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**DISINFORMATION AND PROPAGANDA IN PROXY WARFARE ANATOMY: AN
ANALYSIS OF RUSSIAN NARRATIVES IN FRANCOPHONE AFRICAN COUNTRIES**

MASTER'S THESIS

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Key words: propaganda, disinformation, media, proxy warfare, weaponization, narratives, meta-narratives, framing theory, Sahel countries, France, Russia, Niger, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic

Summary: The spread of disinformation throughout the Sahel countries by Russia led to question why and how Russia seeks to weaponize societies not only in African francophone states but also by proxy in France and the West. The main goal was to distinguish narratives spread in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and CAR by Russian state media and establish the way they integrate themselves in the modern proxy warfare anatomy. With a wide sample of 537 articles selected between 2022 and 2024 from the “RT France” and “Sputnik Afrique” websites, analysed through 7 different pre-established frames, 47 key narratives were identified, permitting to visualize at a micro-level how media can not only be an instrument but also an actor in an ongoing virtual proxy warfare. At the end of the study, the 47 key narratives were narrowed down to 10 distinct meta-narratives.

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INTRODUCTION

Late-night scrolls are full of secrecy and surprisingly, sometimes lead to some interesting questions. During one of those nights, while I was scrolling through my Twitter feed in search of the latest updates and developments about the war in Ukraine, I noticed one unusual detail.

Following a large panel of official and verified accounts for research purposes, as experts in geopolitics, political scientists, governmental organisations and politicians can be of great help to get various information in several languages, thus allowing the reader to “integrate” different circles inside of a well-constructed algorithm. You can not only know “what’s *really* going on” in (almost) real-time but also learn about the way the same information is perceived in each country or social group.

Below most of the articles concerning the war in Ukraine, dedicated to the French audience and shared on the infamous app, plenty of negative and hateful anti-NATO, anti-US and anti-Ukraine comments could be found. Nothing surprising for the trained eye, as we all know about the existence of bots and online disinformation. Nevertheless, while digging a bit deeper into the commentators’ profiles, I noticed that many of them are from African countries, especially from the Sahel region and Central Africa. For most of them, they were real profiles. They *acted* like bots, but they *weren’t* bots.

This caught my attention: why do people, living at tens of thousands of kilometres from Russia, having (at first sight) no geopolitical interest in the Russian war in Ukraine would support Putin’s regime, using a plethora of supportive hashtags and Russian flag emojis? Even for those with a background in geopolitics, the *real* scope of Russian influence on the African continent still remains difficult to grasp.

This led to another question: why was I noticing this phenomenon only below French-written posts and articles?

We all know for a fact, that the spread of disinformation and propaganda from the Russian side has existed since the Soviet years and before. Baltic, Scandinavian, Central and Eastern European countries have been exposed to an unaccountable number of disinformation campaigns and tried to alert other countries of the dangers of it. Unfortunately, as mentioned in a 2018 joint report by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Armed Forces, “Until 2014 [these countries] were preaching to the deaf: their attempts to draw attention to this phenomenon have long aroused

indifference or even irritation among the “big” countries of Western Europe for what was sometimes described as anti-Russian “hysteria”.¹

And that’s true. Russian disinformation campaigns in France became more apparent, or at least received increased attention from the authorities only in the last five years, starting from the COVID-19 crisis. Of course, the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation only highlighted and reinforced their existence: “We reacted too late, the Kremlin's rhetoric is already far too entrenched in France”, underlines Marie Peltier, a researcher analysing the effects of Russian disinformation on Western societies since the civil war in Syria.² These disinformation campaigns slowly but surely shaped themselves in the most unexpected situations in France, where many wouldn’t even suspect them of being linked to pro-Russian forces: presence among the “Yellow Vests” movement³, anti-Ukraine signs amid the 2023 protests against the pension reform⁴, Stars of David graffiti daubed on walls in Paris⁵, fake news republished by prominent and reliable media⁶...

Overall, between 2023 and 2024, disinformation campaigns and cyber-attack numbers have increased in France⁷, with the French foreign-disinformation watchdog Viginum unveiling several massive disinformation campaigns, such as operations “Doppelganger”⁸ (2023) and “Matryoshka”⁹ (2024), all in relation with the structured and coordinated pro-Russian propaganda network “Portal Kombat”¹⁰. And it wasn’t until February 2024 that the French government finally took action,

¹ Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer, Alexandre Escorcica, Marine Guillaume, Janaina Herrera, *Les Manipulations de l'information : un défi pour nos démocraties*, report of Centre d'analyse, de prévision et de stratégie (CAPS) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and of IRSEM, Ministry of Armed Forces (Paris, 2018), p. 50.

² William Audureau, “Desinformation russe: On a réagi trop tard, les discours du Kremlin sont déjà bien trop implantés en France”, *Le Monde*, accessed November 2, 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2022/04/01/desinformation-russe-on-a-reagi-trop-tard-les-discours-du-kremlin-sont-deja-bien-trop-implantes-en-france_6120163_4355770.html

³ Rhys Blakely, “Russian accounts fuel French outrage online, *The Times*, accessed November 2, 2023, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/russian-accounts-fuel-protesters-outrage-online-xx2f2g8th>

⁴ N. Carvalho, B. Francois, “D’où viennent ces pancartes anti-Ukraine vues lors de manifestations contre la réforme des retraites ?”, *France Info*, accessed November 2, 2023, https://www.francetvinfo.fr/vrai-ou-fake/vrai-ou-fake-d-ou-viennent-ces-pancartes-anti-ukraine-vues-lors-de-manifestations-contre-la-reforme-des-retraites_5817398.html

⁵ Dominique Vidalon, “France accuses Russia of 'online meddling' over Stars of David graffiti in Paris”, *Reuters*, accessed December 3, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/france-accuses-russia-online-meddling-over-stars-david-graffiti-paris-2023-11-09/>

⁶ AFP, “France says uncovers major disinformation campaign by Russia”, *France 24*, accessed December 3, 2023, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20230613-france-says-uncovers-major-disinformation-campaign-by-russia>

⁷ Clotilde Goujard and Mathieu Pollet, “France is ‘overwhelmed with propaganda,’ minister says”, *Politico*, accessed April 22, 2024, <https://www.politico.eu/article/france-overwhelmed-with-propaganda-european-affairs-minister-says/>

⁸ *Le Parisien*, “Campagne de désinformation russe : ce que l’on sait après les accusations de la France envers Moscou”, accessed April 22, 2024, <https://www.leparisien.fr/high-tech/campagne-de-desinformation-russe-ce-que-lon-sait-apres-les-accusations-de-la-france-envers-moscou-13-06-2023-3U6DGC7U6VHVHHCJZGVA7VSVY.php>

⁹ AFP, “Matriochka”, la nouvelle campagne russe de désinformation anti-ukrainienne”, *France 24*, accessed April 22, 2024, <https://www.france24.com/fr/info-en-continu/20240127-matriochka-la-nouvelle-campagne-de-d%C3%A9sinformation-anti-ukrainienne-%C3%A0-destination-des-m%C3%A9dias-occidentaux>

¹⁰ Viginum, “Portal Kombat: A structured and coordinated pro-Russian propaganda network,”, Secrétariat général de la Défense et de la Sécurité nationale, accessed April 22, 2024, https://www.sgdsn.gouv.fr/files/20240212_NP_SGDSN_VIGINUM_PORTAL-KOMBAT-NETWORK_ENG_VF.pdf

deciding to “denounce these manipulations”¹¹ and “neutralize beforehand”¹² these threats, understanding the consequences of many years of naïve neutrality and inaction.

Indeed, this lack of initiative cost France more than one can think about at first sight. The French sphere of influence in African countries was equally targeted by these campaigns. Even if according to France 24, „France has for several years sounded the alarm over alleged Russian disinformation campaigns in areas of Francophone Africa, particularly those where the Russian mercenary group Wagner has been active”¹³, the spread of anti-French disinformation has had “disastrous consequences in Africa [...] turning the people of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger against France.”¹⁴ Furthermore, the foreign-disinformation watchdog Viginum reports that “During the summer of 2023, the pravda-fr.com website published a large amount of content dealing with the various crises in countries such as Niger and Gabon, denigrating the French presence in the Sahel and promoting increased cooperation between Russia and the African continent.”¹⁵ Additionally, mass disinformation campaigns have been trying to incriminate the French army, as those spread in Mali (over a mass grave found near an ex-French military base)¹⁶, and in Niger, over a so-called attack on a military convoy¹⁷.

This a perfect reflection of the current situation in several of these countries, where local political turmoil combined with the Russian influence and strong anti-colonialist and Pan-African feelings resulted in main changes through 2022 and 2023. French troops pulled out from Mali, the Central African Republic (CAR) in August and December 2022¹⁸; the end of the military cooperation between France and Burkina Faso was proclaimed in February 2023¹⁹; and the full withdrawal of

¹¹ Nicolas Poincare, “La France tape du poing sur la table contre les sites de fake news pro-russes”, BFM TV, accessed April 22, 2024, https://rmc.bfmtv.com/actualites/international/la-france-tape-du-poing-sur-la-table-contre-les-sites-de-fake-news-pro-russes_AV-202402150241.html

¹² Vincent Collen, “Désinformation russe : la France sonne l'alarme”, Les Echos, accessed April 22, 2024, <https://www.lesechos.fr/monde/europe/desinformation-russe-la-france-sonne-lalarme-2075816>

¹³ AFP, “France says uncovers major disinformation campaign by Russia”, France 24, accessed November 20, 2023, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20230613-france-says-uncovers-major-disinformation-campaign-by-russia>

¹⁴ Poincare, “La France tape du poing”, accessed April 22, 2024, https://rmc.bfmtv.com/actualites/international/la-france-tape-du-poing-sur-la-table-contre-les-sites-de-fake-news-pro-russes_AV-202402150241.html

¹⁵ Viginum, “Portal Kombat”, accessed April 22, 2024, https://www.sgdsn.gouv.fr/files/files/Publications/20240214_NP_SGDSN_VIGINUM_PORTAL-KOMBAT-NETWORK_PART2_ENG_VF.pdf p 8

¹⁶ Peter Mwai, “What are France's accusations over a mass grave found in Mali?“, BBC, accessed November 2, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/61257796>

¹⁷ AFP, “Disinformation attack targeted key Sahel state Niger: AFP investigation“, France 24, accessed December 10, 2023, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20230323-disinformation-attack-targeted-key-sahel-state-niger-afp-investigation>

¹⁸ AFP, “Last French troops leave Central African Republic amid closer Bangui-Moscow ties“, France 24, accessed December 10, 2023, <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20221215-last-french-troops-leave-central-african-republic-amid-closer-bangui-moscow-ties>

¹⁹ The Arab Weekly, “French troops withdraws troops from Niger as military cooperation ends“, accessed April 25, 2024, <https://the arabweekly.com/french-troops-withdraws-troops-niger-military-cooperation-ends>

French troops from Niger was concluded in December 2023²⁰. Moreover, in the same year, Mali²¹ and Burkina Faso²² officially abandoned French as one of their official languages, relegating it to the rank of “working” language, thus severing their ties with the ancient colonial nation even more.

So, what are the Russian interests in francophone countries on the African continent?

Let’s go back in time and history, right to the mid-1950s. The African continent is evolving into yet another significant Cold War battleground between two political giants, and the Soviet Union has become actively involved in Africa. Committed to reshaping the continent’s political and security landscape, it started providing generous economic and security assistance programmes to a wide range of local Marxist, anti-colonial or anti-American groups.

Furthermore, through the backing of independence movements amid colonial strife and assistance to governments confronting internal or external challenges, the Soviets managed to gain access and build their influence in all of the main nations across Africa. The Kremlin supplied those states with weapons and equipment, provided military training and advisers, and established relations with numerous African intelligence communities, thus creating “a long-term legacy of Soviet hardware and operational culture throughout Africa.”²³ Despite that, following the fall of the Soviet Union, the newly created Russian Federation was forced to disengage from the African continent, having to deal with its own political, economic and social challenges at home.²⁴ It was not until the late 2000s that Russia initiated a “diplomatic re-engagement” with the African countries, first with Medvedev, then with Putin’s come-back as president. It was in 2014, the year of Crimea’s annexation, that “the Kremlin doubled down on its diplomatic efforts” in the African continent, seeking “new geopolitical partners and business opportunities” following the first wave of Western sanctions against the Russian Federation²⁵. The first Russia-Africa Summit and Economic Forum in 2019, followed by the one in 2023, combined with strategic partnerships enforcement, diplomatic ballet and joint economic trade goals have proved particularly useful, for example at the United Nations. Indeed, the Kremlin found immeasurable allies during several important UN votes, such as the General

²⁰ Matthew-Mary Caruchet, “Last French troops leave Niger, ending decade of Sahel missions“, France 24, accessed April 25, 2024, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20231222-□-last-french-troops-leave-niger-ending-decade-long-operation-in-the-sahel>

²¹ Africanews, “Mali drops French as official Language“, accessed April 25, 2024, <https://www.africanews.com/2023/07/26/mali-drops-french-as-official-language/>

²² Africanews, „Burkina abandons French as an official language“, accessed April 25, 2024, <https://www.africanews.com/2023/12/07/burkina-abandons-french-as-an-official-language/>

²³ Mathieu Droin and Tina Dolbaia, “Russia Is Still Progressing in Africa. What’s the Limit?“, Center for Strategic and International Studies, accessed November 2, 2023, https://www.csis.org/analysis/russia-still-progressing-africa-whats-limit?fbclid=IwAR0F6As-Vzi_Ux0bGiW1UTbWJbVjYUIN3DsFCFRFKQo9UF9YNOAPOE2PhvU

²⁴ Droin and Dolbaia, “Russia is still progressing in Africa“, accessed November 2, 2023, https://www.csis.org/analysis/russia-still-progressing-africa-whats-limit?fbclid=IwAR0F6As-Vzi_Ux0bGiW1UTbWJbVjYUIN3DsFCFRFKQo9UF9YNOAPOE2PhvU

²⁵ Same place

Assembly resolution from 2014 denouncing the Russian annexation of Crimea, the 2018 resolution urging Moscow to demilitarise the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, and last but not least – the 2022 resolution denouncing Russia's attempted annexation of four regions in Ukraine²⁶. In all three instances – numerous African nations abstained, voted against or failed to cast a ballot, thus supporting Putin's efforts to subvert the US and its allies.

2022 definitely became a pivotal year concerning Russia's presence on the African continent, despite the large-scale invasion of Ukraine. Multiple countries, such as Cameroun (by establishing new defence deals) or Mali (as recipient of military equipment from Moscow) newly initiated or continued existing military cooperation agreements with the Kremlin²⁷, in addition to the ongoing Russian wide-range disinformation campaigns. The results are compelling: five former French colonies have had their governments overthrown, with the new leaders of Mali and Burkina Faso openly supporting Russia; the Nigerian prime minister managed a coup in July 2023, meeting the Russian ambassador shortly after; and Wagner mercenaries have replaced French forces in Mali and the CAR²⁸. By all ways and means, these disinformation campaigns combined with a strong military and diplomatic presence managed to accomplish more than destabilise political systems and consolidate the Russian sphere of influence, while shaking up the Western one.

These attempts by Russia to gain a new sphere of influence in the Sahel countries can be viewed as a proxy warfare strategy, targeting not only the mentioned countries but also France and the Western bloc by extent. The term "proxy warfare" refers to wars in which a third party subtly intervenes to affect particular strategic outcomes to fight or weaken a more significant opponent. It highlights thus the need to **analyse the effects of propaganda and disinformation as part of proxy warfare** and, to an extent, **how proxy warfare is nowadays changing and evolving**, getting new forms of activity and recognition. Plenty of publications analyse the existence of Russian disinformation in African countries, and the consequences of it as the apparition of PMC in Africa. On the contrary, there are almost none about analysing the impact of it in francophone African countries, and by extent on France, especially while addressing the relation to the changing nature of proxy warfare in parallel.

Therefore, **the main issue raised by this Master's thesis** is the following: Russia is widely spreading disinformation throughout Africa, however, there is a lack of assessment, of why and how precisely Russia seeks to weaponize societies in African francophone states. **The main aim of this**

²⁶ Same place

²⁷ Same place

²⁸ Elizabeth Dwoskin, "How Russian disinformation toppled government after government in Africa", The Washington Post, accessed March 12, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2023/10/21/percepto-africa-france-russia-disinformation/>

Master's thesis is, based on the qualitative analysis of articles published by Kremlin-sponsored media, to distinguish narratives spread in francophone African countries and understand how they manage to weaponize African and French societies as actors and instruments of modern proxy warfare. **To achieve this goal, objectives are raised as follows:**

- 1) Review existing academic research and theoretical texts on proxy warfare anatomy and the use of disinformation and propaganda;
- 2) Collect and analyse sampled articles from sponsored Russian-state media;
- 3) Conduct thematic analysis of qualitative data and detect used narratives;
- 4) Present conclusions, insights and overview of disinformation and propaganda use in proxy warfare anatomy.

In order to achieve the aim and objectives of this thesis, the first part will introduce the theoretical framework used to understand why Russia is waging a proxy war in the Sahel countries against France and the West, while suggesting an expansion to the modern proxy warfare theory. Based on the theoretical framework identified ideas, the chosen methodology will be presented in the second part of this work. The third part of this thesis will demonstrate the qualitative analysis of the results and the detected “weaponizing” narratives throughout it. To provide a concrete framework for the research, focus will be placed only on the countries complying with the following specific criteria:

1. Is the chosen country a former French colony?
2. Was French one of the official languages of the chosen country?
3. Were there active Russian disinformation campaigns spread in the chosen country?
4. Were PMC movements spotted in the chosen country?
5. What is the current political system in the chosen country?

The countries, meeting these criteria after consideration, are the following: Mali – Burkina Faso – Niger and the Central African Republic, with a slight exception applied to the Central African Republic political system, which technically is not a military junta. Nevertheless, taking into account the facts stated in the introduction, the country is included in the research.

Given the recent nature of the political occurrences in these four countries, this thesis proposes a unique and one-of-a-kind theme.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The chosen theoretical framework should allow us to understand how and why Russia seeks to weaponize societies in francophone African states, by using disinformation and other means.

First of all, let's get the basics right: what is proxy warfare and how is its anatomy shifting nowadays?

