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Adding a temporal dimension to the analysis of argumentative discourse: *justified reframing* as a means of turning a single-issue discussion into a complex argumentative discussion

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Abstract

This paper seeks to extend existing models of argumentation by considering an important dimension of real-life argumentative discourse: how complex argumentative discussions evolve over time. We define a complex argumentative discussion as a multi-issue discussion, in which the different issues are interrelated in the form of a hierarchy. We claim that *justified reframing* might be used to transform a single-issue argumentative discussion into a complex argumentative discussion. To illustrate this, we examine the Facebook discourse of the Rhodes Must Fall movement in South Africa. We analyse how reframing is justified by means of arguments, allowing the protagonists to claim as legitimate their reframing of a single issue into a complex argumentative discussion. Our findings complement existing sociological research on social movements by highlighting how their goals are achieved by means of argumentative discourse.

Keywords: argumentation, issue, reframing, justified reframing, complex argumentative discussion, Rhodes Must Fall movement, Facebook, South Africa, temporal development of discussions

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reflection on the notion of issue originated within that project, although in this paper we analyse different data.

Biographical notes

Sara Greco is Senior Assistant Professor of Argumentation at USI – Università della Svizzera italiana (Lugano, Switzerland), Institute of Argumentation, Linguistics and Semiotics. She works on collaborative argumentation and argumentative dialogue as a means to prevent and resolve conflict in different settings. She has a particular interest in dispute mediation (see the published monograph *Argumentation in dispute mediation: A reasonable way to handle conflict*, John Benjamins 2011). She is also developing research into children’s argumentation in the family and in educational settings.

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Adding a temporal dimension to the analysis of argumentative discourse: *justified reframing* as a means of turning a single-issue discussion into a complex argumentative discussion

1 Introducing and positioning the problem

On 8 April 2015, a statue of Cecil Rhodes, erected in 1934, was removed from the University of Cape Town (UCT) campus as a result of student protests. Rhodes was a wealthy British businessman and a political figure in South Africa, having served as Prime Minister of the Cape Colony from 1890 to 1896. His statue stood in front of UCT because Rhodes donated the land on which the university was founded; the reason why his figure was (and still is) controversial is that Rhodes was a champion of British imperialism and is often considered to be one of the initiators of racial segregation.¹ The decision to remove the statue was the result of a movement protesting against racism and discrimination against black students. The statue was interpreted for its semiotic value, i.e. as a tangible element of a bigger and more complex cultural system of which it became a *condensation symbol* (Sapir, 1934; Zarefsky, 2014; Kaufer & Carley, 1993).

The students and other participants (with various backgrounds and political agendas) who organised this movement called themselves the “Rhodes Must Fall” movement (henceforth: RMF). The protest, amplified by the use of Facebook (a page called “UCT: Rhodes Must Fall” was created on 12 March 2015),² had been ongoing for less than a month when the academic senate at UCT decided to remove the statue. RMF’s communication campaign was intrinsic to the development of the movement; this campaign can be interpreted as argumentative, as RMF, through Facebook, defended their opinions in the face of real or anticipated antagonists.³

Originally, the only issue tackled by RMF was: “should the statue of Cecil Rhodes be removed?”; to which they adopted a positive standpoint (“yes, it should be removed”). The name of the movement – RhodesMustFall – stemmed from this standpoint. Soon, however, RMF started discussing other issues. In particular, on 25 March 2015, they posted a clear and official “mission statement”, saying

¹ This was how Cecil Rhodes was portrayed in newspapers at the time of the events that we are going to consider. The UK’s Guardian newspaper, for example, claimed that Rhodes “began the policy of racial segregation in South Africa and allowed the newspapers he controlled to publish racist tracts” (Smith, 2015).

² See www.facebook.com/RhodesMustFall (last visited 28 February 2018). Although our paper is based on the RMF communication via Facebook, we are not focusing on the specific features of argumentation used in the digital media in this paper. This topic has been explored by Lewiński & Mohammed (2015). The authors discuss new features of interaction on digital media (with a focus on Twitter). Lewiński & Mohammed (2012) focus on the argumentative discussions generated by using the “status updates” on Facebook, taking the Arab Spring as a case in point. In our contribution, we do not consider comments in reaction to RMF’s posts; we are mainly interested in RMF as the protagonist of an argumentative discussion. Consequently, the features of argumentation contained in the digital media will remain in the background in our study.

