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The construction of Moroccan state authorship in the Pegasus controversy (2021–2026): Disinformation and propaganda in Forbidden Stories' investigative-journalistic order of discourse

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ABSTRACT

Disinformation can pose a threat to national security when accusations against state security institutions are presented as established investigative findings without sufficient verification, potentially undermining institutional legitimacy, public trust and interstate relations. The Pegasus controversy raises this problem through the attribution of surveillance operations to Moroccan security institutions. This study examines Forbidden Stories' investigative-journalistic order of discourse in relation to Citizen Lab's scientific research and Amnesty International's forensic and human-rights discourse, following the subsequent circulation of the accusations into journalistic and Algerian diplomatic discourse. A longitudinal investigation of publications from 2018 to 2026 traces the historical emergence and development of a hybrid discursive formation, from Citizen Lab's initial geographical inferences and Amnesty International's subsequent accusations to the coordinated July 2021 Pegasus Project and Forbidden Stories' renewed investigation in July 2026. The findings identify disinformation by design where categorical assertions of Moroccan institutional authorship exceed what the published investigative procedures establish concerning suspected geographical activity, telephone-number selection, confirmed Pegasus infections and NSO customer identity. Disinformation by omission concerns the exclusion of relevant speech acts, judicial circumstances and investigative limitations. Forensic findings are presented alongside journalists' symbolic biographies, accounts of persecution and negative moral evaluations. The relationship between conceptual and affective meaning, reinforced by the symbolic capital of participating institutions, contributes to the accusation's persuasive coherence. The coordinated July 2021 publications, subsequent journalistic reaffirmation and later use of the accusation in Algerian diplomatic discourse demonstrate how disinformation as process enters the organized persuasive communication examined as propaganda. The additional testimony and technical findings published in July 2026 do not retrospectively establish that the investigations published in 2021 had demonstrated Moroccan institutional authorship. Drawing on Critical Discourse Studies, Bakhtin's theory of speech genres and discourse-immanent critique, the study examines these developments through intertextuality, interdiscursivity, symbolic capital, sedimentation and naturalization. It contributes to Critical Discourse Studies by developing interdiscursive generativity to explain how relations among different orders of discourse produce further representations and practices. Through discourse-immanent critique, the paper also identifies genre distortion in the discrepancy between Forbidden Stories' designation of its publications as 'investigative journalism' and the investigative practices described in those publications when assessed against the methodological guidelines, professional standards and ethical requirements governing that journalistic genre.

KEYWORDS

Pegasus - Forbidden Stories - Investigative Journalism - Critical Discourse Studies – Disinformation – Propaganda - Interdiscursive Generativity - Genre Distortion.

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1. Introduction

Recent research in security studies has increasingly examined "the nexus forged between disinformation and national security, as well as its many facets" (Arcos et al., 2024, p. 1). This research seeks to provide decision-makers, particularly those involved in

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strengthening societal resilience, with knowledge of the threats posed by disinformation (see Arcos et al., 2024). These threats may also be considered in relation to other forms of subversion, particularly ideological subversion, whose "core strength […] lies on its ability to shape perceptions, values, and loyalties" (Gvineria, 2025). These concerns become particularly significant when allegations target the conduct of state security institutions. In this context, accusations that state security institutions conduct unlawful digital surveillance can pose a security threat when the alleged conduct is presented as an established investigative finding without sufficient verification. Such accusations can call into question the legitimacy and professional competence of the institutions concerned, undermine public trust in their activities, and strain interstate relations.

The possible consequences for interstate relations also raise the question of the scope of disinformation as a security threat. Hellman (2024, p. 3) argues that "[d]isinformation does not target geographical borders or national sovereignty, but liberal democratic principles such as governance and the rule of law, as well as institutions, elections, and public trust in the government." While this argument rightly identifies the vulnerability of democratic governance, institutional legitimacy and public trust to disinformation, we reject its categorical exclusion of geographical borders and national sovereignty from its potential targets. Within the perspective of security studies, disinformation must also be examined as an instrument of hybrid warfare directed at territorial integrity, sovereignty and the authority of states. We consider it a particularly consequential instrument because of its viral speed and its capacity to shape the interpretation of events, institutions and political claims across different communicative settings.