While President Dwight D. Eisenhower referred to proxy wars as “the cheapest insurance in the world”, a few dozen years later former Pakistani President Zia-ul- Haq believed proxy conflicts to “keep the pot boiling” in already-conflicted areas²⁹. As Andrew Mumford, one of the top theoreticians concerning proxy warfare, stated in 2013: “[the study] of proxy warfare remains a missing link in contemporary war and security studies [being] historically ubiquitous yet chronically under-analysed.”³⁰ This implies the difficulties encountered by theoreticians and politicians to define the essence of proxy warfare properly, and so until the present day. In 1964, a first attempt to define proxy wars by political scientist Karl Deutsch was made, establishing them as “an international conflict between two foreign powers, fought out on the soil of a third country; disguised as a conflict over an internal issue of that country; and using some of that country's manpower, resources and territory as a means for achieving preponderantly foreign goals and foreign strategies.”³¹ Nevertheless, Mumford believed Deutsch's definition to be “too state-centric”, downplaying the importance of non-state actors in proxy conflicts (such as rebel or insurgent groups) and ignoring the frequently regional power struggles they represent, highlighting the fact that the majority of proxy battles during and after the Cold War would not have been possible without pre-existing local tensions ready to be exploited.³²

Indeed, we do have to understand that “*Cold War* proxy warfare” is somewhat different from “*Contemporary* proxy warfare”, thus strengthening the need to analyse in-depth the changes that occurred since the world shifted from bipolar to multipolar, and the role of proxies in it. Mumford proposed a new definition of proxy warfare, as follows: “Proxy wars [are] conflicts in which a third party intervenes indirectly in order to influence the strategic outcome in favour of its preferred faction”³³, adding that “Proxy wars are the product of a relationship between a benefactor, who is a state or non-state actor external to the dynamic of an existing conflict, and the chosen proxies who

²⁹ Andrew Mumford, “Proxy Warfare and the Future of Conflict”, *The RUSI Journal*, Volume 158, Issue 2, (2013): 40-46

³⁰ Mumford, “Proxy Warfare and the Future of Conflict”, 40-46

³¹ Karl W. Deutsch, *External Involvement in Internal War*, in Harry Eckstein (ed), *Internal War, Problems and Approaches* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), cited from Andrew Mumford, “Proxy Warfare and the Future of Conflict”, *The RUSI Journal*, Volume 158, Issue 2, (2013): 40-46

³² Mumford, 40-46

³³ Same place

are the conduit for the benefactor’s weapons, training and funding.”³⁴ To keep it simple – proxy conflicts are often a substitute for direct, expensive, and violent warfare, and his definition reflects the idea that both state and non-state actors can both be proxies – and have proxies. Thus, the notion of “cheapness” as stated by the belated Eisenhower. On the other hand, other theoreticians, such as Geraint Hughes, prefer a more state-centric option by advancing that only states can act as “principals” and only non-state groups as proxies³⁵, while Anthony Pfaff suggests that proxy warfare is “the use of surrogates to replace, rather than augment, benefactor’s assets or capabilities”³⁶. Bergen and co-authors in “Understanding the New Proxy Wars” suggest that “Proxy warfare is best defined as the direct or indirect sponsorship of third-party conventional or irregular forces that lie outside of the constitutional order of states engaged in armed conflict”³⁷. As we can see, the definition of proxy warfare in itself is still debatable and the lack of agreement on what constitutes a proxy relationship between principal and agents leaves a gap for interpretations. It will indeed be that gap that we will explore later by advancing that proxies can have multiple forms and disinformation can be used as a proxy or as an instrument “activating” said proxies.

Whilst establishing at least a few possible definitions for the notion of proxy warfare, let’s dig into the shifting anatomy of it. As stated by Candace Rondeaux and David Sterman in “Understanding the New Proxy Wars – Battlegrounds and Strategies Reshaping the Greater Middle East”, “rethinking the character of war and directly engaging local social reality, history, and politics [...] are essential to understanding proxy warfare.”³⁸ Indeed, being aware of the importance of taking into account local and regional issues, political and historical contexts, and new communication technologies (as well as civilian and military ones) should be one of the first steps towards understanding the new design of proxy warfare. These interlaced dynamics, evolving in a complex system that grew in an interconnected world, were shaped by the legacies of Cold War alliances: the Middle East’s experience of decolonisation, the rise of transnational movements, including the rise of terrorism and the apparition of PMCs in the late ’80s³⁹. Turning back to Mumford, he identifies four major changes in the nature of proxy warfare: 1) the decline in support from the Western public and politicians for large-scale counter-insurgency (or in other words, large-scale wars) amid global recession; 2) the increasing significance and visibility of PMCs in modern warfare; 3) the exponentially growing use

³⁴ Same place

³⁵ Geraint Hughes, *My Enemy’s Enemy: Proxy Warfare in International Politics*, (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2012), 2-3

³⁶ C. Anthony Pfaff, “Proxy War Ethics”, *Journal of National Security Law and Policy*, Volume 9, No. 2, (2017), 310-311

³⁷ Peter Bergen et al., *Understanding the New Proxy Wars – Battlegrounds and Strategies Reshaping the Greater Middle East*, (London: Hurst and Company, 2022), 27

³⁸ Peter Bergen et al., *Understanding the New Proxy Wars – Battlegrounds and Strategies Reshaping the Greater Middle East*, (London: Hurst and Company, 2022), 12

³⁹ Peter Bergen et al., *Understanding the New Proxy Wars*, 12-15

of the cyberspace to indirectly wage war; 4) the ascent of China as superpower⁴⁰. These explanations are too supported by the authors of “Understanding New Proxy Wars”: “While interstate conflict has decreased markedly around the world over the last seventy years, there has been an increase in civil wars and internationalized internal conflicts. This has led to the proliferation of ungoverned, or contested, spaces—territory under the control of militias, rebel groups, or other autonomous and semi-autonomous local actors—many of which operate as proxies in various ways.”⁴¹ Mumford’s explanation in four parts is interesting, as it permits us to connect theory with practice: even if Mumford analyses proxy warfare from “a US focused-perspective”, thus narrowing our theoretical field, all of the four statements offer a way to understand the Russian presence in African countries and how it attempts to maintain its geo-strategic goals. In this context, we must rely on the research of Candace Rondeaux and David Sterman, which offers a broader context and explanations.

Indeed, even if Mumford addresses the question of the rise of PMCs and cyberwarfare as instruments of proxy warfare, there is a need to understand how 1) Russian PMCs integrated themselves into proxy warfare, and 2) A more precise explanation of the role of information networks incorporated into the cybersphere, thus leading to the fast-spreading of disinformation and propaganda.

In the chapter “Decoding the Wagner Group”, Candace Rondeaux states that Russian private military security contractors are “pivotal players in ongoing proxy wars in the Greater Middle East and its periphery, targeting intelligence, training, logistical support, infrastructure protection [...] Their covert operations—real and imagined—are also critical in shaping Russia’s strategy for escalation management as well as relations with adversaries and allies.”⁴² In the case of this thesis, it is crucial to demonstrate the role of Russian PMCs, as they are part of the Russian proxy warfare strategies as a whole, together with disinformation narratives and propaganda. In fact, their connections with local proxies act as a force multiplier, enabling the Kremlin to exert its sphere of influence far beyond Russian territory⁴³. It highlights an interesting detail too: even if proxy warfare is as old as war itself, and even if the Russians might know the ropes of it pretty well since the end of World War II, many see Russian PMCs current operations as a form of new hybrid warfare⁴⁴, thus

⁴⁰ Mumford, 40-46

⁴¹ Candace Rondeaux, David Sterman, “Twenty-First Century Proxy Warfare”, in *Understanding the New Proxy Wars – Battlegrounds and Strategies Reshaping the Greater Middle East*, Peter Bergen et al., (London: Hurst and Company, 2022), 14

⁴² Candace Rondeaux, “Decoding the Wagner Group”, in *Understanding the New Proxy Wars – Battlegrounds and Strategies Reshaping the Greater Middle East*, Peter Bergen et al., (London: Hurst and Company, 2022), 177

⁴³ Rondeaux, “Decoding the Wagner Group”, 177-178

⁴⁴ Rondeaux, 178

suggesting that the Russian behaviour in francophone African countries nowadays, seen through the prism of this theory, works as “old techniques generate new ones”, if the right tools are used.

Concerning the cyber sphere, with the development of the internet and social media, toppled with constantly upgrading communication technologies, the world has become ultra-connected and interconnected at all levels. Mumford states that “Large surrogate armies are no longer integral to proxy-war strategy; indeed, developments in communication and information technology have the potential to nullify the twentieth-century belief in “boots on the ground” as a proxy-war necessity.”⁴⁵ Cyber warfare is “an ideal vehicle for a proxy strategy”⁴⁶, as they can in practice create even more damage than armies, becoming a real cost-risk bargain.

However, while the cyber world would be a more than interesting component of proxy warfare to analyse, our problem is oriented towards the use of disinformation and propaganda to weaponize societies through proxies. And unfortunately, this area still remains pretty poorly researched. As stated by Rondeaux and Sterman – “Much of the journalistic and think-tank coverage on conflicts in the region relies on interviews with participants and key decision-makers but leaves open, primary-source data virtually untouched. For some countries mired in proxy conflict today—notably Syria, Iraq, and Ukraine—journalists and analysts have begun to exploit digital traces of conflicts by sifting through social media platforms and other online data; the work has been impressive, but it only scratches the surface.”⁴⁷ Plenty of research about the use of disinformation by Russians has been done, but none in relation to proxy warfare and very few in relation to francophone African countries. It’s missing in Mumford’s theory and slightly mentioned in Bergen’s “Understanding the New Proxy Wars”, always in tight connection with the importance of PMCs. As stated by Rondeaux, “It is important to consider how the idea of Wagner fits into the bigger picture of a strategy of coercion [...] The Wagner case exemplifies Russia’s use of disinformation and deception to assert reflexive control over its adversaries by creating confusion around desired goals.”⁴⁸ But how to notice something unnoticeable? How to check the veracity of facts, or retrace the information, that was manipulated by a long chain of proxies and actors? This might be the most complex and obscure part of proxy warfare: “Secrecy, plausible deniability, and ambiguity in the rules of engagement and command structure are characteristic features critical to the success of proxy strategies, making narrative control over the quality of command and control a central tactical concern.”⁴⁹ And that may

⁴⁵ Mumford, 40-46

⁴⁶ Same place

⁴⁷ Rondeaux, Sterman, “Twenty-First Century Proxy Warfare”, 22

⁴⁸ Rondeaux, 199

⁴⁹ Rondeaux, Sterman, “Twenty-First Century Proxy Warfare”, 27

be the statement that will motivate the analysis of narratives controlled by the Kremlin and oriented towards African francophone countries.

This resonates pretty well with the handbook on how to recognize disinformation when well hidden. As stated by Thomas Rid in “Active Measures – The Secret History of Disinformation and Political Warfare”: “Recognizing an active measure can be difficult. Disinformation, when done well, is hard to spot, especially when it first becomes public. It will therefore be helpful to clarify what an active measure is, and what it is not.”⁵⁰ An “active measure”, or in Russian “активные мероприятия - *aktivnyye meropriyatiya*”, is a term that was used by the Soviet Intelligence, going back to the early 1920s, when the modern era of disinformation began. It describes the political warfare conducted by the Soviet Union towards foreign governments, by the means to “exacerbate existing tensions and contradictions within the adversary’s body politic, by leveraging facts, fakes, and ideally a disorienting mix of both.”⁵¹ No surprise knowing that these “active measures” are still in use in contemporary Russia and by the Putin administration.⁵² A great example of a “well-run” active measure would be the aftermath of the shooting of the Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 in 2014, struck by a Russian-made 9M38 missile and launched by a Buk-M1 anti-aircraft system: with a “schizophrenic torrent of state-sponsored propaganda” the Kremlin seeded doubt and controversy while managing to deny its involvement⁵³.

Rid established three ways to differentiate an active measure from what is not: 1) active measures aren’t spontaneous lies, but professional, well-oiled operations and results of large bureaucracies; 2) all active measures contain at least one element of disinformation, with content that may be falsified, sourcing that may be manipulated, secretive acquisition and influence agents posing as someone they are not; 3) an active measure will always be, with no exception to the rule, directed towards an end to weaken a targeted adversary.⁵⁴ And the methods for achieving this goal may differ: “creating divisions between allied nations, driving wedges between ethnic groups, creating friction between individuals in a group or party, undermining the trust specific groups in a society have in its institutions [...] erode the legitimacy of a government.”⁵⁵ This establishes a perfect logical link with the current situation in the chosen countries of Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali and CAR, and the double PMC – disinformation campaign combo as a “new” proxy warfare method, highlighting the importance of the disinformation part in it. On one side, the complex and intricate structures of

⁵⁰ Thomas Rid, *Active Measure – The Secret History of Disinformation and Political Warfare* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2020), 7

⁵¹ Rid, *Active Measure*, 6

⁵² Steve Abrams, “Beyond Propaganda: Soviet Active Measures in Putin’s Russia”, *Connections: The Quarterly Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 1, (2016): 5-31

⁵³ Steve Abrams, “Beyond Propaganda: Soviet Active Measures in Putin’s Russia”, 5-31

⁵⁴ Rid, *Active Measure*, 7

⁵⁵ Rid, *Active Measure*, 7-8

Russian PMCs make it “challenging to attribute actions to actors”, although “the tightly overlapped networks of Kremlin insiders and PMCs are often hidden in plain sight”, while on the other “the arrival of the digital age undercuts Russia’s ability to maintain plausible deniability.”⁵⁶ As Rondeaux perfectly summarizes, “Puncturing the narrative of plausible deniability and lifting the lid on the Kremlin’s secrecy and disinformation will be a critical part of any winning strategy.”⁵⁷

That’s why P.W. Singer’s and E. Brooking’s research “Like War: The Weaponization of Social Media” was added to this theoretical part. With the rise and mass use of social media, as for example “X” (*Better known under its old name – “Twitter”*), “a new kind of communication became a new kind of war [...] fought by hundreds of people [...] with not just a novel battlespace, but weapons and tactics too.”⁵⁸ This adds to the features suitable for modern proxy warfare, and the changes that should be made to its definition. As mentioned in this book, it was actually ISIS, that pioneered and mastered an updated kind of German blitzkrieg and spread the use of the internet as a weapon: “The Islamic State, which had no real cyberwar capabilities to speak of, had just run a military offensive like a viral marketing campaign and won a victory that shouldn’t have been possible.”⁵⁹ This implies that the media doubled with the power of the internet and social media is not only an instrument of war but also an actor in this same wedged war. And everyone can play a role in it: journalists, individuals, and influencers are all becoming proxy actors, who can engage and participate as “proxy soldiers” in an online proxy warfare. Social media has altered the dynamics of conflict in addition to its message. The power to access, modify, and disseminate information has increased, and the actors can be twisted and transformed⁶⁰, sometimes by one simple click.

Thanks to a theoretical pot-puri, it is now put forward that Wagner’s operations and disinformation campaigns, coupled together with their activities, probably indicate a new form of hybrid warfare while activating local and regional proxies – thus creating a kind of weaponization of societies. Nevertheless, the question remains – *how* Russia is seeking to do it? For practical reasons, the following step would be to analyse articles, issued by state-controlled Russian media such as Sputnik or RT, and their narratives; the reach they have in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and CAR, and then by extension, the impact they do have on French influence, and on the “Western world” idea in these specific countries. For practical reasons, articles and not social media posts will be analysed. Nevertheless, as articles are nowadays shared on social media, the same narratives will provide the same generated reactions.

⁵⁶ Rondeaux, 200

⁵⁷ Same place

⁵⁸ P. W. Singer, Emerson T. Brooking, *Like War – The Weaponization of Social Media*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018), 6

⁵⁹ P. W. Singer, *Like War – The Weaponization of Social Media*, 13

⁶⁰ Same place

2. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Analysis Method

In order to analyse the Russian narratives disseminated in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and CAR, and the way they weaponize local societies, the qualitative content analysis method will be applied to pre-selected articles from Kremlin-backed state media outlets. This part will introduce an overview of the qualitative content methods and instruments used to analyse the collected data, followed by a presentation of the specific research field and chosen time frame.

Introduced by the sociologist Erving Goffman and then applied to the analysis of mass media by Robert Entman, the “framing theory” has become a popular way to explain how the media structure their delivery of news⁶¹. Multiple definitions of “framing second-level agenda setting” exist, with one of the most thorough established by Reese: “Frames are organising principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world.”⁶² Terkildsen and Schnell addition to the framing theory underlines the importance of frames while analysing disinformation and propaganda: “Framing is important whenever an issue can be presented in multiple ways which may potentially influence how people think about an issue.”⁶³ As mentioned by Wood, “not all communication can be measured quantitatively [...] and quantitative data cannot provide substantial insight into the texture and meaning of experiences”⁶⁴, thus, the most important here would be to focus on the possibility of “qualitative” analysis in framing theory.

Indeed, thanks to qualitative frame analysis, the emphasis is put on the cultural and political content of new frames, evolving into social meaning, while examining keywords and metaphors and included or left-out details in texts.⁶⁵ Neuman, Just and Crigler identified five common frames, usually applied by the media: human impact, powerlessness, economics, moral values, and conflict⁶⁶. These five common frames would have been a great basis for analysing data, nonetheless, Semetko and Valkenburg carried out a little further their colleague’s research by identifying five similar, but broader frames: **conflict, human interest, attribution of responsibility, morality and economic consequences**.⁶⁷ For Neuman et al., the “human impact” frame focuses on “descriptions of individuals and groups affected by an issue” while for Semetko and Valkenburg, the “human interest”

⁶¹ Margaret Linstrom, Willemien Marais, “Qualitative News Frame Analysis: A Methodology”, *Communitas*, Vol. 17, (2012): 21-38

⁶² Margaret Linstrom, “Qualitative News Frame Analysis: A Methodology”, 2012, 24

⁶³ Same place, 25

⁶⁴ Margaret Linstrom, 26

⁶⁵ Same place, 28

⁶⁶ Same place, 28

⁶⁷ Same place, 28

frame is defined as “bringing human face or emotional angle to the presentation of an event, issue, or problem.”⁶⁸ Additionally, their “conflict” frame refers to “conflict between individuals, groups, institutions or countries”, whilst for Neuman et al., it “deals with the news media’s game interpretation of the political world as an ongoing series of contests, each with a new set of winners and losers.”⁶⁹ Last but not least, Semetko and Valkenburg’s frame typology includes “attribution of responsibility” instead of the one of “powerlessness”, defined as the presentation of “an issue or a problem in such a way as to attribute responsibility for causing or solving to either the government or to an individual or group.”⁷⁰

This study aims to analyse disinformation narratives through frames. Semetko and Valkenburg established frames are excellent, nevertheless, relying only on these five frames would narrow down the analysis field and would render it incomplete. Identifying new or additional frames is a common practice among researchers, especially when having previous knowledge of the analysis. According to Capella and Jamieson, the criteria for establishing new frames should be as follows: 1) a frame must have identifiable conceptual and linguistic characteristics; 2) it should be commonly observed in journalistic practice; 3) it must be possible to distinguish the frame reliably from other frames; 4) a frame must be recognized by others and not be a figment of a researcher’s imagination.⁷¹ The analysis of Russian narratives in francophone African countries thus should be conducted through the five already established Semetko and Valkenburg frames and two complementary ones, the “**Colonisation**” and “**Saviour figure**” frames. This will help demonstrate a more accurate depiction of the present narratives and their impact on different societies.

Furthermore, this analysis adopts the definition of narratives provided by the “Improving NATO Strategic Communications Terminology” project, defining narratives as “morals drawn from stories”, arguing that narratives are formed and maintained in human memory and stories are the way of conveying narratives to others.⁷² Indeed, narratives are not stories, themes, or topics – they help us analyse how real-world events, speeches, policy documents, and in this case, information, disinformation and propaganda interact to create meaning on the part of individuals and audiences, with 1) A cognitive process of ordering information into a structure of cause, effect and consequence; and 2) A system of stories structured in such a way as to make meaning⁷³.

