

# Tense Arguments Questions, Exclamations, Emotions

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Article abstract

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# Tense Arguments: Questions, Exclamations, Emotions

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**Abstract:** Tension is a major issue in the analysis of argumentative discourse in ordinary language. Tension is an operator showing that the speaker is highly involved in her speech, and wants to share her commitments, that is, wants to persuade her audience. This paper proposes a case study of an extremely tense and controversial argument with strong anti-Semitic undertones (§2). The following sections examine the main components of tension: (§3) radicalization of arguments; (§4) exclamations; (§5) rhetorical questions; (§6) emotions. Tension is interpreted as a verdictive operator resisting refutation.

**Résumé:** La tension est un problème majeur dans l'analyse du discours argumentatif dans le langage ordinaire. La tension est un opérateur qui montre que l'oratrice est très impliquée dans son discours et souhaite partager ses engagements, c'est-à-dire, persuader son public. Cet article propose une étude de cas d'un argument extrêmement tendu et controversé, ayant de profondes nuances antisémites (§2); les sections suivantes étudient la principale composante de la tension: (§3), la radicalisation des arguments; (§4), exclamations; (§5), questions rhétoriques; (§6), les émotions. On interprète la tension comme un opérateur véridique qui résiste à la réfutation.

**Keywords:** Argumentation, tension, involvement, rhetorical question, exclamation, emotion, resistance to refutation, anti-Semitism

## 1. Introduction

*Tension* is a major issue in the analysis of ordinary argumentative discourse as a linguistic, inter-subjective, activity. Tension is a *complex unitary, multilevel* syndrome, cutting across the classical levels of linguistic analysis. Tension and laxity phenomena are

currently investigated in linguistics under different headings, such as degree words, gradation, intensity, exclamation, emotional expression, etc.

From the point of view of argumentation, tension is an operator showing that the speaker is highly involved in her speech and wants to share her commitments, that is, wants to persuade her audience. In face-to-face interactions, Tannen (1984) characterizes high-involvement speakers by the fact that they leave no inter-turn pause. From the perspective of argumentation, tension is a characteristic of radical discourse—discourse that presents all-or-nothing arguments rejecting compromises and negotiations.

This paper presents a case study of such an extremely tense and controversial argument: a polemical Internet intervention that has strong anti-Semitic undertones. The first section introduces the text being analyzed, which is a violent rejection of a new French law compensating “the US victims of the Holocaust.” The relevant historical context of this law has developed from the Second World War until the present day. The relevant legal texts include the Nuremberg Tribunal conclusions and decisions; the *Convention on the non-applicability of statutory limitations to war crimes and crimes against humanity*; the ratification of this Convention by the French law, and the complex legislation implementing these decisions.

The following sections examine the main components of tension: (§3) radicalization of arguments excluding the relevant counter-discourse; (§4) exclamations as feigned natural signs and prototypization<sup>1</sup> operators; (§5) rhetorical questions that both challenge and give no voice to the opponent; (§6) and emotions as specific correlates of tension.

The visions of argumentation are many. The definitions corresponding to the conceptual framework implemented in this study can be found in Plantin (2018). The vision of argumentation as a technique “to make discourse more resistant to refutation” (Doury

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<sup>1</sup> We ask permission to use the noun *prototypization* (occurrences on the internet), and the verb *paragonize* with the meaning “to establish as a paragon or a prototype.”

2003, p. 13), is especially well adapted to this case, where *tension* posits arguments beyond refutation.

## 2. The case: Issue and legal context

### 2.1 *The case*

The text, henceforth **T**, comes from the Dieudonné Mbala Mbala website.<sup>2</sup> A controversial personality, Dieudonné Mbala Mbala “is a French comedian, actor, and political activist born on February 11, 1966 in Fontenay-aux-Roses” (after Wikipedia).<sup>3</sup> His shows and political declarations frequently spark polemics and controversies. He has been repeatedly condemned for anti-Semitism and negationism.<sup>4</sup>

**T** is introduced as a reaction to news from the article, “France will pay \$60 million to US victims of the Holocaust,” published in the French daily newspaper, *Le Figaro*. This title is followed by a picture from the 2012 inauguration of the “Shoah Memorial” in Drancy performed by then President of the French Republic, François Hollande.<sup>5</sup> In response to this news, **T** argues as follows<sup>6</sup>:

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<sup>2</sup> I thank Ruth Amossy and her students who proposed this text for discussion during a data session that took place in Ruth Amossy’s PhD seminar on argumentation theory at Tel Aviv University on January 2016. The text is violent and possibly shocking as is often the case in online discussions.

<sup>3</sup> After Wikipedia <https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dieudonné> (03-11-2019).

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.francetvinfo.fr/societe/justice/dieudonne/> (03-11-2019).

<sup>5</sup> “The Cité de la Muette [in Drancy] became an internment camp in 1941, and then in 1942 a regroupment camp for the Jews of France in preparation for their deportation to extermination camps. Between March, 1942, and August, 1944, approximately 63,000 of the 76,000 Jews deported from France went through Drancy.”

<http://www.memorialdelashoah.org/en/english-version/the-shoah-memorial-in-drancy.html> (02-21-2019).