The question of Moroccan sovereignty over the Sahara provides one example of how territorial disputes become targets of disinformation campaigns, fabricated news and hate speech. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2797, adopted on 31 October 2025 (United Nations Security Council, 2025), provides a diplomatic reference point for this broader geopolitical context, rather than a second case study. Although the Moroccan Sahara dispute and the attribution of Pegasus operations to Moroccan security institutions belong to different fields of political and communicative activity, their relationship becomes relevant to the present study when the Pegasus allegations subsequently enter the Algerian diplomatic order of discourse. The Algerian case thus provides a basis for examining how distinct political issues converge within representations of Morocco, its sovereignty and its core institutions, without necessarily constituting a single campaign or serving the same immediate purpose.

The subsequent use of the Pegasus allegations in Algerian diplomatic discourse also draws attention to the associations established between pieces of information and the interpretations advanced through them. Hellman's (2024, p. 21) observation that deception may reside in "the structure of the messages, or the associations made between pieces of information" is particularly relevant here. The production of discourse in geopolitical contexts is not always transparent: what is explicitly stated, what remains unsaid, and what is concealed or backgrounded are structural dimensions of the discursive process through which events are represented, relations between pieces of information are organized, and particular interpretations are advanced. The said and the unsaid must therefore be examined in relation to the selection and organization of information, the presuppositions underlying particular representations, and the relations between the different orders of discourse (see Foucault, 1971) through which geopolitical claims acquire meaning and circulate. In allegations of state-directed spyware operations, confirmation of a technical event does not, by itself, identify the institution responsible for it. The present study consequently examines how Forbidden Stories' investigative-journalistic order of discourse represents Moroccan security institutions as directing Pegasus operations, including the propositions advanced, the connections established between them, and the investigative questions that remain unanswered.

The examination of this attribution also raises the question of the institutional authority under which Forbidden Stories presents its investigative findings. Vos (2013, p. 39, as cited in Vos & Thomas, 2018, p. 2) defines institutions as "a set of rules that take shape and gain legitimacy over time." Vos and Thomas (2018, p. 3) further explain that "[t]he institutional collectivity of journalists links disparate newsworkers into a shared frame of reference around what journalism is and how it should be practiced." They consequently identify discourse as central to journalistic authority and institutional change or continuity. Drawing on Schudson (2001), they also explain that "[i]t is through discourse that practices gain legitimacy by becoming attached to a language of virtue associated with journalism's institutional mission, elevating them beyond practices and into norms" (Vos & Thomas, 2018, p. 3). These arguments direct attention to the emergence and historical development of Forbidden Stories' investigative-journalistic order of discourse within the hybrid discursive formation, particularly the relationship between its representations of investigative practice, the professional norms of investigative journalism and the institutional authority claimed for those practices.

Forbidden Stories presents its Pegasus publications as investigative journalism, invoking the professional identity and authority associated with that genre. This designation does not, however, demonstrate that the findings establish every accusation advanced within the publications. Investigative journalism requires the examination of hypotheses, verification, independent assessment of sources, consideration of competing explanations, and accuracy and fairness in presenting findings (Canadian Association of Journalists, 2004; Hunter et al., 2011; ProPublica, n.d.). These requirements become decisive where a confirmed infection, suspected geographical activity, the inferred identity of an NSO Group customer and the institution allegedly directing a particular operation appear within the same account. Each concerns a different investigative proposition. The question is whether the published investigation supports the alleged institutional authorship, or whether the certainty attached to a technical finding is extended to an accusation that requires further verification and forensic evidence.

The attribution of Pegasus operations to Moroccan state institutions, including the claim that Morocco was an NSO Group customer, developed through publications by institutions operating in distinct professional domains. Citizen Lab's scientific investigations, Amnesty International's forensic and human-rights reports, and the coordinated investigative-journalistic discourse of Forbidden Stories and its partners contributed to the historical development of the hybrid discursive formation (Citizen Lab, 2021; Marczak et al., 2018, p. 10; Richard & Rigaud, 2021a). Forbidden Stories' investigative-journalistic order of discourse is the principal object of examination. The analysis traces the emergence of this discursive formation through the earlier scientific and forensic investigations and examines their subsequent intertextual and interdiscursive relations with Forbidden Stories' publications. Within the Pegasus Project, Amnesty International's Security Lab participated through forensic investigation, while Forbidden Stories coordinated the participating newsrooms. As accusations that Moroccan security institutions conducted Pegasus operations circulated across national boundaries and entered further journalistic and diplomatic orders of discourse, their development acquired wider political and security significance.

Critical Discourse Studies permits the examination of how linguistic choices and the compositional organization of investigative reports construct the attribution of Pegasus operations to Moroccan security institutions. The analysis also follows how earlier findings and interpretations are reproduced or transformed across orders of discourse and how their circulation contributes to subsequent accusations and institutional practices. Within these investigative reports, forensic descriptions may co-occur with representations of journalists, allegations of repression and moral evaluations in the immediate co-text. The different propositions brought into relation within these passages must nevertheless be examined in light of the investigative procedures presented in their support.

