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(DIS)INFORMATION
WARFARE

(Dis)information warfare: From social media to the mainstream, how propaganda reaches our newsfeeds

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Abstract:

Information warfare in the digital space affects our ability to perceive the world. Following the spread of information technology, I present a case demonstrating that propaganda functions as a transmedia phenomenon. This paper follows a mixed-methods approach to understanding how propaganda makes its way into our news feeds on social media. Through a Critical Discourse Analysis, I look into the characteristics of both pro and anti-French propaganda related to the Téra incident, and subsequently study these narratives on Twitter through a network analysis. Based on my findings, conceptualize a new approach to study propaganda from gatekeeping media to social media, and conclude with suggestions for how to better study cases of information warfare and propaganda in the future.

Introduction

On the 27th of November 2022, a French military convoy escorted by Nigerien police was traveling to join France's military Barkhane military operation in the Sahel. It was stopped by a group of protesters, and in a subsequent clash, 2 people died and 18 were wounded. French news outlets pointed to the violence of the protesters, while other news outlets, including Russian state media, pointed to the deaths and blamed the French armed forces. This event and the related media coverage unfolded in the context of an anti-terrorism operation, information warfare, and competition for influence in Sub-Saharan Africa. In an attempt to win over the hearts and minds of the local population, the discrepancies between the coverage of the event by different media outlets, and the spread of narratives on social media underline form a basis for studying propaganda and disinformation. The challenging political and geopolitical context of the Sahel as an area of low media literacy, makes it fertile ground for the spread of disinformation (Oyeleke 2021)

The Téra incident takes place in the context of questioning of our presuppositions about reality. As the collective western understanding of the world evolves from a modern to a post-modern one, the truth has been replaced by a plurality of narratives pushed by influential actors. While some of these have no basis in reality, these different narratives aim to influence discourse and change worldviews. Simultaneously, the 'truth' previously guarded by gate-keeping journalists has shifted to more decentralized methods of information production.

This is particularly true for the social media component of the spread of propaganda. Media Scholars like Henri Jenkins coined the term participation culture, evoking the possibility to join and create the world together. While the internet has been a source of empowerment and technology of liberation (Guess and Lyons 2020, 1), it has threatened the journalistic profession whose monopoly on information has disappeared (McDowell-Naylor, Thomas, and Cushion 2021). The information revolution has meant that information has been able to spread at unprecedented speeds and together with the advent of social media since the early 2000s, reach more people (Taylor 2003, 298–314).

While more people are being reached, one should also ask what is the information that is reaching them. Indeed, social media is facilitating the spread of misinformation (Tsfati et al. 2020)which has been correlated with the rise of both left- and right-wing populism, science scepticism in the case of the coronavirus pandemic, and the undermining of democratic norms (Wang, Angarita, and Renna 2018; Broersma and Graham 2012; Chadwick, Vaccari, and O'Loughlin 2018). Simultaneously, the field of political science has concerned itself with 'information warfare' (Sanovich 2017), of which an important element is the spread of both disinformation and propaganda. This has manifested itself in the interference in the electoral process of the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, and France where bot factories alongside foreign media push disinformation (Hansen 2017).

Disinformation also has a geopolitical component to it with the Russian invasion of Crimea which was accompanied by a propaganda and disinformation campaign. It is also currently one that is taking place in Africa, where as recently as 2020, Russia and France were competing for influence in the digital space (Murphy 2020).

While previous studies of disinformation have looked at the overarching narratives of disinformation campaigns and mapped out the networks involved in spreading them or investigated computational propaganda in this paper, I consider a mixed-methods approach, focusing on a single event to understand both the different discursive practices and the networks responsible for spreading them. The selection of the Téra incident was made to both reduce the size of the corpus and allow this paper to consider disinformation on an event level. Using a mixed-methods approach, I will unpack the different narratives and look into how they are spread by answering the following research question: 'How did propaganda regarding the Téra incident spread and showcase the interplay between social media and mainstream media content?' This paper will further look into the following sub-questions:

- *RQ1: What are the discursive practices relating to the spread of disinformation on France's involvement in the Sahel, and particularly related to the Téra incident, in mainstream media?*
- *RQ2: What are the networks of hashtags, group membership, and followers of Twitter users associated with spreading news related to the Téra incident.*
- *RQ3: What are the most popular narratives on social media and how do they relate to those from mainstream media?*

Theoretical Framework

Defining the semantic field of propaganda and disinformation

The conceptual framework of propaganda can be understood as being framed around several somewhat interchangeable key concepts. Let us first establish the nuances between disinformation, misinformation, fake news, and online propaganda, which are all used to spread misleading messages. Misinformation can be understood as information that either distorts or contradicts verifiable facts (Guess and Lyons 2020). It is conceptually different from rumours or conspiracy theories which, unlike misinformation, do not seek to establish a truth claim through knowledge. Disinformation is understood by Guess and Lyons as being misinformation that is deliberately spread. The concept of fake news is related to both misinformation and disinformation yet is one that takes on the format of journalistic pieces (Guess and Lyons 2020). As Tsfati et al. argue in 2020, fake news is 'the deliberate creation of pseudo journalistic disinformation'. Lastly, Guess and Lyons 2020 identify propaganda as

being information that may be true, but that is used to undermine opposing views. Benson argues that propaganda should be viewed neutrally since it can be used to incite both hatred of an enemy or convince people to donate clothes to charity (Benson 2012).

Taylor views propaganda as a neutral tool that people use to convince others of their opinion 'propaganda analysis demands objectivity if it is to be undertaken effectively' indeed, 'propaganda is really no more than the communication of ideas designed to persuade people to think and behave in a desired way.' In that sense, it differs from education, which pushes the recipient to make up his own mind on a topic (Taylor 5,6). In that sense, he considers propaganda to be a 'deliberate attempt to persuade people to think in a desired way. A further concept is that of 'information warfare' which sets competing narratives against each other in a quest for supremacy (Szostek 2020) and often involves propaganda According to Golovchenko, Hartmann, and Adler-Nissen information warfare is the 'strategic use of information and disinformation to achieve political and military goals'.

Despite the considerable overlap between these concepts, not least because of the need to differentiate on intent between misinformation and disinformation, this paper will focus principally on propaganda and its relation to the concept of information warfare.

The history of propaganda

Disinformation is ancient but never before has the means to spread it been so powerful. Historical sources reveal an ancient smear campaign by Octavian (soon to be the first Roman Emperor Augustus) against his rival Mark Anthony by etching slogans on the coins used in the Roman Empire. While these historical examples highlight the fact that disinformation is not a novel phenomenon, it was not until 1493 and the invention of the Gutenberg press that its spread would be radically sped up (Posetti and Matthews 2018). This innovation contributed to the spread of the protestant reformation across Europe, and also lead the Catholic Church to coin the term propaganda in response to the spread of material promoting 'heretical thoughts' (Taylor 2003, 3).

The use of propaganda was subsequently accelerated by the development of both mass media and information technology in the 20th and 21st centuries. As conflicts shifted from being those between armies to those of total war, the notion of the home front and the necessity to keep up morale in one's army became of increasing importance (Taylor 2003, 173-174). While the term initially meant 'the means by which the converted attempted to persuade the unconverted' the word received its current connotation with its use in the total wars that were the first and second World Wars. Propaganda became not about rallying troops or slandering a rival: it became an intrinsic part of warfare. This was subsequently accelerated by the spread of information technology, which enabled countries to reach their own populations, but also that of their enemies better.