³ See the definition of argumentation in van Eemeren et al. (2014: 2): “Argumentation arises in response to, or in anticipation of, a difference of opinion, whether this difference of opinion is real or merely imagined. [...] Argumentation comes into play in cases when people start defending a view they assume not to be shared by others”.

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that “this movement was sparked by Chumani Maxwele’s radical protest against the statue of Cecil John Rhodes on Monday 9 March 2015. This has *brought to the surface* the existing and justified rage of black students in the oppressive space cultivated and maintained by UCT”. They added: “This movement is not just about the removal of a statue” and “The removal of the statue will not be the end of this movement, but rather the beginning of the decolonization of the university”.

RMF did not position these diverse issues as a disconnected list but as one coherent discussion incorporating subordinate issues. As we will explain in section 2, we call this type of complex web of interrelated issues a *complex argumentative discussion*, which is created through what we term *justified reframing*, i.e. a reframing of the original issue which is justified by arguments. This paper aims to illustrate justified reframing as a means of creating a complex discussion.

Before describing these concepts in greater detail, we note that RMF’s complex argumentative discussion was created *over time*, with issues emerging one after another. To our knowledge, research into how argumentative discussions develop diachronically is still limited. In this paper, we will consider *how argumentative discussions evolve* within discourse; and, in particular, how a complex discussion develops from a discussion on a single issue, by means of justified reframing. By adopting a discursive and dialogical approach (cf. Plantin, 2005; Jacquin, 2014; van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004), this work shows how argumentation emerges and is developed. This analysis contributes to the study of argumentation in complex settings that are typical of real-life contexts. Lewiński & Aakhus (2014: 161) argue for the necessity of extending existing dialectical models, which “theorize argumentation as a dyadic exchange between two and only two parties (...) who take up only two basic positions” (ibid.). These authors consider the complexities of multi-party discussions and introduce the concept of *polylogue* (ibid.). Starting from a similar concern, Palmieri & Mazzali-Lurati (2016) elaborate a model with different levels of text stakeholders in argumentation to define what they call “complex rhetorical situations”. The present work also extends existing models of argumentation to achieve a more nuanced view of argumentative discussions in real-life settings: we concentrate on how a discussion evolves and becomes complex over time. By way of illustration, we will focus on RMF’s posts on Facebook (see section 3).

We will proceed as follows. In section 2, we will outline a theoretical proposal concerning justified reframing as a means of turning a discussion on a single issue into a complex argumentative discussion. This will be illustrated in section 3, using a corpus of data taken from the RMF case. In section 4, we will present the core of our analysis, before moving on to explore the main implications at a theoretical level in section 5. Finally, section 6 will present conclusions and indicate areas for further research.

2 Theoretical concepts

In this section, we will first illustrate what we mean by “complex” argumentative discussions (2.1). We will then go on to explain how justified reframing may be used to create a complex argumentative discussion (2.2).

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2.1 The concept of “complex” argumentative discussion

The idea that argumentative discourse is generated by some form of disagreement, often called the “issue of the discussion” is widely held in both ancient and contemporary approaches. Aristotle used the term ‘*próblema*’ (Gr. *πρόβλημα*) to identify this notion of the issue of the discussion, i.e. the problem around which an argumentative discussion revolves (Tredennick and Forster, 1960). More specifically, Aristotle understood the issue as an either/or question (introduced by the Greek term *πότερον*, translated into the Latin *utrum...an*). In contemporary understanding, the issue can be interpreted as a question that allows for two or more different (opposing) standpoints, each of which needs to be supported by argumentation.⁴ We agree with the dialogical model introduced by Plantin (2005), according to whom a typical argumentative situation is defined by the confrontation of different opposing viewpoints that address the same issue (Fr. “question”, which corresponds to Latin “*quaestio*”, which in turn translates the Aristotelian “*próblema*”). Our understanding of the issue is informed by the pragma-dialectical concept of *difference of opinion*: “in a difference of opinion, two different positions are taken with regard to a certain issue” (van Eemeren & Snoeck Henkemans, 2017: 3). In real argumentative practice, “instead of being stated at the outset, the main difference of opinion often comes to light gradually, so that what the two parties actually disagree on becomes clear only in the course of the discussion” (van Eemeren & Snoeck Henkemans, 2017: 8). This hints at the question of time which, however, is not considered in detail in the pragma-dialectical model.