<sup>6</sup> *French original*: Les victimes américaines de la Shoah ? Des victimes devenues américaines post-shoah car il ne me semble pas qu'un seul SS ait foulé le sol américain. Mais de qui se moque-t-on ? Et surtout jusqu'à quand va-t-on devoir payer ? Ça fait 70 ans, qui est encore responsable de cette saloperie ? Que donnent les Américains aux victimes d'Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Bagdad, Saïgon, Kaboul, et à tous ceux qu'ils agressent en permanence et en toute impunité depuis ces mêmes 70 ans ? Putain, mais quelle honte, c'est scandaleux ! Et on prétend faire de la lutte contre l'antisémitisme une cause natio-

(our numbering):

1. The US victims of the Shoah? 2. The victims became American post Shoah, because I don't think that a single SS ever trod the American soil. 3. But whom are they trying to fool? 4. And especially until when will we have to pay? 5. That was 70 years ago, 5b. who is still responsible for that shit? 6. What do the Americans give to the victims of Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Baghdad, Saigon, Kabul, and to all those who have been endlessly attacked with impunity for the same 70 years? 7. Fuck! It's a disgrace, it's scandalous! 8. And we say the fight against anti-Semitism is a national cause? 9. Do we not create it by making such a disparity between the atrocities caused by human beings? 10. What is France doing to repair the damage caused by colonization, the slave trade, 10b. or simply to pay their pensions to the Africans who came and died for France? 11. Nothing! Sod all! 12. And as a famous comedian once said: *"If we do not make it up to the niggers, there are some who will have to pay back a few dollars..."* 13. Fucking mafia clan!

At first reading, the reader is left with a feeling of confusion and unease, due to the violence of the text and to a felt discrepancy between two possible, but inconsistent, argumentative orientations leading to an apparent ambiguity of the general intention: on the one hand, a plea for the victims of imperial wars, slave trade and colonization, and, on the other hand, a rabid anti-Semitic attack. In any case, such was the feeling of the students who proposed the text for discussion.

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nale ? N'en créons-nous pas en faisant une telle disparité dans le traitement des horreurs causées par les humains ? Que fait la France pour réparer les dégâts dus à la colonisation, à la traite négrière, ou tout simplement pour payer les pensions des Africains venus mourrir pour la France ? Rien ! Que dalle ! Et comme disait un célèbre humoriste : "si on ne répare pas pour les négros, y en a qui vont être amenés à rembourser quelques dollars..." Clique mafieuse de merde ! (01-12-2017)

## 2.2 Legal context

The issue is the compensation for the damages suffered by the victims of deportation and spoliations in France during the Second World War. The relevant legal texts include the Nuremberg Tribunal conclusions and decisions; the *Convention on the non-applicability of statutory limitations to war crimes and crimes against humanity*; and the ratification of this Convention by the French law. The current French law states that these damages arose from the anti-Semitic legislation in force during the occupation of France by Nazi Germany. This anti-Semitic legislation was enforced by “The French State,” led by Marshall Pétain, which replaced the French Republic during the Nazi German Occupation (from July 10, 1940 to August 20, 1944). As a consequence, and following a statement made in 1995 by Jacques Chirac, then President of the French Republic, “*the victims of deportation and spoliations arising from the anti-Semitic legislation in force during the Occupation*”<sup>7</sup> have a legal right to a financial compensation.

The specific issue here is the compensation due to American victims. **T** attacks a 2015 law creating a €60 million fund, administered by the Americans, to that effect. This fund allows full compensation for the Holocaust victims deported from France, *who had not been able to receive compensation under the French law because they lived in the US and/or have taken the US nationality*. So, the purpose of the 1995 law is to make up for this unfair treatment of the victims under a pre-existing law.<sup>8</sup>

## 3. Argumentative tension: the argument of the loser

### 3.1 The arguments

The analysis of the argumentative refutation structure is relatively straightforward. First there is an argumentative correction, which is then followed by the following three arguments backing up the

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<sup>7</sup> [http://www.civs.gouv.fr/images/pdf/thecivs/Livret\\_Ruzie\\_Avril07\\_AN.pdf](http://www.civs.gouv.fr/images/pdf/thecivs/Livret_Ruzie_Avril07_AN.pdf) (12-08-2019)

<sup>8</sup> More information:

<https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichJuriAdmin.do?idTexte=CETATEXT000026618461>

conclusion “*we shouldn't pay*”: 1) argument from the statute of limitation, 2) argument from categorization and *a pari*, and 3) argument from consequences.

For two reasons, these arguments will be accompanied by key elements of their respective refutation discourses. The first reason is deontological and legal: under its anti-Semitic reading, the text is highly controversial and can be attacked in court. The second, reason is methodological: since arguing is an interactional activity, arguments can only be properly understood and appreciated by confronting their counter-argument. Moreover, these counter-arguments are common knowledge. Since nobody is supposed to ignore the law, they belong to the argumentative space as framed by the issue. This amounts to approaching that speech from a jurislinguistics perspective, with the analysis being framed as potentially useful counsel for a judge, not a transcendental rational judge, but an ordinary court having to enforce the law.

### 3.1.1 Argumentative correction

The first move is a correction:

**1.** The US victims of the Shoah? **2.** The victims became American *post* Shoah, because I don't think that a single SS ever trod the American soil.

Mbala Mbala is saying there is nothing like “*US victims of the Shoah*.” Rectifying the other discourse, that is, denying the truth of the facts alleged by the opponent and/or the adequacy of her expression, is a basic refutative move. The speech act of clarification or precization is a way to gain the upper hand over the opponent by framing the exchange as a relation between expert/ignoramus.

