# INSULT AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE OTHER'S IDENTITY: REMARKS ON PORTUGUESE POLITICAL DISCOURSE

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**Abstract**. The aim of our paper is to present and analyse insults in Portuguese political discourse. In the first part of our paper we present the current political context in Portugal and a recent term which describes the Portuguese political arena, "crispação" [friction]. Then we offer a detailed state of the art on the linguistic research on verbal aggressiveness and the act of insulting and propose a definition for the insult. The analysis of the examples selected from the electoral and the parliamentary corpus is the most consistent part of our work, showing how insults are proffered in these contexts. Regardless of the hypothesis that the political discourse has a functional aggressive feature, due to its confrontational nature (between the representatives of the opposition and of the government who fight for power), our analysis proves that insults are offensive and contribute to the general degradation of the current political discourse in Portugal.

**Keywords**: Portuguese political discourse, verbal aggression, insults, identity.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Personal antagonisms, political rivalries, verbal duels, petty disputes and insults play an important role in the Portuguese political arena and reflect a tense atmosphere which sometimes transgresses elementary rules of social conduct and shows an increasing level of aggression and verbal violence. Of course, offensive acts in political debates are not new, insults or name-calling go back to the Roman Empire, to name only Cicero's famous *Philippicae*, among other examples of diatribes. Portuguese politics is not an exception, as politicians sometimes make use of invectives, pejorative and derogatory epithets when referring to their adversaries, in an attempt to win verbal duels in electoral campaigns, in parliamentary debates or in talk-shows.

Based on the discursive-pragmatic approach to insulting and offensive acts (Larguèche 1983; Larguèche 2009; Lagorgette 2009), the object of this paper is to

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analyse discursive mechanisms – especially insults and name-calling – which lead to the systematic degrading of the other in Portuguese political discourse.

We are interested in the effect of pejorative utterances, which are insulting or considered as such, used in recent electoral campaigns (presented in Portuguese newspapers or in social media) and in plenary sittings or committee meetings held in the Portuguese legislative body, the *Assembleia da República* [Assembly of the Republic].

We will consider insults as manifestations of impoliteness, verbal violence – see Bousfield and Locher (2008), Culpeper (2011) – and then focus on their impact on personal, social and political identity[3]. This paper will describe and analyse the linguistic means which define such manifestations, in an attempt to show how the multiple elements that stand for ill intention, deception, indignation or even anger may be reflected through verbal aggression of the parts involved and may define the identity of the other.

The political discourse is known to be confrontational. In one of her studies, Marques (2009: 294) concludes that Portuguese parliamentary discourse – and, in our opinion, other types of political discourse as well, such as electoral debates or talk shows – may be aggressive, but it is not offensive, as conflict is an intrinsic part of the polarised political communication. Harris (2001: 468) previously argued too that impolite or rude utterances "do not contravene Members' expectation of politeness strategies", Ilie (2004: 81) considered that "Parliamentary insults are deliberately offensive rhetorical acts performed in a competitive institutional setting", Perez de Ayola (2001: 147) affirmed that *question time* is a "face-threatening genre". Doury (2009: 122) states that in presidential debates there is a certain "preference for disagreement", since conflict is expected in this type of verbal interaction.

While the offensive nature of a given insult may differ according to the addressee or the discursive genre, the impact of such utterances on the image and on the identity of the other is important in political communication. Once in the public sphere, certain insults – name-calling is an example in this sense – become very popular and affect the identity of the addressee, becoming "labels" that "identify" politicians. For this reason, analysing insults, name-calling and their role in defining the other is an interesting field of research. Moreover, due to the "theatrical" nature of the political discourse – verbal duels between politicians always target an audience, such as the media, the constituents, etc.[4] – denigrating

[3] As far as political identities are concerned, we agree with Van Dijk (2010: 38) that they: "[…] may be of different types, such as professional political identities, e.g., those of members of institutions or organizations such as parliaments and political parties, and positional or relational political identities, such as members of the opposition, leaders of parties, members of political action groups (activists), and so on".

[4] See, for instance Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969: 19): "a member in Parliament in England must address himself to the Speaker, but he may try to persuade those listening to him in the chamber, and beyond that, public opinion throughout the country".

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the other becomes a powerful tool for threatening the opponent's public image and a means to consolidate one's own image.

In the next section we briefly present the political situation in Portugal, and then we focus on the corpus and on the theoretical framework used in this paper.