The examination of these discursive practices in relation to the professional requirements of investigative journalism draws on discourse-immanent critique (see Reisigl & Wodak, 2009). This critical examination compares the methods and conclusions published by Forbidden Stories and the newsrooms participating in the Pegasus Project with the ethical standards and methodological requirements of investigative journalism. These standards apply throughout the investigative process, from the examination of the initial hypothesis to the testing and reassessment of successive hypotheses arising from further findings, before the resulting conclusions are presented as established.

The linguistic and professional examination of these publications, together with the historical analysis of their circulation and subsequent uses, is guided by two research questions. RQ1 asks: To what extent, and through which investigative and discursive mechanisms, does the attribution of Pegasus operations to Moroccan state institutions constitute disinformation by design, disinformation by omission and disinformation as process, particularly through the movement from forensic findings to categorical accusations and the representation of the persons and events associated with those accusations? RQ2 asks: To what extent do the coordinated production, publication, circulation and amplification of these representations meet the conditions for propaganda, and how do their subsequent uses in journalistic, institutional and diplomatic discourse contribute to the political and security significance of the accusations?

2. Theoretical and conceptual frameworks

2.1. Theoretical Framework

2.1.1. Critical Discourse Studies, intertextuality, interdiscursivity and hybridity

Critical Discourse Studies examines linguistic choices in relation to the production, distribution and social use of discourse. Bakhtin (1986) relates the thematic, linguistic and compositional characteristics of utterances to the conditions and purposes of particular spheres of human activity. Fairclough (1992b, p. 269) identifies discourse practice with "the practices of producing, distributing, and consuming texts". These perspectives bring the linguistic and compositional characteristics of utterances into relation with the institutional practices through which discourse is produced and subsequently circulated. Van Leeuwen's (1996, 2008) account of inclusion, exclusion and the representation of social actors further informs the analysis of how persons, institutions and social activities are represented, including the participants and circumstances left outside a particular representation.

Interdiscursivity concerns relations among different orders of discourse within a discursive formation (Fairclough, 1992a, 1992b; see also Foucault, 1969/1989). These relations cannot be reduced to the recurrence of earlier statements, since scientific inquiry, human-rights advocacy and investigative journalism participate in distinct institutional practices while their publications may become interrelated. Mäntynen and Shore (2014, p. 738) characterize hybridity as "an umbrella term for all kinds of blending, mixing, and combining that occur in genres and texts". Hybridity therefore refers here to the combination of discourses or generic conventions within particular texts, not simply to relations among institutions or the circulation of an accusation between them.

The critical examination of these discursive relations also requires explicit criteria for evaluating the institutions and practices under investigation. Referring to the rationale of critical research, van Dijk (2008, p. 8) writes: "Such research critically analyses what according to specific social norms and values is wrong, illegitimate, misguided or bad." Such interpretations cannot follow from the identification of particular lexical or grammatical choices alone. They require examination of the social practices in which discourse is produced and the professional or institutional standards against which those practices can be assessed.

Mutua (1996) directs this critical concern towards the human-rights movement itself. He examines the moral appeal of human-rights discourse and the ideological commitments that may remain obscured by that appeal. In this regard, he observes that "the

discourse's major authors present it as non-ideological" (Mutua, 1996, p. 591). His critique concerns the relationship between the political and moral commitments informing human-rights discourse and the manner in which its institutional authors present those commitments as impartial and independent of ideology. This perspective informs the subsequent examination of Amnesty International's institutional self-representation, particularly the relationship between forensic investigation, human-rights advocacy and claims to impartiality.

Reisigl and Wodak (2009, p. 88, original emphasis) distinguish two forms of critique. They explain that "[t]ext or discourse-immanent critique aims at discovering inconsistencies, self-contradictions, paradoxes and dilemmas in the text-internal or discourse-internal structures." They further state that "[s]ocio-diagnostic critique is concerned with demystifying the – manifest or latent – persuasive or 'manipulative' character of discursive practices." These distinctions inform the examination of contradictions within published investigations and the persuasive or manipulative character of the discursive practices through which institutional authority and claims to knowledge are communicated. The ethical and methodological requirements of investigative journalism provide the professional standards against which the investigative practices supporting those claims are critically examined.