In *The Encyclopedia of Propaganda*, Robert Cole distinguishes between 'white' (overt)

propaganda and 'black' (covert) propaganda depending on whether the intentions of the source are clear (Cole 1998). In the case of the latter, there is often an attempt to give a journalistic, and hence an apparently neutral, air to the story for legitimacy (xviii). The line between journalism and propaganda has further been blurred by the crisis of confidence in the journalistic field. Indeed, the digital age has facilitated 'user-generated content and visibility as citizens actively search for, and produce, new information in an environment characterized by growing distrust of professional journalism and established authorities' (Golovchenko, Hartmann, and Adler-Nissen 2018).

Ultimately the way propaganda is being spread is constantly evolving and has been facilitated by technological improvements, while there has been some focus on what disinformation is spread, and quantitative studies looking into how it is spread (Sanovich 2017), the interaction between these two phenomena which would require us to look at propaganda as a transmedia phenomenon has been more limited.

Propaganda as a transmedia phenomenon

Transmedia storytelling, and in particular journalism, has had an impact on the spread of fake news and disinformation. Indeed, stories are rarely told and spread solely by the same actor, on the same platform, or the same medium. In the case of disinformation, there have been several studies highlighting how fake news from the more mainstream media is spread by social media (Chadwick, Vaccari, and O'Loughlin 2018). Benson's study of WWI propaganda by the US Committee on Public Information highlighted the use of transmedia campaigns with speeches, publicity, and news articles (Benson 2012). Yet this approach to transmediality (though preceding the age of mass information), views propaganda as unidirectional, as opposed to something which has to connect and engage with its target audience. While Monaci summarizes that ISIS propaganda has been studied on both a network and narrative level, it also focuses on transmedia storytelling as originating from the producing party, even on social media (Monaci 2017). In doing so, it pays little attention to the recipients of the message and how they appropriate the content and subsequently contribute to spreading it further.

There seems however to be a gap in the literature in looking at content derived from propaganda, whether it be in the form of social media posts or reshares of content. This gap is something that I will seek to study in this paper, particularly with *RQ2*, by looking at how the initial story is recuperated on another, and its message transcends its original media platform and engages with communities.

The concept of information warfare

Information has always been crucial to waging war, helping to decide targets and make better plans (Taylor 2003, 298). Yet the term has taken on a distinct turn in recent years, to reflect the conflict over narratives. Wars were lost or won with information: wars became lost because the increasing news coverage of them grew increasingly negative like the Korean and Vietnam wars, which were particularly televised conflicts. The concept of information warfare consists in shaping the attitudes of foreign citizens (Szostek 2020, 14:2). In this context, the effects of propaganda can be measured in terms of the changes that they bring in terms of opinions, attitudes, and behaviours (Szostek 2020, 14:4). While it can be seen as an extension of diplomacy and soft power, serving to persuade the other side of one's interest, many in the security industry are viewing it as a weaponisation of discourse (Szostek 2020, 14:5). While this influence campaign is never the sole focus of warfare, which also requires troops on the ground, winning over the hearts and minds of the public is an invaluable asset to winning conflict (Hansen 2017, 8). This term is contrasted by Szostek with the term 'Public diplomacy' which she contrasts with the often subversive and aggressive nature of information warfare. Information warfare is a subject closely linked to the idea of computational propaganda, explored by Sanovich and Jones and which looks into artificially spreading and amplifying discourses online (Sanovich 2017).

While it is a subject most notably associated with the concept of hybrid warfare in Eastern Europe, which means waging war on several fronts, most contemporary conflicts feature an information component to it. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one where there is competition over portrayals of violence by the other side, with manipulation and planting of stories taking place (Luyendijk 2006). Similar happenings took place in Qatar in 2017, which saw the country shunned by its neighbours (Jones 2019) or in Ethiopia where the civil war has proven to be polarizing and violent (Ramos 2021). A further point of interest is French-speaking Africa, from which the case of this paper has been selected. The region is subject to competition between France, the former coloniser, and Russia which has economic interests in the region: 'Russia-linked "trolls" create profiles and promote a negative image of Europe, with particular regard to France' (Maślanka 2020).

It is something that can be seen with the multilingual services of national public broadcasters like RT (formerly Russia Today) or Sputnik, whose target audience is primarily foreign (Golovchenko et al. 2018, 990). Western countries also have their equivalents, namely the BBC for the UK, France 24 for France, or VOA (Voice of America) for the United States. The contention of these different sources has seen them be banned or their work hindered in some countries -the German branch of RT was closed in 2021, and BBC correspondents in Russia were expelled. This highlights the need to look at the competing narratives established by different state and non-state actors to understand the

disinformation taking place online and highlights the value of comparing discursive practices between different state media actors. The relevance of this for this paper is something that I will further expand upon in the methodology section of this paper.

The Spread of Disinformation on Social Media

One idea and assumption central to our understanding of social media is that it facilitates the spread of disinformation is widely shared and has been documented in popular media through shows like Netflix's *Social Dilemma*, which is a critique of algorithmic decision-making that limits what we view through 'filter bubbles'. While social media 'echo chambers' are often considered as places of ideological segregation, current literature has argued that the phenomenon is somewhat exaggerated and questioned this assumption (Barberá et al. 2015). Indeed, (Möller 2021) elaborates saying that the reality of social media and algorithmic filter systems today seems to be that 'they inject diversity rather than reducing it' (Möller 2021). Instead, it has been suggested that through homophily (individual's pursuit of like-minded opinions), clusters in like-minded bubbles in a process that is simplified rather than enforced by social media (Möller 2021). Studies of disinformation through the lens of computer science and communication have modelled the phenomenon of disinformation (Baumann et al. 2020; Törnberg 2018; Plikynas, Raudys, and Raudys 2015) based on the aforementioned empirical insights and further establish the spread of disinformation to self-reinforcement mechanisms whereby users naturally cluster together.

However, while filter bubbles and echo chambers may be a limited phenomenon, Möller points to one notable exception: already radicalized individuals. When already radicalised, people are prone to creating their echo chambers to actively look for and engage with more extreme content (Möller 2021). Once formed these echo chambers become incubators for ideas and counter-factual stories 'the echo chamber constitutes a 'protected space' in which an idea or a narrative can find a firm footing for further diffusion through the network' (Törnberg 2018). Golovchenko et al. use the term 'citizen curator' to refer to the role of individuals in spreading information online and establish that they can be as influential as traditional media in spreading disinformation (993). In the case of the 2014 MH14 crash, a large majority of the sharing related to a single incident, citizens (individual users) were the ones responsible for most of the sharing (986).

While 'citizens' play an active role in the spread of online messages, the 'online citizen' has a different definition than that of a regular conception of what citizen. Indeed, bots used for computational propaganda are also included in this definition. This has been used simultaneously by government agents like Russia's Internet Research Agency (Sanovich 2017; Hansen 2017) or in the context of political campaigns such as the lead-up to Brexit or the United States 2016 presidential election. While bots are not exclusively subversive, much attention has been paid to those used for

subversive uses such as spreading or misleading messages. Investigators and journalists regularly uncover networks ranging from hundreds to thousands of bots and users on different social media platforms waiting to be activated (Hansen 2017; Jones 2019) Wang, Angarita, and Renna further discuss the potential future dangers of social bots which could generate, fetch, and spread deceptive information potentially without humans (Wang, Angarita, and Renna 2018). This information is occasionally picked up by mainstream media and pushed to an even larger audience than those who would witness it via social media (Jones 2019, 21). While 80% of fake news at the source is consumed by 1% of the population, awareness of fake news stories is much more widespread (Walter and Tukachinsky 2020).