## 2. THE CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION AND THE PHENOMENON OF "FRICTION" IN PORTUGAL

On the first page of the weekly magazine *Visão*, dated 14th April 2011, we read the following title:

> "Birras fatais. Conflitos pessoais, zangas e invejas entre poderosos influenciam os destinos do País. Em que medida estão as rivalidades a matar Portugal?"
> [Deadly tantrums. Personal conflicts, anger and envy between powerful influents in the country's destiny. In what ways is rivalry destroying Portugal?]

In Portuguese politics, rivalry has progressively ceased to be synonymous with healthy and creative competition to become destructive and self-degrading. Within the Portuguese political lexicon, a new word appeared following the 2009 electoral campaign, which rapidly spread to other areas of the society: *crispação* [friction], a type of verbal aggression.

According to scholars of the Institute of Social Sciences in Lisbon, there are three fundamental explanations for the current "friction" in the political arena: Portugal is a small village/a small parish where rivalries have already contributed to the destruction of the country during the era of liberal "rotativism"; personal conflict has always affected the path of democracy and much more than a phenomenon of political rivalry, it may be inserted within a logic of the conquest of will; when the ideological constituent diminishes, the personal conflict increases (*Visão*, 20th April 2011). Thus, the with personalization of political conflicts, verbal aggression become a constant presence in the Portuguese debate and it is a strategy of degrading the opponent(s) and hopefully increase one's political capital.

In the next section we present insults from a theoretical point of view, and then we analyse examples selected from our corpus.

## 3. INSULTS: A THEORETICAL APPROACH

We can analyse verbal aggression in the following ways: *a sociological approach* which is very common because it allows us to detect language usage within a specific group; *a psychological approach*, which searches for certain

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pathological symptoms of those who profess insults; *a historical evaluation*, which leads us to determine that certain violent expressions may reveal negative values of a specific social group at a given time; *a linguistic analysis* that reveals lexical-sematic or syntactical aspects of the construction of language; *a rhetorical and stylistic approach*, centred on the explanation of the reasons for argumentative force.

Offensive language can also be studied in terms of culture. In line with Garciá Meseguer (1984), we consider that studying the insults of a language is a means of understanding the cultural values shared by the community of speakers:

> "The analysis of insults in any culture is fundamental for an understanding of established social value. An insult is the negation of a quality, whose existence is pre-supposed. Consequently, a reading of its meaning tells us, through transparency, what conducts and qualities are expected of an individual by society." (Garciá Meseguer 1984: 80, our translation)

A multidisciplinary perspective[5] is likely to give a more accurate analysis of the discursive strategies used by speakers, because the psychological, historical, social, political and economic contexts are determining for understanding the level of revolt and verbal aggression, or contrariwise, its repression.

However, in order to ensure consistency, in this study we adopt a discursive-pragmatic framework. We start from the idea that an insult consists of utterances which on the one hand break with the communicative process, while on the other hand, aims to reinforce the cohesion of a certain group, more precisely groups created according to political affiliations. We analyse offensive acts and their impact of the different levels of identity of the target, personal, social or political (Van Dijk 2010). Insults can be analysed according to the degree of transgression of the politeness norms. Even in political debates, which are intrinsically conflictual, insults are perceived as the opposite of acceptable social behaviour. Research on linguistic politeness seeks to explain how conversational strategies used in a given interaction may help to maintain, reinforce or to destroy interpersonal relations. In this sense, based on the model of politeness proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) and according to later reformulations by Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1992; 2004), we consider the insult to be a verbal, impolite act, more precisely, a FTA (face threatening act), which works as a *detonator of interaction*, meaning that its main role is to denigrate the image of the other, to injure and/or somehow to label/identify the other. FTAs, a broad category of impolite acts, may

[5] Lagorgette (2006: 26) considers that: "A study of insult limited to a purely linguistic dimension, cannot allow us to fully comprehend its global role: besides, the study of words alone would induce numerous mistakes, the analysis of context would not be enough to grasp the whole process". (our translation).

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be classified according to their degree of aggression, insults and sarcasm being considered the most offensive (Casamiglia Blancafort and Tusón Valls 1996: 163). We agree Laforest and Vincent (2004: 62), with the claim that:

> "it is more theoretically profitable to think of the insult as a combination of specific usages of pejorative designations, rather than as an autonomous category of menacing speech acts" (our translation).

As pointed out by Détrie (2008: 43) in her analysis of offensive address terms, while insults may affect the image of the addressee, they also have an impact on the image of the speaker, who appears as aggressive, impolite and uneducated. If Larguèche (2012: 4) said that words are "bullets", we add that their trajectory is not always certain, as the verbal attack can damage both the "shooter" and its victim.

