fictionality. In her view, Maria Augusta Babo (1996) points out that the textual procedures of fictional narratives are formally the same as those of factual narratives, as is the case with the construction of journalistic narratives. We highlight the contributions of Genette (1990) and Eco (2019) that emphasize the existence of protocols that allow readers and users to distinguish the universality of representation they are engaging with, from the medium to the socio-professional status of the authorship, summarizing examples. These protocols are essential for readers, viewers, or users to manage their expectations of factuality regarding the universe they are dealing with.

Recalling the narrative turn in the 1980s that opened the door for the social sciences (Hyvärinen, 2008), we emphasize the movement of the New Journalism and its strong link with the writing techniques associated with literature. Susan Greenberg (2014, p. 517) adds: “an engagement with literary journalism often leads to a struggle to reconcile the twin demands of truth and beauty”. The author revisits the debate on the potential devaluation of narrative journalism, which shares rhetorical-narrative procedures with fiction (Peixinho, 2014) as if this investment in story (and in stories) undermines the truthfulness of the facts. It is a discussion that overlooks the narrative procedures that are present in all journalistic discourse and genres. After all, “the narrative, by organizing, (...) establishes itself as a communicational modality for conferring meaning to reality in general” (Babo, 1996, p. 4), becoming a tool for accessing, processing, and transmitting knowledge.

Hypermedia narratives represent a cut between old and new habits of being and doing journalism, as well as its consumption (Bastos, 2005). Digital media narratives and tools offer an “alternative to the objectifying form of traditional journalistic writing” (Lits, 2015, p. 18), which means that the very figuration of characters,

as protagonists of these narratives, is influenced by multimediality. Hence, the author advocates for an emerging “hyper-narratology”. In the Portuguese case, a study conducted by Inês Fonseca Marques and Ana Teresa Peixinho on the Impresa group revealed that storytelling techniques began to gain significant prominence “in the process of character development, which ultimately translates into a humanization of narratives” (2016, p. 159) and is reflected in the new hyper-mediated and mediated narratives.

The character thus positions herself as “the axis of the conflict around which the entire intrigue revolves” (Motta, 2013, p. 174), regardless of the nature of the narrative. In journalistic narratives, these characters also assume the status of sources to whom voice is given (or not). In reports, the daily news, or journalistic profiles, their construction and representation are also the responsibility of other sources, which directly and indirectly characterize a certain character, like “figures manufactured by discourse” (Motta, 2013, p. 190).

The figuration itself, as a central concept when studying the character, is a procedure

[that] is dynamic, gradual, and complex, meaning three things: first, that it rarely exhausts itself in a specific place in the text; second, that it develops and completes itself throughout the narrative; third, that, because of its dynamic nature, figuration is not limited to a description of a character, nor even to a characterization. (Reis, 2018, p. 166).

We cannot forget, therefore, in this context, the subjectivity of the choices that guide the journalistic process and influence the very construction of the public persona in and by the media. In other words, it is a process “that reduces the person from the ontological world to a character” (Marques, 2016, p. 50) and that Mário Mesquita describes as rudimentary mimesis, a process in its construction that “facilitates the effects of identification to the extent that it reduces the complexity of the beings portrayed” (Mesquita, 2003, p. 126). Thus, it is a procedure that involves choices made by the journalist, from the sources they choose to contact to the quotes they choose to highlight, being a figuration framed by the code that outlines and constrains the rules of the profession.

“The creation of characters is a structuring activity of journalistic practices and discourse” (Mesquita, 2003, p. 124), regardless of the genre. Nonetheless, we believe it is crucial to emphasize two situations where this process is central: the report and the profile.

By studying the case of digital reporting in the Portuguese context, Inês Fonseca Marques (2016, p. 54) puts forward her definition of a journalistic character: “any figure – individual or collective – present in a journalistic narrative, serving informational and communicational goods, constructed according to a selection of characteristics of a person with empirical existence”. We also emphasize that its study and analysis should not overlook that “the final product (...) is already the result of intersubjective, dialogical, and highly professionalized compositions” (Peixinho, 2014, p. 334), as we have been highlighting.