The theoretical studies in the field suggest that it may be interesting not only to look at how state actors are spreading propaganda online but how citizen curators or bots spread it. It is an aspect for consideration in our case in order to grasp the extent to which narratives are effective in their reach through social media and how these social media posts on their own can spread narratives.

The specific context of disinformation in the Sahel

The political context of the Sahel is one of 'anti-colonial populism' where entrepreneurial politicians push inflammatory narratives to gain audience and traction (Collins 2022). Content forwarded on WhatsApp that is difficult to trace often portrays France's presence in the region negatively and influence networks on social media by France and Russia to steer public opinion have been reported (Africanews 2022).

Looking into 'infodemics' in Western Africa, Oyekele Sunday argues that media disinformation spread quickly in countries where media information literacy is low, this tends to happen disproportionately in countries where 'large number of people rely on certain individuals to rightly inform them'. In the Sahel where phones and access to information are scarce, (dis)information quickly takes route (Oyeleke 2021). The combination of the information war alongside low media literacy in those areas points to an environment in which disinformation is widespread and readily digested by audiences.

Methodology and Corpus

Case

Since 2013, France has been militarily engaged as part of the anti-Islamist military operation 'Barkhane'. Public opinion of the operation, though initially positive has turned sour amid complaints that France is propping up local strongmen, and that the operation is a front to steal natural resources. This paper will seek to look at the discursive practices of the Téra incident, which took place on the 27th of November 2021. It saw a French military convoy stopped by protesters at the Nigerien border.

It was headed to the Gao military base, in neighbouring Mali. After the protesters behaved 'aggressively' against the convoy, throwing stones and breaking trucks, the convoy which was accompanied by Nigerien policemen fired at the protesters (whether directly or not has yet to be established) and saw two people killed and 18 wounded. The incident, which was widely covered in both English and French media, was widely shared on social media, with competing claims about the story and who was responsible for the shooting, of which the prevailing sentiment was anti-French, and disinformation surrounding the story. Some of the controversies on social media have been echoed on news sites as well.

Methodology: Qualitative Analysis

To answer the three sub-questions, this paper will make use of a split qualitative/quantitative approach. I will first deconstruct this material through a Critical Discourse Analysis to compare articles coming from two different state media outlets which can reasonably be considered to fall under the definition of propaganda. This will be done using Fairclough's methodology. This approach consists in looking first at the "Discursive practices, events, and texts, and broader social, cultural, relationships and relationships, process" involved in the text, which we can subsequently divide into a textual analysis, a discursive analysis, and an analysis of socio-cultural practice (Fairclough 1992). Special attention will be paid to the neo-colonialism, resource exploitation discourse, and the context of France's military presence in the Sahel.

For the purpose of this research, I will have chosen to focus on a subset of five propaganda techniques described by Cole (Cole 1998), this is due to the mostly textual nature of the material that I have analysed. These are namely:

- Distortion, which refers to the 'misrepresenting or perverting the true meaning of a fact or an idea', this distortion leads recipients to have a false impression of the intent of an action. In this case, I will look into the intentions of the French troops in the Sahel.
- Defective proof refers to the idea that 'evidence is faulty or incomplete' and thus does not allow a conclusion to be taken 'beyond a reasonable doubt'.
- Doublespeak refers to the ' using of words and phrases in an ambiguous and deceptive manner. It is the process of saying a great deal without saying anything substantive'
- Euphemism refers to 'an innocuous word or expression used in place of one that is deemed offensive or suggests something unpleasant.'
- Exaggeration (or hyperbole) refers to the stretching of the truth to make something appear more meaningful than it was.

The results of this comparative analysis will subsequently be used to construct a media ecology of discursive practices, which can subsequently be mapped according to their truth claims. Robertson designed a media ecology covering the discursive practices of different television channels in covering the Arab Spring (Robertson 2013). I labelled news sources as either being pro-French, neutral, or anti-French in their wording and while this is a subjective choice, it is one I will attempt to clarify using the Critical Discourse Analysis of the Russian and French state media articles. The limitations of this approach will later be discussed in this paper's results section. Subsequently, the web links of these news sources will function as one of the search elements for the qualitative component of this research.

Methodology: Quantitative Analysis

To answer RQ2 and RQ3 requires a more quantitative approach in order to visualize how Twitter users, whether they be bots or real people are talking about the incident and what they relate it to. This exploration relates closely to the conceptual frameworks of 'citizen curators' which push information and are responsible for most of the people viewing it (Golovchenko, Hartmann, and Adler-Nissen 2018) as well as actor-network theory which seeks to view users' connections with one another.

The Raw Twitter Data consists of 89950 Tweets and Retweets between the 24th of November 2021 and the 24th of December 2021. The Twitter data was collected by Jeroen Bakker through the Twitter API with Python. This was done by gathering tweets that contained the words 'Téra' or 'Niger' in both French and English. This will be done by focusing on the methodology laid out by (Grandjean 2016) whereby Twitter users are scrapped based on hashtags used and participation in debates and use of keywords. To identify the actors and narratives on social media, I performed a network analysis with Gephi, a data visualisation software (Bastiaan et al., 2009).

For RQ2, I will create a user network analysis of the users, creating a map of the main clusters of activity and labelling them by doing both a textual analysis of the most prominent messages and a statistical analysis of the words and hashtags used by different communities. I used Excel's Power Query tool to rank the most common occurrences of certain words and hashtags and looked into their use within the different clusters. I selected the 25 most shared hashtags and 25 words in order to look at the use of narratives. For the word selection, I had to make more conscious decisions, first eliminating prepositions and common verbs. It will allow me to infer which groups are reacting to the incident and the narratives that they are relating them to.

For RQ3, I will subsequently perform a semantic analysis and look into the links shared by the different communities. It will thus be possible to identify trends and recurring narratives regarding the Tera incident. This will then be linked to the narratives laid out by state media to identify which of these is most closely related to discourse on social media and to find new related narratives that may

interact with the story about Téra. By linking these websites to the findings of RQ1, I will then be able to link to the continuity of narratives between traditional media and social media.

Corpus

The corpus will consist of news articles on the Téra incident as well as a series of Tweets (See Appendix) dating from the 27th of November until 15th of January. The start date has been chosen as the day of the incident taking place. Additional research into the discursive practices before the incident will be related to the #NoMore #PasPlus, which are hashtags used to call for an end to Western involvement in Africa, and are closely linked to discussions of the incident on social media. Further online material will be used from English and French news websites covering the story (See Appendix). The choice for a multilingual approach is to ensure that more French and Nigerien (of which French is a local language) perspectives can be included in the debate. Unfortunately, the absence of Hausa, the local language, is likely to limit the extent to which local perspectives are included in the story. The decision to centre the corpus around the Téra incident rather than anti-French sentiment, in general, is a deliberate one, which I made to facilitate the mapping of the discursive practices. By its nature, this corpus cannot hope to be a fully comprehensive overview of the case at hand, due to its exclusion of local languages on both Twitter and the mainstream news media.