Pragma-dialecticians also distinguish between *single* and *multiple* differences of opinion. A multiple difference of opinion “will arise when someone brings up two or more issues at the same time, for example by giving his standpoint on a whole series of matters, or by stating an opinion about a complex theory or about a plan with numerous components” (van Eemeren & Snoeck Henkemans, 2017: 7).⁵ Instead of “multiple *differences of opinion*”, we prefer to use the term “complex argumentative *discussions*”, because in our view the complexity derives from the fact that *one* discussion encompasses *several* interrelated differences of opinion (and, therefore, different issues). On this particular point, our interpretation diverges from the pragma-dialectical model. A complex argumentative discussion should have the following two characteristics:

- a) It is multi-issue, i.e. it comprises more than one issue or difference of opinion;
- b) The different issues that are tackled in the discussion are interconnected, in the sense that they are situated within some form of hierarchy, so that the argumentative discussion is presented not just as a list of separate issues but as a coherent macro-text of argumentative discussions⁶.

In this paper, we concentrate on how complex argumentative discussions are generated over time. There might be different ways to create a complex argumentative discussion, depending on two variables: (a) whether the protagonist of an argumentation creates a complex discussion through personal choice or does so because requested by a critical antagonist; (b) whether the discussion is created by listing one issue after another; by splitting up the original issue into more than one sub-

⁴ We therefore believe that the issue or question should be formulated as a specific alternative, incorporating a confrontation between different standpoints; this should not be confused with the general topic of a discourse.

⁵ Pragma-dialecticians also distinguish between non-mixed (when there is only one party committed to defending a standpoint) and mixed (when more parties are committed to defend a standpoint) discussions (van Eemeren & Snoeck Henkemans, 2017: 6). The RMF Facebook page is a multiple non-mixed discussion.

⁶ An example relative to dispute mediation has been discussed in Greco Morasso (2011: 206-207).

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issue; or whether a single issue is later reframed as part of a broader issue, which also includes other (sub-)issues.⁷ These two variables, if intersected, give rise to six possibilities:

	A One speaker creates a complex discussion	B The complex discussion is created by responding to critical questions of an antagonist
1 List of interconnected issues	1A	1B
2 Splitting up of the original issue into more sub-issues	2A	2B
3 An original issue is later portrayed as a sub-issue of a broader issue, which also includes other sub-issues	3A	3B

Table 1: Possibilities for creating complex argumentative discussions

The RMF case corresponds to 3A. In fact, the RMF movement, after having introduced the statue-issue, later re-described it as a trigger for a more profound oppression-issue that also included other forms of oppression, which were added progressively, especially in the campaign’s early months (see table 2 below).

2.2 Justified reframing as a means of creating a complex argumentative discussion

Type 3A includes discussions that, originally, start with a single issue; later, the discussion is made complex as this single issue is said to be part of a broader issue, which also includes other (sub-)issues. In 3A, the temporal aspect is important because a single issue is presented as part of a more abstract category at a later time: this change of perspective counts as a *reframing*. As we will show, in the RMF case, this reframing is justified by arguments, thus becoming *justified reframing*.

Reframing of an issue means changing the original frames of interpretation; it has been studied as a communication competence (Putnam, 2004; Dewulf et al., 2009). For Putnam (2004), reframing is a process of re-categorisation that includes *shifts in vertical levels of abstraction* (Putnam, 2004; Putnam & Powers, 2015: 383). Shifts in levels of abstraction can happen when an issue is shifted, for example, from the particular to the general (e.g. “from the details of particular positions to the broader common goals that both parties share”, Putnam, 2004: 279); from the concrete to the abstract, from the individual to the system, and from the literal to the symbolic (for example, “introducing new metaphors that transcend the polarizing and stereotyping of parties” as in Putnam, 2004: 282).