A possible counter argument to this move runs as follows: the formulation “*the US victims of the Shoah*” is accurate as it is. The expression “*US [citizen]*” does not consider whether nationality was acquired by birth or naturalization, and in both cases, *US victims* are entitled to compensation. In any case: 1) some of the persecuted Jews have chosen the US nationality, whatever their former nationality might have been; 2) US citizens have been persecuted as Jews when they were living in France under the

Vichy regime.<sup>9</sup> The suggested rectification, “...to the victims of the Shoah who became American post Shoah,” changes nothing about the issue apart from excluding the case of US citizens persecuted as Jews under the Vichy regime, which would be contrary to the intention of the legislator.

### *3.1.2 Argument from the statute of limitation*

**4.** And especially until when will we have to pay? **5.** That was 70 years ago, who's still responsible for that shit?

The answer to this rhetorical question is “we don't have to pay since we cannot be held responsible for *cette saloperie*, (‘that shit’)”—meaning the Shoah (see also §6.2.2). A possible counter-argument runs as follows: on legal grounds this argument is void because crimes of genocide are not subject to the statute of limitation that “sets the maximum time after an event within which legal proceedings may be initiated” (Wikipedia, *Statutes of limitation*). As nobody can legally ignore this, the conclusion could be that **T** must be brushed aside as irrelevant, and so, it is fallacious. Beyond this judgment, such a first-level, open irrelevance has a derived interpretation, which is exposed in the following reconstructed dialogue:

**T** — *This is an old story; the issue is cleared up now!*

**O** — *This would violate the no limitation statute*

**T** — *I know and repeat. The case should be closed. The no limitation status is unfair; genocides should be treated as any other crimes—this is my steadfast position. No exceptions.*

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<sup>9</sup> “Hundreds, perhaps thousands of American citizens were in every major concentration camp: Auschwitz, Mauthausen, Dachau, Buchenwald. Americans were even in the Warsaw Ghetto. More than 5,000 Americans were imprisoned in internment camps. The total number who died in Nazi camps is uncertain, but definitely was in the hundreds. American Jews were subject to the same anti-Semitic regulations and dangers as any other Jews who came under the control of the Nazis.” “In places like France and Hungary, American property was confiscated” <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/u-s-policy-toward-americans-in-peril> (03-22-2019).



So, a deeper issue emerges regarding the *exceptional status of genocides and crimes against humanity*. The open issue about financial compensation for the victims now appears to be dependent on this ulterior issue.

### 3.1.3 Argument from categorization and a pari

**6.** What do the Americans give to the victims of Hiroshima [...]?

**10.** What is France doing to repair the damage caused by colonization [...]?

Categorization is the central issue here. The victims of the Shoah, of colonization, of Hiroshima are placed in the same category. It follows by application of the rule of justice (*a pari* principle) that they should be treated in the same way, with either all, or none, being entitled to receive compensation. This implies an *ad hominem* charge of incoherence against France and the United States. The suggestion is that they violate the same category principle. Some kind of violation of the *transitivity principle* might also be involved. *France* does something for *American* victims of the Vichy regime, while *Americans* do nothing for *Iraqi* victims of the same kind of criminal war.

A possible counter-argument runs as follows: **T**'s central *a pari* argument is legally void because the victims of Hiroshima and the colonized are not *legally* recognized as victims of genocides that have a right to financial compensation.

### 3.1.4 Argument from negative consequences and victimization strategy

**8.** And we say the fight against anti-Semitism is a national cause? **9.** Do we not create [anti-Semitism] by making such a disparity [...]?

The claim is that: “*everybody agrees that being an anti-Semite is something negative, and this measure creates anti-Semitism, so it should be condemned.*” At face value, this is a pragmatic argument from unwanted consequences. It can be used as a proleptic defense against the charge of anti-Semitism (see §7.3).

The resulting overt conclusion of these three converging arguments is that the law *should have been rejected*. As it is actually *enacted*, the argument is interpreted as blame.

### 3.2 Argumentative tension

**T** is tense first of all because serious, open argumentative situations are inherently tense and emotional. Tension is heightened here through the following argumentative techniques:

- *A strong-arm strategy*: One opponent tries to intimidate and overcome the other, which is framed as a fraud; rectification **1**. implements this strategy.
- *No dialogue*: There is no dialogism, and not even a hint of counter argument. Since the relevant counter arguments are common knowledge, their omission cannot be due to ignorance, and this can be used as an argument to reject **T**. It can also be interpreted as showing that **T** is part of a much broader argumentative continent rejecting international and national laws about the Shoah. In both cases, the decision to leave a basic legal principle unmentioned is a major factor in radicalization and argumentative tension.
- *Arguing after the decision*: A major source of tension comes from the special status of this argument. Arguments are currently seen as contributions to an ongoing deliberation that attempt to influence the decision process. Here, the argument develops *after* the decision has been made. **T** is not addressed to the opponent or to the judge; **T** is actually *powerless*. The argument is *lost* and **T** is the *loser*. The failed proposal is not withdrawn, as logic might require, but radicalized. This is the main source of tension and *hateful rage*, see §6.

## 4. Exclamatory tension and resistance to refutation

The preceding remarks did not take into account a salient characteristic of **T**, that is, its use of exclamatory sentences, two of which follow rhetorical questions (see §5), and the third being the conclusive insult (see §7). This section proposes to integrate exclamation into an argumentative perspective on the basis of 1) its capaci-

ty to paragonize its object, and 2) its capacity to mimic natural signs and natural *causation* as opposed to argumentative defeasible *inference*.