As far as political debates are concerned, insults and their strategic usages reflect the dynamics of the community of practice. In parliamentary debates, for instance, MPs speak according to specific institutional norms – the *Rules of Procedures* in parliaments – and in order to obtain political gain: pass a law, get media's attention, impose their opinion in the public debate, be re-elected, etc. As opposed to everyday interactions, in political debates the public dimension is essential, as the insult is not only a speech act which threatens the image of the interlocutor, but an act which exists within the social sphere, in that it seeks to attack the behaviour, the qualities and the beliefs of the other(s) by contrasting them with social *anti-values*.

We propose *ab initio* the following definition:

> The insult is characterized as a verbal and/or non-verbal act which transgresses the ethical code of society or of a group/a community of practice, an intentional transgression on the part of the speaker with depreciative motivation or resulting as such from an interpretation of the addressee or of the audience.

Let us see some criteria that can be used in classifying offensive acts. For political debates, the dichotomy ritual vs. non-ritual insults[6], used by Détrie (2006: 86-89; 2008) in her research on debates held in the French National Assembly and in local councils, is pertinent. Given that in political debates certain types of FTAs are acceptable (for instance, those referring to political or ideological views), Détrie (2008: 24) affirms that insults belong, to a certain extent, to the debating routine. Some offensive utterances may not trigger reactions from the addressee or

[6] The distinction between ritual vs. non-ritual insults was first made by Labov (1972).

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the third party, being considered a *prêt-à-penser* typical for the institutional debates. Two main categories of ritual insults are identified by Détrie in her paper: those attempting to discredit a political view and those attempting to discredit the discourse itself. As far as non-ritual insults are concerned, Détrie (2008) identifies different types of *ad hominem* attacks, as their objective is not related to the political activity of the addressee. According to Laforest and Vincent (2004: 64), ritual insults target an addressee so that the audience may identify the winner of the dispute. In political debates, the role of the audience is crucial for the effectiveness of an insult.

In parliamentary debates, the asides are an example of ritual insults, as they rarely trigger reactions from the audience or from the addressee. They offer MPs the opportunity to express themselves sometimes in a less parliamentary fashion. Since the regulation of the Parliament and the President impose strict rules concerning the concession of the floor and how the orators should speak, it becomes very difficult to utter insults or to employ an offensive discourse directed at the tribune. Nevertheless, the asides, which allow both the sustaining of affirmations made by colleagues and the criticising by adversaries (Marques 2005), may become a channel which allows the expression of harsher affirmations. In our corpus, we identified insults, aimed either at the addressee: “Seu trogodita!” [You troglodyte!], “Santa ignorância!” [The ignorance!], or at his or her discourse: “Demagogia!” [Demagogy!], “Que descaramento!” [The nerve!], “Que vergonha!” [The disgrace!], “Mais lengalenga!” [More of the same!], “Isto é uma aldrabice!” [This is swindle!], “É mentira!” [This is a lie!]. These offensive acts are almost responded in kind.

For a pragmatic study of insults, Jucker and Taavitsainen (2000: 74) propose five levels of analysis: a formal level, a semantic level, context dependence, the attitude of the speaker and the reaction of the target, each of them containing one or more criteria. At the formal level, there are ritual (rule governed) vs. creative insults, typified vs. *ad hoc*, from a semantic point of view insults can be classified into two categories, truth conditional vs. performative, while as far as the context dependence is concerned, insults can be conventional or particular. According to the attitude of the speaker, offensive acts can be ludic vs. aggressive, intentional vs. unintentional, and may express irony vs. sincerity. Reactions to insults may be in kind denial, violence, silence.

We suggest other criteria which may be pertinent in classifying insults: individual (aimed at one person) vs. collective (aimed at groups), allocutive (targeting an addressee, usually a term of address in vocative case) vs. delocutive (targeting an addressee, without using the vocative case[7]), *in praesentia* vs. *in absentia*, direct

[7] In Portuguese this distinction is pertinent, as the 3rd person singular is used when addressing somebody in a polite fashion.

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(aimed at the target) vs. indirect (aimed at a target's kin, for example), initial (uttered by the speaker without previous trigger) vs. reactive (pronounced as a response to previous insults[8]).

From a lexical point of view, Lagorgette (2006: 28-29) identifies three main types of insult, which are the result of metonymic of metaphorical transfers: comparison with non-human elements (animals, substances), comparison with human elements (such as professions, vices and bad habits, proper nouns, titles), attacks on inalienable elements (race, ontotypes[9], sexual capacity, filiation).