Regarding typology, yielding to the constraints inherent to the daily rhythm of publication, accelerated by the imperative of online media, as well as the simplifying practice of journalistic discourse, there is a tendency to construct flat characters (Peixinho, 2014), succumbing to the simplification of the “effects of identification” of the rudimentary mimesis that Mesquita (2003) discusses. They stand out for their reductive, simplistic, and static nature (Reis, 2018), relating to the representation of archetypal figures that embody characteristics of a professional class or social group using stereotyping processes.

With the profile, which will be later analyzed, we believe that it is the journalistic genre where the character reigns, because of its micro-biographic nature (Mesquita, 2003). It is “a genre of writing and research to present life stories”, allowing “to humanize journalistic sources”, whether they are “heroes” or “anti-heroes” (Reginato & Dias, 2020, p. 45). It is a ‘character’s report’ (Peixinho, 2014), which allows for the exploration of their otherness and evolution, bringing them closer to a dense character (Reis, 2018).

As such, given the relevance of the journalistic character, we will focus on one of the most common protagonists in news media: politicians. Here, we will address the issue of radical right populist actors (Mudde, 2020), a party family in which the character we will study is framed within the literature of the field. (Mendes, 2021).

### **3 The populist actors and their relationship with the media**

In the last two decades, the political and international context has been influenced by the discussion of populism, focusing particularly on right-wing movements (Zúquete, 2022). In our article, although we acknowledge its operational limitations, we will adopt its “minimal definition” (Zúquete, 2022, p. 24), which we

believe is suitable for our study, since it highlights the seminal line of the concept of populism: the 'agonistic' (Prior, 2021) view of the phenomenon that opposes an untainted people to a corrupt elite.

Our choice does not disregard, nonetheless, the perspective of other authors on a concept that has been mobilized from different viewpoints, depending on the focus and the starting point of their approach. Benjamin Moffitt (2016) specifically focuses on the performative dimension by proposing a perspective that integrates the performative, aesthetic, and relational dimensions of a particular populist actor. It is, therefore, a gradual perspective, as the author acknowledges that a leader or a party can be more or less populist over a certain period. Ernesto Laclau (2005), for instance, sees populism as an inherent logic of the nature of politics.

Still, in this article, the focus is on the perspective of authors, like Cas Mudde, who define populism as a "(weak) ideology" (2020, p. 19) that contrasts the virtuous people with a corrupt elite. The ideational approach to the complex and varied phenomenon that is populism defines it as a low-density ideology (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017), because of its mutability and the fact that it can be 'contaminated' by other denser and stronger ideologies.

With the radical right, Mudde (2020) also coined this terminology to define far-right groups that subtly accept the essence of democracy but oppose fundamental elements of liberal democracy, such as the rights of minorities and immigrants (Mudde, 2020). In this family of populist radical right parties, several parties fit in, among which Chega stands out due to its agenda proximity: "Chega's discourse is similar to that of the PRR party family, not only in its content but also in the emphasis given to the core themes that define this party family" (Mendes, 2021, p. 348). According to the author, except for European integration, Chega's party agenda reflects, even in terms of relevance, the ideologically foundational issues of this family, such as nativism, populism, and authoritarianism, which are evident in the themes of immigration, corruption, and security (Mendes, 2021).

Generally, populists are personalities with a keen media conscience, since they need these channels to convey their message, creating a reciprocal relationship. This means that populist communication, centered around a leader, much like a cult (Mudde, 2020), is a "simple, polarizing, and often personified narrative" (Zúquete, 2022, p. 37), which becomes appealing to the media



and the press, always focused on the binary of people/elite. After all, as Estrela Serrano (2020, p. 226) warns, the trend towards the spectacularizing of politics and the primacy of image “requires that political leaders be good ‘actors’ – populist or not – capable of mastering the instruments of representation and reaching an audience eager for emotions”. Apart from social networks, television is one of the central means of communication with the electorate, especially because of the position it regained during the pandemic (Cunha et al., 2022).