#### 4.1 Exclamatory tension

Culioli expresses the difference between assertive and exclamatory statements in terms of the “tension” resulting from the self-prototypization process that characterizes exclamatory sentences. Tension goes beyond expressing a high degree of something. Tension is a phenomenon of utterance that is attached to *the way* things are said not *what* is said.

Tension produces a high degree of arousal, providing the substrate on which emotions such as surprise, joy, anger, or hate can develop (see §6).

In speech, tension can be signified through *linguistic means* (*I'm excited*) or through *semiotic actions*. Semiotic signifiers are produced through the experiencer's body and classified according to their bodily origin, tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures, and postures. Tension, that is affect, can be signified through all these dimensions. The higher voice and rising intonation traditionally associated with exclamation can be considered a particular manifestation of a generally tense body. Other kinds of more or less conventional exclamatory semiotic signifiers also accompany exclamatory tension, such as banging one's fist on the table, opening the arms, shaking the head, rolling or rising the eyes to heaven, etc. This “para-exclamatory” behavior is operative in argumentative interactions.

#### 4.2 Exclamation as a prototypization process

Exclamatory sentences presuppose not only the truth of the corresponding *assertion* but also the truth of the assertion of the *high degree* of the predication. The utterance, “*What a hot summer it was!*” presupposes that it was an extremely hot summer. Exclamatory sentences can be easily reduced to the true/false assertion that something was of a high degree and consequently go unnoticed in an analysis of argumentation focusing on informative content and truth-values.

Intensity variations are expressed in relation to an intensity scale (*he is not very patient, he is patient enough, he is very patient*) or a paragon (*a foolproof, unshakable patience; an angel's patience; patient as a cat waiting for its prey* etc.). Exclamation corresponds to something different: a specific manner for expressing something of a high degree. Following Culioli (1974) the exclamatory sentence can be seen as *a statement that constitutes itself in a self-referential process as the paragon of the high intensity of the property it predicates*. In “*What a patience Paul must have had!*” Paul's patience is promoted as the paragon of patience. This exclamatory sentence performs two linguistic operations: 1) it predicates a high intensity of something about Paul, specifically, “*Paul is extremely patient*” and 2) it characterizes Paul's extreme patience as a paragon of its kind. So, the resulting exclamatory sentence should not be paraphrased as “*Paul's patience equals the patience of an angel,*” but, paradoxically that Paul's patience is evaluated as *matching the paragon it establishes*, or, according to Culioli's formulation “*Paul a une patience comme la patience qu'il a,*” “Paul has the patience he has” (Culioli 1974, p. 8).

From an argumentative point of view, it follows that nobody can dispute the fact that Paul is extremely patient (since he paragonizes patience) any more than they could dispute the fact that Harpagon is extremely stingy. The production of such a paragon and the ensuing self-referring evaluation is a kind of performative act, positing its content beyond all possible refutation. The resulting appreciation is presented as self-evident and analytically valid. This is the first way for an exclamation to position itself beyond refutation.

#### *4.3 Exclamation as mimicking a natural response to a situation*

As interjections, exclamatory sentences are also considered beyond refutation in virtue of their specific pragmatic function as natural signs. Both are *linguistic signs mimicking causal processes* as indicated by exclamation marks in written language (given the case considered, the issues of oral language won't be discussed here).

Interjections, even if they are not “torn out” by the actual situa-

tion, are presented as such. *Ouch!* and *alas!* pose [*se donnent pour*] as consequences of pain or sadness. (...) The feelings and emotions that constitute the meaning of the interjections are *attested* meanings [*significations attestées*] much more than *expressed* meanings [*significations exprimées*]. (Ducrot 1972, p. 19).

As linguistic signs produced under the general conditions of the specific language they belong to, interjections are conventional signs, and, as such, can be feigned, insincere, etc. Nonetheless, the speaker produces them, even when they are pretended, as natural signs of a response caused by a natural stimulus, or as a component of a general physical syndrome such as pain or any emotion. They don't express pain as "*I suffer*" or "*I'm glad*" would do, instead they present themselves as proving the existence of pain in the way that bruises prove the existence of an impact. According to Ducrot, this same "triggering" [*déclencheur*] mechanism is at work in exclamatory sentences; they present their enunciation as "triggered by the representation of its object" (Ducrot 1984, p. 186) just like interjections "present their enunciation as triggered by the feeling they express" (Ducrot 1984, 200).

Arguing empirically from acceptability judgments, grammarians conclude that *interjections cannot be contradicted*:

Studies in pragmatics have clearly shown that interjections cannot be denied: "*Madam, you said Ah!, but this is rigorously false!*" (Barb ris 1995, p. 101). There is no question of thinking of, telling oneself, or even imagining an interjection: "*Ouch! he thought / he told himself*" (Kleiber 2006, p. 19).

The truth of declarative sentences is *asserted*, while exclamatory sentences literally *show* that they are true, their truth being given as visible and tangible evidence. Under this analysis, exclamatory sentences are ideally suited for radical argumentation.

Nonetheless, notwithstanding their intended compelling character, exclamatory sentence can actually be challenged in face-to-face interactions. Consider the pair:

S1 — *What a heat!*

S2 — *No.*

S3 — *Well, no, nothing special, absolutely not exceptional*

*here at that time of the year.*

Acceptability judgments are themselves more or less acceptable; grooming the examples may be enough to change the perspective. *No* is actually a rather dry answer, but does the preceding conversation violate any grammatical or interactional rule? According to conversation principles, non-ratification is the second turn that is not preferred. As such, it is normally followed by some face-to-face work and backed by substantial rectifications and justifications. When these routine elements are duly integrated, the denial process runs quite smoothly as in S3.