In this analysis, will try to identify some mechanisms of constructing the identity of the others. For purposes of clarification, we will briefly place the selected examples in their social and political context, when useful to the linguistic analysis.

## 4. DATA ANALYSIS

The corpus includes offensive acts uttered by Portuguese politicians during election campaigns and in parliamentary debates. We collected from the Portuguese press insults pronounced during the 2011 parliamentary election campaign; the verbal attacks were aimed at political actors affiliated to all major Portuguese political parties.

We have also selected offensive utterances from parliamentary plenary sittings and meetings of committees held in the *Assembleia da República* between 2009 and 2014. As opposed to the electoral discourse, all parliamentary debates, regardless of their topic or nature, are subject to the regulations stipulated in the Rules of Procedure and the Statute of Members. Thus, the MPs and other political actors engaged in arduous polemical debates feel more compelled to adhere to a polite or at least a neuter tone of discourse. However, in the heat of the debates, as we shall see, regulations are forgotten and verbal attacks occur, especially during the confrontations between the MPs of the opposition and the representatives of the government.

Using the pragmatic criteria of Jucker and Taavitsainen (2000: 74), we observe that as far as the attitude of the speaker is concerned, all insults selected are aggressive, intentional and sincere; they are also conventional, that is "in normal circumstances are understood as insults by all members of a speech community", and performative, in the sense that "are face-threatening without predicating any

[8] Cornelia Ilie calls them "counter-insults" (Ilie 2001: 83).

[9] According to Ernotte & Rosier (2004: 35), ontotypes "target characteristics that are supposed to be ontological", such as *imbecile.*

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testable description about the target". Most of the selected examples are individual and delocutive; the identified in our corpus both direct and indirect insults, as well as both *in praesentia* and *in absentia* offensive acts. Let us see each example and identify some mechanisms of attacking the image of the other.

### 4.1. Qualifying adjectives: *trauliteiro* and *caloteiro*

These two examples of offensive acts are expressed through qualifying adjectives that that target a group, PSD, the Social Democrat party, in (a) or an individual, José Sócrates, the prime minister in office in 2011 and Secretary General of the Socialist Party, in (b); there were uttered during a rally of the Socialist Party (a) and during a radio talk show (b), respectively. From a lexical point of view, both insults belong to the second category of Lagorgette (2006: 28-29), as they express comparisons with human characteristics: aggressive behaviour (a) and not paying one's debts (b). Both insults are perceived as such by the addressees and the audience, the aim of attacking the image of the political opponent – either a party, or a person – being achieved.

*Trauliteiro* is highly pejorative because it evokes not only unacceptable social conduct, but also because it alludes to assault, oppression and lack of civil behaviour (etymologically the word *trauliteiro* was the name given to the monarchists in Portugal during the Traulitânia, between January 19th and February 13th 1919 when the Northern Monarchy was in power and settled in Oporto).

*Caloteiro* is offensive in this context because it transfers features of common behaviour to someone holding one of the highest offices in Portugal, the prime minister. By naming the PM *caloteiro*, the speaker states that he is responsible and reliable, suggesting he is not worthy of the office he holds. Both terms are used in the colloquial register of the Portuguese language, having an impact on the ethos of the speakers as well, who appear aggressive and rude before their audiences.

(a) "Um PSD *trauliteiro* e intolerante, um PSD demagógico, arrogante e malcriado".
(Capoulas Santos accuses PSD of being *trauliteiro*)
[A *rough* and intolerant PSD, a demagogical, arrogant and rude PSD].

(b) "Quando ainda esta semana, pela segunda vez, Sócrates veio dizer que quem quer renegociar a dívida é um *caloteiro*, é evidente que ele sabe perfeitamente não está a falar a verdade. Ele sabe perfeitamente, aliás, que *caloteiro* é quem aceita um empréstimo sabendo antecipadamente não poder pagar devido aos juros que tem e ao contexto recessivo."
(Blog post: *Who is caloteiro after all?*)

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[When yet this week, José Sócrates, for the second time said he who wishes to negotiate the debt is a *conman*, it is evident that he is perfectly aware of the fallacy in this. He knows perfectly well that the *conman* is he who accepts a loan which he knows in advance that he won't be able to pay because of interest taxes in this recession context].