However, there are always two sides. The researcher José Pedro Zúquete (2022) warns that hostile media treatment can be beneficial for the communication of these parties, as it allows their leaders and militants to label the media and journalists and include them in the group of ‘corrupt elites’. On their social media profiles, for example, André Ventura (Chega) and Santiago Abascal (Vox), journalists and media outlets “have become a target of the Iberian radical right” (Ramos Antón & Baptista, 2022, p. 620). On the other hand, recent studies highlight that “André Ventura’s populist leadership essentially feeds on his presence in the media” (Serrano, 2020, p. 237), which illustrates the interdependent relationship between these actors and the traditional and mainstream media.

As we mentioned before, political actors, regardless of whether they fit the definition of ‘populist’, are frequent characters in the media, and their public image is also mediated by advisors and communication teams aware of the “value of media figuration” (Peixinho & Araújo, 2017, p. 234). As such, “by constructing the politician as a character, the media tend to incorporate values that are constitutive of popular cultural imagination” (Peixinho & Araújo, 2017, p. 241). With populist actors, there may be a tendency to exacerbate the characteristics of leaders who stand out for their charisma, mastery of rhetoric, constant reference to modest origins, or distancing from classes identified as elites (Zúquete, 2022). They are identified “by their exceptional qualities, but at the same time, as common as the people, classes, and groups they claim to represent” (Zúquete, 2022, p. 45), adopting styles that are sometimes considered aggressive.

Ultimately, journalism and journalists should strive to think critically about the coverage of these phenomena, not yielding to market and time pressures. As Miguel Carvalho highlighted in an interview with the newspaper *Setenta e Quatro*: “For that, time is needed, a time that journalism does not have. That is why we

reproduce clichés. But if we do so, we realize that what brought them there was, first, the disillusionment with the State<sup>[3]</sup>.

Zúquete (2022) also criticizes the ongoing rhetoric of Portuguese exceptionalism in studies about Chega, which extends to political and academic discourse. In his book, *Populismo, lá fora e cá dentro* [Populism, outside and inside], the author establishes a chronology of populism in Portugal, seeking to demonstrate that the case of Chega should be studied as a phenomenon of continuity (Zúquete, 2022). Subsequently, “it is suggested to replace the common saying of ‘populism that is here to stay’ with the uncommon assertion that populism has always been here” (Zúquete, 2022, p. 223), with Chega being “the last specimen of regenerative populism<sup>[4]</sup> (...) of the Third Portuguese Republic” (Zúquete, 2022, p. 226).

Regarding André Ventura, religiosity is one of the main discursive traits that has accompanied his political rise since 2017 (Marchi, 2020; Matos, 2024), and which he echoes on his various social media profiles. His “missionary narrative interacts regarding two other symbolic and mythical sources from our history”: Sebastianism and “the idea rooted in the popular imagination of the savior who emerges to restore Portugal’s independence”, as well as the constant allusion to Francisco Sá Carneiro “based on an unfinished promise of transforming the country” (Zúquete, 2022, p. 230). In other words, his constant religious references, such as the ongoing mention of the ‘miracle of Fátima’ (Dias, 2022), can be seen as strategies for emotionally mobilizing his electorate (Dias, 2022).

#### **4 The character ‘André Ventura’ in Revista E**

In 2021, André Ventura was still Chega’s only deputy in the Assembly of the Republic of Portugal<sup>[5]</sup>. In the Portuguese presidential elections of that same year, in which Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa<sup>[6]</sup> would be re-elected, the leader of Chega publicly positioned himself as an opponent of a specific candidate: Ana Gomes<sup>[7]</sup>. On his public Twitter profile, now X, he even derogatorily nicknamed her a “Roma candidate”<sup>[8]</sup>, promising that if he fell behind Ana Gomes, he would resign, which happened on January 24, 2021. The antagonism between these two political figures, also fueled by the media (Cunha et al., 2022), culminated in André Ventura’s resignation from the party leadership.

In March 2021, André Ventura ran for election again, achieving 97.3% of the votes. It is in this context that the profile *Entre Deus e Diabo* is published as the headline of Revista E, one of the three sections of the weekly newspaper Expresso, in edition number #2523. At the time of publication, the weekly newspaper, regarded as one of the reference journalistic outlets (Peixinho, 2014), according to data from APCT<sup>[10]</sup>, was the newspaper with the highest paid digital circulation and the general information newspaper with the highest paid print circulation, with over 58.000 copies sold in the first quarter of 2021.