⁶⁸ Same place, 28

⁶⁹ Same place, 28

⁷⁰ Same place, 28

⁷¹ Same place, 31

⁷² Karel Svoboda, “Russia’s Activities in Africa’s Information Environment”, 10

⁷³ Scott Ruston, “Narrative and Strategic Communications”, in “Russia’s Footprint in the Nordic-Baltic Information Environment”, (Riga: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 2020), 6-10

According to a 2021 NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence report on Russia's activities in Africa's information environment, “Kremlin-sponsored media, in particular RT and Sputnik, are rising in popularity across the African continent [with] a significant increase in subscribers to the RT France Facebook page (from 50, 000 to 850,000)”⁷⁴. Additionally, media cooperation with Russia and African nations began to expand, as the reach of Western outlets in African countries began to crumble: this with evidenced by the retrenchment of BBC, shutting down at least three channels broadcasting in local African languages and the suspension of French media such as “Radio France Internationale” and “France 24”⁷⁵, whilst several partnerships were signed between RT, Sputnik, and countries as Mali, Burkina Faso and others⁷⁶. Furthermore, adding to the fact that thanks to these newly established partnerships, African online websites started relaying in mass content from Kremlin-sponsored media, Sputnik France stopped producing content in July 2022, changing its name to “Sputnik Afrique” and intending to “internationalize its editorial identity, targeting more explicitly large audiences in French-speaking African countries.”⁷⁷ For these reasons, this analysis will be based on Kremlin-sponsored French language online news outlets “RT France” (<https://français.rt.com/>) and “Sputnik Afrique” (<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/>), considering their position as “key public diplomacy tools of the Russian government and their popularity amongst the French population as well as French-speaking African audiences.”⁷⁸ As RT broadcasting and its website were banned in Germany, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania before the EU sanctions that followed the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022⁷⁹, RT France was accessed through VPN.

The chosen time frame for article sampling is settled from 2022-01-01 to 2024-04-30, for 2 reasons: 1) 2022 is stated as a “pivotal year” for Russian presence on the African continent (as mentioned in the introduction), and 2) April 2024, to get the most actual and accurate analysis possible. The articles featured in this study, belonging to the mentioned time frame, were collected using “RT France” and “Sputnik Afrique” website’s built-in search tools, with a defined mix of keywords. Each country’s name (Mali – Niger – Burkina Faso and CAR) was matched with the

⁷⁴ Karel Svoboda, Paula-Charlotte Matlach, Zack Baddorf, “Russian narratives in the context of peacekeeping missions in Mali and the Central African Republic”, in “Russia’s Activities in Africa’s Information Environment, Case Studies: Mali and Central African Republic”, (Riga: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 2021), 10

⁷⁵ Elian Peltier, Adam Satariano, Lynsey Chutel, “How Putin Became a Hero on African TV”, The New York Times, accessed on April, 28, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/13/world/africa/russia-africa-disinformation.html>

⁷⁶ Elian Peltier, “How Putin Became a Hero on African TV”, accessed on April, 28, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/13/world/africa/russia-africa-disinformation.html>

⁷⁷ Maxime Audinet, “Cat and Mouse: The Mutations of Russia’s International State Media RT and Sputnik”, accessed on April, 28, https://russiapost.info/society/rt_sputnik

⁷⁸ Karel Svoboda, “Russia’s Activities in Africa’s Information Environment”, (Riga: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 2021), 10, cited from Kragh, Asberg, “Russia’s Strategy for influence through public diplomacy and active measures”, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 40, 3

⁷⁹ Gjeraquina Tuhina, “Two Years into EU Ban, Russia’s RT and Sputnik Are Still Accessible Across The EU”, Radio Free Europe, accessed on February, 28, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-rt-sputnik-eu-access-bans-propaganda-ukraine-war/32803929.html>

complementary keyword “France”, to select only relevant material for this study. The sample for “Sputnik Afrique” includes a total of 341 articles, with 112 for Mali/France, 127 for Niger/France, 71 for Burkina Faso/France and 31 articles for CAR/France. For “RT France”, the sample includes 170 articles, with 69 articles for Mali/France, 51 for Niger/France, 42 for Burkina Faso/France and 8 for CAR/France. Additionally, for the site website “RT France”, 26 articles mentioning all four countries and France were selected, for a global overview, elevating the final sample to a total of 196 articles. Both websites combined, the total number of analysed articles is 537. The difference between the number of articles published by “Sputnik Afrique” and “RT France” concerning each country can be explained by the lengths and form of said articles: “Sputnik Afrique” publishes short articles, such as “news flash” or “wires” (as Sputnik originated as a news agency). On the other hand, “RT France” articles are longer and usually extremely informative, having an in-depth approach to shared information. For both websites, only textual information will be analysed to identify the narratives in question, with acute attention to headlines. This selection of media and articles should lend us an understanding of the Kremlin’s agenda in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and CAR, with a further discernment of the potential impact on France and Western countries.

3. ANALYSIS RESULTS

After carefully reviewing all the pre-selected articles according to the criteria mentioned earlier, this section will first provide a general insight into the structure of the frames that have been used to shed light on the Russian narratives spread in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and CAR. Secondly, it will also provide statistics on the overall distribution of articles by frames. Then, each identified frame will be reviewed and analysed separately, with citations and examples taken from specific articles and explaining the observed narratives and ideas in the context of the used frames. Finally, at the end of this chapter, insights and a short overview related to the selected media portals and articles will be presented, highlighting the similarities and differences found.

As mentioned earlier, the total number of collected samples for both “Sputnik Afrique” and “RT France” is of 537 articles, for the period starting from 2022-01-01 to 2024-04-30. All of these articles were collected thanks to the hashtag mentioning the concerned country of analysis + France. It should be mentioned that several of the analysed articles, especially on the “Sputnik Afrique” website, displayed a concrete country’s hashtag even if the article was about another country in the Sahel region: for example, an article about the *coup d’état* in Niger could have mention of Niger, France, Burkina Faso and Mali hashtags, thus sometimes making it difficult to pre-select the needed articles for each country. Taking into account this communication trick (especially useful for

attracting attention and engaging readers on social media), the duplicated articles were not taken into account, unless as in the case of “RT France” in a “common” overview for inside notes and global understanding. In the case of each country, the procedure was the following: according to Semetko and Valkenburg framing methodology⁸⁰ pre-formed questions were asked while reading each pre-selected article. These questions and their notations permit to identify the said frames, thus highlighting the existence of narratives. For the two self-identified frames, the updated version of the questions will be presented at the beginning of their respective parts, later in this study. Additionally, it is important to underline that in every article could be found several of the mentioned frames.

The most commonly discovered frames in the articles for all four countries and through both websites were the “Conflict Frame” and the “Attribution of Responsibility Frame”. They proportionally completed each other in almost every sample, going by pairs:

- Mali (“Sputnik Afrique”): Out of 112 articles, the “Conflict Frame” was found 101 times, or in other words detected in 90% of articles; the “Attribution of Responsibility Frame” was found 98 times, or detected in 88% of the articles.
- Mali (“RT France”): Out of 69 articles, the “Conflict Frame” was recognized 63 times, so identified in 91% of articles; the “Attribution of Responsibility Frame” was identified 57 times, detected in 83% of the articles.
- Burkina Faso (“Sputnik Afrique”): Out of 71 articles, the “Conflict Frame” was found in 58 of them, detected in 82% of the analysed articles; the “Attribution of Responsibility Frame” was found 52 times, so identified in 73% of the articles.
- Burkina Faso (“RT France”): Out of 42 articles, the “Conflict Frame” was perceived in 26 of them, so in 62% of the articles; the “Attribution of Responsibility Frame” was detected in 21 articles, highlighted in half (50%) of the sample.
- Niger (“Sputnik Afrique”): Out of 127 articles, the “Conflict Frame” was found 111 times, in 87% of the read articles; the “Attribution of Responsibility Frame” was found 101 times, identified in 80% of the articles.
- Niger (“RT France”): Out of 51 articles, the “Conflict Frame” was recognized 44 times, detected in 86% of the sample; the “Attribution of Responsibility Frame” was found 40 times, so identified in 78% of the articles.
- CAR (“Sputnik Afrique”): Out of 31 articles, the “Conflict Frame” was underlined 23 times, so in 74% of the articles; the “Attribution of Responsibility Frame” was detected in 22 articles, so highlighted in 71% of them.

⁸⁰ Holli Semetko, Patti. M. Valkenburg, “Framing European Politics: A Content Analysis of Press and Television News”, *Journal of Communication*, (2000): 1-18

- CAR (“RT France”): Out of 8 articles, the “Conflict Frame” was perceived in 6 of them, so in 75% of the sample; the “Attribution of Responsibility Frame” was recognized in 4 – half of the articles, or in 50% of them.

The high percentages of these two frames already indicate the strongly “conflictive” nature of the analysed articles and probably what will be the most important base for the upcoming analysis.

The second most popular frames were the “Colonisation Frame” and the “Saviour Frame”, not always perceived in the same amount, but pretty complementary too:

- Mali (“Sputnik Afrique”): Out of 112 articles, the “Colonisation Frame” was found 38 times, or in other words detected in 34% of articles; the “Saviour Frame” was found 34 times, or detected in 30% of the articles.
- Mali (“RT France”): Out of 69 articles, the “Colonisation Frame” was recognized 10 times, so identified in 15% of articles; the “Saviour Frame” was identified 15 times, detected in 22% of the articles.
- Burkina Faso (“Sputnik Afrique”): Out of 71 articles, the “Colonisation Frame” was found in 23 of them, detected in 32% of the analysed articles; the “Saviour Frame” was found 13 times, so identified in 18% of the articles.
- Burkina Faso (“RT France”): Out of 42 articles, both the “Colonisation Frame” and the “Saviour Frame” were detected in 9 articles, and identified in 21% of them.
- Niger (“Sputnik Afrique”): Out of 127 articles, the “Colonisation Frame” was found 34 times, in 27% of the read articles; the “Saviour Frame” was found 18 times, identified in 14% of the articles.
- Niger (“RT France”): Out of 51 articles, the “Colonisation Frame” was recognized 10 times, detected in 20% of the sample; the “Saviour Frame” was found 15 times, so identified in 29% of the articles.
- CAR (“Sputnik Afrique”): Out of 31 articles, the “Colonisation Frame” was underlined 15 times, so in 48% of the articles; the “Saviour Frame” was detected in 10 articles, so highlighted in 32% of them.
- CAR (“RT France”): Out of 8 articles, the “Colonisation Frame” was perceived in 3 of them, so in 38% of the sample; the “Saviour Frame” was recognized in 2 – one-quarter of the articles, or in 25% of them.

The third most recognized frame would be the one of “Human Interest”:

- Mali (“Sputnik Afrique”): Out of 112 articles, the “Human Interest Frame” was found 24 times, or in other words detected in 21% of articles;

- Mali (“RT France”): Out of 69 articles, the “Human Interest Frame” was recognized 12 times, so identified in 17% of articles;
- Burkina Faso (“Sputnik Afrique”): Out of 71 articles, the “Human Interest Frame” was found in 15 of them, detected in 21% of the analysed articles;
- Burkina Faso (“RT France”): Out of 42 articles, the “Human Interest Frame” was detected in 10 articles, and identified in 24% of them.
- Niger (“Sputnik Afrique”): Out of 127 articles, the “Human Interest Frame” was found 32 times, in 25% of the read articles;
- Niger (“RT France”): Out of 51 articles, the “Human Interest Frame” was recognized 14 times, detected in 27% of the sample;
- CAR (“Sputnik Afrique”): Out of 31 articles, the “Human Interest Frame” was underlined 14 times, so in 45% of the articles;
- CAR (“RT France”): Out of 8 articles, the “Human Interest Frame” was perceived in 3 of them, so in 38% of the sample.

Last but not least, the rarest encountered frames in the analysed articles are the “Morality Frame” and the “Economic Frame”, with the “Morality” one being by far the least popular:

- Mali (“Sputnik Afrique”): Out of 112 articles, the “Economic Frame” was found 11 times, or in other words detected in 10% of articles; the “Morality Frame” was found 10 times, or detected in 9% of the articles.
- Mali (“RT France”): Out of 69 articles, the “Economic Frame” was recognized 5 times, so identified in 7% of articles; the “Morality Frame” was identified 4 times, detected in 6% of the articles.
- Burkina Faso (“Sputnik Afrique”): Out of 71 articles, the “Economic Frame” was found in 6 of them, detected in 8% of the analysed articles; the “Morality Frame” was found 2 times, so identified in 3% of the articles.
- Burkina Faso (“RT France”): Out of 42 articles, the “Economic Frame” was detected in 7 articles, and identified in 17% of them; the “Morality Frame” was recognized 3 times, so just in 7% of them.
- Niger (“Sputnik Afrique”): Out of 127 articles, the “Economic Frame” was found 19 times, in 15% of the read articles; the “Morality Frame” was found 2 times, identified in 2% of the articles.
- Niger (“RT France”): Out of 51 articles, the “Economic Frame” was recognized 5 times, detected in 10% of the sample; the “Morality Frame” was found 2 times, so identified in 4% of the articles.

- CAR (“Sputnik Afrique”): Out of 31 articles, the “Economic Frame” was underlined 3 times, so in 10% of the articles; the “Morality Frame” was detected in 4 articles, so highlighted in 13% of them.
- CAR (“RT France”): Out of 8 articles, the “Economic Frame” was perceived in 2 of them, so in 25% of the sample, while the “Morality Frame” was not recognized at all (0 mentions).

In this statistical presentation, the 26 “RT France” articles that depict a global overview of the 4 countries were not included; they will later be used as an extra to summarize the results of the analysis and understand even better the ways Russian narratives manage to weaponize African francophone societies in the shadow of an updated proxy warfare.

3.1. “Attribution of Responsibility” Frame

To detect the “Attribution of Responsibility” frame, 5 methodological questions were kept in mind at all times: 1) Does the story suggest that some level of government has the ability to alleviate the problem? 2) Does the story suggest that some level of the government is responsible for the issue/problem? 3) Does the story suggest solution(s) to the problem/issue? 4) Does the story suggest that an individual (or group of people in society) is responsible for the issue/problem? 5) Does the story suggest the problem requires urgent action?⁸¹

As mentioned earlier, the “Attribution of Responsibility” frame was one of the two most widely detected throughout the total 537 analysed articles, with an average of more than 70% of articles demonstrating it. This frame managed to shed light not only on the intense tensions existing between different governments and institutions but also on the manner of assigning liability to different countries, groups or individuals, consequently manufacturing independent narratives.

One of the first “Attribution of Responsibility” noticed through the articles on both websites was strongly oriented towards France, as the country responsible for all possible and imaginable issues existing in African countries of the Sahel region. The first issue, strongly intertwined with the “Colonialism” frame, is the one that France is *“the cause of colonisation, slavery, neo-colonisation,*

⁸¹ Holli Semetko, Patti. M. Valkenburg, “Framing European Politics: A Content Analysis of Press and Television News”, *Journal of Communication*, (2000): 9

exploitation of wealth and subjugation.”⁸² For Malians, French presence on the African continent is “*a real disappointment*”, depicting the country as “*a victim of its arrogance, its hateful and belligerent behaviour.*”⁸³ In Burkina Faso, against a backdrop of scandal surrounding the French embassy, the Minister of Foreign Affairs declared that “*It is to be feared that such a condescending attitude towards the transitional authorities will further exacerbate the resurgence of "anti-French political" sentiment.*”⁸⁴ The same rhetoric was found in articles concerning CAR and Niger: “*Western countries, and France in particular, are at the root of the security crisis in some African countries*”⁸⁵ Nevertheless, adding to the very largely spread vilification of France, Western countries, the USA, NATO are prey to the same disinformation, as part of one and same block: one of villains and enemies, the “responsible” ones: “*NATO is responsible for the continued insecurity in the Sahel [...] NATO has done "something illegal" and caused lasting instability in the Sahel [...] while France which initiated this attack, had not succeeded in restoring stability*”⁸⁶

Indeed, the presence of French and NATO troops in the Sahel area was prone to a very large disinformation campaign throughout all four countries, leading to mass manifestations and dissatisfaction from the local populations. Articles covering the retreat of said troops (first in Mali and Burkina Faso, then in Niger) led to the second most visible attribution of responsibility: the one that French troops failed to content terrorism and/or are responsible for the spread of it. During a meeting at the UN, the Malian government even accused France of “*informing and arming terrorist groups [...] not only of violations of its sovereignty and acts of espionage but also of alleged support by Paris for Islamist terrorist groups.*”⁸⁷

Moreover, during protests against the presence of French soldiers from the Barkhane force in Niamey, Niger’s capital city, reports of posters and slogans accusing “Paris of destabilising the Sahel

⁸² Sputnik Afrique, “Une intervention militaire de la CEDEAO au Niger "sera pour des intérêts français"”, accessed May 3, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230804/une-intervention-militaire-de-la-cedeao-au-niger-sera-pour-des-interets-francais-1061067787.html>

⁸³ Sputnik Afrique, “Au Mali, la France "victime de son arrogance, de son comportement haineux et belliqueux” accessed May 3, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20220214/au-mali-la-france-victime-de-son-arrogance-de-son-comportement-haineux-et-belliqueux-1055151211.html>

⁸⁴ Sputnik Afrique, “Les propos de l'ambassadeur français sur la "guerre civile" au Burkina Faso irritent les autorités” accessed May 3, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20220723/les-propos-de-lambassadeur-francais-sur-la-guerre-civile-au-burkina-faso-irritent-les-autorites-1055624583.html>

⁸⁵ Sputnik Afrique, “La France était à la base de toute cette insécurité que l'Afrique est en train de vivre” accessed May 3, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230524/la-france-etait-a-la-base-de-toute-cette-insecurite-que-lafrique-est-en-train-de-vivre-1059442158.html>

⁸⁶ Sputnik Afrique, “L'Otan est responsable de l'insécurité dans le Sahel qui perdure, selon le chef d'un parti nigérien” accessed May 3, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230729/lotan-est-responsable-de-linsecurite-dans-le-sahel-qui-perdure-selon-le-chef-dun-parti-nigerien-1060893224.html>

⁸⁷ RT France, “Devant l'ONU, le Mali accuse la France d'avoir renseigné et armé des « groupes terroristes »”, accessed May 3, 2024, <https://francais.rt.com/international/100378-devant-onu-mali-accuse-france-avoir-renseigne-arme-groupes-terroristes>

region” and of France “financing and sponsoring terrorism in Sahel”⁸⁸ were made. Identical or similar accusations were made during all of the protests that took place against French military forces in all four countries, at different moments between 2022 and 2024.