As far as the relation between the speaker and the target of the offensive acts is concerned, both utterances are produced *in absentia*, the targeted group or individual being unable to react *in loco*. However, reactions occurred on the following days, as reported by the media. The role of these insults is twofold: on the one hand, antagonizing the political adversaries, but on the other hand, creating solidarity of the speaker within his political group. The offensive acts threaten both the political image of the targets, as we have shown, while in the second example, *caloteiro* affects also the personal image of the PM, by suggesting he does not pay his debts. FTAs which target the personal image of the addressee are not acceptable in political debates, being non-ritual, in the sense that they transgress the barrier between the political and the social image.

### 4.2. Reactive insults: *Manso é a sua tia, pá!*

This offensive act expressed through a qualifying adjective was used was uttered in parliament during a bi-monthly debate on April 16th 2010 and was recorded on television and commented in the media. It is an individual, *in praesentia*, reactive insult, addressed by the PM in office at an MP of the opposition. The offense was pronounced with the microphone off, thus making it seem lighter. Nevertheless, because it is a typical insulting phrase, we have chosen to include it in our study. Using Lagorgette's classification (2006: 28-29), we identify *manso* [meek] as an insult belonging to the second category, as it expresses a comparison with human characteristics. The qualifying adjective *manso* [meek] is not intrinsically offensive, as it does not convey a negative meaning; however, in the political arena, meekness may be perceived as an insult, as it suggests weakness, an attribute incongruent with the powerful images that politicians want to project in the public space. This insult is also an example of a reactive offense, as the MP uttered a brief observation which troubled the Prime Minister:

(a) "Sr. Primeiro Ministro, eu vejo que de intervenção a intervenção, vai ficando *mais manso*."
[Prime Minister, I see that with every claim, you grow *meeker*].

With this provocation and the subjacent belittling, the PM also replies with an insult of powerful emotional, instinctive nature beginning the sentence with the adjective:

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(b) "*Manso* é a tua tia, pá!"
[*Meek* is your aunt!]

Personal insults clearly fit into the category of defamation, and according to Lepoutre (1997) the most common insult is aimed at someone else as an indirect attack of the interlocutor, in this case a family member. Being an indirect insult, the degree of offense is potentially minimized; though it can have the reverse effect if the rules are transgressed; for instance, insulting the mother may be perceived as an even greater outrage. We agree with Dominique Lagorgette (2003: 124) who stresses the role of referring family: "Insulting family, is striking not only the other, but his kin". There is, in this offensive expression a defamation of an absent figure as affirmed by Laforest and Vincent (2004: 73).

In this case, the offense is a reaction to a provocation. The trigger element was the adjective used by the left wing politician who ironically classified the Prime Minister's attitude. Since it was the final word of the sentence (a), it caught the attention and caused the emotional reaction (b). This example shows the impetuous reaction to an FTAs that aimed at belittling someone used to project an image of power. The symbolic loss of power, or the loss of an important part of the identity triggers the emotional reaction, which is a reactive insult. As Larguèche (2009: 86) very well said:

> "Situations of weakness, risk or impotence, or even the loss of self-control are precisely those which most frequently lead to non-specific offenses and those which appear as forms of resistance and refusal to surrender". (our translation)

### 4.3. Politicians as entertainers: *Pop star decadente* and *palhaço*

These three examples of individual offensive acts, *pop star decadente* [decadent pop star] in (a) and *palhaço* [clown] in (b) and (c) are related, as they express a comparison of politicians with entertainers; they belong to the second category of Lagorgette's classification (2006: 28–29).

The example (a) was pronounced by an MP of the Social Democratic Party, who accused the Socialist Party and its secretary general of conducting a "Hollywood style campaign" for the parliamentary elections of June 5th 2011, classifying the secretary general (at the same time the PM in office) as a "decadent pop-star who disrespects the 700 000 unemployed and needy in Portugal". The insult is delocutive, produced *in absentia*, during a press conference. Here is the offensive attack as it was presented by the media:

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(a) "O PS e o engenheiro José Sócrates têm protagonizado uma campanha hollyoowdesca, marciana, de estratosfera. É um gastador compulsivo, alheado da realidade que o pais vive. Transformou-se numa *'pop star' (estrela pop) decadente*."
(PSD accuses José Sócrates of having turned himself into a 'pop star')
[The PS and José Sócrates conducted a Hollywood style, Martian, from outer space, campaign. He's a compulsive spender, totally alien to the state of the country. He has mutated into a *decadent 'pop star'*].