Although it is not the focus of our study, we cannot fail to mention the ongoing investment by Expresso in this specific content, which has been used again in 2023. *Entre Deus e o Diabo, Como André se fez Ventura*<sup>[11]</sup> is a series of seven episodes of a narrative podcast, as announced by the newspaper itself, which expands on the version published in 2021 and revisits many of the interviews conducted, as well as it goes deeper into other topics. More recently, in 2024, during the electoral period of the 2024 legislative elections, journalist Vítor Matos, the author of the profile and the podcast, released a book based on this work – *Na Cabeça de Ventura*.

#### 4.1 Methodological approach

Our narrative analysis is based on some of the fundamental assumptions of Luiz Gonzaga Motta, which will require a “sharp and comprehensive analytical attitude” (2013, p. 19) from the researcher in analyzing the corpus formed by the authorship profile of Vítor Matos. The “methodical, organic, rigorous study of the narrative communication process, which arises from doubt about the established and pursues systematic knowledge regarding the historical relationships that shape the stories” defines his critical perspective (Motta, 2013, p. 23). More specifically, we will analyze the protagonist according to four analytical categories: typification, discourse, characterization, and lexicalization (Marques, 2016; Peixinho & Marques, 2016).

Thus, typification refers to the category in which the character fits (type or non-type), seeking to understand whether its construction contributed to the association of the figure André Ventura with a typically populist leader. Our analysis of the profile closely and critically

examined the elements of the different discourses – direct, indirect, or absent (Peixinho & Marques, 2016) – conveyed by the involved actors. From this analysis, it was possible to infer procedures of direct, indirect, or mixed characterization, which provide various perspectives and contribute to the descriptive richness of the character that is the focus of the profile. Regarding the fourth variable, lexicalization allows us to “verify, at the discursive level, how the characters are semantically approached” (Peixinho & Marques, 2016, p. 250), whether, for example, through their description as a passive or active actor, or by the calm or aggressive style adopted throughout their political journey. The theoretical frameworks of populism, particularly those traits identified in the literature on these leaders and André Ventura to address the goals of our study, underpinned this narrative analysis of the journalistic character.

#### **4.2 Analysis of the figuration of the character 'André Ventura'**

The first clue of the centrality of religiosity in André Ventura (Dias, 2022; Zúquete, 2022) is the title: *Entre Deus e o Diabo*. It is a trait that is continuously highlighted and reinforced, both by the illustration of the article – the character with a light and microphones pointed at him, with the castle of Guimarães, the cradle of the nation, in the background – as well as by the introductory paragraph, which describes him as a “religious fundamentalist”, along with the reference to the use of cilice. In the same paragraph, journalist Vítor Matos announces that “André Ventura’s story before becoming the leader of Chega is a manual on how to rise in life”, which underlies the myth of the self-made man, who fought to earn his place, and it is also a narrative present in the discourse of populist politicians (Zúquete, 2022).

Throughout the narrative, his speech is introduced directly, with snippets of his interview quoted (“I had to do a lot to get to the places I’ve reached”), as well as indirectly, through the journalist or the sources. Regarding his testimony, in the first person, the protagonist took the opportunity to criticize opponents (“I am not a social democrat like Marisa Matias...”), emphasize his journey, which he believes to be arduous and without any ‘connections’ (“When I was a tax inspector, I had to apply; no one appointed me.”), attempt to

defend himself against his speech against minorities (“I don’t want to make it seem like I have a personal problem with Roma.”), and acknowledge his initial religious radicalism rooted in Christianity, reaffirming his belief that “God gave him a mission”. In essence, his self-characterization reinforces his messianic discourse (Dias, 2022; Mendes, 2021; Zúquete, 2022), as well as the idea of the effort and struggle that he claims have set his political and professional journey (“...I have always been very proactive”). Therefore, it ends up integrating itself into the category of untainted people (Prior, 2021) and workers, distinguishing himself from those who do not work. In addition to taking the opportunity to criticize opponents and politicians of the system – the elite – for the direct reference to Marisa Matias ([Long silence] “I am not a social democrat like Marisa Matias...”), a former MEP for *bloco de esquerda*, one of the preferred targets in his speech.