In relation to *social movements*, framing and reframing have been extensively studied in sociology as a means used deliberately to achieve a movement’s intended effect (Benford & Snow, 2000; Levin, 2005). (Re)framing processes (e.g. ‘frame alignment’ and ‘frame extension’: Snow et al., 1986) and their ability to construct meaning for the purposes of social movements have already been examined (Benford & Snow, 2000; Tsarouhas, 2011; Levin, 2005). In particular, processes of frame extension, which, according to our interpretation, include reframing through shifting an issue to a more abstract

⁷ We thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting the idea of dimension (b), which we have further elaborated in table 2.

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category, serve “to encompass interests or points of view that are incidental” to the social movement’s primary goals “but [are] of considerable salience for potential adherents” (Snow et al., 1986: 472). Frame extension (including reframing) thus, functions in support of a social movement’s aim to be as inclusive as possible in terms of audience and participation; not in terms of adding more adherents (quantitative extension) but in terms of adding a wider variety of adherents from different backgrounds and with different goals (qualitative extension).⁸

Although sociological studies acknowledge the use of language and discourse as a driver for action, in general, research is scant about how this is connected to argumentative discourse. However, the connection to argumentation is important as it illuminates the persuasive function that social movements try to attain through framing and reframing processes. In argumentative terms, reframing, as part of frame extension, might be interpreted as a means of creating a complex argumentative discussion rather than opening a new different discussion; because the movement will try to present the new issues as coherent with its primary objectives. It is no coincidence that Tsarouhas (2011) speaks of *redefinition* and *reinterpretation* of the original frame; this, as noted above, transforms a discussion over time, by modifying the issue.

Thus, primarily, reframing is important for argumentation because it has a role in modifying discussions over time. A second reason why an argumentative perspective is important in this study is that, because shifting the original interpretation of an issue is a questionable process, reframing will often be justified by arguments (Greco, 2016). As already discussed, we call this *justified reframing*. Notably, this is more likely to happen in category A (1A, 2A, 3A, see table 1) because in these cases it is a single arguer (the protagonist) who autonomously decides to create a complex discussion and modify it over time; consequently, the burden of proof for this transformation stays with the protagonist. The arguments in justified reframing support the legitimacy of seeing different issues as one complex discussion.

3 The Rhodes Must Fall case study

On 9 March 2015, a student dropped excrement on Rhodes’ statue on the UCT campus as a protest against the statue’s presence on the university’s premises. Thereafter, the RMF campaign began to take shape and started posting comments and argumentative justifications of their actions on Facebook.

Less than a month later (on 8 April 2015), the academic senate held a meeting to discuss what to do about the monument and decided to have the statue removed. RMF, which had started to talk about

⁸ This is clear if we consider the examples given by Snow et al. (1986: 472). To cite just one example, these authors discuss a memo produced by the Austin Peace and Justice Coalition (APJC) about the activities of this social movement, which had originally concentrated on “nuclear disarmament, stopping military intervention, and redirecting military spending to the needy”. The memo notes that the APJC has failed “to work actively on issues important to minority groups such as hunger, better public housing, and police brutality” and that its goals did not include fighting racism and unjust discrimination (ibid.). The APJC then proposed to add the goal “to promote social justice by nonviolently confronting racism, sexism, and all forms of discrimination and oppression” to its communication (ibid.). The intention was to broaden its adherent pool, going beyond the cohort of “white middle class baby-boomers” (ibid.) whom the movement originally addressed. The original goal (justice and peace) was not left behind but it was reinterpreted (reframed, in our terms) through this frame extension.

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other issues, particularly from 25 March 2015 onwards, continued to make active use of their Facebook profile. By July 2016, this had attracted 17,659 likes with the number still increasing at the time of writing this paper (there were over 18,000 by January 2018).

The events surrounding the statue were picked up in the national media and became an important theme with widespread repercussions, as the protest for equal rights spread to other universities such as Stellenbosch.⁹ The movement also became popular worldwide: for example, a movement named Rhodes Must Fall Oxford was started in Oxford, UK, whereas in the US, Harvard Law School decided to retire its official symbol due to connotations of slavery.¹⁰

Our corpus is based on a collection of posts taken from the Facebook page of the RMF movement between March 2015 and March 2017. We have utilised only the official posts, disregarding comments. In particular, we have focused on the “status updates”, in which the movement has periodically redefined itself. As Lewiński & Mohammed (2012) explain, “Status updates, similarly to other activities, appear on the user’s personal “wall” as well as on their friends’ “news feeds”. Obviously, in this case, what is published on the Facebook page is part of a broader stream of communications involving different contexts and media (face-to-face communication, national and international press, other media, and so on). We do not provide an exhaustive analysis of either the RMF movement’s communications or of the broader reactions to this campaign from other parties.