This offensive act is not singular, as it is preceded by two characterisations which also aim at attacking the image of the PM: *gastador compulsivo* [compulsive spender] and *alheado da realidade que o país vive* [totally alien to the reality of the country]. These insults were chosen to create the image of an unstable person, with low credibility, who acts according to his fantasies and who does not understand the reality. Nothing could be more damaging for a politician who wants to govern a country and who should appear before constituents as responsible and trustworthy. All these offensive terms give the outgoing Prime Minister the negative image the opposition was aiming at. Moreover, the expression *decadent pop-star* emphasize the idea that the current success of the PM is in decline.

Portraying a high official as an entertainer is a derogatory strategy that can be pronounced *in praesentia*, as the examples (b) and (c) show.

In (b) we have selected an individual, direct insult aimed at a political adversary. The speaker produced the offensive attack in a meeting of the Healthcare Committee in 2009 and was presented and commented in the media during the following days. The derogatory intention is very clear, since the speaker affirms clearly that the role of the addressee is to "entertain"; moreover, the second occurrence of the word *palhaço* [clown] – *palhaço permenente* [permanent clown] – is related to the political function of the MP targeted by the insult, who was a permanent member of the committee. A permanent member of the committee thus becomes a permanent clown.

(b) A Srª Maria José Nogueira Pinto (PSD): — Sabe, há pouco eu estava a perguntar de onde é que saiu este *palhaço*, que é o senhor. E sabe porquê? Porque eu nunca tinha visto um *palhaço* permanente numa comissão parlamentar. Mas acho que o devem ter eleito exactamente para isso, para nos animar.
(Article *Nogueira Pinto calls "clown" and MP of PS*, TVI24, our transcription)
[M. Maria José Nogueira Pinto (PSD): — You know, a few moments ago I was asking where this *clown* came from, you being the clown, sir. And do

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you know why? Because I had never seen a permanent *clown* in a parliamentary committee. But I think they must have elected you exactly for this, for entertaining us.]

The second offensive act in which the word *palhaço* [clown] is used was produced during a plenary sitting in 2014. It is an individual, indirect attack, *in praesentia*, produced during a verbal duel between two MPs. As in the example analysed in 4.2., this is a reactive offense, triggered by a previous statement of the target. However, the response surpasses in aggressiveness the initial trigger. If the first intervention targets the debate: "este debate é uma palhaçada" [this debate is a circus show], the reactive insult is aimed at an individual: "vá chamar palhaço ao seu pai" [you should call your father a clown]. The transgression is both institutional and social: this kind of affirmation is definitely rejected by the Rules of Procedures and by the community of speakers (see the reactions of the audience: "Protests of PSD", "We don't have things like that in here!") and it would be equally unacceptable in other contexts. As opposed to the example (a) in this section, *palhaço* [clown] is not used to attack the image of the addressee – as we have seen, this is an indirect insult, aimed at the addressee's father –, and its function is not to portrait the targeted individual as an entertainer. It is a reactive insult triggered by a previous statement, an emotional reaction to what the speaker perceived initially as an offense addressed to him. While being indirect, the insult is very offensive and has an impact on the image of the speaker himself, who appears aggressive and rude; he briefly tried to justify his reaction: *Yes he did!*, but the audience did not accept it.

(c) O Sr. Duarte Filipe Marques (PSD): — Este debate é uma palhaçada!
O Sr. José Magalhães (PS): — Sr. Deputado Duarte Marques, vá chamar palhaço ao seu pai!
*Protestos do PSD.*
O Sr. Luís Menezes (PSD): — Mas o que é isto?!
O Sr. José Magalhães (PS): — Aqui não há coisas desse género!
O Sr. Luís Menezes (PSD): — Não foi isso que ele disse!
O Sr. José Magalhães (PS): — Foi, foi!
(Journal of the Assembly of the Republic, 27th of June 2014)
[Mr. Duarte Filipe Marques (PSD): — This debate is a circus show!
Mr. O Sr. José Magalhães (PS): — Mr. Duarte Marques, you should call your father a clown!
*Protests of PSD.*
O Sr. Luís Menezes (PSD): — What is this?
O Sr. José Magalhães (PS): — We don't have things like that in here!
O Sr. Luís Menezes (PSD): — He didn't say that!
O Sr. José Magalhães (PS): Yes he did!]

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### 4.4. Insults within the political domain: *ministro do desemprego* and *Mubarak do desemprego*, *Salazar*

In this section we analyse examples of insults that express comparisons within the political domain.