As for the hetero-characterization, there were several sources that the journalist relied on, without ever mentioning any close family members – which demonstrates, in our point of view, one goal of this profile: the focus on the political persona. The first reference is to the priest Mário Rui Pedras, his spiritual confessor, who refused to speak with the journalist. Several public and political figures that crossed his path to follow, such as Jorge Castela (one of the party’s initial ideologues), Sérgio Azevedo (PSD), Miguel Fernandes (journalist at TVI), Onder Bakircioglu (former PhD colleague), neighbor João Nuno, neighbor Susana Vicente, priests António Gonçalves and Barata Pereira, or Luís Marques (former seminary colleague).

The past as a football commentator (Marchi, 2020; Matos, 2024) and the fact that he is a “fanatic for Benfica”, which gave him public visibility, are not forgotten. Journalist Miguel Fernandes remembers him as “an excellent communicator, an attentive citizen, and interested in current affairs”. With this path outlined, Jorge Castela notes that, at the time, the leader of *Chega* “hated Le Pen, abhorred Salvini, and was disgusted by the AfD”, with the candidacy for Loures and the discourse about the Roma community – still evident in his public positions today (Mendes, 2021; Prior, 2022; Serrano, 2020) – being what may have propelled him onto the national stage. Regarding the speech about the community, André Ventura, in an interview with the journalist, admits: “I once had a Romani friend, who was ‘Miguel the Romani’, in the street where I lived. I don’t know what he will think of me today; he probably won’t think the best”.

This demonstrates that the politician is aware of the stigmatizing discourse he and his party disseminate about the Roma community.

In college, Jorge Castela describes him as “very shy”, who “blushed every time he heard a swear word” – which contrasts with his somewhat aggressive current political speech style (Zúquete, 2022). Now, the former ideologue of the party highlights his opportunistic character: “he is a surfer. Rides the wave, as it’s important to attract voters”. A characteristic associated with various populist leaders (Mudde, 2020; Zúquete, 2022). The descriptions of these sources suggest that we are dealing with a complex character who has even contradicted herself ideologically and politically over the years.

With his religious path in the spotlight, after his conversion at the age of 14, his radical trait is reinforced by the priest Antônio Gonçalves: “he was more papist than the Pope, very orthodox, very liturgical. And although I acknowledge his communication skills and emphasize his intelligence, I believe that what has changed is the message”. Intelligence is, in fact, one trait highlighted and proven by the academic success achieved in his law degree.

The journalist seems, throughout the narrative about André Ventura, to try to demonstrate and highlight contradictions that have defined his path and discourse. In the words of Vítor Matos, it is “the representative of a mass of angry voters without ideology” – a segment that makes us wonder whether the professional might be being too subjective in his description of the character (and even its electorate).

The journalist employs the term “venturism”, which exacerbates the populist association with the protagonist of the narrative he is telling, naming him, and attributing greater significance to the phenomenon. Vítor Matos also revisits the theme of André Ventura’s doctoral thesis, in which the “researcher Ventura” criticizes the “stigmatization of communities”, contrasting with his current stance on the need for a strengthening of immigration control. (Marchi, 2020; Matos, 2024). Vítor Matos points out that, were it not for his public status and political rise in recent years, “he would just be another outraged taxi driver from the Sintra area”. A statement that, in our point of view, stimulates the association of the leader of Chega with the common people, the central axis of populist ideology and discourse (Mudde, 2020; Zúquete, 2022).

Still, despite the focus on André Ventura’s religious and political journey, the journalist frequently uses his name in isolation, bringing him closer to the audience. Another aspect that, in our view, contributes to the humanization of the politician is the reference to

his musical taste: “he liked Bryan Adams and Rui Veloso and spent his holidays, since he was 3 years old, in his grandparents’ caravan in the same Porto Covo sung about by the artist”. In the words of the neighbor, despite being recognized for his football taste, “he was never seen playing ball in the square”. Another element that contributes to its humanization is the episodic accounts of his life, such as a trip to the hospital in a serious condition or the first time he fell in love with a woman.