2.1.2. Speech genres and the investigative-journalism genre

Bakhtin (1986) emphasizes the diversity of speech genres and their development within the different spheres of human activity:

"The wealth and diversity of speech genres are boundless because the various possibilities of human activity are inexhaustible, and because each sphere of activity contains an entire repertoire of speech genres that differentiate and grow as the particular sphere develops and becomes more complex. Special emphasis should be placed on the extreme heterogeneity of speech genres" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 60, original emphasis).

His theory of speech genres relates communicative activities within particular social spheres to the development of the genres through which these activities are carried out. In their examination of journalistic genres, Herrero-Diz et al. (2024, p. 1638) observe that "[j]ournalistic genres are linguistic tools and narrative strategies that combine several rules, codes, and regulations agreed on and shared." In the case of Forbidden Stories' investigations, this relationship directs attention to how information is investigated, verified and presented. The designation 'investigative report' does not, by itself, establish that a publication meets the requirements of investigative journalism. Its professional character must also be examined through the investigative procedures employed and the linguistic and compositional conventions of its reports.

Investigative journalism is both a method of inquiry governed by ethical and professional standards and a journalistic genre with conventions for organizing the investigation and presenting its findings. These conventions concern the order in which evidence is presented, the attribution of claims to sources, the expression of uncertainty or certainty, the representation of actors, and the linguistic and compositional choices through which findings are linked to conclusions about responsibility. In their examination of debunking news, Herrero-Diz et al. (2024, p. 1645) distinguish "Display evidence," "Verification results," and "Verdict (and labeling)" as components of its writing structure. Although this structure belongs to a different journalistic genre, the distinction between the presentation of evidence, the verification reported and the conclusions communicated is relevant to the examination of investigative journalism. Hunter et al. (2011) require journalists to begin with a provisional hypothesis, seek material that may disprove it and examine the coherence of the completed account. Al Shawabkeh and Khalil (2020) distinguish technical examination from the further investigative work necessary to identify the actor responsible for an event. Verification of a technical occurrence does not, by itself, establish who was responsible for it.

The professional practice also requires independence from sources' interests, critical examination of testimony, corroboration and attention to materially important circumstances (Canadian Association of Journalists, 2004; Environmental Justice Foundation & Tempo Institute, n.d.; ProPublica, n.d.). The journalist must distinguish what sources allege, what an investigation establishes and what remains unverified. The questions of 'Who,' 'What,' 'When,' 'Where,' 'How' and 'Why' concern not only the event described but also its participants, the circumstances of the testimony and the investigative basis for identifying the actor responsible. These obligations provide criteria for assessing whether published conclusions correspond to the methods, findings and verification procedures made available to readers.

Van Dijk (2008, p. 216) distinguishes "adequate information and persuasion" from manipulation "by omitting very important information, by lying or distorting the facts". He relates this distinction to the professional ethical standards of journalism. The present inquiry accordingly examines how scientific findings, human-rights evaluations and journalistic assertions are related within individual publications, distinguishing what was observed, what a witness stated, what investigators verified and what remains an interpretation. Where materially important circumstances are omitted, or findings regarding one proposition are presented as confirmation of another, the linguistic and compositional organization of the report may direct readers towards an accusation without making its investigative justification sufficiently clear.

The relationship between the genre of investigative journalism claimed by a publication and its investigative practices is particularly important where a publication assigns responsibility for alleged unlawful surveillance to an identifiable institution. Bourdieu's (1991) examination of the value attributed to utterances within linguistic markets helps explain how institutional prestige and professional standing function as symbolic resources contributing to the authority attributed to discourse. Vos and Thomas (2018, p. 2) describe journalism as "a belief system" expressed through "metajournalistic discourse that polices the institution to safeguard

its authority and is activated in times of institutional strain." Their account helps frame the public statements through which Forbidden Stories describes its mission and working methods; it does not determine whether the accusations in its reports are supported by the evidence presented. Scientific expertise, professional reputation or a declared commitment to human rights cannot substitute for the investigative work required to establish the responsible actor. Discourse-immanent critique makes the requirements of the professional practice itself criteria for examining discrepancies between the authority claimed by an investigation and the conclusions advanced through its published discourse.

2.1.3. Historical emergence, sedimentation and naturalization

Hopper (2014), drawing on Clifford's account of culture as "temporal, emergent, and disputed" (Clifford, 1986, p. 19, as cited in Hopper, 2014, p. 144), describes grammar as "always deferred, always in a process but never arriving, and therefore emergent". His discussion concerns grammar; the present study draws from this account the emphasis on historical constitution to examine the development of a discursive formation through successive and interrelated institutional practices. Emergence does not require a completed or unchanging formation; it permits the examination of how earlier propositions are taken up, disputed and transformed through their subsequent use.