The choice to do this on Twitter and not Facebook is because the topic spread more virally on Twitter, and the potential dataset for analysis is therefore larger. This will be done through the use of Twitter's API. Information about the links shared, and the general content of the posts will be gathered for coding and linking to the discursive space established through the media ecology of this paper. This will enable me to better make the link between the different discourses on social media and on mainstream media.

Analysis

Critical discourse analysis

In this discourse analysis, I will look into the English and French versions of the articles written about the Téra incident by RT and France 24.

Textual Analysis

Headlines

Language is subjective, and the choice of words in an article is suggestive of the stance that a person or a publication takes. When looking at the choice of headlines for the articles, which are the aspect most likely to be seen, the initial France 24 headline referred to 'violent protests' in the English version

and 'protestors' in the French one. The choice of language is one of passivity, whereas in French were 'des heurts', which implies a collision rather than an act of violence, and the French army is 'blocked', was 'going through the city' or 'faced' protests. This contrasts with the RT headlines which are more direct in their assignation of responsibility in the event: 'Two killed in clash with French military convoy' and 'Two dead and 18 wounded – the French army confirms the outcome of clashes'. What is of further interest is that both RT and France 24 affirm that there is still uncertainty around the events, yet they take different approaches to the headlines, which either intentionally obscure some of the details, or hint at claims that could not yet be fully substantiated.

While the France 24 articles were published on the 27th of November, the day of the incident, and those of RT on the 28th, the absence of the deaths from the headlines suggests that the France 24 retelling of events are a euphemism of reality, minimising the events and relegating crucial elements of the story to later on in the article. While a subsequent article on the 29th by France 24 in French complemented the initial report to say there were three dead (there were only two). Its formulation attributes the deaths to the passage of the convoy and not to clashes or the French military. In a similar fashion, RT's headlines can be considered to be a distortion. By focusing solely on the actions of the French army and not of the protestors, in doing so it assigns blame for the incident, without subsequently supporting that claim in the text, in that sense, the RT retelling of the incident also presents the characteristics of a defective proof.

The actors of the story

Another way France 24 and RT differ is the way in which they refer to the quoted officials in the story as well as the French military and the protesters. While France 24 refers to 'soldiers' and 'military convoy' interchangeably to refer to the troops, RT refers to them exclusively as the 'French convoy' drawing attention to the fact that the convoy is armed and erasing the individuality of the soldiers. Furthermore, the way the actors are referred to in the articles differs. France 24 refers to Nigerien police have used tear gas before the 'Nigerien police and the French soldiers' as having fired warning shots. RT refers primarily to the French military having fired warning shots, and only refers to the Nigerien police when quoting French military officials. This can be further seen as attribution of blame by the reporting by RT, and a deflection of blame by France 24.

Similarly, there is a discrepancy in the way Pascal Ianni, the spokesperson for the French military who handled much of the press response is referred to. While both RT and France 24 refer to his rank (colonel) and the fact that he is a spokesperson, RT labels him as a 'communications advisor' in the French version of its article. While this is included on his LinkedIn profile, the reference to this aspect of his profile by RT implies that what he says is to improve the French Army's public image, instead of being an objective source of facts.

The role of the protestors is also evoked in a different way: while they both quote Pascal Ianni on the subject, France 24 takes this narrative at face value, citing the quote, RT uses the wording 'according to' and makes extensive use of prominent quotation marks. This creates a break between the article and the quotes, leading us to question the narrative of Pascal Ianni. France 24 also is more descriptive in terms of the behaviour of the protestors, highlighting that they were throwing rocks and damaging trucks, whereas RT only addresses this using the term 'violence'.

This showcases that both RT and France 24 distort reality and give legitimacy to different actors within the story. This is further expanded by additional quotes and material included by the two media platforms: RT in English features a collection of Twitter videos by users and its own journalists to illustrate the situation from what it claims to be a more personal standpoint, yet there is no indication that those people were present at the event itself and it focused on the emotions of the protestors rather than the events of the story. This effectively creates doublespeak: without clarifying the event, the article serves as a way to express anger, which can then be reshared and spread.

Discursive Practice

The two articles showcase two different stances on France's role in the region and raises questions as to whether to portray the country as a saviour or as an oppressor. As I have previously discussed in the introduction to this case, both France and Russia have vested interests in the region, and the narratives of the two state-owned media platforms can be seen as extensions of those interests.

A slip-up or a recurring blunder?

One noticeable difference between the articles is the way in which the incident is being contextualized and framed: RT refers to the 'cold welcome' that faced the French troops, the 'anger over France's military presence', the 'contested nature of France's military presence' and the 'criticism surrounding France's campaigns in the Sahel. It also goes on to question the capability of the French military presence stating its 'inability to stop militant attacks' and implying through analogy with a previous event where 'four protestors were wounded by gunshots in undetermined circumstances'. This creates the implication that French soldiers are trigger-happy and repressing civilians instead of dealing with the counter-insurgency campaign.

This contrasts with France 24's coverage which attempts to shore up legitimacy despite the incident, especially in the last paragraph of the articles. Placing the incident within the context of an anti-Islamism operation portrays the deaths as a regrettable incident part of a useful campaign. This contributes to relativizing the events as a slip-up of the French forces as opposed to a malaise with the French forces. Indeed, referring to a previous incident in Burkina Faso, France 24 acknowledges

the protestors wanting to expose the 'flaws in Burkina Faso's security accords with former colonial ruler France', the articles go on to partially dismiss the protesters by saying they were inspired by rumours on social media.

A failing operation or an appreciated presence?

While RT questions the French military's capability, it also portrays the French military operation as a failing endeavour. Indeed, the French article hones in on France re-organising and reducing its military presence in the region, and the English article highlights local anger with an embedded video saying 'down with France'. It further contributes to the creation of an atmosphere of rejection, stating that French troops came across 'fresh protests […] less than 30km from the border' which questions the legitimacy of the French presence in the region.

In contrast, France 24 highlights the purpose of the convoy to join a French military base in the region, linking it back to the counter-insurgency operation. This showcases that French troops are at work in the region, and further creates a narrative that the protesters were being a nuisance to the region. France 24 goes on further to quote the Burkinabese and Nigerien presidents, who expressed their 'gratitude' and thanked France for its 'long history of help in crises'.

Socio-Cultural Practices

These textual and discursive practices can be seen through a post-colonial and neo-colonial social-cultural practice. If we relate this to studies made in the political science field, the history of the region, and the geopolitics of the region, Africa and the Sahel region is an area of geopolitical competition between France and Russia (Maślanka 2020). While there is unanimity on the facts being presented the way that they are shaped and distorted within these articles highlights the battle for hearts and minds in the region: it is a campaign of information warfare.

Interestingly, it is a battle that France, the former colonial power (as mentioned repeatedly in the articles), is apparently losing. Recent coups in Mali, the Central African Republic (reported to being Russian backed), and Russia moving in where France is moving out highlight the barriers to continued French involvement in the region. While the framing of the incident and French presence in the region either reinforces or attempts to dismiss narratives about the country's imperialist past. The Russian State media, as an extension of Russian state power, has interests in displacing and replacing the French presence in Africa regardless of what it means for the stability of the region. In contrast, French state media, which can also be viewed as an extension of French state power, has an interest in preserving the status quo, both to keep got ties with friendly regimes, and prevent the collapse of societies that would lead to migratory pressure.