The direct and indirect speech, as well as the hetero-characterization, seem to reinforce, since the beginning, the populist traits previously identified in André Ventura (Cunha et al., 2022), such as aggressiveness, constant criticism of opponents (and the political class in general), and a messianic discourse, due to the ongoing association of André Ventura’s journey with a mission that the politician himself claims to believe is assigned by God. The lexicalization and the nominalization of ‘venturism’ as the nomenclature for “Portuguese populism” – by the journalist – enriches this populist figuration, in a context where the party had only been publicly active for two years and had just one deputy in the Assembly of the Republic of Portugal.

Regarding typification, it presents itself as a complex and dual character, as we believe we are facing a typically populist figure – although we acknowledge that the traits are not uniform among all leaders – but also a round or dense character, due to the constant contradictions pointed out, both through the discourse of the cited sources or even by the journalist himself. There is still an effort by the journalist to include in the construction of the political character the childhood of André Ventura up to the path that led to the founding of the party, which was defined by his time in the seminary, which the politician speaks about publicly on several occasions (Dias, 2022; Zúquete, 2022).

## 5 Final considerations

“The narrative is, in fact, the privileged mode of the press discourse” (Peixinho, 2014, p. 324). Thus, the study of its categories is essential for the study of media in an increasingly fragmented society of micro-narratives (Lits, 2015; Ryan, 2021b) that calls into question the health of contemporary democracies.

In the case of the journalistic profile in analysis and its protagonist, we believe we are faced with an empirically challenging character. On one

hand, we recognize the evidence of a dense character who has developed, albeit with her contradictions, and who has shed his shyness to become a media persona. On the other hand, we believe he fits into a prototypical character, in the sense that he aligns with the frequent characterization of a populist leader, whether due to the aggressive speech style adopted by the politician, or the prominent themes in his agenda, such as the negative stereotyping of the Roma community.

The procedures of self-characterization and hetero-characterization, as well as the direct and indirect discourse of the various participants – including the journalist – have, in our opinion, reinforced the traits of a populist leader in the character 'André Ventura'. In some cases, as we described, they even exacerbated, as in the one we consider the most evident characteristic: its messianic nature (Dias, 2022; Zúquete, 2022) – from the title to the image, to the very discourse of the politician. Opportunism and intelligence are also highlighted traits, particularly through the interviewed sources and their characterization. The self-made man's myth is clear and present throughout the narrative, which André Ventura himself emphasizes, distinguishing himself from the corrupt elites to connect with the common people (Mudde, 2020; Zúquete, 2022).

The analysis of André Ventura's figuration cannot overlook the context in which it is situated, a context marked by the rise and greater representation of radical right populist parties. (Mudde, 2020; Mendes, 2021; Matos, 2024). Therefore, journalism also plays a significant role in the stance and coverage it provides to the issues important to the agenda of these parties, as well as to their representatives, without ignoring the codes that guide the profession. However, the imperative of audiences and the need for profit, since journalism is also a business, is in constant challenge and at stake when we address this theme.

In an undeniably two-sided relationship, it seems to us that balance has still not been found. While some of these parties complain about the hostility of the media and its professionals (Ramos Antón & Baptista, 2022), some outlets seek to analyze these phenomena more deeply, with more time (Novais, 2022) and without yielding to the sound bite imperative. Still, there are media outlets and editorial guidelines close to sensationalism that do not 'withstand' the permanent coverage of these leaders and their statements, including publications of their social media profiles turned into "news", without proper context – a trend that has been accentuated by declarative journalism.



In an analysis such as this one, we cannot forget that “the journalistic character reflects, besides creative construction, the work of observation, documentation, inquiry, and interpretation developed by the journalist, in order to gather the elements related to the objective referent” (Mesquita, 2003, p. 132). As such, the construction of the character ‘André Ventura’ is, therefore, the product of the journalist’s choices, as well as the editorial filter, along with those who were given a voice (and whose words to highlight were selected by the professional), as well as the press officers that are behind these personas.