The first episode took place during a plenary sitting in the Portuguese Parliament and was later cited and analysed in the media. The speaker, a MP of the opposition ridicules the Minister of Economy and Employment by intentionally distorting his official title: "Minister of Employment" becomes "Minister of Unemployment". This is an individual, direct attack, aimed at the public image of the addressee in which the speaker expresses a negative assessment of the minister's activity. It is an example of a ritual insult, accepted by the community of practice. Moreover, by threatening the professional political identity of the addressee, and not the personal one – this is not an *ad hominem* attack –, the speaker abides by the unspoken rule of the political confrontation, that allows criticism within the limits of the political domain. The addressee tries to defend himself by adding that he is the unemployment minister because of what was inherited from the previous government. However, two other two MPs of the opposition insist by calling him "the minister of unemployment", "the minister of unemployment and of the bankruptcy of the country", repeating the same derogatory expression and thus demonstrating its discursive effectiveness.

(a) O Sr. Basílio Horta (PS): — Mas como a prioridade do Governo não é a retoma económica, como a prioridade do Governo é aumentar impostos, cortar salários e viver num momento permanente de contracção, obviamente o Sr. Ministro deixa de ser Ministro do Emprego para passar a ser «*ministro do desemprego*».
[…]
O Sr. Ministro da Economia e do Emprego: — O Sr. Deputado Basílio Horta falou sobre o desemprego e afirmou que eu seria o «*ministro do desemprego*». Pois, se sou «*ministro do desemprego*», o legado é do governo que nos precedeu.
[…]
A Sr.ª Rita Rato (PCP): — O Sr. Ministro fala-nos de precariedade, mas a precariedade tem conduzido este País para o fim! O Sr. Ministro é o «*ministro do desemprego e da falência do País*»!
O Sr. Miguel Laranjeiro (PS): — Foram 80 000 novos inscritos em apenas um mês, menos 39% de ofertas de emprego disponíveis, em comparação homóloga, e menos 23,7% de ofertas recebidas, ao longo do mês, nos centros de emprego!! Sr. Ministro, por isso, o senhor arrisca-se a ser o «*Ministro do Desemprego*»…
(Journal of the Assembly of the Republic, 27th of October 2011)

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[Mr. Basílio Horta (PS): — But since the government's priority is not economic retake, but to raise taxes, cut down on salaries and to live in a permanent moment of contraction, then obviously Sir, you will cease to be the Minister of Labour, to become the *minister of unemployment*.
Minister of Economy and Emplyment: Mr. Horta, you spoke of unemployment and stated that I would be the *minister of unemployment*. Well if I am the *minister of unemployment* the legacy comes from the government which preceded us.
M. Rita Rato (PCP): — Sir, you speak of precariousness, when precariousness has led this country to its end. You are the *minister of unemployment and the bankruptcy of this country*!
Miguel Laranjeiro (PS): — There were 80 000 new applicants in just a month, 39% less job offers available in comparison and under 23,7% offers received during the month at the Employment Agencies. For these reasons, you, Mr Minister run the risk of becoming the *minister of unemployment* ...]

The second example analysed in this section is an intentional, dellocutive insult, pronounced *in absentia*, aimed at the Secretary of State for Employment. It is also a ritual insult, in the sense that it does not cross the barrier between the political and the personal identity of the target. As opposed to the previous offensive act, this insult is not aimed only at the professional political identity. On the one hand, the comparison with Hosni Mubarak is ideologically charged, as the former Egyptian president was considered a dictator by the Western societies and, on the other hand, by referring a specific situation, in which Mubarak refused to acknowledge the protesters on the streets in Cairo, the speaker suggests that the Portuguese Secretary of State for Employment refuses to see the reality. What makes his claim most offensive is evidently comparing him to a political leader that symbolizes antidemocratic values, tyranny and dictatorship. There was no immediate reaction to the insult, but it was largely commented in the following days by the media and political pundits. As we shall see in the next example, this was not the only time in which speakers use comparisons with blamable political personalities in order to attack their adversaries.

(b) O Sr. Pedro Mota Soares (CDS-PP): — Sr.a Ministra, não vê a realidade?! Deixe-me que lhe diga que a Sr.a Ministra não tem um Secretário de Estado do Emprego: a Sr.a Ministra tem um *Mubarak do desemprego*! Na semana passada, o povo egípcio estava na rua e o Presidente egípcio dizia que estava tudo calmo e que as manifestações estavam a desacelerar...!"
(Journal of the Assembly of the Republic, 11th of February 2011)
Mr. Pedro Mota Soares (CDS-PP): — Minister, can't you see the truth?! Let me tell you that you Madam, do not have a State Secretary for employment:

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you have a *Mubarak of unemployment*! Last week, the Egyptian people were out on the streets while their President claimed that everything was calm and that the protests were slowing down..!