The rejection of the first exclamatory turn is based upon the asserted content of the exclamation. The exclamation itself remains untouched but could be destroyed at another level, for example by a well-coordinated ironic joke like “*Well, I see that you are actually boiling.*” Refuting intensity is not quite enough to refute an exclamation as refuting the subjacent analogy is not quite enough to refute a metaphor (Plantin, 2017). Exclamatory sentences are not irrefutable but are framed as such.

## **5. Interactional Tension: Rhetorical questions (RQ)**

### *5.1 RQ in T*

**T** is built around eight questions. Question **1.** is an echo question introducing an argumentative correction (see §3.1.1). The following questions illustrate the variety of forms and degrees of “rhe- toricity” of rhetorical questions:

- **Question 3:** *de qui se moque-t-on?* “But whom are they trying to fool?” could be a request for information similar to “*who are you trying to call?*” However, this question is typically used as a collocation of: *on se moque de nous* “they are laughing at our face,” and thus its answer is fully constrained. Moreover, 1.-2. can be seen as a correction of a brazen attempt to deceive the reader, that is, as a proof that “they are laughing at us.”
- **Questions 4 and 5:** **4.** *And especially how long will we have to pay?* **5.** *That was 70 years ago,* **5b.** *who's still responsible for that shit?*

Sentence **5.** plays a pivotal role in the sequence **4.-5.-5b.**, in relation to both question **4.** and question **5b.** As an argument, **5.** backs a conclusion corresponding to the preferred answer to **5b.**, which is: “*now, nobody is responsible.*” The link is presented through the linking principle or semantic topos “(plus, +) *long past*, (minus, -) *responsibility.*” Question **4.**, “*how long,*” literally asks for information about a time limit. Context **5.** provides the answer: “*we shouldn't have to pay now*” according to the topos “(+) *paid for a long time*, (-) *pay now.*”

- **Question-answer pairs 6.-7. and 10.-11:** These pairs develop the same argument in parallel structures; they are followed by a second and third exclamation:

**6.** What do the Americans give to the victims of Hiroshima, Nagasaki...? **7.** Fuck! It's a disgrace, it's scandalous! **10.** What is France doing to repair the damage caused by colonization, the slave trade, **10b.** or simply to pay their pensions to the Africans who came and died for France? **11.** Nothing! Sod all!

Their rhetorical character is derived from the fact that they (pretend to) express a shared knowledge. They are followed by exclamatory sentences adding exclamatory tension to rhetorical coercion. **7.** further adds an explicit emotional content to the mix. In both cases, the opponent is not given a chance to answer the question. This is especially unfortunate for the second half of **10.** because relevant information about the regular payment of pensions to African soldiers having fought for France is widely available on the Internet. This can be considered as a case of fake implied information.

## 5.2 RQ as argumentative moves

Rhetorical questions are not intended to gather information from the listener, or to control that she knows the correct answer (as in exam question), or to indirectly request some action (*could you pass me the salt?*). All kinds of questions can be found in written texts. For example, the writer can frame the issue in a deliberative

question, present the possible argumentative answers, argue at some length the pros and cons, and conclude by taking a more or less firm personal position. In such a case, the deliberative question is not a rhetorical question insofar as the answer is carefully constructed. The question turns rhetorical when, all information and arguments being omitted, it immediately solicits or imposes an answer considered as self-evident.

By using an RQ in an interaction, the speaker proceeds as if the answer were self-evident for all the participants, and this answer can be explicitly formulated or not. RQs are intended to evoke and stress a (supposed) common belief in the participants. They are “*No issue!*” questions that exclude the dissenting voice from the participants included in the current interaction. RQs reframe the situation as fully empathetic, that is, they encourage the audience to quietly identify with the speaker.

In face-to-face argumentative situations, the use of RQs is risky due to the physical presence of opponents who won't hesitate to loudly object that they consider the question as a provocation. In such situations, RQs can be characterized as the result of a series of coordinated operations of topic-and-interaction management:

- (i) Arguer **P** is defending a claim **C**, and the audience knows **P**'s position.
- (ii) **P** asks a question **Q** about a crucial point in the argument she develops. For example, **Q** can be an interrogative reformulation of **C**.
- (iii) The audience knows that 1) **Q** is divisive, and that 2) when voiced by **P** in relation to **C**, **Q** has a strongly preferred answer **A**.
- (iv) The arguer challenges the participants, and especially the opponents, to openly produce and defend an answer different from **A**.
- (v) If the participants fail to produce a different answer (or are not given the opportunity to have their say), then **P** is authorized, by default, to continue from **A** under the assumption that his progression to **C** is well on track.

Having not been challenged, **A**, the answer to the rhetorical question, is considered to be valid by default for the discussion. RQs



are a privileged vehicle for quick arguments from ignorance. Stages (iv)-(v) are the key moments. The speaker assumes that nobody in the audience will dare interrupt her discourse, and that, anyway, she has the floor and won't leave it to the opponents. The emphasis put upon the answer originates from such a discursive coup: "*you see, there's no alternative to my claim.*" This is an intimidating strategy.