Furthermore, French force tasks were also accused of plotting and conspiring against the new Nigerian leader after his illegitimate takeover of power (*Coup d’Etat*): according to the interim Prime Minister of Niger, “*Driven out of Niger, France is trying to destabilise the situation in the country by various means [...] fomenting a plan to eliminate the country's new authorities, supports terrorism and has no plans to withdraw its troops.*”⁸⁹ The same article subtly insinuated that the information about a possible murder was shared by Russian intelligence services and that the United States, unsatisfied with the situation in Niger, could be “studying various options for consolidating democracy”, as “*The Americans consider the physical elimination of the "coup leaders", who have the support of the majority of the population, to be a more "effective" option, according to the Russian intelligence service.*”⁹⁰

To another extent, the ECOWAS (*Economic Community of West African States*), a political and economic union also serving as a peacekeeping force in the region, was blamed by several states for being an organisation under the yoke of France (and the cooperation of the US, the European Union and NATO) supporting sanctions against local juntas and further impoverishing “already extremely poor” countries⁹¹: according to the Vice-Chairman of the Defence and Security Committee of the Transitional Council in Mali, “*France ordered ECOWAS to take inhumane and illegitimate sanctions*”⁹², while in another articles ECOWAS is depicted as an “*instrument that gradually became a stick [...] because a large part of the funding came from the West. And now it has become a stick against all states that want to free themselves.*”⁹³

These first three distinct “attributions of responsibility” permit us to identify the following narratives widely used and spread through the 4 analysed countries: **1) France is responsible for all**

⁸⁸ Sputnik Afrique, “*“Barkhane, dehors!”, "À bas la France!": des Nigériens descendent dans la rue – images*” accessed May 3, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20220918/barkhane-dehors-a-bas-la-france-des-nigeriens-descendent-dans-la-rue--images-1056218187.html>

⁸⁹ Sputnik Afrique, “*La sortie des trois pays de la CEDEAO va "Niamey accuse Paris de préparer le meurtre de hauts responsables nigériens"*”, accessed May 3, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20231004/niamey-accuse-paris-de-preparer-le-meurtre-de-hauts-responsables-nigeriens-selon-al-jazeera-1062527927.html>

⁹⁰ Same place

⁹¹ RT France, “*Soutenue par la France, l'Algérie et les Etats-Unis, la Cédéao met la pression sur le Mali*”, accessed May 3, 2024, <https://francais.rt.com/international/94607-soutenue-par-france-algerie-etats-unis-cedeao-met-pression-sur-mali>

⁹² Sputnik Afrique, “*La France ordonnait à la CEDEAO de prendre des sanctions inhumaines et illégitimes*”, accessed May 3, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20240131/la-france-ordonnait-a-la-cedeao-de-prendre-des-sanctions-inhumaines-et-illegitimes-1064857938.html>

⁹³ Sputnik Afrique, “*La sortie des trois pays de la CEDEAO va "créer une nouvelle page de panafricanisme"*”, accessed May 3, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20240206/la-sortie-des-trois-pays-de-la-cedeao-va-creer-une-nouvelle-page-de-panafricanisme-1064958518.html>

ills of the African continent; 2) France is responsible for destabilising the Sahel region; 3) France supports and sponsors terrorism in the Sahel; 4) The French presence in the Sahel didn't manage to counter-terrorism (or failed to counter-terrorism); 5) The ECOWAS is an organisation acting under France and Western countries orders.

Following the same topic, another different “attribution of responsibility” can be detected as well, this time in favour of the analysed countries: in an important number of samples, the turn of phrases and the used rhetoric try to demonstrate the sovereign capacity of the four states for bold decision-making (especially while mentioning Russia by opposition to French ex-dominance): *“The marriage with France lasted 60 years. It's not 60 days [...]. But if these African countries see that their situation is not really improving, that their daily lives are not improving, they look for another partner [...] We're not going to Russia because we want to go to Russia. We're going to Russia because Russia has something to offer these African countries.”*⁹⁴ This will to act and get France and Western countries to acknowledge their “sovereignty” has indeed been concluded in 2023, with Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger creating their own mutual defence pact (Alliance of Sahel States - ASS) and definitively leaving the ECOWAS bloc in 2024.

The additionally identified narrative through the “Attribution of Responsibility” frame would be the following: **6) The Sahel countries are sovereign decision-makers.**

3.2. “Conflict” Frame

To identify the “Conflict” frame, 4 different methodological questions were raised: 1) Does the story reflect disagreement between parties/individuals/groups/countries? 2) Does one party/individual/group-country reproach another? 3) Does the story refer to two sides or to more than two sides of the problem or issue? 4) Does the story refer to winners and losers?⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Sputnik Afrique, “Au Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, "on constate ce sentiment d'appartenir à cette communauté russe”, accessed May 3, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20240313/au-burkina-faso-mali-niger-on-constate-ce-sentiment-dappartenir-a-cette-communaute-russe-1065524510.html>

⁹⁵ Holli Semetko, “Framing European Politics”, (2000): 9

The “Conflict” frame was the two most widely detected throughout the 537 samples, with an average of more than 80% of articles mentioning one or another kind of existing conflict, disagreement or dissension. This frame is the other side of the “Attribution of Responsibility” frame, and they usually go together or at least complete each other, so the upcoming results should be similar. For a common understanding, this frame highlights the very disruptive narratives used by Sputnik Afrique and RT France, reflecting situations in a twisted way and worse than they are in reality. As the scope of the “Conflict” frame is exceptionally broad and would suggest a useless overshare of information, the idea here would be to present a summarized compendium of the most repeatedly discussed and described conflicts over the two past years in all four countries, thus allowing a more productive presentation of the results for this specific part of analysis.

As a way to weaponize public opinion, the first very distinct “Conflict” which becomes immediately obvious through the articles is the following: France and Western countries want war. It is signalled by cited statements of “experts”, as the following: *“In the event of ECOWAS military intervention in Niger, the whole of West Africa could descend into armed conflict, according to Adama Garbu, a senior member of Nigeria's ruling APC party. It is a "trap" set for the organisation by the West, in particular Paris and Washington, "to enter into an all-out war in the region.”*⁹⁶ As usual in the field of study of propaganda and disinformation, the separate analysis of 1) headlines and 2) concrete information shared in articles reveals the “click-bait” side of the written content. It is then logical that when talking about conflict, the most shocking and viral information will be placed at the head of the article, as in the following case: “Crisis in Niger: The West wants a war in West Africa, according to a Nigerian analyst”. Plenty of click-bait titles were indeed found during the analysis of this specific frame, referring to some kind of existing “conflict” directly: *“France "persona non grata" on the African continent, according to the Turkish media”*; *“Central African Republic: Frenchman accused of spying evacuated to France”*; *“Bamako's complaint against France blocked at the UN: "Mali must be allowed to express itself”*, and many others.

One of the other main existing “conflicts” would be, as mentioned earlier, the accusations by the Sahel countries of France, of 1) supporting and sponsoring the terrorist groups, 2) turning its back on the safety of the mentioned countries. Paris, of course, denies all existing accusations, whilst continuing to stand firm on its political and diplomatic line: Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna *“asserted that France remained a "credible, competitive and attractive partner". Defending her record, she spoke of her recent trip to Nigeria, where she said French investment had "doubled in ten*

⁹⁶ Sputnik Afrique, Crise au Niger: “l’Occident voudrait une guerre en Afrique de l’Ouest, selon un analyste nigérian”, accessed May 10, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230802/crise-au-niger-loccident-voudrait-une-guerre-en-afrique-de-louest-selon-un-analyste-nigerian-1061008702.html>

years”⁹⁷ Of course, while analysing the different conflicts provided by the Kremlin-backed media, finding “the other point of view” and objective responses from the other parties is a difficult task.

In Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, 3 other similar conflictual situations that kept repeating themselves have also been noticed. The first one would be of diplomatic range, against a backdrop of already well-established tensions. A “back and forth” diplomatic game between Paris, Bamako, Niamey and Ouagadougou, with France eventually shutting down its embassies or being obliged to call back its ambassadors in all three countries. In Mali, *“France takes note of the decision by the transitional authorities to end the mission of the French ambassador to Mali. In response, France has decided to recall its ambassador”*⁹⁸. In Burkina Faso, *“Ouagadougou has asked for the French ambassador to the country to be replaced”*⁹⁹, whilst the situation is even more complicated in Niger, *“At the end of August, the military in power in Niamey also ordered the expulsion of the French ambassador, Sylvain Itté. He had been trapped inside the diplomatic representation for almost a month before leaving. He was “taken hostage”, commented French President Emmanuel Macron”*¹⁰⁰, resulting in the total shutdown of the French embassy in Niamey: *“France has decided to close its embassy in Niger, where “it is no longer able to function normally or carry out its missions.”*¹⁰¹

The second repetitive conflictual situation follows a similar pattern and concerns the ban on French and Western media in the same three countries: “France 24” and “Radio France Internationale – RFI” were suspended in Niger and Mali, and RFI as well in Burkina Faso. According to Ouagadougou, *“RFI is contributing to a desperate manoeuvre by terrorist groups to dissuade the thousands of Burkinabè mobilised to defend their homeland”*¹⁰², whilst Bamako banned France 24 and RFI after the French media published reports that the Malian army was involved in acts of violence against civilians. The reaction of French president Emmanuel Macron was clear-cut: *“The suspension of the two media outlets is “a sign of a race to the bottom” for the Sahelian countries”*¹⁰³

The third conflict between France, Mali and Burkina Faso concerned the suspension of commercial flights between the 3 countries: another “back and forth” game, with Air France

⁹⁷ RT France, “Les militaires du Sahel se concertent, Traoré fustige la condescendance de Macron à l’égard des dirigeants africains”, May 10, 2024, <https://francais.rt.com/afrique/108091-militaires-sahel-se-concertent-traore>

⁹⁸ Sputnik Afrique, Crise au Niger: “La France rappelle son ambassadeur au Mali”, accessed May 10, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20220131/la-france-rappelle-son-ambassadeur-au-mali-1054916192.html>

⁹⁹ RT France, “Crise au Niger: “Le Burkina Faso a demandé le départ de l’ambassadeur de France sur fond de tensions””, accessed May 10, 2024, <https://francais.rt.com/international/103405-burkina-faso-a-demande-depart-ambassadeur-francais-fond-tensions>

¹⁰⁰ RT France, “Niger : la France sur le point de fermer son ambassade ?”, accessed May 10, 2024, <https://francais.rt.com/afrique/108524-niger-france-sur-point-fermer-ambassade>

¹⁰¹ Same place

¹⁰² RT France, “Le Burkina ordonne la suspension immédiate de RFI « jusqu’à nouvel ordre »”, accessed May 10, 2024, <https://francais.rt.com/international/102799-burkina-ordonne-suspension-immEDIATE-rfi-jusqu-a-nouvel-ordre>

¹⁰³ RT France, “RFI et France 24 annoncent qu’ils sont définitivement suspendus au Mali”, accessed May 10, 2024, <https://francais.rt.com/international/98175-rfi-france-24-annoncent-qu-ils-sont-definitivement-suspendus-mali>

suspending its flights from Paris to Niamey and Bamako, and Mali responding the same way, by “cancelling the airline’s authorisation to fly from Paris to Bamako.”¹⁰⁴

Taking into account the way the information was shared and provided through both websites, it appears clear to identify the following narratives and the way they depict France: **7) France wants and provokes war by its actions; 8) France disrupts good relations; 9) France twists information; 10) France is a conflictual country.**

Furthermore, it is important to mention the existence of another “conflict” demonstrated by propagandist media, or more likely the “silencing” of one very important actor of the “proxy warfare” theory that was presented earlier in this study. In fact, the Wagner Group is extremely rarely mentioned in the 537 articles, and always in similar terms: “mercenaries” are identified as “Russian instructors”, and the Wagner PMC is rarely mentioned with its full name. “RT France” additionally implemented a little disclaimer in several of their articles, remaining at the bottom of them (with no distinctions of the analysed countries): *“Moscow claims to have Russian instructors in the Central African Republic, but they are not directly involved in combat operations against “illegal armed groups”, and denounces any confusion between its military and the private group Wagner.”*¹⁰⁵

Here appears a new and extremely severe and dangerous narrative, spread by the Russian side, that will perfectly be described by a citation of Yevgeny Prigozhin, ex-leader of the Wagner PMC: *“Not only France but also the United States and many EU countries commit heinous crimes and finance terrorists all over the world, particularly in Africa [...] But I would like to stress that the enemies of the peoples of the Central African Republic, Mali, Libya and other countries are not the French, not the French people, but presumptuous politicians, like Mr. Macron, who make accusations instead of acknowledging their own mistakes [...] Those who have supposedly been fighting terrorism in the countries of the region for many years have been stealing from them and making money from drug trafficking, the slave trade, the smuggling of natural resources and other atrocities.”*¹⁰⁶ In other words, here is a full compendium of the possible “conflicts” existing between France, Russia, Western, and the Sahel countries; “conflicts” that are pre-fabricated and disseminated through the means of propaganda and disinformation, leading to high-scale weaponization of masses and opinions. The interesting detail here is the double-edged use of the same arguments from one side to

¹⁰⁴ Sputnik Afrique, “Le Mali annule l'autorisation de vols d'Air France”, accessed May 10, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230811/le-mali-annule-lautorisation-de-vols-dair-france-1061265701.html>

¹⁰⁵ RT France, “Centrafrique : le chef d'un centre culturel russe hospitalisé après une tentative d'assassinat”, accessed May, 10, 2024, <https://francais.rt.com/international/103089-centrafrique-chef-maison-russe-hospitalise-tentative-assassinat>

¹⁰⁶ Sputnik Afrique, “Prigojine compare les rumeurs autour de Wagner à la légende de Robin des Bois”, accessed May, 10, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20220218/prigojine-compare-les-rumeurs-autour-de-wagner-a-la-legende-de-robin-des-bois-1055225594.html>

another, as a boomerang: *“France has also accused the Central African Republic of using the private Russian security group Wagner, which Paris claims is “waging war by proxy on behalf of Russia”. This accusation, also made by NGOs and the UN according to AFP, is denied by Russia”*¹⁰⁷, while the other hand, Prime Minister of the CAR Félix Moloua declares: *“Unfortunately, the focus is generally on the Wagner group, and that's just disinformation, because these armed groups are committing acts of violence, and that's creating a lot of problems among the population, who are always calling on the government to quickly bring in the FACA and Russian forces. So this is another opportunity to say a big thank you to Russia, which is constantly helping us to improve the security situation.”*¹⁰⁸

Unfortunately, this perfectly demonstrated how France is losing the information war in this context, while the following narratives take root: **11) Russians in Africa are instructors, not mercenaries; 12) The Wagner PMC has no official ties with Russia; 13) Wagner PMC is not subordinated to the Kremlin; 14) France’s military has its own mercenaries; 15) The enemy of Africans are Western politicians; 16) France and Western countries are spreading disinformation and propaganda against Russia.**

3.3. “Human Interest” Frame

To recognize the “Human Interest” frame, 5 other methodological questions were stated: 1) Does the story provide a human example or “human face” on the issue? 2) Does the story employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy, or compassion? 3) Does the story emphasize how individuals and groups are affected by the issue/problem? 4) Does the story go into the private or personal lives of the actors? 5) Does the story contain visual information that might generate feelings of outrage, empathy- caring, sympathy, or compassion?¹⁰⁹

The “Human Interest” frame was most often encountered in articles treating subjects as 1) poverty 2) education 3) humanitarian help 4) crimes allegedly committed by the French military and 5) mass protests. It is worth mentioning, that no article depicting the private life or the portrait of one or more individuals was found, which was indeed surprising: in disinformation and propaganda, the

¹⁰⁷ RT France, “Centrafrique : le chef d'un centre culturel russe hospitalisé après une tentative d'assassinat”, accessed May, 10, 2024, <https://francais.rt.com/international/103089-centrafrique-chef-maison-russe-hospitalise-tentative-assassinat>

¹⁰⁸ Sputnik Afrique, “Sécurité, relations avec Paris, BRICS”, accessed May, 10, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230121/securite-relations-avec-paris-brics-entretien-avec-le-premier-ministre-centrafricain-felix-moloua-1057655115.html>

¹⁰⁹ Holli Semetko, “Framing European Politics”, (2000): 9

manipulation of “portraits” with multiple vivid adjectives is usually used to appeal to the reader and its compassion, anger, or other kind of emotion.

Addressing the subject of poverty, the situation might be paradoxical, as in the case of Mali. The Malian government decided to ban all activities by French-funded NGOs in response to Macron government’s decision to suspend development aid, resulting in another clash between Niamey and Bamako: according to the official spokesperson Abdoulaye Maïga, *“the French decision to suspend its aid is helping to restore the “scorned dignity” of the Malians”*¹¹⁰ whilst Paris has been accused of *“dehumanising aid [...] used as a means of blackmailing governments”*¹¹¹ A similar rhetoric is used in Burkina Faso, as Touadéra denounces *“systematic plundering facilitated by the political instability maintained by certain Western countries [and by] armed terrorist groups whose leaders are foreign mercenaries [...] of his country’s immense geological treasure trove”*¹¹² whilst deploring the fact that *“more than 60 years after its independence, the Central African Republic remains “one of the poorest countries in the world.”*¹¹³ Additionally, “Sputnik Afrique” published an article related to the suspension by France of child adoptions in Burkina Faso¹¹⁴, which resonates with a more “human” overview of the tensions between the two countries. This suggests a classical use of the “Human Interest” frame, oriented towards emotions and statistics *“7.5 million Malians require assistance, more than 35% of the population [...] Mali ranks 184th on the Human Development Index”*¹¹⁵ supposing the following narrative: **17) France destabilizes and isolates the Sahel countries at the expense of the local populations.**

Following up with the topic of education, the “human interest” frame recalls the fabricated ongoing joust between France and Russia, as in this article published by “Sputnik Afrique”: *“France’s sanctions policy has deprived Burkina Faso students of the opportunity to begin or continue their studies at French universities [...] Burkina Faso requests Russian aid to redirect its young people towards Russian education and to modernise its education system”*¹¹⁶ Once more, Russia is portrayed

¹¹⁰ RT France, “Réciprocité : le Mali interdit les activités des ONG financées par la France”, accessed May 11, 2024, <https://francais.rt.com/international/102521-reciprocite-mali-interdit-activites-ong-financees-france>

¹¹¹ Same place

¹¹² RT France, “Centrafrique : Touadéra accuse les Occidentaux de faciliter le «pillage» des ressources”, accessed May 11, 2024, <https://francais.rt.com/international/104608-touadera-accuse-occidentaux-empecher-developpement-republique-centrafricaine>

¹¹³ Same place

¹¹⁴ Sputnik Afrique, “La France suspend les adoptions d’enfants au Burkina Faso”, accessed May 11, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230917/la-france-suspend-les-adoptions-denfants-au-burkina-faso-1062172682.html>

¹¹⁵ RT France, “Réciprocité : le Mali interdit les activités des ONG financées par la France”, accessed May 11, 2024, <https://francais.rt.com/international/102521-reciprocite-mali-interdit-activites-ong-financees-france>

¹¹⁶ Sputnik Afrique, “La Russie vient en aide aux étudiants du Burkina frappés par les sanctions françaises”, accessed May 11, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230929/la-russie-vient-en-aide-aux-etudiants-du-burkina-frappes-par-les-sanctions-francaises-1062443595.html>

as a “saviour” as France is tackled for its political line and apparent “insensitivity”. One more narrative can be found: **18) France does not care about the future of young Africans.**

Another interesting detail was found, this time especially in articles concerning the CAR: the mention of allegedly committed sexual abuses by French military soldiers between 2013 and 2014, during the “Sangaris” military operation. The suspicions of sexual abuse were then published by “The Guardian”, and in 2016 the French court dismissed the case for lack of “sufficient charges”. Despite the fact that this scandal is pretty ancient, in the context of tensions between Bangui and Paris, this story re-emerged with detailed articles and associations *“calling for those responsible for "war crimes" to be punished, including the sexual abuse of "starving" children and women by the French army.”*¹¹⁷ These facts, when skilfully used at the right time and right moment, can indeed ad fuel on an already “erupting” situation, and form a new narrative to spread: **19) French military commit crimes against defenceless people they are supposed to protect.**

3.4. “Morality” Frame

To highlight the “Morality” frame, 3 other distinctive methodological questions were raised: 1) Does the story contain any moral message? 2) Does the story make reference to morality, God, and other religious tenets? 3) Does the story offer specific social prescriptions about how to behave?