In the same way, we can analyse the talks where the speakers compare their adversaries and their actions to the time of Salazar's dictatorship (1932-1974). There is also some sense of "nostalgia" in comparisons of Portuguese society today with the time of Salazar (the longest dictatorship in 20th Century Europe) which is synonymous with censorship, poverty, colonial war, economic and social under-development.

In the example (c), we identify a ritual, collective, direct, *in praesentia* offensive act, aimed at the governing party. It is an insult attacking the political identity of the target, suggesting that they represent a totalitarian, oppressive ideology, and a that their political action is against the working class. The utterance was one of the asides pronounced during the plenary sitting and there was no reaction to it from the audience or from the targeted political party.

(c) "O Sr. Jerónimo de Sousa (PCP): — O *Salazar* tinha tanto medo da greve quanto vocês!"
(Journal of the Assembly of the Republic, 22nd of March 2012)
[Mr. Jerónimo de Sousa (PCP): — *Salazar* feared strikes as much as you do!]

### 4.5. *Ad hominem attacks: Africanista de Massamá*

The last example we analyse in this paper is an *ad hominem* verbal attack. Uttered during the electoral campaign, the individual, direct, dellocutive, *in absentia* offensive act was aimed at the president of the Social Democrat Party. "The africanist of Massamá" is an allusion to the African roots of the target, who spent his childhood in Luanda (the capital of Angola, a former Portuguese colony) and whose wife was born in Guinea-Bissau (another former Portuguese colony):

"Esse africanista de Massamá tem de demonstrar amanhã se tem unhas para tocar a guitarra do país ou se não as tem, como no fundo já provou".
[This africanist of Massamá must show us tomorrow if he has the fingers to play the country's guitar or not, as he has already proven his inability].

This expression uses racist elements and the insult is stronger in that it is aimed not only at the candidate but also at his wife, of mixed race; by ricochet, the result of the incriminations is not only aimed at those to whom it was uttered but also at the neighbourhood where this candidate lives, Massamá, a suburban area close to Lisbon.

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The insult followed a previous statement of the President of the Social Democrat Party, who said during a rally with immigrant citizens that:

> "Posso-vos garantir que eu sou o mais africano de todos os candidatos ao Parlamento que existem em Portugal. É verdade, porque a minha mulher é da Guiné-Bissau, é de Bissau, e, portanto, a minha filha mais pequenina também é africana."
> ("I am the most African of all candidates", says the leader of PSD)
> [I can assure you that I am the most African of candidates in Portugal. I am practically married to Africa. It's true. My wife was born in Guinée-Bissau and my youngest daughter is also African].

As opposed the examples analysed in 4.2. and the example (c) in 4.3., this is not a reactive insult, as it is not triggered by a previous offensive; the speaker makes use of a previous statement to produce a verbal attack. This offensive act is a non-ritual one, and, by targeting the personal identity of the third party, who refused to comment it. While *ad hominem* attacks are not very frequent in Portuguese political debates, this example shows that they do occur.

## 5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The exchange of negative axiology plays an important social role in the reclaiming of status or position and when the public image of politicians is at stake, or rather, when there is a rough struggle for power, the political debate turns fierce provoking more frequently situations of verbal aggression.

In the examples we looked at, the negative classifications, the follow ups (4.2.) and the repetitions (4.4.) that empower the critique, highlight a verbal aggression that instead of strengthening ties, degrade the other by marking and destroying their image, by increasing the rupture and encouraging the dissolution of social tie and lowering the level of the political debate.

Situated within the political domain or not, threatening the addressee's political (either professional or ideological) or personal identity, offensive acts are used strategically in political discourse, since conflict is accepted in the political arena. In order to attack their adversaries, Portuguese politicians use intentional distortions, colloquial words, allusions to blamable political personalities, or simply racist characterizations. In the heat of the debate, they may overreact to previous statements and produce offensive utterances that may, in turn, affect their own image. Some of these reactions are largely commented by the media, but the level of verbal aggressiveness does not seem to diminish. As Catarina Madeira e

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Márcia Galrão wrote in their latest book, "if at the beginning of the Republic, insults were almost formal and masqueraded of a certain sophistication, in recent years, the level of vocabulary rivals that of the fishmongers at *Mercado do Bolhão*" (Madeira and Galrão 2011: 19).

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