In the specific case of this journalistic profile, we argue that the journalist exaggerated some of the populist characteristics of the figure ‘André Ventura’, although we acknowledge his effort to seek a greater diversity of sources and approaches, to convey to readers an image beyond the public and political persona, but which also contributes to its construction. It seems to us that this profile contributes to the construction of a populist figure of exceptionality in the Portuguese context (for instance, highlighted by his policy as ‘venturism’), with the novelty being related to the results he achieved rather than to his discourse or party agenda (Zúquete, 2022). It is, nonetheless, a profile that coexists with three phases: in his childhood/adolescence, before the founding of the party Chega, and when he was running for election again within the party, which introduces greater dynamics and complexity to the figuration of the character André Ventura, not only focusing on his political journey but also on his personal journey.

The study is not, as it seems obvious to us, free of limitations. A single profile does not tell us who the mediatic character ‘André Ventura’ is, although we believe it contributes to the construction of his public figuration, because of the inherent investment in a genre that requires more time and thorough research, as well as providing tools to think about the representation of these actors in the media. We recognize that a holistic analysis would be necessary, both in terms of time and regarding the number of media outlets and media formats to be studied, for greater support of the results we sought to highlight.

An analysis that could add value to this one would be an empirical study on the recently launched podcast, but which, due to the language and nature of the medium, seems deserving of a differentiated investigation, potentially serving as a starting point for new reflections. The recent book published by the author of the journalistic profile, which is a work that extends the journalistic

piece, revisits interviews, and brings new data and insights about André Ventura's journey, should not be overlooked either.

It seems to us, finally, that the importance of the interdisciplinary crossover of media narrative studies with these phenomena is beneficial, as it can introduce original angles and approaches to a topic that is so close and pressing to contemporary democracies. It would be fruitful to broaden this study to include more Portuguese political figures, as well as other geographical contexts and leaders of Radical Right Populist Parties.

## NOTES

- 1 For example (e.g.) Matos, V. (2021, March 6). Entre Deus e o Diabo. A história de André Ventura antes de ser líder do Chega. *Revista E*. Retrieved from <https://expresso.pt/politica/2021-03-06-Entre-Deus-e-o-Diabo.-A-historia-de-Andre-Ventura-antes-de-ser-lider-do-Chega>. In 2024, the journalist published a book, edited by Livros Zigurate, that develops the work originally published in Revista E.
- 2 We follow this terminology since we understand the figuration according to which Carlos Reis stands, who argues that it “should be seen as a broader, more encompassing, and consequential macro-device than characterization” (2018, p. 166).
- 3 E.g. Biscaia, J. (2024, February 1). Miguel Carvalho: “Parte do eleitorado do Chega é resgatável para o ‘lado bom’ da democracia”. *Setenta e Quatro*. <https://setentaequatro.pt/entrevista/miguel-carvalho-parte-do-eleitorado-do-chega-e-resgatavel-para-o-lado-bom-da-democracia>
- 4 Zúquete (2022) proposes a three-part typology: military populism (above the party system), regenerative populism (apart from the party system), and local populism (the central power/government represents the corrupted elite). The author presents various examples, being the regenerative populism the one that stands out with names associated like Francisco Sá Carneiro, Paulo Portas, or even the party Bloco de Esquerda (mainly until 2014).
- 5 A scenario that changed in 2022, with the election of ten deputies and one woman as deputy. More recently, in 2024, the parliamentary group reached 50 deputies.

- 6 Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa is the 20th President of the Republic in Portugal, having been re-elected in 2021. Jurist, journalist, and political commentator, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa was an official member of the PSD until his election in 2016, having been the party leader from 1996 to 1999.
- 7 Ana Gomes is a jurist, diplomat, and former MEP for the Socialist Party. In 2021, she ran as candidate for the presidential elections in Portugal, without the official support of her party, having achieved the second place. Although she was not elected, she was the most voted woman ever in a presidential election in the country.
- 8 E.g. <https://twitter.com/AndreCVentura/status/134938892221191171>
- 9 E.g. <https://expresso.pt/politica/2021-03-06-Ventura-reeleito-presidente-do-Chega-com-973-dos-votos-e-um-alerta-ao-PSD->
- 10 E.g. <https://www.apct.pt/analise-simples>
- 11 E.g. <https://open.spotify.com/show/4GGH6cvML6AdTEEDzZy6gu?si=d4f91c557f514e54>

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