In the scope of analysed articles, the “Morality” frame permitted to isolate and highlight the questioning of two specific ideas by the Kremlin-backed media: 1) Values and principles shared by Western countries and France and 2) The notion of freedom of speech concerning Western VS pro-Russian media. The “Morality” frame was the less detected frame throughout all the 537 analysed articles.

Indeed, Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso expressed their dissatisfaction and critics towards France, after the reaction of Paris concerning the suspended broadcasting of French and Western media in the three mentioned countries. According to a researcher cited by “Sputnik Afrique”, *“What is paradoxical is that the same French who supported allowed and even demanded the suspension of the Russian media in Europe are outraged by the fact that their media are suspended in these African countries, and they accuse them of muzzling the press or taking measures that run*

¹¹⁷ Sputnik Afrique, “En Centrafrique, les actes criminels des troupes françaises pendant l’opération Sangaris dénoncés”, accessed May 11, 2024 <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20220930/en-centrafrique-les-actes-criminels-des-troupes-francaises-pendant-loperation-sangaris-denonces-1056354229.html>

counter to freedom of expression and freedom of opinion.”¹¹⁸ As mentioned earlier in the “Conflict” frame part, the same double-edged use of arguments from one side to another, as a boomerang, is noticed again with the use of the “freedom of speech” argument, stating that *“the government defends the press freedom in Africa and elsewhere, but not in Europe”*¹¹⁹ and even offering an alternative to the French government, suggesting to lift the ban on Kremlin-backed media to regain its credibility: *“Paris may decide to end the ban on RT News and Sputnik broadcasting in the Republic in order to be credible in its request concerning the broadcasting in Niger of two of its media: France 24 and RFI.”*¹²⁰

Furthermore, backing up these statements of morality, principles and values, the same rhetoric is perceived in a different context: according to an activist and member of the Niger Movement for the Promotion of Responsible Citizenship (MPCR) cited by “Sputnik Afrique”, *“there is not the same respect for international values depending on whether you are in an African country or a European country”*¹²¹, denouncing that *“for the Western countries, people do not have the same value.”*¹²² This narrative is supported by Moscow, with a targeted sentence from Sergei Lavrov, calling the West to self-criticism: *“Judge for yourselves how our colleagues deal with coups d’état, particularly those that take place far away, and those that they organise themselves”*¹²³

This leads to the highlighting of the following constructed narratives: **20) French media is not credible and objective; 21) France does not support freedom of the press and freedom of expression and 22) The West does not share the same principles and values**, all detected within the framework of the “Morality” frame.

¹¹⁸ Sputnik Afrique, “Suspension de médias français au Niger: l’indignation de Paris relève du “deux poids, deux mesures””, accessed May 4, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230804/suspension-de-medias-francais-au-niger-lindignation-de-paris-releve-du-deux-poids-deux-mesures-1061066572.html>

¹¹⁹ Sputnik Afrique, “Mécontent de la suspension de France 24 au Niger, Paris se souvient-il d’avoir interdit Sputnik?”, accessed May 4, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230807/mecontent-de-la-suspension-de-france-24-au-niger-paris-se-souvient-il-davoir-interdit-sputnik-1061136376.html>

¹²⁰ Same place

¹²¹ Sputnik Afrique, “Coups d’État au Niger et en Ukraine: pour l’Occident, “les peuples n’ont pas la même valeur””, accessed May 4, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230802/coups-detat-au-niger-et-en-ukraine-pour-loccident-les-peuples-nont-pas-la-meme-valeur-1061016414.html>

¹²² Same place

¹²³ Same place

3.5. “Economic” Frame

To distinguish the “Economic” frame, 3 new methodological questions are to be kept in mind while analysing the articles: 1) Is there a mention of financial losses or gains now or in the future? 2) Is there a mention of the costs/degree of expense involved? 3) Is there a reference to the economic consequences of pursuing or not pursuing a course of action?¹²⁴

While the economic frame wasn’t that much highlighted throughout all the analysed articles, the distribution of it according to countries shed light on Burkina Faso and Niger, where both “RT France” and “Sputnik Afrique” underlined newly established economic cooperation, potential gains and new areas of development between these two countries and the Russian Federation.

For Burkina Faso, “RT Afrique” articles emphasised a new partnership between the country and the Russian State Atomic Energy Corporation “Rosatom”, specialised in nuclear energy, nuclear non-energy goods and high-tech products¹²⁵. According to a statement issued by Rosatom, *“The roadmap sets out concrete actions to be taken to train personnel in a West African country in the civil use of the atom, to develop a nuclear infrastructure and to promote a positive perception of atomic energy in the eyes of public opinion in Burkina Faso.”*¹²⁶ Additionally, in 2023, the country signed an agreement with Moscow for the construction of a nuclear power plant, to cover the energy needs of the Burkinabé population: the document *“fulfils the wish of the President of Burkina Faso, Captain Ibrahim Traoré, expressed last July at the Russia-Africa summit during a meeting with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin.”*¹²⁷

A second economic goal has been set after a meeting between the Russian ambassador in Ouagadougou and the Ministers of Transport and Infrastructure of Burkina Faso, planning to build a railway line between Ouagadougou and Accra, the capital city of Ghana. According to the Russian ambassador to Burkina Faso, Alexei Saltykov, *“I think it's one of the main routes for the country,*

¹²⁴ Holli Semetko, “Framing European Politics”, (2000): 9

¹²⁵ Kacper Szulecki, Indra Overland, “Russian nuclear energy diplomacy and its implications for energy security in the context of the war in Ukraine”, *Nature Energy*, Vol. 8, (2023): 413-421

¹²⁶ RT France, “ Le Burkina Faso signe un accord avec Moscou pour la construction d'une centrale nucléaire”, accessed May 5, 2024, <https://francais.rt.com/international/107543-burkina-faso-signe-accord-avec-moscou-construction-centrale-nucleaire>

¹²⁷ RT France, “ Burkina Faso : la diplomatie russe évoque avec Ouagadougou la construction d'un chemin de fer avec le Ghana”, accessed May 5, 2024, <https://francais.rt.com/afrique/109626-burkina-faso-diplomatie-russe-evoque-ligne-ferroviaire>

which is landlocked on the Atlantic Ocean. That's why Burkina Faso's leaders need to develop this route [...] we will continue to work together to assess the possibilities of reaching a contract."¹²⁸

The benefits of a durable and “strong” economic relationship between Burkina Faso and Russia are indeed strongly highlighted in each article containing the “Economic” frame, as depicted in one mentioning the launch of a new strategic cereal production programme: *“On 26th of January, Burkina Faso received 25,000 tonnes of wheat from the Russian Federation as part of the 200,000 tonnes promised by Vladimir Putin to several African countries at the Russia-Africa summit last summer.*”¹²⁹ The Minister for Solidarity and Humanitarian Action, Nandy Some-Diallo, *“welcomed Moscow's genuine desire to support the efforts of the authorities in Burkina Faso, which is going through a difficult humanitarian situation as a result of the crisis.*”¹³⁰ Of course, the economic and diplomatic aspects of the relationship between Burkina Faso and Russia in this frame are equally interlaced with the ones in the “Human Interest” and “Saviour Frame”, as we will see later. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that even though the articles are highlighting the “support” and “economic help” of the Kremlin, they also try to equally underline the “sovereign” character of decision-making of each country, depicting them as “equal partners” in due and proper form. It is then possible to conclude, that at least for Burkina Faso, the narratives are the following: **23) Russia is a reliable economic ally; 24) Burkina Faso newly established leader, Capitaine Ibrahim Traoré, is leading the country towards development; 25) The decision-making of Burkina Faso is legit and sovereign; 26) Russia's and Burkina Faso relationship is on an “equal to equal” basis; 27) Burkina Faso is thankful to Russia, an “old friend” and “renewed” partner.**

On the other hand, actualities around the economy in Niger highlighted the importance of their primary and fossil resources and the way French and European energy depends on the country. As covered by “Sputnik Afrique”, the sanctions imposed by the ECOWAS had a “real impact” on the production of Uranium in Niger: according to the French “Orano group”, *“The Somair plant, Orano's subsidiary in Niger, has ceased production of uranium concentrate and switched to “early maintenance”, due to the sanctions that are blocking supplies of reactive products.*”¹³¹ This news thus activated a new form of “doubled-edged” propaganda to use, with 1) blaming the ECOWAS, France and the Occident for the losses in production and the imposed sanctions and 2) highlighting

¹²⁸ RT France, “Burkina Faso : la diplomatie russe évoque avec Ouagadougou la construction d'un chemin de fer avec le Ghana”, accessed May 5, 2024, <https://francais.rt.com/afrique/109626-burkina-faso-diplomatie-russe-evoque-ligne-ferroviaire>

¹²⁹ RT France, “Le Burkina Faso lance un programme stratégique de culture de céréales”, accessed May 5, 2024, <https://francais.rt.com/afrique/109359-burkina-faso-lance-programme-strategique>

¹³⁰ RT France, “Le Burkina Faso reçoit 25 000 tonnes de blé de la Russie”, accessed May 5, 2024, <https://francais.rt.com/international/109087-burkina-faso-recoit-25-000-tonnes-ble-russe>

¹³¹ RT France, “Uranium au Niger : placée en «maintenance anticipée», l'usine d'Orano arrête sa production”, accessed May 5, 2024, <https://francais.rt.com/international/107056-uranium-niger-orano-arret-production>

the idea that France is maintaining its influence in Niger only for the mentioned resources: according to a French politician cited by “Sputnik Afrique”, *“The end of uranium production in Niger will have a "handicapping" effect on Europe”*¹³². In another article, it is mentioned that *“France is seeking at all costs to preserve its influence in Niger to maintain its position as one of the world's leading economic powers. To this end, it is manipulating ECOWAS to launch a military intervention in the country”*¹³³ while a third one states that *“Nigerian gas, which is supposed to reach Europe via the new trans-Saharan pipeline, will not be able to compensate the EU for the absence of Russian gas.”*¹³⁴

The slowly concretising narratives are becoming even more acute and sharp while analysing articles concerning Mali and CAR and containing the “Economic Frame”: a representative of the CAR Minister of Education told *“[...] Other say that the cause of the Central African Republic's misfortune is France. And that today the country has not seen any development "because of France's stranglehold" on its mineral resources.”*¹³⁵ On the same topic, Faustin-Archange Touadéra, CAR head of state, stated that his country is claimed that his nation is a “victim of geostrategic aims linked to its natural resources” and accused the West of “fuelling political instability” in order to steal the wealth of the CAR: *“Since its independence, the Central African Republic has been subjected to systematic looting facilitated by the political instability maintained by certain Western countries [and by] armed terrorist groups whose leaders are foreign mercenaries [...] to make the country ungovernable, to prevent the State from exercising its right of sovereignty over the natural reserves and its legitimate right to self-determination.”*¹³⁶ The use of specific and harsh vocabulary detected in the articles, as the words “pillage” (looting), “vol” (theft), “mettre à sac” (ransacking) are all referring to the pretty strict Sahel countries point of view about France and its activity in the region, thus permitting to expose some serious additional narratives to the ones stated above: **28) France steals our resources; 29) France wants to continue exercising its hegemony over the region for economic motives; 30) France and the Western countries depend on the African continent resources; 31) The ECOWAS is an organization under the French yoke;** and more specifically

¹³² Sputnik Afrique, “La fin de l’uranium nigérien aura un effet "handicapant" pour l’Europe”, accessed May 5, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230810/la-fin-de-l-uranium-nigerien-aura-un-effet-handicapant-pour-leurope-selon-un-politique-francais-1061219591.html>

¹³³ Sputnik Afrique, “Si la France perd le Niger, elle perd tout”, accessed May 5, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230809/si-la-france-perd-le-niger-elle-perd-tout-selon-le-vice-president-dapaise-niger-1061210770.html>

¹³⁴ Sputnik Afrique, “Bénéfique pour l’Afrique, le gazoduc transsaharien ne compensera pas le gaz russe pour l’UE”, accessed May 5, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230812/benefique-pour-lafrique-le-gazoduc-transsaharien-ne-compensera-pas-le-gaz-russe-pour-lue-1061288176.html>

¹³⁵ Sputnik Afrique, “On demande à la Russie d’être l’ange gardien de la Centrafrique”, accessed May 5, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230813/on-demande-a-la-russie-detre-lange-gardien-de-la-centrafrique-1061295481.html>

¹³⁶ RT France, “Centrafrique : Touadéra accuse les Occidentaux de faciliter le «pillage» des ressources”, accessed May 5, 2024, <https://francais.rt.com/international/104608-touadere-accuse-occidentaux-empecher-developpement-republique-centrafricaine>

for Niger, **32) France would be nothing without Niger**. It is worth mentioning too in this part, that in most of the articles where France is positioned as an “enemy” usurping the natural resources of the countries, a parallel is established with Russia “not having the same comportment”, thus substantiating the existence of “anti-French” and “pro-Russian” narratives that this frame permitted to distinguish.

3.6. “Colonisation” Frame

According to the mentioned criteria in the “methodological” part of this study, the two upcoming complimentary frames – the “Colonisation” frame and the “Saviour” frame – were self-induced following the same methodology as the Semetko and Valkenburg already deducted frames, with the following questions in aim to help recognize the needed frames: 1) Does the story suggests a conflict between two or more countries in a past time/going back to History? 2) Does the story suggest material, financial, or spiritual gains or losses between two or more countries? 3) Does the story suggest a hierarchy between two or more countries? 4) Does the story indicate a gain or loss of sovereignty? It is also worth mentioning that these two frames could have been treated as distinct narratives, nevertheless, they have been attributed the status of “frame” with the idea of narrowing down the research and the scope of data to analyse, as they would have been too wide as narratives.

First of all, some changes at the national scale were perceived in the framework of the “Colonisation” frame, in an idea of “post-colonialism” and revival of “Pan-Africanism”: Burkina Faso and Mali decided to strip French of its status of “official language” and keep it as “working language.”¹³⁷ Additionally, the French high school of Niamey, in Niger, will be shut down in 2025: as stated by “Sputnik Afrique”, “*The government of Niger would like to develop "a more inclusive and effective education system", capable of "meeting the needs of the national labour market.*”¹³⁸ In Ouagadougou, an initiative to change the names of the streets of the capital city of Burkina Faso has been launched, as declared by a high representative of the municipality: “*All streets still bearing the names of colonists or other foreign personalities will be changed [...] to promote the country's history*

¹³⁷ RT France, “Burkina Faso : le français perd son statut de langue officielle”, accessed May 2, 2024, <https://francais.rt.com/afrique/108315-burkina-faso-francais-perd-son>

¹³⁸ Sputnik Afrique, “Le lycée français La Fontaine de Niamey sera fermé à la rentrée prochaine”, accessed May 2, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20240325/le-lycee-francais-la-fontaine-de-niamey-sera-ferme-a-la-rentree-prochaine-1065767144.html>

*and identity, by naming streets after national figures and symbolic places.*¹³⁹ This surge and will to split up almost totally with the French legacy in the Sahel countries was indeed brewing for a while, and accelerated by the governmental changes, putsches and *Coup d'état*. It is often referred to as a long-awaited “divorce” between the former colonialist power and its ancient colonies.

This underlines the need by Mali, Burkina Faso, CAR and Niger to be treated as equals, sovereign and decision-makers countries: Ouagadougou declares the aim “*to regain genuine sovereignty, remove the real constraints on diversifying military partnerships [...] and better protect our secret defences*”¹⁴⁰, whilst Traoré described the “*total liberation of Africa*” as “*unstoppable*”¹⁴¹. In Niger, the global instability “*has given the junta the pretext to stir up the nationalist fervour of the people of Niger and surf on anti-colonialist sentiments.*” In Bangui, the sentiment is as strong as in the other countries: “*Freeing ourselves from neo-colonialism "is a question of the responsibility of each State [...] Today, we no longer want the neo-colonialists to continue to impose their will on African or Central African leaders.*”¹⁴² These kinds of statements are shared in a wide scope of the analysed articles, emphasizing the idea that African francophone countries are acting on their own, without any backup: nevertheless, these narratives detected through the “Colonisation” frame are also strongly interlaced with the “Saviour” one, as it will be overviewed in the last part of this analysis. This makes it possible to distinguish a few more new narratives: **33) African countries must separate from France’s grip; 34) France and the Sahel countries are having a long-due divorce; 35) African countries must continue their fight against neo-colonialism and the West; 36) African countries are sovereign and must be respected and treated as equal partners.** The resurgence of Pan-Africanism and the idea that “neo-colonisation” is still strong is a narrative vehemently spread all over the African continent through disinformation and propaganda.

On the other hand, one of the most interesting parts of this analysis was noticing the choice of words (or group of words) used to describe France through the “Sputnik Afrique” and “RT France” websites: “former ancient colonialist empire”, “French tradition of arrogance”, “privileged”, “disrespectful”, “cunning”, “spreading instrumentalization”, “abusive”, “France, get out”, “*A bas la*

¹³⁹ Sputnik Afrique, “La capitale burkinabè envisage de débaptiser les rues portant des noms français”, accessed May 2, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20240331/la-capitale-burkinabe-envisage-de-debaptiser-les-rues-portant-des-noms-francais-1065857640.html>

¹⁴⁰ Sputnik Afrique, “Dénonciation d’un accord franco-burkinabè: “Il mérite d’être rompu il y a très longtemps””, accessed May 2, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230303/denonciation-dun-accord-franco-burkinabe-il-merite-detre-rompu-il-y-a-tres-longtemps-1058096723.html>

¹⁴¹ RT France, “Les militaires du Sahel se concertent”, accessed May 2, 2024, <https://francais.rt.com/afrique/108091-militaires-sahel-se-concertent-traore>

¹⁴² Sputnik Afrique, “On demande à la Russie d’être l’ange gardien de la Centrafrique”, accessed May 2, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230813/on-demande-a-la-russie-detre-lange-gardien-de-la-centrafrique-1061295481.html>

France” (that would translate as “Let’s get France to shreds”), “neo-colonialist”, “imperialist”, “paternalist”, “oligarchic”, “barbaric”, and many more, all out from the same lexical field.