However, while it is possible to make a direct analogy between France 24 and RT's coverage

of the same event, comparisons of the two platforms more broadly are trickier. Indeed Rawnsley argues that Russian state media focuses on criticizing the West (in the case of Ukraine) rather than pursuing a degree of introspection into Russia's own activities (Rawnsley 2015). With media being used in the context of information warfare also raises some questions on the legitimacy of the narratives being presented as being purely journalistic. Szostek discusses the difference between propaganda, a concept associated in the West with Russian activity, and public diplomacy, which the West uses to refer to its own attempts at influence. While these are both methods to shape public opinion, public diplomacy is often seen as a subtler tool, whereas propaganda consists in shouting as loud as possible about a certain topic. He then concludes that the goal of information warfare may not be to convince but rather to disrupt the regular flows of information within a country (Szostek 2020).

Creating a media ecology

Thanks to the Critical Discourse Analysis above, I have demonstrated a framework for understanding anti and pro-French framing within the context of the Téra incident. This framework is by no means an attempt to establish what is the truth regarding the event: it is a mere attempt at labelling the framing of different media platforms with regards to the incident. By extension, this means that coverage by French state media can also be anti-French in its reporting when assigning blame relating to the event. Instead, it implies that the framing benefits the French position in the region.

In order to proceed further, I would like to consider the following non-exhaustive compilation of news headlines regarding the Téra incident (see table 1). Based on whether they mention death, and assign or deflect blame, I have labelled them according to their coverage of the event. The table below includes the links of these articles as well as the position of their narrative. This overview demonstrates the presence of pro, neutral and anti-French narratives in both Western and non-Western state/non-state media. This will later be used in order to evaluate the types of links being shared on social media.

Network Analysis

Using Gephi, a network visualisation tool, which analyses the proximity of different users according to their tweeting behaviour, it is possible to divide the network surrounding the Téra Incident into five main clusters (figure 1) according to their modularity class. Since the search terms used also feature Niger more broadly, not all the events are related to the focus of this case, but it does allow us to identify the broader discourses that people are interested in on social media. While there were other clusters present within the data set, most notably a series of India and Bollywood conversations, these were removed for the sake of clarity.
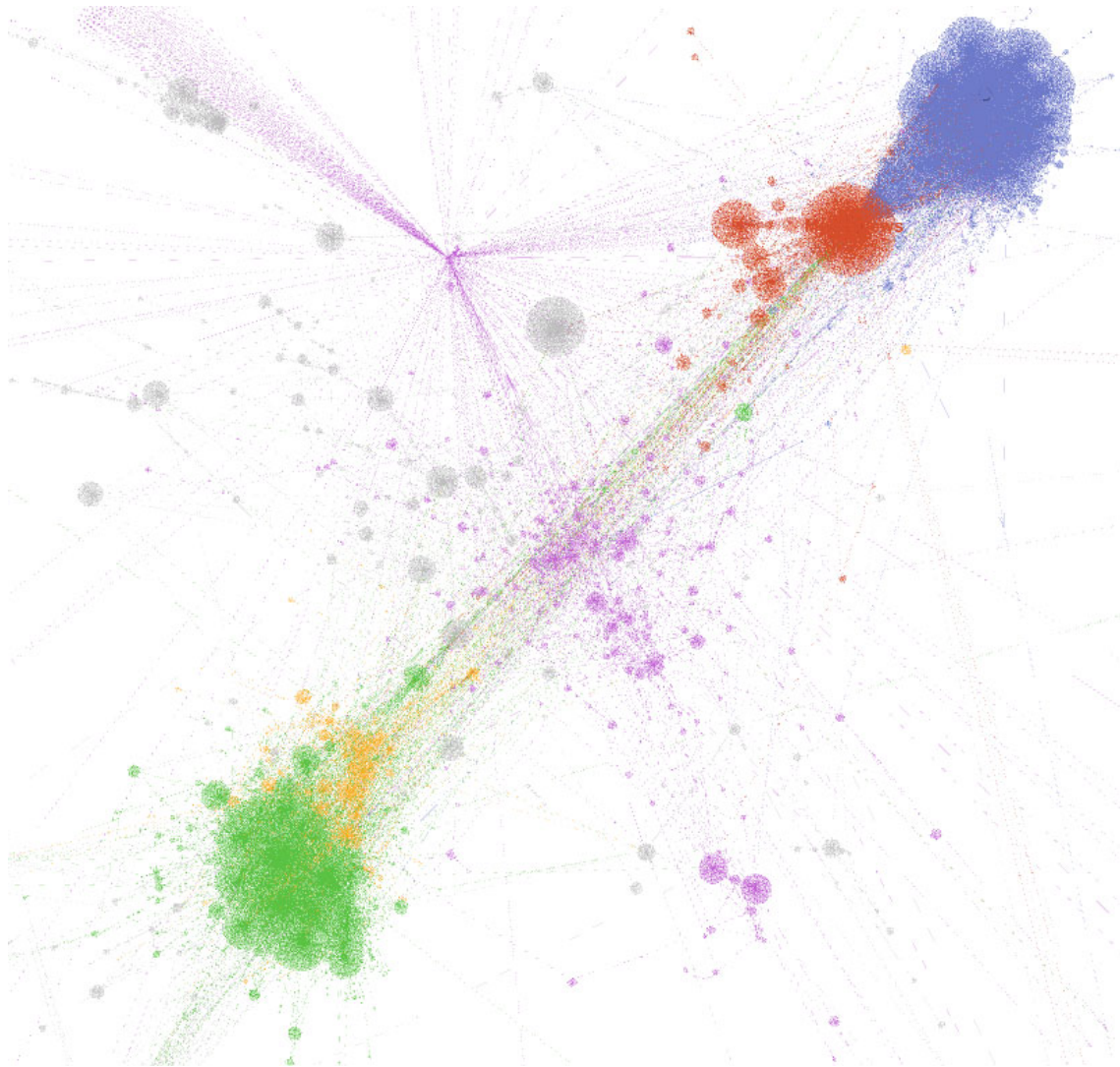
Figure 1 : Network analysis of the different communities in Gephi

Interestingly, there is no visible split (separate clusters) between the French and English language data in the visualisation, suggesting that the language barrier does little to create silos within this debate. Through a qualitative observation of the most prominent Twitter accounts of each cluster, I developed the following descriptions, for the different clusters: Nigerien public debate (green), Nigerian public debate (yellow) International debate on Niger (pink), narrative recombination sphere (red), anti-colonial sphere (blue). Due to the limited amount of Tweets relevant for this case study in the Nigerian public sphere, this cluster will be left out of the subsequent parts of my analysis. The 12 Tweets selected for analysis can be found in the appendix of this paper.

Cluster 1: International debate about Niger

The Nigerien public sphere cluster makes up 10% of the total network and a significant amount of the Tweets here were related to the Téra incident. While mainstream media outlets like Reuters, AFP, and AP could be found near this cluster, they were not directly a part of it and were mostly isolated within the social media ecosystem related to the coverage of this event.

What characterizes the debate in this cluster is a mix of pro-French, anti-French, or neutral narratives. Tweet 1 questions the responsibility of the French military whereas Tweet 2 mentions the violent nature of the protests against the convey and deflects blame from the French military by using the passive form 'were killed' instead of 'were killed by', it also points to the violent nature of the protests against French troops. This contrasts with Tweet 3 which follows an anti-French narrative, directly assigning blame to the French military.