A question is 100% rhetorical when it bears upon an analytically true statement: "Peter has always lived alone, shouldn't he be considered a single person?" Generally speaking, a question is considered to be fully rhetorical when the speaker envisions just one precise, known answer. Practically, the speaker can more or less orient the audience towards their preferred answer through various linguistic strategies. Questions might exhibit different "*degrees of rhetoricity*" depending upon the coercive force of the answer. (Feigned) consensus is just one technique to postulate the consensus one wants to create.

## 6. Tension as the affective substrate of emotions

### 6.1 Emotions in argument

The argument developed by **T** is clear, as are the main lines of the counter-discourse that could be constructed against it. Now, an adequate representation of **T** as an argumentative text must also account for its emotive-emotional character. We will not take the easy way out; we will first declare that emotions are inherently fallacious (that is, we will use the semantic topos "(+) *emotion*, (+) *fallacious*"). We will then conclude that such a strong appeal to fallacious emotions is not surprising in an anti-Semitic text. Strong emotions go along equally well with good and bad arguments. Ordinary language is inherently subjective. It includes sets of values and interests that play a defining role in the construction of emotional-argumentative positions.

*Tension variation* is the defining feature of emotions in general—in discourse as in interactions. These variations can be represented by a wavy (phasic) line fluctuating over time. *Specific emotions* (*anger*, *depression*, etc.) correspond to salient (inflec-

tion) points on this line (Plantin 2011; 2015; Quignard & al. 2016; Nassau 2016; Baker, 2018).

## 6.2 *Reconstructing emotions*

Emotions can be attributed to the experiencer based on the lexicon she uses. This method avoids the perils of attributing emotions based on empathy and psychological introspection. The reconstruction of emotions necessarily relies upon a list of *emotion terms* that has been independently constructed. Following a lenient policy and pending verification, all the terms belonging to such a list will be a priori considered as emotion terms. Such lists are widely available; some are short, for example Ekman's list of basic emotions (1969), while others are more detailed. For French, we will use Galati and Sini's list of 146 emotion nouns (2000, p. 79), supplemented by the corresponding adjectives adverbs and verbs (Mathieu, 1997). Emotion terms *directly* refer to emotions; other terms can refer *indirectly* to emotions. We will suggest that if the definition of a word includes an emotion term, this word has an emotional component and can be the basis of an inference to that kind of affect. To avoid arbitrary reconstructions, definitions will be taken from reference dictionaries.

This method will be used to reconstruct **T**'s key emotions based on the words used in the original language, in this case, French. The reconstruction materializes in emotion sentences mentioning the following elements: 1) *the emotion*, (**E**); 2) the *experiencer* (**Exp**) of the emotion; 3) the situation as the *source* (**S**) of the emotion; and 4) the *allocator* (**A**) of the emotion (emotions can be self-allocated as in: “*I'm sad*,” or hetero-allocated as in “*Peter is sad*”). In short, “**A [Exp, E, S]**” or “According to **A**, **EXP** experiences emotion **E**, originating in **S**.”

### 6.2.1 *Surprise?*

In **1.-2.** an affect like /pity/ could be inferred from the word *victim* (the slashes note that emotion terms are reconstructed). But the focus is not on victims in this case. The word is used in a quotation that will be immediately rectified as **2.** ridicules the expression “*the US victims of the Shoah*,” the inference to /pity/ is cancelled.

An affect is actually attached to the rectification speech act when it bears upon an expression that is framed as not only *unfortunate* but also utterly *laughable*, that is, *stupid*. Based on these intuitions, something like /surprise, derision/ could tentatively be attached to this segment. In any case, the tension of this segment remains low.

### 6.2.2 Derision, contempt, resulting in disgust, anger and indignation

Consider the verb (*se*) *moquer* (Fr) “to mock,” in question 3. *Mais de qui se moque-t-on?*; “But who are they laughing at?” The root sentence is “**A se moque de B**”; “**A mocks B**.” Mockery is defined as follows:

- *Moquer* is defined as “tourner en dérision”; “to deride, to ridicule” (TLFi, *moquer*).
- *Dérision*, “derision” is not listed as an emotion term by Galati and Sini. Nonetheless, it is defined as “moquerie, raillerie mêlées de mépris,” “Mockery combined with contempt” (TLFi, *moquer*).

To sum up, the dictionary defines *moquer* through *dérision*, and then defines *dérision* using an undisputable emotion term, *mépris*; “contempt.” The situation is apparently the same for *contempt*, *to mock*, and *to deride*. So, from “**A mocks, laughs at B**”, one can infer that “[**A scorns, despises B**].” The arguer, **B**, allocates the feeling of *contempt* to an experiencer referred to as an indefinite agent *on*; “one” (3<sup>rd</sup> person personal pronoun). Moreover, *contempt*, as an emotion term, has an interactive structure according to which an emotion can be allocated by default to experiencer **B**—in this case **T**: “If **A despises B**, and **B** knows that **A** despises him/her, then **B** is *angry* against **A**.” For the issue under consideration, /anger/ is a high-degree, socio-political anger directed towards an unspecified person or group—that is /indignation/.

Sentence 4: *And especially how long will we have to pay?* is a rhetorical question best answered by something like, “*Now, we have paid long enough! Enough is enough!*”; in French, “*Ça suf-*

*fit!*” associated with a feeling of /irritation/ (Fr. “agacement”)<sup>10</sup>, that is, in a socio-political context, a feeling of rebellion akin to /indignation/. The same reconstruction process is applied to the expression *cette saloperie*; “that shit.” *Saloperie* refers to something “unclean, despicable, potentially harmful” (after TLFi, *Saloperie*). *Despicable* is an emotion word; the context “unclean, obscene” allows a more precise definition of the specific emotion associated with *saloperie* as being /disgust/.