The choice of words and descriptions are indeed pretty harsh, and the throwback to the colonial past of the country manages to truly stimulate anger and vivid emotions among those of have been under the yoke of it. For CAR, a researcher declared that “*Those who know the history of the Central African Republic [know that] France has never been more arrogant in Africa than in the Central African Republic*”¹⁴³ In the case of Burkina Faso, an activist pleaded that “*Worse still, France was offering its EU cronies our country's territories and subsoil wealth*”¹⁴⁴ and added that “*France is literally disrupting our triumphal march towards happiness.*”¹⁴⁵ The new leader of Burkina Faso even stated that “*We're up against imperialist, oligarchic, savage, barbaric France, which despises us.*”¹⁴⁶ The idea that nothing has changed in more than 60 years of independence is widely spread too: “*Young Africans are against this French presence because they realise that they are not moving forward with this French presence [...] Paris has not changed the paradigm in the appreciation of Africans. The Africa of 1960 cannot be the Africa of 2022.*”¹⁴⁷

The existence of the following narratives **37) France is a neo-colonialist country; 38) France continues spreading its colonialist views in the Sahel region; 39) No changes were noticed since the Independence because of the French presence** are and will continue to be extremely hard to tackle for Paris in the future, as they are deeply rooted into the history of the mentioned countries. Additionally, one more found narrative can be added in the framework of the “Colonisation” frame, this time about Russia: as cited several times in “Sputnik Afrique”, “*Russia has no colonial past, it does not interfere in the internal affairs of countries, it intervenes at the request of the official authorities.*”¹⁴⁸ The narrative would be formulated as follows: **40) Russia is not a former colonial power, thus it is a reliable and trusted partner.** This perfectly leads to our last part, the “Saviour” frame.

¹⁴³ Sputnik Afrique, “La France n’a jamais été plus arrogante en Afrique qu’en Centrafrique”, accessed May 2, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20221111/la-france-na-jamais-ete-plus-arrogante-en-afrique-que-centrafrique-1056786608.html>

¹⁴⁴ Sputnik Afrique, “Retrait du Burkina: “la France dérange notre marche triomphale vers l’horizon du bonheur””, accessed May 2, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230124/retrait-du-burkina-la-france-derange-notre-marche-triomphe-vers-lhorizon-du-bonheur-1057697079.html>

¹⁴⁵ Same place

¹⁴⁶ Sputnik Afrique, “Burkina: manifestation contre la France à Ouagadougou”, accessed May 2, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20221029/burkina-manifestation-contre-la-france-a-ouagadougou-1056663565.html>

¹⁴⁷ Sputnik Afrique, “Le Burkina a 64 ans: “l’Afrique de papa” n’est plus l’Afrique des Français”, accessed May 2, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20221211/le-burkina-a-64-ans-lafrique-de-papa-nest-plus-lafrique-des-francais-1057234528.html>

¹⁴⁸ Sputnik Afrique, “Au Mali, “Moscou apporte son expertise, son savoir-faire dans nombreux domaines””, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20220216/au-mali-moscou-apporte-son-expertise-son-savoir-faire-dans-nombreux-domaines-1055183969.html>

3.7. “Saviour” Frame

As mentioned above, the “Saviour” frame was also self-induced following the same methodology as the Semetko and Valkenburg already deducted frames, with the following questions aimed to help recognize the needed frames: 1) Does the story suggest that an individual, government or country is responsible for the success of another one? 2) Does the story suggest gratitude, appreciation or recognition from one party to another one? 3) Does the story display specific lexica suggesting the importance played by an individual, government or country?

Often used as a “mirror” to the “Colonisation” frame throughout the 537 analysed samples, the “Saviour” frame permits quantifying and defining the narratives Russian disinformation and propaganda spread about Putin, the Kremlin and Russia in general. It gives an idea of how they manage to state themselves as heroes, with the perfect amount of modesty in need to be the most credible possible.

A common spread rhetoric would be the one mentioning that “Russia managed to achieve what France couldn’t in 60 years.” The CAR ambassador in Moscow, in a meeting with Sergei Shoigu, mentioned the possibility of the installation of a Russian military base in his home country, expressing his gratitude towards “Russian military help”: “*Given what the Russian army did for the country when armed groups invaded, I am fully entitled through my state to ask for a Russian military base in the Central African Republic*”¹⁴⁹ adding that “*The Russian army is the army that listened to the cry of the Central African people, that came to their aid when the population was abandoned by the French army [...]. So whatever the Russian army does can only be in the right direction and accepted by the people.*”¹⁵⁰

In Mali, the praise towards the Kremlin is similar: “*Moscow contributes its expertise and know-how in many areas, including security and peacekeeping in crisis zones.*”¹⁵¹ It is worth mentioning, that in a wide scope of the articles containing this specific frame, the fact that the Soviet Union has been present on the African continent is highlighted: “*The Russian presence in Africa is not new. During the Cold War, the Soviet military, who were pursuing other objectives at the time, were welcomed by Africans [...] Russia helped to emancipate the African people from colonial rule,*

¹⁴⁹ Sputnik Afrique, “Base russe en Centrafrique: Moscou a fait ce que Paris n’a pas pu faire en 60 ans”, accessed April 29, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230531/base-russe-en-centrafrique-moscou-a-fait-ce-que-paris-na-pas-pu-faire-en-60-ans-1059605496.html>

¹⁵⁰ Same place

¹⁵¹ Sputnik Afrique, “ Au Mali, "Moscou apporte son expertise, son savoir-faire dans nombreux domaines”, accessed April 29, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20220216/au-mali-moscou-apporte-son-expertise-son-savoir-faire-dans-nombreux-domaines-1055183969.html>

notably in Mali.”¹⁵² In the context of disinformation spread by the mentioned articles, this argument gives a solid base to the renewed “friendships” and partnerships between Russia and the Sahel countries.

In Burkina Faso and Niger, during mass protests prior to the retreat of French troops, Russian flags were seen in the streets: a demonstrator cited by “Sputnik Afrique” declared that “*The people want to go with Russia*”, whilst the use of Russian flags demonstrates a “newly established symbolic”: “*The Russian flag is used as a banner for a breath of freedom, a breath of sovereignty, a breath of determination to take responsibility for our own strategic decisions and to safeguard the higher interests of our peoples. This flag is like a banner that is used to express this desire.*”¹⁵³

Russia is also depicted as a guarantor of security and peace, once again compared in parallel to France: “[...] *Russia is capable of providing the stability that France has never been able to guarantee [...] This is the main reason for the local enthusiasm for Russian private and state military resources.*”¹⁵⁴ Additionally, hopping on the subject of peace, the Kremlin is often depicted as a “mediator”, without the need for direct interventions: “*Russia advocates a peaceful settlement between X and Y*”¹⁵⁵; “*Russia suggests to restore legality in the country as quickly as possible and to show restraint*”¹⁵⁶; “*Russia has something to offer to the African continent*” and positions itself as a “a reliable partner compared to our traditional French and European partners.” The idea behind sovereignty is the ability to first access stability and security, and according to different leaders of the Sahel area, only the Kremlin can provide it: “*At one point, Russia's intervention was crucial and calmed the situation down [...] Before we start thinking about sovereignty, we need to think about stability [...] the Russian Federation must put stability at the centre of its action in the Central African Republic. Stability and security are "the bedrock of development".*”¹⁵⁷ The paradoxical element here, being noticed across the samples, of the “non-intervention” interventions of the Russian Federation in the African continent.

¹⁵² Same place

¹⁵³ Sputnik Afrique, “Fin de la “volonté néocoloniale française”: un ancien diplomate malien sur le Niger”, accessed April 29, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230804/fin-de-la-volonte-neocoloniale-france-africaine-un-ancien-diplomate-malien-sur-le-niger-1061062126.html>

¹⁵⁴ Same place

¹⁵⁵ RT France, “Niger : Poutine et le dirigeant malien Assimi Goïta appellent à un règlement pacifique de la crise”, accessed April 29, 2024, <https://francais.rt.com/international/106698-niger-poutine-dirigeant-malien-assimi-appellent-reglement-pacifique>

¹⁵⁶ RT France, “La France s'apprête à évacuer plus de 500 ressortissants du Niger” accessed April 29, 2024, <https://francais.rt.com/international/106543-france-sapprete-evacuer-plus-500-ressortissants-niger>

¹⁵⁷ Sputnik Afrique, “On demande à la Russie d'être l'ange gardien de la Centrafrique”, accessed April 29, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230813/on-demande-a-la-russie-detre-lange-gardien-de-la-centrafrique-1061295481.html>

Furthermore, in a global overview of the analysed articles, the lexica used has an almost religious feel to it: *“Mali was saved by Russia”*¹⁵⁸, *“Russia came to the rescue”*¹⁵⁹, *“The Russian hope”*, *“Russia is asked to be the guardian angel [...]”*¹⁶⁰ This especially resonates with the “Human Interest” frame analysed earlier, referring to the multiples initiatives discussed in education, economy and humanitarian aid areas: *“At the recent Russia-Africa summit, Vladimir Putin promised to send cereals to this African country free of charge. The volume involved ranges from 25,000 to 50,000 tonnes. In addition to Mali, other countries involved are Burkina Faso, Zimbabwe, Somalia, the Central African Republic and Eritrea [...] Bamako is also expecting a humanitarian consignment of Russian fertiliser.”*¹⁶¹

At last, before bringing this section to a close, the “Saviour” frame permits the identification of several new narratives: **41) In the Sahel region, Russia managed to achieve what France could not; 42) Russian “military forces” managed to minimise the spread of terrorism in the Sahel area; 43) Russia emancipated former colonies from the French influence; 44) Russia saved Africa; 45) Russia is the guardian angel of the African continent; 46) Russia is a guarantor of liberty and sovereignty; 47) Russia helps the African continent.**

4. Global overview of the analysis results

This section focused on highlighting the main narratives spread by Kremlin-backed media websites “Sputnik Afrique” and “RT France”, through the analysis of 7 different methodological frames: 1) The “Attribution of Responsibility” frame; 2) The “Conflict” frame; 3) The “Human Interest” frame; 4) The “Morality” Frame; 5) The “Economic” frame; 6) The “Colonisation” frame; 7) The “Saviour” frame. These frames, as the noticed extracted narratives, permit the understanding of the way and means media can weaponize information to affect not only decision-makers but also populations, thus becoming actors of modern proxy warfare.

¹⁵⁸ Sputnik Afrique, “Beaucoup espéraient voir le Mali tomber”, mais “la Russie est venue au secours”, accessed April 29, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230801/beaucoup-esperaient-voir-le-mali-tomber-mais-la-russie-est-venue-au-secours-dit-assimi-goita-1060982562.html>

¹⁵⁹ Same place

¹⁶⁰ Sputnik Afrique, “On demande à la Russie d’être l’ange gardien de la Centrafrique”, accessed April 29, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230813/on-demande-a-la-russie-detre-lange-gardien-de-la-centrafrique-1061295481.html>

¹⁶¹ Sputnik Afrique, “Beaucoup espéraient voir le Mali tomber”, mais “la Russie est venue au secours”, accessed April 29, 2024, <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230801/beaucoup-esperaient-voir-le-mali-tomber-mais-la-russie-est-venue-au-secours-dit-assimi-goita-1060982562.html>

After analysis of the 537 collected samples, out of the 47 recognized narratives, 10 meta-narratives were identified:

- 1) France is responsible for destabilising the Sahel region
- 2) France and Western countries depend on the African continent's resources
- 3) France is a neo-colonialist country
- 4) French media are not credible and objective
- 5) The Sahel countries are sovereign decision-makers
- 6) The Sahel countries are in an equal partnership with Russia
- 7) The Sahel countries must separate themselves from France's grip
- 8) Russia is a guarantor of liberty and sovereignty
- 9) Russia is a reliable economic, diplomatic, political and military ally
- 10) Wagner PMC is not subordinated to the Kremlin

Meta-narratives speak about the narrative and are a product of discourse, whereas narratives portray the story as it is shaped by the discourse¹⁶²: for this reason, it is easier to classify narratives into meta-narratives for presenting analysis results. These 10 identified meta-narratives get extremely similar media coverage all over the four Sahel countries, Mali, Burkina Faso, CAR and Niger, following the same patterns and applied to the vagaries of political life in these countries. By being spread in the French language through Kremlin-backed websites and shared through social media, reaching a large audience, these meta-narratives have no issues becoming popular beyond the borders of the African continent, making an impact in France and Europe.

It is worth mentioning too some noticed elements related to the selected media portals and articles: "Sputnik Afrique" definitely displays more "click-bait" headlines than "RT France". Additionally, the mentioned "experts" and "political figures", from whom citations and sentences are collected, are more vague and less credible than the ones mentioned by "RT France": on the same subject, "RT France" offers a display of information more acute, with facts being less "twisted" and out of context than "Sputnik Afrique".

¹⁶² Rosario Vignolo Munson, *Telling Wonders: Ethnographic and Political Discourse in the Work of Herodotus*, University of Michigan Press, (2001): 20

Conclusion

As stated in the introduction of this Master's thesis, the spread of disinformation throughout the Sahel countries by Russia led to question why and how Russia seeks to weaponize societies not only in African francophone states but also by proxy in France and the West. To resolve this problem, the main goal was to distinguish narratives spread in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and CAR by Russian state media and establish the way they integrate themselves in the modern proxy warfare anatomy. With a wide sample of 537 articles selected between 2022 and 2024 from the "RT France" and "Sputnik Afrique" websites, analysed through 7 different pre-established frames, 47 key narratives were identified, permitting to visualize at a micro-level how media can not only be an instrument but also an actor in an ongoing virtual proxy warfare. At the end of the study, the 47 key narratives were narrowed down to 10 distinct meta-narratives: 1) France is responsible for destabilising the Sahel region; 2) France and Western countries depend on the African continent's resources; 3) France is a neo-colonialist country; 4) French media are not credible and objective; 5) The Sahel countries are sovereign decision-makers; 6) The Sahel countries are in an equal partnership with Russia; 7) The Sahel countries must separate themselves from France's grip; 8) Russia is a guarantor of liberty and sovereignty; 9) Russia is a reliable economic, diplomatic, political and military ally and 10) Wagner PMC is not subordinated to the Kremlin.

These meta-narratives demonstrate how Russian state media shifted the blame onto France and Western powers while promoting the sovereignty and decision-making capabilities of Sahel countries in their quest for alternative alliances, particularly with Russia. The complexities of post-colonial relationships and the enduring impact of colonial legacies on African nation's perceptions of themselves and their former colonizers were also largely depicted throughout the detected meta-narratives. Moreover, the idea that French media lacks credibility and objectivity and does not genuinely support press freedom and freedom of expression, whilst the West does not success in upholding its professed principles and values was also spread. Additionally, they depicted France and Western countries as instigators of regional conflicts and manipulators of information, while simultaneously downplaying Russian involvement and portraying Russian support as beneficial and legitimate. Kremlin-backed media equally highlighted the evolving economic dynamics between African nations and Russia, while also exposing tensions and narratives concerning resource exploitation and geopolitical influence by France and Western countries. "Sputnik Afrique" and "RT France" equally managed to shape public perception against France while contrastingly portraying Russia as a benevolent saviour, highlighting Russian narratives of assistance, gratitude, and recognition in Africa, posing Moscow as a key player in providing security, stability, and humanitarian aid to African nations.

During the past three years, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and CAR have been the theatres of political *Coup d'état*, terrorist attacks, national and transnational instability, protests and more. As revealed throughout the analysed articles, tensions with France were in their heyday, resulting in the retreat of French and other Western military forces, the dismissing of diplomats, the shutdown of embassies, the disruption of the smooth flow of goods and services between countries (ban on airlines, suspension of media, factory shutdowns). In parallel, France faced a growing resurgence of Pan-Africanism and nationalism, widely and loudly communicated during mass protests all over the Sahel region. Although propagandist articles blacken the truth, these subsequent events have been a hard blow to the French sphere of influence and Paris, sounding the alarm bell. Moscow has succeeded in its plans, asserting a new dominance by manipulating narratives resonating with already unstable societies in need of truth and success.

This research proposes in addition a newly retrieved expansion of the modern proxy warfare theory, highlighting its evolving anatomy in conjunction with the transforming face and use of media in cyberspace. Analysis of propaganda and disinformation should be a part, or at least a subpart of the proxy warfare understanding. Combined with the right military means, it becomes not only an instrument but also a substantial actor, triggering virtual and physical consequences.

To this extent, the use and spread of disinformation and propaganda by the Kremlin can indeed weaponize societies, with wider implications for other societies: as actualities show, not only African francophone countries are targeted and suffer from it. The damaging effects of this information warfare are being perceived in Metropolitan France, influencing public discontent and political, and social fragmentation. Combined with other proxy instruments and actors, it lays the ground for modern proxy warfare, in which the media is already playing an important role.

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Annexe 1 “RT France” Research Samples

Russia Today in French

Time Frame: 2022-01-01 to 2024-04-30

For MALI: 69 articles with the hashtags Mali / France

1. 2024/03/22
<https://francais.rt.com/afrique/110253-operation-anti-terroriste-niger-soldats-embuscade>
2. 2024/03/11
<https://francais.rt.com/france/110001-france-apres-critiques-droite-visant-nakamura>
3. 2024/02/29
<https://francais.rt.com/afrique/109794-mali-russie-vers-partenariat-renforce>
4. 2024/02/26
<https://francais.rt.com/afrique/109712-cedeao-leve-sanctions-contre-guinee-mali>
5. 2024/02/02
<https://francais.rt.com/afrique/109237-mali-chaine-france-2-suspendue>
6. 2023/09/24
<https://francais.rt.com/international/107275-niger-mali-previent-quil-ne-restera-bras-croises-intervention>
7. 2023/09/19
<https://francais.rt.com/documentaires/107187-mali-revoir-france>
8. 2023/09/10
<https://francais.rt.com/international/107076-poutine-dirigeant-malien-assimi-goita-appellent-reglement-pacifique>
9. 2023/08/31
<https://francais.rt.com/international/106942-onu-russie-bloque-resolution-conseil-securite-mali>
10. 2023/07/23
<https://francais.rt.com/international/106407-mali-se-dote-d-nouvelle-constitution-goita>
11. 2023/06/14
<https://francais.rt.com/international/105886-aide-humanitaire-securitaire-mali-poutine-goita>
12. 2023/05/18
<https://francais.rt.com/magazines/africonnect/105566-africonnect-pourquoi-maliens-accordent-leur>
13. 2023/03/02
<https://francais.rt.com/international/104554-projet-constitution-malienne-prevoit-releguer-francais-reng-langue-travail>
14. 2022/11/22
<https://francais.rt.com/international/102521-reciprocite-mali-interdit-activites-ong-financees-france>
15. 2022/09/25
<https://francais.rt.com/international/101230-a-tribune-onu-bamako-ettrille-gouvernement-francais>
16. 2022/09/16
<https://francais.rt.com/international/100979-mali-suspectes-despionnage-deux-membres-ambassade-france-interpelles-puis-relaches>
17. 2022/09/07
<https://francais.rt.com/france/100747-bamako-appelle-organisations-africaines-lever-sanctions>
18. 2022/08/18
<https://francais.rt.com/france/100387-accusee-soutenir-groupes-terroristes-mali-diplomatie-francaise-repond>
19. 2022/08/17
<https://francais.rt.com/international/100378-devant-onu-mali-accuse-france-avoir-renseigne-arme-groupes-terroristes>