4 Analysis

By way of illustration, we analyse how justified reframing has created a complex discussion (category 3A, table 1) in the RMF case. Firstly we explain how RMF has created a complex discussion of type 3A (section 4.1) over time by means of a reframing. Secondly, we see how this reframing is justified (at a later point in time) and analyse the main arguments given to support its legitimacy (4.2). Finally, we discuss the impacts of this reframing on the subsequent discussion (4.3).

4.1 Mapping issue reframing: the creation of a complex argumentative discussion

Table 2 outlines the most frequently recurring issues that emerged on the Facebook page of the RMF movement in the first weeks after its creation (March 2015) and provides examples. We give examples taken from the first weeks because this is the moment when one can clearly see how a first issue is introduced and then other issues are added to the same discussion; most of the issues, however, are treated in the subsequent weeks and months and some of them (e.g. those concerning decolonisation and gender oppression) are still debated in 2017.

⁹ This is not the only protest concerning higher education going on in South Africa at the moment. For example, in 2015, other groups started demonstrating against a rise in university fees under the title “Fees must fall”.

¹⁰ The Harvard Law School logo used to feature a shield showing three sheaves of wheat, based on the crest of an 18th century slaveholder family who made an important donation to the university. Yet, as an article published in March 2016 reports, some students “have been calling for the shield to be removed since October, inspired by the success of a similar campaign by South African students, Rhodes Must Fall” (Mackey, 2016).

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<i>Issue</i>	<i>Date of first introduction</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Should the statue of Cecil Rhodes be removed? (trigger issue)	12.03.2015	Creation of the webpage with the title “Rhodes must fall” (12.03.2015) “The media have heard the call” (speaking about the protest against the statue) (13.03.2015)
Should the curriculum of UCT be decolonised?	25.03.2015	“Our black academics who want to decolonise the body, the mind and the university space” (25.03.2015) “Implement a curriculum which critically centres Africa and the subaltern. By this we mean treating African discourses as the point of departure - through addressing not only content, but languages and methodologies of education and learning - and only examining western traditions in so far as they are relevant to our own experience” (25.03.2015)
Should the patriarchy in South African society end?	25.03.2015	“We are an independent collective of students, workers and staff who have come together to end institutionalised racism and patriarchy at UCT” (25.03.2015).
Should gender oppression end?	25.03.2015	“The struggle is not limited to removing a statue or changing a name. It is about making real social changes - in a country that is the most unequal in the world. South African universities reflect this inequality – racial, gender and class” (25.03.2015).
Should financial exclusion from UCT end?	09.04.2015	Secondly, we will be launching a campaign around the financial and academic exclusion of black students (09.4.2015). “RMF along with allied organisations are making a clarion call for students to share their personal experiences of battling with the exploitative anti-black fee structure of this university, including: - Financial exclusion” (18.10.2015)
Do black lives matter?	08.09.2015	Introduction of a “black lives matter syllabus” (8.9.2015) Video showing the “disrupted and disorganized lives of black people” (13.09.2015)
Should outsourcing at UCT be terminated?	27.09.2015	“End outsourcing, forward to a living wage [with pictures of graffiti stating similar things]” (27.09.2015) “Privatisation, from public – private partnership to outsourcing, contracting out services, commercialization etc, costs workers more and delivers less. When privatizing or contracting out services to private companies for profit, the workers and the poor lose.” (05.10.2015)

Table 2: Recurrent issues in the RMF Facebook argumentation in the first weeks in 2015

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The complex argumentative discussion of type 3A is created as follows. The first issue (12 March, should the statue be removed?) is reframed on 25 March: it is said to be only a trigger for a more profound, more abstract and more encompassing problem, namely “should racism be ended?” (25 March). The category of racism is immediately re-interpreted as a more general category of “oppression”, with RMF also adding “should gender/class oppression end?” into the issues they want tackled (25 March). From this moment on, other issues are introduced under the category of oppression, such as “should the curriculum be decolonized?” (25 March), “should outsourcing be ended?” (29 September), and other sub-issues.