Explicit emotion terms are found in the exclamatory outburst in 7. following a rhetorical question:

6. What do the Americans give to the victims of Hiroshima  
[...] 7. *Putain, mais quelle honte, c'est scandaleux!* Fuck! It's  
a disgrace, it's scandalous!

*Honte*, “shame,” is an emotion word hetero-attributed to the Americans by T: “T [They, shame, compensation].” The correlative emotion is expressed twice, first through the interjection *putain* “fuck,” expressing /outrage, indignation/ (TLFi).<sup>11</sup> And second through the exclamation *c'est scandaleux!*; “it's a shame!”<sup>12</sup> Both expressions allocate the emotion to the speaker. The resulting emotion sentence is “T [T, /indignation/, compensation].”

### 6.2.3 From indignation to hate

T is capped with an insult: “*Clique mafieuse de merde!* “Fucking mafia clan!” The expression *N de merde*, “shitty N,” is used to convey “contempt, irritation, anger” (TLFi, *Merde*). This last exclamatory outburst paragonizes *contempt, irritation, anger* as felt in relation to the compensation issue. This series represents the last and most intense development of the strongly coherent and intense line of emotion that structures the text, going from /surprise/, to *anger, indignation* and, when applied to a human group, *hate*. T culminates in hate speech, and hate speech is prohibited by law. Law is the lid put on the hate pot, and this repres-

<sup>10</sup> fr.wiktionary.org/wiki/ça\_suffit, 03-22-2019)

<sup>11</sup> “*Putain*: [...] Marque la surprise, l'étonnement, l'admiration ou l'indignation” (TLFi, *Putain*)

<sup>12</sup> “*Scandaleux*: [...] Qui cause du scandale, qui provoque l'indignation, la réprobation” (TLFi, *Scandaleux*)

sion or “compression” certainly contributes to the tension expressed by **T**.

## 7. *In cauda veritas*: an anti-Semitic orientation

### 7.1 *Progressive and regressive conclusions*

**T** concludes as follows:

**12.** And as a famous comedian [Dieudonné Mbala Mbala] once said: “If we do not make it up to the niggers, there are some who will have to pay back a few dollars...” **13.** Fucking mafia clan!

The confusion felt by some readers can be attributed to the fact that **T** manages two antagonistic orientations, which are, for convenience, called 1) “progressive”: tending to generalize the existing financial compensations, and 2) “regressive”: tending to cancel the existing compensations.

**T** could be read as a “progressive” discourse about victims. First, it constructs a unique category of victims that includes different kinds of unquestionable victims of history. Then, there is an unfair treatment of these victims: “there are important compensation for the *victims of deportation*, nothing for the *victims of slave trade and other victims*.” This historical and social fact is vehemently denounced as an injustice. The corresponding moral feelings of injustice and indignation are good grounds for a call to action. By an *a pari* reasoning based on the two categories of victims, this *progressive perspective* could culminate with a call to support some association pleading for a compensation for the victims of slave trade and other victims. The addressee of such a call should be France, the Americans, or perhaps Westerners at large; the call could summon the UN to create a commission to carry out the task of determining the level and beneficiaries of the compensation. According to such an orientation, the compensation obtained by the victims of the Shoah could be *praised* as a first exemplary step in the process of systematically compensating the victims of history. This line of argument implies that the Jewish

genocide, if not considered to be unique, actually represents the prototype of a category of crimes against humanity.

Now, the *a pari* scheme can be applied the other way around to serve a *regressive, anti-Semitic perspective*. Since the *victims of slave trade* are *not* compensated, the *victims of deportation* should also not be compensated. In other words, **T** calls upon *the Jewish victims of the Shoah* to *refund* their compensations.

### 7.2 *An anti-Semitic insult*

**T** concludes and culminates with an insult, *fucking mafia clan!*, without further identifying this *clan*. It can only refer to the beneficiaries of the compensations and to the Jewish people in general by repeating an anti-Semitic stereotype of Jews as a “mafia clan.” This clearly reveals **T**'s final target and its anti-Semitic fabric.

### 7.3 *Proleptic rejection of the charge of anti-Semitism*

The charge of anti-Semitism is rejected in three different ways.

#### 7.3.1 *The word Jews is not used*

**T** speaks of a “mafia clan,” but the reference to Jews is never explicit. **T** never uses the word *Jew*, thus leaving its target behind a (transparent) fog of indeterminacy. This is true also in context **3**. *Whom are they trying to fool?* and **12**. *some will have to pay back a few dollars*. The referent of *they* remains unclear—it could be the US victims of the Shoah or the French government. *Some* refers to the victims having already benefited from compensations, leaving aside their identification as Jews.

#### 7.3.2 *A proleptic defense: anti-(anti-Semitism) creates anti-Semitism*

Recall the following passage:

**8**. And we say the fight against anti-Semitism is a national cause? **9**. Do we not create [anti-Semitism] by making such a disparity [...]?