20. 2022/08/15
<https://francais.rt.com/international/100345-derniers-militaires-francais-force-barkhane-quitte-mali>
21. 2022/08/15
<https://francais.rt.com/international/100342-barkhane-degage-manifestation-mali-pour-demander-depart-rapide-soldats-francais>
22. 2022/08/12
<https://francais.rt.com/international/100317-allemagne-suspend-ses-operations-militaires-mali-apres-nouveau-refus-survol-bamako>
23. 2022/08/10
<https://francais.rt.com/international/100281-mali-vante-partenariat-gagnant-gagnant-russie-acquisition-materiel-militaire>
24. 2022/07/28
<https://francais.rt.com/international/100099-mali-moins-15-soldats-trois-civils-tues-dans-plusieurs-attaques-djihadistes-coordonnees>
25. 2022/07/20
<https://francais.rt.com/international/99989-bamako-expulse-porte-parole-mission-onu-mali>
26. 2022/07/01
<https://francais.rt.com/international/99627-france-officialise-fin-force-takuba-mali>
27. 2022/06/15
<https://francais.rt.com/international/99167-mali-france-annonce-capture-dun-haut-cadre-daesh>
28. 2022/05/26
<https://francais.rt.com/international/98761-apres-operation-barkhane-mali-se-tourne-nouveaux-partenaires>
29. 2022/05/20
<https://francais.rt.com/international/98645-retour-pensee-coloniale-serguei-lavrov-denonce-attitude-france-egard-mali>
30. 2022/05/18
<https://francais.rt.com/international/98592-morts-lors-passage-d-convoi-barkhane-des-tirs-probablement-francais-niamey>
31. 2022/05/16
<https://francais.rt.com/international/98528-mali-se-retire-organisation-regionale-g5-sahel>
32. 2022/05/11
<https://francais.rt.com/international/98460-juge-instruction-malien-convoque-le-drian-affaire-atteinte-biens-publics>
33. 2022/05/04
<https://francais.rt.com/international/98318-bamako-estime-que-france-plus-base-legale-pour-operer-mali>
34. 2022/05/03
<https://francais.rt.com/international/98291-atteintes-flagrantes-souverainete-pourquoi-mali-rompt-accords-defense-france>
35. 2022/04/27
<https://francais.rt.com/international/98175-rfi-france-24-annoncent-qu-ils-sont-definitivement-suspendus-mali>
36. 2022/04/27
<https://francais.rt.com/international/98174-mali-reporter-rt-france-constate-degats-causes-attaque-djihadiste-base>
37. 2022/04/27
<https://francais.rt.com/international/98152-mali-gouvernement-accuse-armee-francaise-espionnage-subversion>
38. 2022/04/23
<https://francais.rt.com/international/98037-armee-malienne-annonce-avoir-decouvert-charnier-pres-ancienne-base-francaise>
39. 2022/04/20
<https://francais.rt.com/international/97949-mali-armee-francaise-quitte-base-gossi>

40. 2022/04/08
<https://francais.rt.com/international/97674-neutralisation-terroristes-moura-paris-doute-version-malienne-moscou-felicite-bamako>
41. 2022/03/28
<https://francais.rt.com/france/97207-tartuffe-indignation-macron-quant-interdiction-france-24-mali>
42. 2022/03/17
<https://francais.rt.com/international/97170-accusees-fausses-allegations-rfi-france24-interdites-diffusion-mali>
43. 2022/03/07
<https://francais.rt.com/international/96892-mali-armee-francaise-annonce-elimination-haut-responsable-aqmi>
44. 2022/02/21
<https://francais.rt.com/international/95996-mali-cnt-enterine-jusqu-a-cinq-ans-transition-avant-elections>
45. 2022/02/20
<https://francais.rt.com/international/95958-pas-besoin-france-manifestation-mali-celebrant-depart-soldats-francais>
46. 2022/02/18
<https://francais.rt.com/international/95914-mali-demande-france-retirer-sans-delai-soldats-barkhane-takuba>
47. 2022/02/17
<https://francais.rt.com/international/95881-jour-sombre-desastre-opposition-commenter-annonce-retrait-forces-francaises-mali>
48. 2022/02/17
<https://francais.rt.com/international/95877-mali-onu-sadaptera-retrait-francais-ue-verifier-peut-poursuivre-missions>
49. 2022/02/17
<https://francais.rt.com/international/95874-retrait-militaire-mali-sentiment-anti-francais-afrique-conference-presse-macron>
50. 2022/02/17
<https://francais.rt.com/international/95869-france-ses-allies-europeens-dans-takuba-canada-retrait-mali>
51. 2022/02/15
<https://francais.rt.com/international/95821-estonie-va-retirer-ses-forces-armees-mali>
52. 2022/02/05
<https://francais.rt.com/international/95471-mali-nouvelle-manifestation-bamako-contre-manifestation-militaire-francaise>
53. 2022/02/02
<https://francais.rt.com/france/95388-imbroglio-pays-qui-nous-humilie-opposition-diapason-situation-mali>
54. 2022/02/02
<https://francais.rt.com/france/95376-gouvernement-repond-questions-senateurs>
55. 2022/01/31
<https://francais.rt.com/international/95313-mali-ambassadeur-france-somme-par-autorites-quitter-territoire-72-heures>
56. 2022/01/31
<https://francais.rt.com/international/95303-tout-ca-parce-qu-on-a-touche-leurs-interets-militaires-maliens-repliquent-france-afrique>
57. 2022/01/28
<https://francais.rt.com/international/95216-tensions-franco-maliennes-bamako-n-exclut-rien-relations-france>
58. 2022/01/28
<https://francais.rt.com/international/95198-pour-drian-partenaires-europeens-africains-ne-peuvent-pas-rester-comme-ca-au-mali>
59. 2022/01/27
<https://francais.rt.com/international/95185-tensions-entre-paris-bamako-porte-parole-gouvernement-malien-invite-parly-taire>

60. 2022/01/25
<https://francais.rt.com/france/95096-autorites-maliennes-exigent-danemark-retrait-immediat-forces-speciales>
61. 2022/01/23
<https://francais.rt.com/france/95037-militaire-francais-tue-mali-elysee>
62. 2022/01/18
<https://francais.rt.com/international/94843-insecurite-instrumentalisation-nouhoum-sarr-cnt-mali-operation-barkhane>
63. 2022/01/18
<https://francais.rt.com/international/94826-les-autorites-maliennes-veulent-revoir-accords-defense-avec-paris>
64. 2022/01/17
<https://francais.rt.com/international/94799-wagner-mali-rumeur-propagee-ex-puissances-coloniales-nouhoum-sarr>
65. 2022/01/17
<https://francais.rt.com/international/94791-mali-sanctions-cedeao-sont-illegales-selon-membre-conseil-national-transition>
66. 2022/01/14
<https://francais.rt.com/international/94725-mali-manifestations-grande-envergure-contre-sanctions-cedeao>
67. 2022/01/13
<https://francais.rt.com/international/94644-sanctions-contre-mali-air-france-suspend-liaison>
68. 2022/01/13
<https://francais.rt.com/international/94641-mali-accuse-france-avoir-viole-son-espace-aerien>
69. 2022/01/12
<https://francais.rt.com/international/94607-soutenue-par-france-algerie-etats-unis-cedeao-met-pression-sur-mali>

For NIGER: 51 articles with the hashtags Niger / France

1. 2024/04/12
<https://francais.rt.com/afrique/110623-cooperation-militaire-russie-niger-envoyer>
2. 2024/03/22
<https://francais.rt.com/afrique/110253-operation-anti-terroriste-niger-soldats-embuscade>
3. 2024/03/14
<https://francais.rt.com/international/110064-apres-plusieurs-mois-brouille-nigeria>
4. 2024/02/25
<https://francais.rt.com/afrique/109697-mahamadou-issoufou-justice-face-ambassadeur>
5. 2024/02/15
<https://francais.rt.com/documentaires/109470-catastrophe-africaine-histoire-coloniale>
6. 2024/02/02
<https://francais.rt.com/afrique/109231-niger-plusieurs-compagnies-aeriennes-refusent-francais-niamey>
7. 2023/12/23
<https://francais.rt.com/afrique/108541-depart-contingent-militaire-francais-niger>
8. 2023/12/23
<https://francais.rt.com/international/108540-niger-dernieres-forces-francaises-quittent-pays>
9. 2023/12/22
<https://francais.rt.com/afrique/108524-niger-france-sur-point-fermer-ambassade>
10. 2023/12/13
<https://francais.rt.com/international/108370-niger-tous-soldats-francais-auront-quitte-niger-decembre>
11. 2023/11/24
<https://francais.rt.com/afrique/108091-militaires-sahel-se-concertent-traore>
12. 2023/10/20
<https://francais.rt.com/international/107618-retrait-armee-francaise-niger-etat-major-tient-delaies>

13. 2023/10/10
<https://francais.rt.com/international/107504-niger-premier-convoy-militaire-francais-quitte-niamey>
14. 2023/10/07
<https://francais.rt.com/international/107462-niger-contraint-par-sanctions-niger-baisse-drastringue-budger>
15. 2023/10/05
<https://francais.rt.com/international/107431-niger-troupes-francaises-amorceront-leur-depart-semaine-afp>
16. 2023/10/01
<https://francais.rt.com/international/107371-niger-peuple-nigerien-va-dicter-avenir-relations-france-tiani>
17. 2023/09/27
<https://francais.rt.com/international/107324-niger-ambassadeur-france-a-quitte-niamey>
18. 2023/09/26
<https://francais.rt.com/international/107306-retrait-troupes-francaises-niger-militaires-negocie>
19. 2023/09/24
<https://francais.rt.com/international/107284-niger-macron-annonce-retrait-militaires-retour-ambassadeur>
20. 2023/09/24
<https://francais.rt.com/international/107275-niger-mali-previent-quil-ne-restera-bras-croises-intervention>
21. 2023/09/23
<https://francais.rt.com/international/107271-niger-ancien-president-issoufou-intervention-exterieure-faute>
22. 2023/09/16
<https://francais.rt.com/international/107165-niger-france-veut-inflexible-elle-revele-impuissante>
23. 2023/09/14
<https://francais.rt.com/international/107134-niger-france-annonce-liberation>
24. 2023/09/10
<https://francais.rt.com/international/107077-niger-militaires-accusent-france-deployer-troupes-paris-dement>
25. 2023/09/10
<https://francais.rt.com/international/107076-poutine-dirigeant-malien-assimi-goita-appellent-reglement-pacifique>
26. 2023/09/08
<https://francais.rt.com/international/107056-uranium-niger-orano-arret-production>
27. 2023/09/05
<https://francais.rt.com/international/107014-niger-retrait-troupes-francaises-evoque-retrait-putschistes>
28. 2023/09/05
<https://francais.rt.com/international/107004-niger-chef-gouvernement-militaire-envisage-depart-rapide-troupes-france>
29. 2023/09/02
<https://francais.rt.com/international/106973-niger-milliers-personnes-manifestent-devant-ambassade-france>
30. 2023/08/31
<https://francais.rt.com/international/106952-niger-militaires-ont-ordonne-police>
31. 2023/08/30
<https://francais.rt.com/magazines/polit-mag/106927-niger-risque-conflagration>
32. 2023/08/26
<https://francais.rt.com/international/106878-niger-20-000-personnes->
33. 2023/08/26
<https://francais.rt.com/international/106872-niger-putschistes-expulsent-ambassadeur-france>
34. 2023/08/22
<https://francais.rt.com/magazines/africonnect/106790-niger-guerre-uranium>
35. 2023/08/20
<https://francais.rt.com/international/106762-niger-general-tiani-toujours-soutenu-transition-trois-ans>

36. 2023/08/19
<https://francais.rt.com/international/106758-niger-delegation-cedeao-est-arrivee-niamey>
37. 2023/08/18
<https://francais.rt.com/international/106739-face-risque-d-escalade-niger-cedeao-divisee-occident-peine>
38. 2023/08/12
<https://francais.rt.com/international/106670-niger-cedeao-reporte-reunion-cle-manifestation-niamey>
39. 2023/08/11
<https://francais.rt.com/international/106653-force-attente-cedeao-dans-plus>
40. 2023/08/10
<https://francais.rt.com/international/106639-niger-militaires-nomment-gouvernement-bras-fer-cedeao>
41. 2023/08/09
<https://francais.rt.com/international/106634-niger-france-accusee-davoir-viole-espace-aerien>
42. 2023/08/09
<https://francais.rt.com/international/106624-niger-cedeao-reitere-quelle-privilegie-diplomatique-sans-ecarter-intervention>
43. 2023/08/04
<https://francais.rt.com/international/106582-niger-putschistes-denoncent-accord-militaire-paris-refuse>
44. 2023/08/04
<https://francais.rt.com/international/106575-tension-monte-niger-fin-ultimatum>
45. 2023/08/02
<https://francais.rt.com/international/106562-niger-russie-met-garde-contre-intervention-etrangere>
46. 2023/08/02
<https://francais.rt.com/international/106551-niger-france-evacue-24h-ses>
47. 2023/08/01
<https://francais.rt.com/international/106543-france-sapprete-evacuer-plus-500-ressortissants-niger>
48. 2023/07/31
<https://francais.rt.com/international/106525-niger-situation-tend-france-cedeao>
49. 2023/07/27
<https://francais.rt.com/international/106478-niger-bazoum-russie-inquietudes-zakharova>
50. 2022/09/18
<https://francais.rt.com/international/101019-niger-centaines-personnes-manifestent-contre-presence-militaire-francaise>
51. 2022/08/17
<https://francais.rt.com/international/100381-force-malefique-interdits-manifester-opposants-nigeriens-barkhane-lancent-petition>

For BURKINA FASO: 42 articles with the hashtags Burkina Faso / France

1. 2024/04/18
<https://francais.rt.com/afrique/110715-burkina-faso-expulse-trois-diplomates-francais>
2. 2024/03/28
<https://francais.rt.com/afrique/110341-burkina-faso-feuille-route-signee>
3. 2024/02/21
<https://francais.rt.com/afrique/109626-burkina-faso-diplomatique-russe-evoque-ligne-ferroviaire>
4. 2024/02/09
<https://francais.rt.com/afrique/109359-burkina-faso-lance-programme-strategique>
5. 2024/01/26
<https://francais.rt.com/international/109087-burkina-faso-recoit-25-000-tonnes-ble-russe>
6. 2023/12/15
<https://francais.rt.com/afrique/108420-france-na-rien-fait-pour>

7. 2023/12/09
<https://francais.rt.com/afrique/108316-burkina-faso-francais-devient-langue>
8. 2023/12/09
<https://francais.rt.com/afrique/108315-burkina-faso-francais-perd-son>
9. 2023/12/03
<https://francais.rt.com/afrique/108219-burkina-faso-suspension-diffusion-medias>
10. 2023/11/17
<https://francais.rt.com/international/108002-interdiction-medias-russes-union-europ%C3%A9enne>
11. 2023/10/14
<https://francais.rt.com/international/107543-burkina-faso-signe-accord-avec-moscou-construction-centrale-nucleaire>
12. 2023/09/15
<https://francais.rt.com/international/107159-burkina-faso-expulse-attache-militaire-france>
13. 2023/08/07
<https://francais.rt.com/international/106601-paris-suspend-son-aide-humanitaire-burkina-faso>
14. 2023/04/02
<https://francais.rt.com/international/105220-burkina-faso-expulse-correspondantes-monde-et-liberation>
15. 2023/03/27
<https://francais.rt.com/international/105078-burkina-faso-ordonne-suspension-diffusion-france24>
16. 2023/03/01
<https://francais.rt.com/international/104546-burkina-faso-denonce-accord-d-assistance-militaire-france-datant-1961>
17. 2023/02/19
<https://francais.rt.com/international/104378-burkina-annonce-fin-officielle-operations-troupes-francaises-sur-son-sol>
18. 2023/02/17
<https://francais.rt.com/international/104325-burkina-societe-israelienne-accusee-d-etre-derriere-campagne-contre-ccir-croix-rouge>
19. 2023/01/26
<https://francais.rt.com/international/103918-burkina-faso-paris-rappelle-son-ambassadeur-pour-consultations>
20. 2023/01/25
<https://francais.rt.com/international/103903-france-retirera-ses-troupes-burkina-dici-un-mois>
21. 2023/01/25
<https://francais.rt.com/international/103891-burkina-faso-lavrov-renvoie-macron-erreurs-francaises-afrique>
22. 2023/01/22
<https://francais.rt.com/international/103852-burkina-faso-demande-depart-troupes-francaises-d-ici-un-mois>
23. 2023/01/03
<https://francais.rt.com/international/103405-burkina-faso-a-demande-depart-ambassadeur-francais-fond-tensions>
24. 2022/12/10
<https://francais.rt.com/international/102955-burkina-faso-entend-mobiliser-152-millions-euros-contre-djihadisme>
25. 2022/12/03
<https://francais.rt.com/international/102799-burkina-ordonne-suspension-immediate-rfi-jusqu-a-nouvel-ordre>
26. 2022/11/20
<https://francais.rt.com/international/102481-vers-retrait-forces-francaises-burkina-faso-paris-evoque-revision-strategie>
27. 2022/11/18
<https://francais.rt.com/international/102459-manifestation-anti-france-burkina-faso-dispersee-apres-utilisation-gaz-lacrymogene>
28. 2022/11/09
<https://francais.rt.com/international/102259-emmanuel-macron-officialise-fin-operation-barkhane>

29. 2022/10/04
<https://francais.rt.com/international/101497-burkina-faso-manifestation-ouagadougou-contre-visite-cedeao>
30. 2022/10/02
<https://francais.rt.com/international/101462-burkina-faso-paul-henri-sandaogo-damiba-demissionne-et-cede-pouvoir-capitaine-ibrahim-traore>
31. 2022/10/02
<https://francais.rt.com/international/101460-burkina-faso-ambassade-france-nouveau-prise-pour-cible-putschistes-appellent-calme>
32. 2022/10/01
<https://francais.rt.com/international/101446-burkina-faso-manifestation-tensions-devant-ambassade-france>
33. 2022/10/01
<https://francais.rt.com/international/101433-burkina-faso-deploiement-militaire-dans-capitale-premieres-reactions-international>
34. 2022/09/30
<https://francais.rt.com/france/101393-burkina-faso-tirs-dorigine-inconnue-retentissent-dans-quartier-presidence>
35. 2022/05/17
<https://francais.rt.com/international/98542-burkina-faso-rsf-condamne-expulsion-journaliste-francaise-meeting-kemi-seba>
36. 2022/04/07
<https://francais.rt.com/international/97637-burkina-faso-ex-president-blaise-compaore-condamne-vie-pour-assassinat-thomas-sankara>
37. 2022/02/13
<https://francais.rt.com/international/95752-burkina-faso-armee-francaise-elimine-40-djihadistes-impliques-attentats-benin-afrique>
38. 2022/02/08
<https://francais.rt.com/international/95573-proces-assassinat-sankara-30-ans-prison-requis-contre-ancien-president-compaore>
39. 2022/01/30
<https://francais.rt.com/international/95292-burkina-faso-soixantaine-djihadistes-tues-etat-major-francais>
40. 2022/01/28
<https://francais.rt.com/international/95214-burkina-faso-apres-coup-detat-cedao-suspend-pays-sans-autres-sanctions>
41. 2022/01/25
<https://francais.rt.com/international/95110-burkina-faso-macron-preoccupe-par-succession-coup-etat-region>
42. 2022/01/24
<https://francais.rt.com/international/95072-president-burkina-faso-roch-marc-christian-kabore-arrete-mutineries-afrique>