The diverging and inconsistent narratives within this cluster highlight an international debate open to pro-French narrative and therefore friendly to French interests. By leaving doubt as to the and questioning the violence of the protestors, these narratives provide a form of exculpation to the French forces.

Cluster 2: Nigerien public sphere

The Nigerien public sphere cluster makes up 11% of the total network. While most of the messages in this network were not related to the Téra event specifically, the most prominent ones that were pointed to the actions of France's military and questioned the official French narrative (Tweet 4). These messages followed either a neutral or anti-French narrative. This can be seen in Tweet 6 which points to the use of a warplane by the French military. Tweet 5 points to the presence of the Nigérien police, following a pro-French narrative, while simultaneously labelling the incident as a massacre.

Yet what distinguishes this cluster from the following two, is that while it admits French responsibility, labelling the incident as a massacre, it also nuances it with elements that would be found in pro-French narratives.

Cluster 3: Anti-colonial sphere

This cluster represents 26% of the entire network and is one of the most active on the Téra debate, and makes extensive use of hashtags compared to the other clusters. Yet it is not exclusively dominated by it, focusing on other events across Sub-Saharan Africa, like the civil war in Ethiopia, and Black Lives Matters movement. It is further related to the notion of Pan-Africanism through the use of #AfricanUnity and #PanAfricanism #OneAfrica (Tweet 7), and to the notions related to the anti-colonial movement using #NoMore and #PasPlus. These frames of reference dictate how this

community views the Téra incident, which views France through a lens of former colonial power, this is once again visible in the hashtags used: #DownWithImperialism #FrenchImperialism.

Cluster 4: Recombining narratives

The narrative combination cluster makes up 4% of the network, yet it distinguishes itself by the impactfulness of its messages, particularly in the Anti-Colonial cluster, where it is often retweeted, and with which it shares codes and hashtags.

However, the narratives that take place in this sphere are original in that different narratives that are found separately in other clusters are combined and subsequently spread virally. This is the case for Tweet 10, where existing narratives about France's uranium mining operation, which can be found in the anti-colonial cluster, are combined with the incident creating a viral message. This is also the most widely reshared Tweet in the whole data set that I analysed with an Indegree of 5292. Tweet 11 echoes this sentiment arguing that France is a 'regime' that poisons 'impoverished civilians' while 'looting the resources of Niger.

A further similar phenomenon can be observed in this cluster like in Tweet 12, where the colonialist behavior of France is contrasted to Chinese vaccine diplomacy. This goes beyond the scope of the incident and creates a new narrative that contextualizes France's operation in the Sahel in a neo-colonial light.

**Statistical analysis of the different clusters and words**

The table containing the overview of my analysis can be found in the appendix (Table 2). From it, I draw several conclusions. The first is that there is a significant difference between the extent to which the debate of the four clusters is centred around the Tera incident specifically. This can be seen by the fact that the word Téra is not common within the network in general, despite having been a search term for the Twitter API. The focus on the incident is also dependent on which community is talking about the incident: the narrative recombination cluster through its word choice refers to other events in the region, including neighbouring Burkina Faso or Ethiopia.

In terms of the use of hashtags, we first notice that the anti-colonial sphere uses them disproportionately compared to the other clusters. This suggests that they are a more cohesive community and respond to the same codes, which is clear in their words and hashtag choices. These revolve around Pan-Africanism and colonialism. Furthermore, there is also considerable overlap between the anti-colonial community and the narrative recombination cluster in terms of hashtags and word use. The use of the word 'uranium' in both of these clusters, though the narrative colonial cluster is more likely to do so, demonstrates the incident is being linked to a broader narrative of neo-

colonialism. This confirms the previous characterisations made of the different communities through textual analysis.

Use of links

The most popular Tweets in the network are those that have additional media attached to them, highlighting the transmedia nature of propaganda. These are made up of either pictures, videos, or links to other media which serve as either proof or confirmation by a mainstream media outlet. Jacob distinguishes between links on Twitter with a 'truth-based informative function' and a 'norm-based argumentative function'. While the former aim to present a factual and empirical understanding of the situation, the latter aims at legitimizing positions on a moral argument (Jakob 2020). The most successful links in the data set are those that have a norm-based argumentative function, which has a tendency to lean anti-French within the observed discourse. This is visible in two widely shared videos, highlighting the opposition of the protestors to the French convoy and demonstrating the violence surrounding the event.
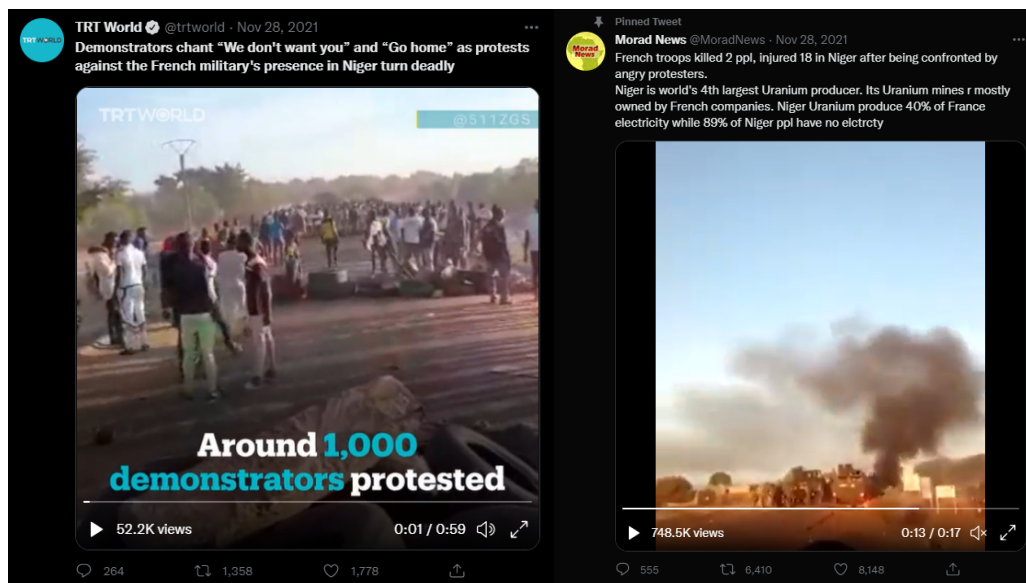
fltr: Video 1 by TRT (Turkish State Media) and Video 2 by Morad News (non-affiliated account)

Indeed, what is noticeable is the near complete absence of the pro-French narrative in the links shared or within the broader narrative. This can be understood in several ways, namely that headlines are only spread when they resonate with the assumptions of the community and clusters they are related to. Alternatively this absence can be explained by interpretations that the pro-French narrative is disconnected from reality, and is outright dismissed. Or it could be linked to the nature of the network which is dominated by non-French, non-Western figures, who are thus less likely to use Western media.