By introducing this shift to a more abstract level (Putnam, 2004, section 2.2), these different issues are presented not as a disconnected list but as a coherent complex argumentative discussion (type 3A, table 1). Arguably, this makes the movement more inclusive as it increases the diversity of potentially interested adherents (section 2.1).

4.2 Main arguments in support of the reframing

We can infer that the creation of a complex discussion of type 3A apparently attracts some criticism, as almost a year later (21 January 2016), RMF posts a status update in which the reframing undertaken is explicitly justified, thus turning it into a justified reframing. This shows that a complex discussion of type 3A (table 1) needs, at least in some cases, a meta-level of justification, as the legitimacy of reframing needs to be proved.

Despite the fact that this status update is partially ambiguous¹¹ and written in a decidedly emphatic style that sometimes hinders comprehension, it is possible to reconstruct its argumentative nature. The text explicitly responds to criticisms that RMF has received; specifically, the leaders of the movement explain why they feel entitled to tackle other issues beyond racism (such as for example misogyny or transgender issues). RMF claims that tackling these problems means “reclaiming and returning the movement on its founding principles”, thus reiterating the continuity of the different individual issues. The title states the occasion on which this status update has been written: “RMF’s Azania House [the headquarters of the RMF] taken over by the black cis womxn (sic), trans womxn (sic) and non-binary people of the movement”. The occupation of the headquarters by a sub-group of RMF, which struggles with issues different from the original white-versus-black divide, becomes the occasion to explicitly justify why RMF is legitimate in dealing with other issues.

More specifically, this text of the status update starts by retelling the story of the RMF movement and referring back to the initial single issue: “The Rhodes Must Fall movement was sparked by a single act of faecal slinging on the Cecil John Rhodes statue, tapping into and awaking the rousing of black pain and structural racism silently experienced by black students at UCT”. By using terms such as “black pain” and “structural racism”, this narrative points to the fact that the episode of the statue has been a trigger for addressing more profound problems, in continuity with the interpretation that had been given starting from March 25 (see table 2). This counts as a reframing that creates a complex discussion of the type 3A (table 1).

¹¹ On strategic ambiguity in the digital media argumentation see Lewiński & Mohammed (2015: 294). To understand where this text is ambiguous, see for example the discussion of our interpretation of the first argument in footnote 11.

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In addition to previous communications by RMF, this status update adds two arguments that make the reframing a justified reframing. In the following sections, we will present and analyse these two arguments. These are particularly important because they represent the first arguments given to justify the reframing. In section 4.2.3, we will also show how these arguments are further supported in the following months; and what effect they have on the subsequent argumentative discussion.

4.2.1 “We do not lead single issue lives”

The first argument given to justify why RMF is legitimately tackling other issues is as follows:

“It’s a frame of thinking that emerged out of black feminist thought to remind us that ‘There’s no such thing as a single issue struggle because we do not lead single issue lives’ as Audre Lorde pointed out. [...] This lens holds us accountable to the notion that other identity markers are not simply add-ons to the battle against institutional racism but are an integral part of the institutional issues that this movement seeks to challenge”.

An analytic overview of this argumentation (based on van Eemeren, Grootendorst & Snoeck Henkemans, 2002) is as follows:¹²

Issue: Can there be a single issue struggle?

Standpoint: 1 There cannot be such a thing as a single issue struggle.

Argument: 1.1 We do not lead single issue lives.

In this argument, advanced by poet Audre Lorde and appropriated by RMF, life is represented as a whole entity that is made up of more than one single issue. Based on a *whole-to-part locus* or argument scheme (see Rigotti, 2008; Rigotti & Greco Morasso, 2010), according to which “if the whole has a certain trait, its parts will have that same trait”, it follows that no part of life is made up of single issues. Therefore, even this specific struggle will not revolve around a single issue. In the second part of the text quoted above, the RMF movement is further elaborating on this argument, by paraphrasing it and making it even clearer that “other identity markers” (i.e. other issues besides the removal of the statue) are an integral part of their movement.¹³ We do not enter here into a detailed evaluation of this argument, as our purpose is to show that the reframing is explicitly justified by RMF; however, it is important to point out that this argument is based on a relatively weak support principle, as it does not always hold that “if the whole has a certain trait, its parts will have that same trait”. This principle is only valid if we consider properties that are actually transferrable from the whole to its parts. According to van Eemeren & Garssen (2009), only properties that are *absolute* (i.e. not relative to a comparison) and independent of structure (i.e. not depending on the whole as a