For CAR: 8 articles with the hashtags CAR / France

1. 2023/03/06
<https://francais.rt.com/international/104608-touadera-accuse-occidentaux-empecher-developpement-republique-centrafricaine>
2. 2023/02/04
<https://francais.rt.com/international/104099-bangui-favorable-davantage-dinstructeurs-russes-selon-ambassadeur-russie-centrafrique>
3. 2022/12/21
<https://francais.rt.com/international/103191-ambassadeur-france-russie-convoque-apres-propos-colonna-centrafrique>
4. 2022/12/18
<https://francais.rt.com/international/103128-centrafrique-enquete-ouverte-apres-attaque>
5. 2022/12/16

<https://francais.rt.com/international/103089-centrafrique-chef-maison-russe-hospitalise-tentative-assassinat>

6. 2022/12/15

<https://francais.rt.com/international/103056-derniers-militaires-francais-ont-quitte-centrafrique>

7. 2022/04/27

<https://francais.rt.com/economie/98169-centrafrique-adopte-bitcoin-comme-monnaie-legale-une-premiere-afrique>

8. 2022/04/21

<https://francais.rt.com/international/97984-ministre-centrafricaine-fouillee-aeroport-roissy-malgre-immunite-diplomatique>

COMMON ARTICLES:

1. 2024/04/30

<https://francais.rt.com/international/110811-afrique-politique-administration-biden-mise>

2. 2024/04/21

<https://francais.rt.com/opinions/110769-etats-unis-ont-decouvert-limite>

3. 2024/04/03

<https://francais.rt.com/opinions/110450-langue-francaise-afrique-quelle-valeur>

4. 2024/03/19

<https://francais.rt.com/opinions/110190-sahel-comment-force-militaire-africaine>

5. 2024/02/14

<https://francais.rt.com/opinions/109455-alliance-etats-sahel-revolutionne-geopolitique>

6. 2024/02/10

<https://francais.rt.com/opinions/109391-communaute-pourquoi-etudiants-africains-russie>

7. 2024/02/06

<https://francais.rt.com/france/109300-jean-marie-bockel-nomme-par-macron-envoye-afrique>

8. 2023/12/31

<https://francais.rt.com/afrique/108648-sahel-mali-burkina-niger-renforcent-cooperation>

9. 2023/11/24

<https://francais.rt.com/afrique/108091-militaires-sahel-se-concertent-traore>

10. 2023/11/07

<https://francais.rt.com/opinions/107860-sahel-france-est-sortie-mais-qui-entre>

11. 2023/11/01

<https://francais.rt.com/opinions/107779-neocolonialisme-pourquoi-lutte-afrique-pour-autosuffisance-difficile>

12. 2023/10/08

<https://francais.rt.com/international/107468-on-est-bloque-etudiants-sahel-ne-peuvent-etudier-paris>

13. 2023/10/03

<https://francais.rt.com/magazines/africonnect/107241-coups-detat-sahel-gabon-maroc>

14. 2023/06/26

<https://francais.rt.com/international/106082-serguei-lavrov-repond-questions-rt>

15. 2023/06/23

<https://francais.rt.com/international/106025-macron-accuse-russie-destabiliser-afrique-moscou-respect>

16. 2023/05/10

<https://francais.rt.com/france/105468-wagner-assemblee-nationale-appelle-bruxelles>

17. 2023/03/20

<https://francais.rt.com/international/104944-otage-sahel-depuis-2021-journaliste-olivier-dubois-libere>

18. 2023/03/02

<https://francais.rt.com/france/104566-age-francafrrique-est-revolu-macron-premier-jour-tournee-afrique-centrale>

19. 2023/02/27
<https://francais.rt.com/international/104511-macron-annonce-diminution-visible-effectifs-afrique>
20. 2023/02/15
<https://francais.rt.com/international/104289-ils-nous-font-porter-chapeau-lavrov-renvoie-occidentaux-neocolonialisme>
21. 2023/01/30
<https://francais.rt.com/international/103976-nouveau-media-francais-afrique-moscou>
22. 2022/12/14
<https://francais.rt.com/international/103008-etats-unis-mettent-paquet-sur-afrique-pour-tenter-contrer-moscou>
23. 2022/07/29
<https://francais.rt.com/international/100112-lavrov-juge-sermon-macron-offensant-pour-etats-africains-ayant-relations-avec-moscou>
24. 2022/06/09
<https://francais.rt.com/international/99033-entretien-entre-chefs-d-etat-major-francais-et-russe-ukraine-sahel>
25. 2022/02/17
<https://francais.rt.com/opinions/95888-mirage-africain-emmanuel-macron-frederic-de-natal>
26. 2022/02/06
<https://francais.rt.com/france/95491-coups-detat-afrique-deux-poids-deux-mesures-france>

Annexe 2

“Sputnik Afrique” Research Samples

Sputnik Afrique

Time Frame: 2022-01-01 to 2024-04-30

For MALI: 112 articles with the hashtag Mali / France

1. 2024/04/10
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20240410/la-reforme-du-franc-cfa-ce-nest-pas-a-la-france-davoir-un-avis-la-dessus-affirme-sejourne-1066009005.html>
2. 2024/03/13
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20240313/au-burkina-faso-mali-niger-on-constate-ce-sentiment-dappartenir-a-cette-communaute-russe-1065524510.html>
3. 2024/02/07
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20240207/la-france-cherche-des-moyens-pour-continuer-sa-politique-paternaliste-en-afrique-1064970084.html>
4. 2024/02/01
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20240201/ce-pays-africain-suspend-les-emissions-de-la-chaine-france-2--1064875264.html>
5. 2024/01/31
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20240131/la-france-ordonnait-a-la-cedeao-de-prendre-des-sanctions-inhumaines-et-illegitimes-1064857938.html>
6. 2024/01/11
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20240111/bilan-catastrophique-11-ans-de-debacle-des-troupes-francaises-au-mali-1064572689.html>
7. 2024/01/02
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20240102/a-quoi-sattendre-pour-lannee-2024-1064429374.html>
8. 2023/12/30
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20231230/des-nigeriens-celebrent-le-retrait-des-soldats-francais-en-presence-des-premiers-ministres-de-laes-1064380501.html>
9. 2023/12/19
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20231219/comment-la-france-perd-sa-presence-militaire-en-afrique-1064202363.html>
10. 2023/12/15
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20231215/un-partenariat-gagnant-gagnant-un-analyste-malien-sur-les-relations-avec-moscou-1064141163.html>
11. 2023/12/06
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20231206/le-mali-et-le-niger-retablissent-la-double-imposition-avec-la-france-1063971024.html>
12. 2023/10/19
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20231019/le-sort-du-mali-ne-se-determine-pas-a-paris-bamako-repond-au-ministre-francais-des-armees-1062913567.html>
13. 2023/10/04
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20231004/niamey-accuse-paris-de-preparer-le-meurtre-de-hauts-responsables-nigeriens-selon-al-jazeera-1062527927.html>
14. 2023/09/27
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230927/la-fin-de-lexceptionnalisme-francais-paris-confronte-a-un-retrait-douloureux-au-niger-1062399193.html>
15. 2023/09/05
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230905/sanctions-de-lonu-contre-le-mali-moscou-denonce-une-approche-neocoloniale-1061911115.html>

16. 2023/09/01
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230901/lue-avec-ses-sanctions-est-impuissante-au-niger-selon-un-chercheur-1061798612.html>
17. 2023/08/28
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230828/ils-manipulent-lopinion-africaine-un-journaliste-sur-le-blocage-des-medias-francais-au-gabon-1061700629.html>
18. 2023/08/17
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230817/lancien-president-sarkozy-evoque-les-raisons-de-lanimosite-antifrancaise-au-sahel-1061400349.html>
19. 2023/08/16
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230816/une-guerre-au-niger-aiderait-lotan-a-piller-nos-ressources-dit-un-haut-responsable-malien-1061378781.html>
20. 2023/08/11
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230811/le-mali-annule-lautorisation-de-vols-dair-france-1061265701.html>
21. 2023/08/11
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230811/niger-chaque-fois-quon-a-une-manifestation-il-faut-que-les-drapeaux-russes-flottent-1061254047.html>
22. 2023/08/10
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230810/le-mali-suspend-la-delivrance-de-visas-aux-ressortissants-francais-par-reciprocite-1061215605.html>
23. 2023/08/02
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230802/la-politique-de-paris-au-sahel-est-un-echec-pour-macron-avoue-un-politologue-francais-1061017221.html>
24. 2023/06/27
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230627/mali-reuters-revele-la-date-probable-de-la-fin-de-la-mission-minusma-1060198371.html>
25. 2023/06/23
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230623/loccident-qui-finance-lukraine-na-jamais-voulu-aider-lafrique-selon-un-expert-malien-1060114112.html>
26. 2023/06/22
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230622/le-president-tchadien-appelle-a-annuler-les-dettes-des-pays-pauvres-1060097881.html>
27. 2023/06/22
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230622/la-france-persona-non-grata-sur-le-continent-africain-selon-un-media-turc-1060089669.html>
28. 2023/06/16
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230616/paris-met-les-batons-dans-les-roues-de-la-securite-malienne-affirme-moscou-105977313.html>
29. 2023/05/22
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230522/la-france-finance-t-elle-reellement-les-groupes-terroristes-1059415194.html>
30. 2023/05/21
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230521/pas-un-grand-succes-le-president-nigerien-sur-la-politique-francaise-dans-le-sahel-1059395091.html>
31. 2023/05/17
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230517/enlevement-dolivier-dubois-au-mali-une-enquete-pointe-des-defaillances-de-larmee-francaise-1059301223.html>
32. 2023/05/14
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230514/trois-footballeurs-du-toulouse-fc-dont-deux-africains-boudent-un-match-a-cause-de-symboles-lgbt-1059251228.html>

33. 2023/04/30
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230430/casque-incendie-et-femmes-armees-de-balais-une-action-pour-le-depart-de-la-minusma-au-mali-1058956712.html>
34. 2023/04/14
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230414/les-pays-du-sahel-sont-libres-de-cooperer-avec-qui-ils-veulent-selon-un-officiel-malien--1058595828.html>
35. 2023/04/14
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230414/le-mali-recadre-la-france-au-conseil-de-securite-de-lonu-au-sujet-des-droits-de-lhomme-1058591657.html>
36. 2023/03/22
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230322/liberation-de-lotage-francais-bamako-reproche-a-paris-de-payer-des-millions-aux-terroristes-1058281771.html>
37. 2023/03/12
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230312/le-pm-malien-evoque-des-gains-substantiels-dans-la-lutte-antiterroriste-grace-a-la-russie-1058172386.html>
38. 2023/03/02
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230302/bamako-retire-a-paris-le-statut-de-porte-plume-des-resolutions-du-cs-de-lonu-relatives-au-mali-1058079934.html>
39. 2023/03/01
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230301/la-presence-militaire-francaise-au-mali-na-rien-regle-selon-un-depute-malien-1058043016.html>
40. 2023/02/27
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230227/macron-fustige-les-mercenaires-criminels-en-afrique-apres-le-retrait-des-forces-francaises-1058031278.html>
41. 2023/02/17
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230217/cette-star-dorigine-malienne-devient-legerie-dune-celebre-marque-de-cosmetiques-1057943366.html>
42. 2023/02/15
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230215/la-hongrie-se-dit-prete-a-agir-aux-cotes-des-francais-en-afrique-1057921306.html>
43. 2023/02/13
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230213/des-mercenaires-au-mali-vetus-duniformes-francais-marvel-rend-paris-furieux-1057906295.html>
44. 2023/02/10
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230210/un-virage-africain-de-la-russie-nous-avons-soutenu-lafrique-depuis-la-naissance-de-pouchkine-1057885705.html>
45. 2023/02/07
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230207/la-cooperation-france-mali-ne-repondait-pas-aux-aspirations-du-peuple-malien-selon-bamako-1057851385.html>
46. 2023/02/01
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230201/la-france-na-jamais-ete-amie-avec-le-mali-ni-avec-le-burkina-ni-avec-un-autre-pays-africain-1057791250.html>
47. 2023/01/30
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230130/macron-na-pas-la-capacite-detre-a-la-tete-de-la-france-estime-erdogan-1057753173.html>
48. 2023/01/24
<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230124/retrait-du-burkina-la-france-derange-notre-marche-triomphe-vers-lhorizon-du-bonheur-1057697079.html>
49. 2023/01/23

<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230123/aeronefs-russes-livres-a-bamako-un-geste-symbolique-sur-fond-de-declin-de-l'influence-francaise-1057688174.html>

50. 2023/01/2022

<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230122/la-presence-militaire-francaise-en-afrique-va-davantage-diminuer-selon-un-ancien-diplomate-russe-1057674527.html>

51. 2023/01/11

<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20230111/les-soldats-francais-de-barkhane-accuses-davoir-detenu-des-maliens-dans-une-prison-secrete-1057561775.html>

52. 2022/12/22

<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20221222/le-ministre-ivoirien-de-la-defense-a-bamako-pour-faire-liberer-ses-soldats-1057356841.html>

53. 2022/11/30

<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20221130/des-francais-arretes-au-mali-bamako-evoque-des-criminels-1057129851.html>

54. 2022/11/26

<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20221126/la-russie-accuse-leurope-de-soutenir-le-neonazisme-dans-le-monde-1057096360.html>

55. 2022/11/23

<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20221123/ong-francaises-interdites-au-mali-le-mal-de-la-france-en-afrique-na-meme-pas-encore-commence-1057070269.html>

56. 2022/11/21

<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20221121/le-mali-interdit-les-activites-des-ong-financees-par-la-france-1057051582.html>

57. 2022/11/20

<https://fr.sputniknews.africa/20221120/paris-necarte-pas-un-depart-de-ses-forces-speciales-du-burkina-faso-1057034489.html>

58. 2022/11/19

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Summary

Disinformation and Propaganda in Proxy Warfare Anatomy: An Analysis of Russian Narratives in Francophone African Countries

The Master's thesis investigates how Russia uses disinformation to influence and weaponize societies not only in the Sahel region, specifically in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and the Central African Republic but also by proxy in France and the West. The study examines the narratives promoted by Russian state media, such as "RT France" and "Sputnik Afrique", and the way they become modern proxy warfare actors. By analysing 537 articles published between 2022 and 2024 through seven predefined frames, the research identifies 47 key narratives, later distilled into 10 meta-narratives: 1) France is responsible for destabilising the Sahel region; 2) France and Western countries depend on the African continent's resources; 3) France is a neo-colonialist country; 4) French media are not credible and objective; 5) The Sahel countries are sovereign decision-makers; 6) The Sahel countries are in an equal partnership with Russia; 7) The Sahel countries must separate themselves from France's grip; 8) Russia is a guarantor of liberty and sovereignty; 9) Russia is a reliable economic, diplomatic, political and military ally and 10) Wagner PMC is not subordinated to the Kremlin.

The meta-narratives crafted by Russian media blame France and Western powers for regional issues in the Sahel while promoting the sovereignty and autonomy of Sahel countries. These narratives reflect the complexities of post-colonial relationships and the enduring impact of colonial legacies, questioning the credibility of French media and accusing the West of failing to uphold democratic values. Russian media portray France and Western countries as conflict instigators and manipulators of information, downplaying Russian involvement and highlighting Russian support as beneficial. They emphasize the evolving economic ties between African nations and Russia, expose resource exploitation by France and the West, and depict Russia as a benevolent saviour providing security, stability, and humanitarian aid, thereby shaping public perception against France.

The study concludes that the spread of disinformation and propaganda by the Kremlin can effectively weaponize societies. When combined with other proxy instruments and actors, this strategy forms the foundation of modern proxy warfare, where media serve as both instruments and actors. This approach has broader implications for other societies, showcasing the power of media in shaping perceptions and influencing geopolitical dynamics.

Santrauka

Dezinformacija ir propaganda Proxy karų anatomijoje: Rusijos naratyvų analizė frankofoniškose Afrikos šalyse

Šiame Magistriniame darbe tirama, kaip Rusija naudoja dezinformaciją siekiant instrumentalizuoti ne tik Sahelio šalių (Burkina Faso, Nigerio, Malio bei Centrinės Afrikos Respublikos), bet ir netiesiogiai Prancūzijos bei Vakarų visuomenes. Tyrime nagrinėjami Rusijos propagandinės žiniasklaidos „RT France“ ir „Sputnik Afrique“ svetainėse skleidžiami naratyvai bei jų vaidmuo moderniam proxy kare.

Analizuojant 537 straipsnius, publikuotus tarp 2022-2024 m., per septynių iš anksto nustatytų rėmų prizmę, buvo išskirti 47 naratyvai, vėliau suskirstyti į 10 meta-naratyvus: 1) Prancūzija yra atsakinga už Sahelio regiono destabilizaciją; 2) Prancūzija ir Vakarų šalys yra priklausomos nuo Afrikos žemyno išteklių; 3) Prancūzija yra neokolonijinė valstybė; 4) Prancūzijos žiniasklaida nėra patikima ir objektyvi; 5) Sahelio šalys yra suverenių sprendimų priėmėjos; 6) Sahelio šalys yra lygiaverčios partnerės su Rusija; 7) Sahelio šalys turi atsiskirti nuo Prancūzijos įtakos; 8) Rusija yra laisvės ir suvereniteto garantas; 9) Rusija yra patikimas ekonominis, diplomatinis, politinis ir karinis sąjungininkas; 10) Wagner PMC nėra pavaldus Kremlui.

Šie meta-naratyvai, kuriuos sukūrė Rusijos žiniasklaida, kaltina Prancūziją ir Vakarų valstybes dėl regioninių problemų Sahelyje, tuo pačiu tvirtindami Sahelio šalių suverenitetą ir autonomiją. Taip pat, atspindi postkolonijinių santykių sudėtingumą ir kolonijinio palikimo poveikį Afrikos tautų suvokimui apie save ir buvusius kolonizatorius. Naratyvai iškelia abejones dėl Prancūzijos žiniasklaidos patikimumo ir objektyvumo, kaltindami Vakarų nesugebėjimu laikytis demokratiškas vertybių. Rusijos žiniasklaida vaizduoja Prancūziją ir Vakarų šalis kaip konfliktų kurstytojus, manipuliuojančiais informacija, o apie Rusijos dalyvavimą regione pabrėžia jos paramos naudą. Jie taip pat pabrėžia besikeičiančius ekonominius ryšius tarp Afrikos šalių ir Rusijos, atskleidžia Prancūzijos ir Vakarų šalių išteklių išnaudojimą, ir vaizduoja Rusiją kaip geranorišką gelbėtoją, teikiančią saugumą, stabilumą ir humanitarinę pagalbą, taip formuodami neigiamą viešąją nuomonę apie Prancūziją.

Tyrimo išvadose vaizduojama, kad Kremliaus skleidžiama dezinformacija ir propaganda gali veiksmingai instrumentalizuoti visuomenes. Kartu su kitais proxy karo instrumentais ir veikėjais ši strategija sudaro šiuolaikinio proxy karo pagrindą, kur žiniasklaida veikia tiek kaip instrumentai, tiek kaip veikėjai. Šis požiūris turi platesnių pasekmių kitoms visuomenėms, parodant žiniasklaidos galią formuoti nuomones ir daryti įtaką geopolitinei dinamikai.