Parameters	Niger Public Sphere	International Niger Debate	Post-Colonial	Narrative combinations
Modularity Class	220	197	262	893
Links				
Twitter	2741	3925	13813	2884
Sputnik	1	2	285	7
Morad (Twitter)	26	38	1241	2065
LeMonde	4	108	6	7
TRTworld	3	25	1485	30
BBC	41	16	3	0
RFI	16	92	1	4
NYTimes	3	26	0	2
Tass	0	0	0	0
Aljazeera	204	11	51	4

Table 3: Overview of the most shared links in the different communities

Unfortunately, due to the developments of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, much of the data surrounding RT and Sputnik has been deleted, and the Twitter accounts of these platforms have been suspended in the European Union. Nonetheless, the prevalence of the link by Sputnik within the network, which was shared 285 times in the anti-colonial cluster highlights the importance of links in shaping the discourse. This is the case for example with TRT, the Turkish state media which pointed to the anger of the protestors in the case of the event with descriptions (Video 1) and of non-affiliated Morad News account, which showed a video of the event (Video 2) and combined narratives. This contrasts with Western links like Le Monde or BBC that have both pro-French or neutral narratives are principally shared in the International debate and to a more limited extent, in the Nigerien public sphere cluster.

What is of further interest is that links by other users within Twitter (i.e. pictures or videos) are more prevalent within the network than those of the mainstream media outlets (links to articles or pictures and videos). @MoradNews, for example, is particularly successful in the post-colonial sphere despite being initially in the narrative combination sphere. This demonstrates the importance of citizen curators in shaping the digital debate, and the effectiveness of social media in challenging the role of traditional gatekeepers.

Results

Research Question 1

Through this study, I have demonstrated the existence of varying narratives in mainstream media, on the same event resulting from the use of well-documented propaganda techniques in the creation of both French and anti-French narratives surrounding the Téra incident. The selective focus and omission of certain facts for both narrative extremes highlights how competing narratives display different facts in their headlines and contest or re-affirm them in the text, without deviating from generally agreed facts.

Additionally, the media ecology demonstrated a diversity of narratives within the coverage of the Téra incident by French and English-speaking media. The fact that non-Western state media is shared over Western media despite similar narratives suggests that any efforts out outreach, public diplomacy, or propaganda by the Western outlets operate at a handicap, and hinder their ability to compete in an arena of information warfare.

Research Question 2

Subsequently, by looking into the social media data related to the event, I was able to determine the communities in which propaganda is spread. This lead me to conclude that anti-French narratives were dominant throughout the debate, with some distinctions between the different clusters as to how they processed and shared the information. In this debate, the anti-colonial and Pan-African movements debate appropriated the Téra incident in the context. This is visible through the widespread use of #PasPlus #NoMore in the conversations of many of the users.

Research Question 3

By looking into the narratives spread on social media, as well as those spreading in the mainstream media, a large majority of the posts follow an anti-French narrative on social media. While a significant amount of that can be related to the incident, and the blame assigned to France, another portion of this can be attributed to underlying anti-colonial sentiment. This can be seen in the creation of new combined narratives, linking resource exploitation to the incident instead of the anti-Islamist operation. This creates a frame of understanding through which every action is one by an oppressor, and amplifies anti-French sentiment in the region.

While I established that links form a supportive part in sharing media content, I only found limited evidence in the use of links from mainstream media outlets leading back to articles. This was in part due to the absence of data related to the Russian Invasion of Ukraine. However, as seen in the

case of TRT, the Turkish state media outlet, mainstream (state) media outlets can give legitimacy to a certain discursive practice and help it spread. This is in part conditioned on their appeal to pre-existing frames of understanding (ie: the anti-colonial movement).

Limitations

While I have strived towards objectivity and neutrality in this paper and to eliminate biases, I am myself French and have. I apologize to the reader for any remnant of bias in this paper, should there be any.

As previously mentioned throughout this paper, data from RT and Sputnik has been removed from Twitter and is not present in the data set that I have studied. This limited my ability to make connections between mainstream and social media narratives, and would thus require another study using different media outlets as a focus point. Twitter's data practices, which involve the banning of bots and the deletion of their activity, furthermore limit the possibility to study the phenomenon of computational propaganda. This will also necessitate ways to bypass geo-restrictions when accessing data of accounts banned within the European Union.

In terms of the statistical analysis that I conducted on the quantitative data, my approach would have benefited from better processing of the data, through the use of a language processing tool. This would have allowed me to focus on the Tweets that matter. Additionally, I could have done the statistical analyses of the main hashtags and keywords for the individual communities separately which would have yielded additional insights into the focus points of the different debates. The fact that one cluster overwhelmingly used hashtags as opposed to others limited my understanding in terms of the priorities held by other communities.

This case study focuses on information warfare and propaganda, yet my study of the Téra incident is one-sided, focusing on the media coverage of the actions of the French military. My study would have benefited from a comparative approach to look into media coverage of other actors, such as Wagner, a Russian mercenary company which has been accused of war crimes. Likewise, insights into positive campaigns on the French or Russian presence in the region would have been of further interest. A comparative study would have allowed me to look at the asymmetry of perception and reception of narratives and study the asymmetry of information warfare.

Moreover, while this study could have been further contextualized by looking into previous examples of disinformation related to the case: the circulation of information that the French convoy was transporting weapons for jihadists. This would have provided additional insights into the lead-up to the event and would have allowed me to compare the networks that existed in spreading this disinformation to those that later spread propaganda on the Téra incident.

The focus on Twitter as the sole platform for my study may have been limiting as well: future

studies should focus on several social media platforms and look have more context into the practices of people in the field. This study further did not go onto the field to research, and see how this incident affected public opinion. The connection between mainstream media, social media, and their role in shaping the perceptions of people on the ground needs to be further established.

Conclusion

In this paper, thanks to a mix-methods approach, I have traced narratives and established propaganda as a transmedia phenomenon. It takes place on several platforms simultaneously, with links between mainstream media and social media. This new insight into the field of propaganda studies from a digital humanities perspective offers a new insights into the transmedia nature of propaganda: major outlets can facilitate discourse by providing legitimacy to social media outlets, and the production of easy-to-consume headlines and videos.

The results of this specific case study suggest the difficulty the West faces in getting their narratives out to the rest of the world, and openness to anti-western propaganda closely related to the anti-colonial movement. This has implications for policymakers in the West to both tackle the core grievances raised by the anti-colonial movements, and find narratives that connect with Africans and make them less receptive to anti-Western propaganda. This thesis connects the digital humanities to the fields of propaganda, post-colonial and geopolitical studies.

While this highlight the need for continued interest in anti-Western propaganda, I fear that this focus may be neglected in the future. The ban of RT and Sputnik have been banned in the European Union, and the closing of the European landscape to certain foreign media will likely limit interest in those platforms. Yet the relevance for foreign relations will not decrease: RT has decided to orient their French staff to focus on Africa, pointing to the continued relevance of studies of propaganda in those areas and from those outlets.

Future research

While this paper focused on a public social media platform, it would be necessary to understand how disinformation is spread in private communication and look into the spread of propaganda on personal messaging apps, chatgroups, and within towns or villages. This would require field research and an ethnographic approach as opposed to a digital humanities approach.

This paper also leads to some interesting tracks for applied research in the field of new media studies, particularly for its implications on international research. Using such an approach would allow governments to frame international initiatives and public diplomacy in a more appropriate way. Another interesting field of study should be the use of media literacy programs as part of counter-insurgency initiatives. While current approaches by governments have been to combat propaganda

with propaganda, a future field of research should consider how media literacy programs could combat disinformation in an information war.

Post scriptum

On the 18th of May, the French and Nigerien governments paid financial compensation to the families of the victims of the incident.