¹² Here we interpret “there’s no such thing as a single-issue struggle” as “there cannot be”, i.e. it is an impossibility for a single issue struggle to exist. In this sense, we rephrase the movement’s words following a principle of *substitution*, which consists in the “replacement of formulations that are confusingly ambiguous or unnecessarily vague by clear ones” (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004: 103).

¹³ Notably, at a linguistic level, the RMF movement explicitly uses the terms “frame of thinking” and “lens” to refer to their way of framing the situations. Both terms seem to allude to the fact that they are aware of proposing a specific reframing of the situation. A “lens”, in particular, is a metaphor referring to the fact that one looks at a given reality in a different way (using a different tool).

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coherent structured entity) are transferable. For example, the following example is not necessarily true: “All parts of this figure are triangular; therefore, this figure is triangular” because “being triangular” is an absolute but structure-dependent property (the example is discussed in van Eemeren & Garssen, 2009: 33). Similarly, in the case of argument 1.1 discussed above, we are dealing with the property of being “single-issued”, which is absolute, but it is also strongly structure-dependent, because “life” might be seen as a coherent whole that is more than simply the sum of its parts. Therefore, the property of being “single-issued” is not easily transferrable from the whole (life) to its parts (struggles).

4.2.2 “The multi-headed monster of oppression”

The second argument appears a few lines below the first one:

“Our movement endeavors to be effective in our struggle for decolonization by pushing for radical change that is holistic and tackles the multi-headed monster of oppression”.

This excerpt of the text can be analysed as follows in argumentative terms:

Issue: Does RMF endeavour to be effective in their struggle for decolonisation?

Standpoint: 2 Our movement endeavours to be effective in our struggle for decolonisation

Argument: 2.1 We push for radical change that is holistic and tackles the multi-headed monster of oppression.

Whilst this text is not completely clear, the issue formulated here seems to be whether RMF’s endeavours are effective or not. Different aspects contribute to the supporting principle (*locus*) underlying this argument. Firstly there is, once again, a whole-to-part relationship involved: in fact, the idea of a holistic approach (also called “intersectionality” later in this status update) that tackles a multi-headed monster shows the necessity of considering all parts of the problem. Secondly, the negative whole is called a *multi-headed monster*. This metaphor clearly condenses a *locus from analogy* (cf. Rigotti & Greco Morasso, 2010; Pollaroli & Rocci, 2015) that makes the audience infer the urgent need for a holistic and radical change that is able to extinguish all parts of oppression, underlining its negativity. The rhetorical strength of the metaphorical image of the multi-headed monster lies in the quality of *immediacy* (cf. Kjeldsen, 2012: 240), which the audience perceives when thinking of a frightening and horrible monster with many heads, each of which has a separate mind and wants to tear to pieces one part of a community. Moreover, using the monster metaphor is a means for RMF to evade the burden of proof regarding the legitimacy of reframing the original issue: through this metaphor, RMF conveys the message that the discussion has been made complex because the issue is itself complex. In this interpretation, the RMF has done nothing more than was required by the existing problem. Thirdly, there is also a means-to-end relation (*locus from instrumental cause*) focused on the role of an adequate instrument (the holistic approach) to attain the movement’s goal (tackling a complex, “multi-headed” problem). In our interpretation, although these three loci are present and together contribute to support the standpoint, the means-end relation is the one in the foreground. In fact, the movement is trying to demonstrate that they endeavour to be effective; reflecting on the adequacy of the instruments they use is crucial in demonstrating effectiveness.

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Note that this argument, as well as the preceding one, explicitly supports RMF's decision to tackle different issues in their communications on Facebook. In this sense, both arguments count as a justification of the creation of a complex discussion of type 3A (table 1).