Sentences **8.-9.** can be interpreted as a proleptic defense against the charge of anti-Semitism looming over the website hosting **T**. The charge is rejected, and the issue is re-defined through a counter-accusation that *admits* the possibility: *I may be an anti-Semite, but redirects the responsibility to the accuser: You made me so, thus you are the guilty one.*

“Nigger”; *négro* is an “unambiguously pejorative and racist” term (Wikipedia, *Nigger* 03-19-2019). Dieudonné has a dual nationality, French-Cameroonian and is from Cameroonian descent. The reasoning might be that one cannot be a racist against oneself; so, using the word *négro* cannot be considered a racist slur here, but rather a mere word play. It can also be given a polyphonic interpretation in relation to the main argument line: “*Victims of slave trade and colonization are not compensated, they are actually treated now as négros, and the word just mirrors your (the opponent’s) reality, even if you don’t want to see it.*” In any case, this move opens up 1) the free use of any racist terms “for fun” and, possibly, 2) a line of defense against the accusation of anti-Jew racism, under the derived principle “*I use racist language against myself, so I can use it against anybody else, for example, the Jews.*”

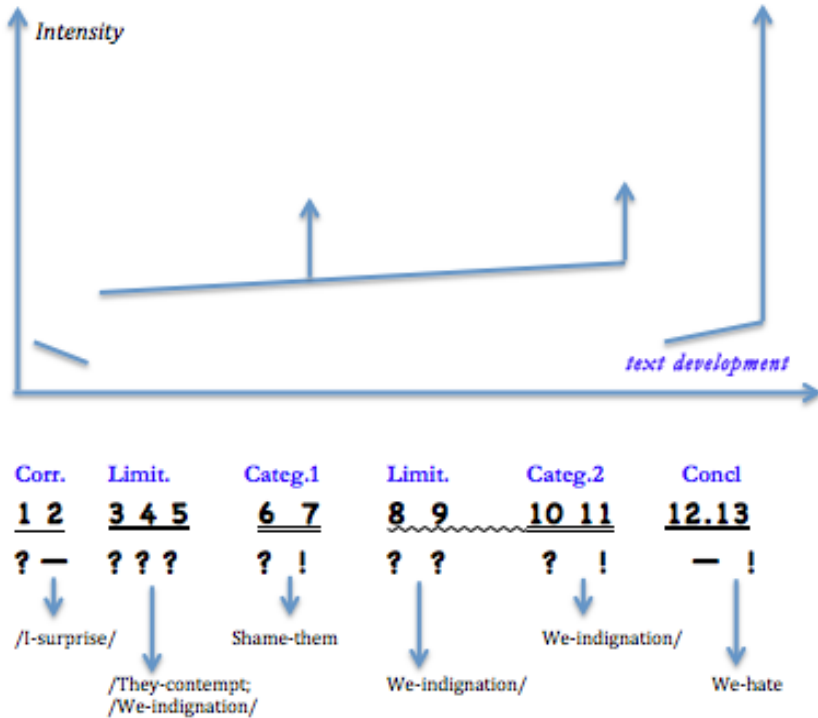
### 7.3.3 “That shit”?

*Saloperie* refers to something “unclean, despicable, potentially harmful” (after TLFi, *Saloperie*; see §6.2.2). Should we understand that the Shoah was a *saloperie* done to the Jews by Nazi bastards, or that, on the whole, the Shoah is just something *disgusting*, that must be kept at a distance? This is strange; the Shoah is not a *lousy trick* but a *crime* against humanity.

## 8. Conclusion: Tension as a veridictive operator

The following graph schematizes the degree and persistence of the speech arousal as it develops along **T**. The lines represent the global level of tension. The arrows note a tension surge (exclamation). The last arrow expresses the emotional conclusion as a transformation of *indignation* speech into *hate* speech. This graph can be considered as a representation of an *emotion episode* de-

defined as the coherent development of an emotion along a textual unit (Plantin 2011). The 4 lines below the graph read:



- Line 1: argument moves (correction, arg. from limitation, categorization, limitation, categorization) and conclusion
- Line 2: **T**
- Line 3: ‘-’ = Assertion; ‘?’ = Question; ‘!’ = Exclamation
- Line 4: experiencer and specific emotions

By saying **P**, a speaker indicates that they considers **P** to be true. Moreover, they can try to back up the truth of **P** by asserting that **P** is indeed true: “*That’s true, I assure you.*” Lay speakers cannot be their own self-auditor.

Self-authority is a type of backing that is inferior to argument, but arguments are only default proofs. They don’t fit well with absolute truths. Tension is a *suturing operation*—a supplement allowing the transition from “*true in my opinion (in my world*



view)” or “*true insofar as my argument is good*” to just *true*. Tension is a *veridictive* operator,<sup>13</sup> a seal that language imposes on truth when expressed in everyday speech (Beneveniste 1971). The Latin adjective *veridicus* refers both to the fact that a sentence *is true* and to the fact that a speaker *tells the truth*, as though *to be true* (for a sentence) and *to tell the truth* (for a speaker) were one and the same thing. Tension is an overall phenomenon. In a tense argument, the arguer brings her whole person, mind and body, to bear upon the issue, that is, the truth of what she says and the relevance of her argument. Arguments are *tensed* insofar as they are communicated through the speaker's body incorporating the claim “*I embody the truth.*” Bodily signifiers unfold beyond refutation in a sphere alien to any kind of linguistic negation. Challenging a tensed claim amounts to challenging the person in their physical existence; the opponent is framed as an enemy. Nonetheless, high tension is no more an epistemic or moral guarantee than any other self-certified backing. Even when accepted by soul and body, hate and racism speech remain hate and racism.

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<sup>13</sup> The word *véridiction* is used by Michel Foucault. Veridictive should not be confused with *verdictive*; in speech act theory, *verdictive* utterances pass judgment upon somebody else's speech act.

86-88.

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