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Appendix: Tweets

Tweet 1

Qui a tiré sur les manifestants hier dimanche à Téra dans l'ouest du Niger ? Le convoi militaire français qui fait route vers le Mali a été pris à partie. Selon le Niger, deux tués. Réaction du colonel Pascal Ianni, porte-parole du chef d'État major des armées françaises. https://t.co/asuiGykvSC

29th of November @YGuichaoua

Tweet 2

Qui a tiré sur les manifestants hier dimanche à Téra dans l'ouest du Niger ? Le convoi militaire français qui fait route vers le Mali a été pris à partie. Selon le Niger, deux tués. Réaction du colonel Pascal Ianni, porte-parole du chef d'État major des armées françaises. https://t.co/asuiGykvSC

29th of November @YGuichaoua

Tweet 3

Russia: \nOn French troops shooting protesters in #Niger recently, killing several people & wounding many others:\n\nDiplomat says it's 1st time he heard about this\n#Sahel \n\nThe reporting: https://t.co/ltQvwemhkc https://t.co/XQboosvtUp

29th of November

Tweet 4

RFI providing cover for the French military's massacre in Niger, interviewing the captain of the French convoy and not even asking about evidence showing his forces killed protesters
https://t.co/hog2KrtRF4

30th of November 2021 @joepenney

Tweet 5

A French Air Force Mirage 2000 dispensing some flares to deter some protesters in Niger NE \n
https://t.co/7pd5IoWKNW

27th of November @air_intel

Tweet 6

A convoy of French troops, escorted by Nigérien gendarmes, fired on Nigériens protesting against them in Téra, Niger, this morning. They killed three people and injured 18 others, 11 of whom are severely injured. A massacre https://t.co/emb1yViREi

28th of November @cchukudebelu

Tweet 7

@Blklivesmatter should stand with #NoMore to support #Africa. We are all fighting the same fight. While black folks are being killed in the #US, we have French troops killing our people in Niger. Black people should stand together and defend Africa's dignity. #OneAfrica

30th of November @MikaChavala

Tweet 8

Demonstrators chant "We don't want you" and "Go home" as protests against the French military's presence in Niger turn deadly https://t.co/2T2x8g99hN

28th of November @trtworld

Tweet 9

We stand with our brothers & sisters in #Niger & #BurkinaFaso. Firing arms on peaceful protestors saying #NoMore exploitation is not acceptable. #Africa should rise together to defend itself from former colonizers & neocolonialism. #HandsoffAfrica! @NeaminZeleke @SheabiaForever https://t.co/Ut84sWjc1P

29th of November iyoba4u

Tweet 10

"French troops killed 2 ppl, injured 18 in Niger after being confronted by angry protesters. Niger is world's 4th largest Uranium producer. Its Uranium mines r mostly owned by French companies. Niger Uranium produce 40% of France electricity while 89% of Niger ppl have no elctrcty"

28th of November 2021 @MoradNews

Tweet 11

"The French regime is oppressing and killing the native people of Niger for standing up against the French occupation looting their resources. French warplanes are dropping toxic tear-gas on the impoverished civilians.\n\nThe true face of Western "civilization"\n\n#StandWithNiger "

Tweet 12

"Idk how y'all see China give Africa a billion vaccines and France literally attack citizens of both Burkina Faso and Niger in the same week and still be confused as to who the colonizer is"

29th of November 2021 @VONDUPPY01

Appendix: Table 1

Headline	Platform	Country	State Media	Mentions Deaths	Blame	Position
Deaths in Niger as protesters confront French army convoy	Al Jazeera	Qatari	Yes	Yes	No	Neutral
French forces face violent protests after crossing into Niger from Burkina Faso	France 24	France	Yes	No	Deflects	Pro French
«Deux morts et 18 blessés», l'armée française confirme le bilan des violences	RT	Russia	Yes	Yes	No	Neutral
Two killed in clash with French military convoy (VIDEOS)	RT	Russia	Yes	Yes	Assigns	Anti-French
At Least Two Killed, 18 Wounded as French Military Convoy Clashes With Protesters in Niger	VOA	US	Yes	Yes	No	Neutral
Convoi de Barkhane : à Téra, «les soldats français se sont rassemblés et ont ouvert le feu»	Libération	France	No	Yes	Assigns	Anti-French
Niger: des violences à Téra lors du passage du convoi militaire français	France Inter	France	Yes	No	Deflects	Pro-French
Niger. Un convoi militaire français bloqué par des manifestants, au moins deux morts et 18 blessés	Ouest France	France	Yes	Yes	No	Neutral
Au Niger, deux morts dans des heurts lors du passage d'un convoi militaire français	Le Monde	France	No	Yes	Deflects	Pro-French
Niger : 3 morts dans de nouveaux heurts sur la route du convoi militaire français au Sahel	Le Figaro	France	No	Yes	Deflects	Pro-French
At least two killed, 18 wounded as French convoy faces new protests in Niger	Reuters	UK	No	Yes	No	Neutral
Niger : 2 morts dans une manifestation à Téra, contre le passage d'un convoi de l'armée française	AA	Turkey	Yes	Yes	No	Neutral
French military convoy faces protests in Niger	AA	Turkey	Yes	No	Deflects	Pro-French

Appendix: Table 2

Parameters	Niger Public Sphere	International Niger Debate	Post-Colonial	Narrative combinations
Modularity Class	220	197	262	893
Number of tweets	9623	8910	23594	3801
Percentage of Network	11%	10%	26%	4%
25 hashtags				
#NoMore	31	529	19555	340
#Niger	530	4870	15649	697
#Africa	30	508	6816	129
#BurkinaFaso	26	781	7563	130
#Ethiopia	5	288	6014	61
#French	9	90	4473	112
#France	13	232	1631	345
#FrenchImperialism	1	37	1693	36
#DownWithImperialism	1	35	1656	37
#KaranKundrra	0	0	0	0
#Sudan	2	97	1591	10
#OneAfrica	2	18	2405	21
#Eritrea	3	177	1685	25
#Niger.	7	207	1287	36
#UNSC	0	302	904	13
#BiggBoss15	0	0	0	0
#PanAfricanism	4	53	1608	29
#Niger,	5	305	707	65
#Mali	17	872	681	53
#Ethiopia,	1	11	1008	8
#PasPlus	3	87	1188	22
#TigrayMassArrests	0	1	0	2
#HumeraMassacre	0	0	0	1
#Haiti	0	128	746	6
#OneAfrica	2	18	2405	21
25 common words				
Niger	9469	7794	23374	3656
French	479	441	12982	2810
tera	36	271	42	329
troops	177	168	6781	1897
Uranium	46	99	2221	1715
France	186	634	5585	2738
African	72	439	8727	208
against	349	358	3380	652
Tera	36	271	42	329
people	1550	429	3934	320
Burkina	219	1270	10439	586
killed	1259	265	1018	1708
what	660	219	3341	98
killing	265	103	4148	215
Niger.	779	507	4791	190
injured	175	53	1145	2123
stop	272	78	1656	35
stand	143	125	3041	163
military	275	149	2393	698
electricity	311	32	2086	1702
confronted	27	17	823	1653
protest	574	202	4782	2386
condemn	31	69	3103	58
colonial	57	218	4198	227
supporting	31	20	31	1
BlackLives	0	5	7	2
China	120	105	78	281
Russia	2	155	228	46