4.2.3 Effects of the reframing on the subsequent argumentative discussion

Van Eemeren (2010: 126) observes that “if successful, framing creates social facts”. Arguably, this happens with RMF. In the months that follow, the legitimacy of having created a complex discussion of type 3A is taken for granted and the actions of RMF are presented as necessary or unavoidable responses to a ‘multifaced’ form of oppression. For example, on 2 February 2016, RMF speaks of a pre-existing “*undercurrent* of pain and anger amongst the black students body” that “was *catalyzed* and *brought to the surface*” by the episode with the excrement (our emphasis). On 10 February 2016, it is claimed that RMF need to resolve “The *nexus* of fees, exclusion and basic needs requirements that have *necessitated* the protested (sic)” (our emphasis). Thus, consistent with the reframing, oppression is presented as a nexus of problems that were objectively present; the RMF protest is presented as an unavoidable and consistent reaction. RMF goes so far as to criticise their opponents who, exploiting the passage of time, end up separating issues that should be treated together (28 July 2016).

Nonetheless, the evolution of the original issue into a complex discussion of type 3A over time is still seen as something whose legitimacy needs to be further proven. We can infer this from the presence of further arguments that are advanced, after January 2016, to support the existence of a multi-faceted oppression. First, we find the repeated presence of *arguments by example*, represented by narratives about the oppression of individuals, which implicitly prove that oppression exists (take the story of a disabled student published on 1 March 2016). Second, we find the presence of *argumentation from expert opinion* (22 September 2016), as RMF declares that they are fighting an era of coloniality and uses a quotation to show how coloniality affects different aspects: “long standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labour, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations (Torres 2007)¹⁴”.

5 Discussion and conclusions

In this paper, we have shown that the RMF movement makes use of justified reframing (as a particular type of frame extension) to create a complex discussion. The original single issue about the statue is then reframed as a trigger that has led to the emergence of a more profound problem; the statue issue thus becomes a sub-issue of a broader issue, namely “should oppression be ended?”. This enables RMF to include further sub-issues, thus potentially adding different supporters to their cause. This reframing is *justified* by different arguments that support the legitimacy of considering different aspects as sub-issues within one discussion.

Our findings confirm the findings of sociological research (section 2.2): reframing (as part of frame extension) is deliberately used by social movements to achieve their aims and, specifically, to appeal

¹⁴ The citation on the RMF Facebook page is simply “Torres (2007)”. We believe that they are referring to a paper titled On the coloniality of being written by Maldonado-Torres (2007: 243).

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to different categories of supporters. The added value of our analysis, however, lies in showing how these processes occur at a discursive level, by developing a complex discussion and then arguing for it (section 4).

This paper also makes a contribution to argumentation studies at a theoretical level, by explaining one way in which complex argumentative discussions might be created, i.e. through justified reframing. From this viewpoint, our analysis complements previous research (Lewiński and Aakhus, 2013; Palmieri and Mazzali-Lurati, 2016) that, in different ways, has argued for the importance of extending existing models for argumentation analysis in order to account for the nuances of argumentation in real-life contexts. Whilst previous research has focused on the existence of different stakeholders within one discussion, we focus on the fact that a complex discussion (i.e. a discussion including more interconnected issues) can be created with different dynamics over time. To our knowledge, the evolution of discussions over time has not been thoroughly analysed in argumentation studies. *Justified reframing* has been proven a possible way in which a single arguer (“protagonist” within an argumentative discussion) might reframe his or her original issue, making the discussion complex over time, and justifying why this is legitimate. These findings pave the way for the introduction of a temporal dimension in the analysis of argumentation.

Finally, the analysis of the RMF case could be further expanded from a viewpoint of multimodal argumentation and multimodal critical discourse analysis, by focusing on the role of the Rhodes statue in the discussion (see for example the analysis by Machin and Abousnougga, 2013 on statues as means to legitimize war discourse). From a different angle, this case could also generate interesting reflections on the role that condensation symbols such as statues play in reconciliation and conflict resolution. In fact, the removal of Rhodes’ statue has been perceived by many as contradicting Nelson Mandela's policy of reconciliation (see for example the commentary in Zille, 2012). It has been observed that Mandela, as the first black President of South Africa, tended not to change the symbols of the apartheid era. In this sense, the RMF case also raises questions about how a society deals with symbols of the past and how this affects reconciliation and conflict resolution.

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