Laclau (1990, p. 34) examines how the circumstances in which a proposition was established can disappear as that proposition becomes taken for granted: "Husserl called the routinization and forgetting of origins 'sedimentation', and the recovery of the 'constitutive' activity of thought 'reactivation'". Sedimentation concerns the relative stabilization of discursive representations through recurrent recontextualization within and across orders of discourse, whereby earlier propositions acquire durability and become available for subsequent interpretations and discursive practices. As these representations are repeatedly reproduced and recontextualized, the conditions under which they were originally produced may become less visible. In this regard, Laclau (1990, p. 34) draws on Husserl's argument that "the practice of any scientific discipline entails a routinization in which the results of previous scientific investigation tend to be taken for granted and reduced to a simple manipulation, with the result that the original intuition which gave rise to them is completely forgotten."

Naturalization concerns a further development in which historically and ideologically constituted ways of representing social activities come to appear natural and legitimate within an institutional order of discourse. Fairclough (2015) examines how a dominant discourse type may cease to be perceived as one possible interpretation among others and acquire the appearance of neutrality as its ideological character becomes less visible. Fairclough (2015, p. 113, original emphasis) explains this process when he argues that " if a discourse type so dominates an institution that dominated types are more or less entirely suppressed or contained, then it will cease to be seen as arbitrary (in the sense of being one among several possible ways of 'seeing' things) and will come to be seen as natural, and legitimate because it is simply the way of conducting oneself." He refers to this as "the naturalization of a discourse type", describing naturalization as "the royal road to common sense" (p. 113). Unlike sedimentation, which concerns the relative stabilization of representations, naturalization concerns their treatment as legitimate and apparently established ways of understanding social activities.

Polyzou (2015) distinguishes knowledge actually shared from beliefs presented as given and explains how presupposition places propositions in the background of discourse, without establishing that readers already know or accept them. Presupposition also concerns the interpretive activity invited of readers, who may draw upon knowledge and representations previously encountered through everyday conversation, social media, news discourse and other forms of institutional communication. Such knowledge is historically and socially constituted. Through recurrent circulation and recontextualization, particular representations may acquire relative stability and become familiar points of reference for understanding subsequent utterances. Through presupposition, an earlier representation may enter subsequent discourse as established background knowledge, allowing further propositions to proceed from it without reconsidering the circumstances under which it was originally advanced. This development may be reinforced where competing representations are excluded, marginalized or accorded less institutional authority. Presupposition, categorical modality and the backgrounding of information can then permit subsequent discourse to proceed from representations whose historical origins and initial justification are no longer made explicit. Naturalization does not require the complete absence of counter-discourse, nor can it be established through recurrence alone. Its critical examination concerns whether particular representations become available as apparently established knowledge and function as taken-for-granted premises for further interpretations, accusations and institutional practices.

2.1.4. Social-actor representation, conceptual and affective meaning, discourse comprehension and evaluation

Van Leeuwen's (1996, 2008) examination of the representation of social actors, particularly inclusion and exclusion, provides the theoretical basis for analyzing how journalists, Moroccan security institutions and their associated activities are represented across the scientific, human-rights and investigative-journalistic orders of discourse. Particular attention is given to the construction of symbolic biographies through selected professional activities, judicial experiences and allegations of persecution, including the omission of participants and circumstances necessary for understanding the events represented.

The representation of social actors also raises the question of how readers interpret the activities and circumstances presented within discourse. Brown and Yule's (1983, p. 66) discussion of Popper's 'need to find regularities' and Bartlett's 'effort after meaning,' which "constitute a powerful expectation in human beings that what is said or written will make sense in the context in which it appears," informs the examination of how different forms of knowledge shape the boundaries of discourse comprehension and

interpretation. Van Cuilenburg et al.'s (1986) distinction between empirical, causal, and evaluative propositions in journalistic discourse provides a further basis for examining the relationships between technical findings, the attribution of responsibility for surveillance operations, and moral judgments regarding the institutions represented.

The co-occurrence of different genres of discourse, each with its own knowledge content, is particularly significant when a verified technical occurrence, an explanation of its alleged institutional authorship, and a negative evaluation of state security practices are presented within the same account, even though these propositions do not necessarily rest on the same investigative findings. White's (2006) examination of evaluation and authorial endorsement further informs the analysis of how moral judgments are placed alongside forensic findings and how the authors of investigative publications may rely on discursive strategies built around an unresolved allegation, initially attributed to other sources, to present it as an established investigative finding.

2.1.5. Persuasive argumentation, presupposition and critical interpretation

Nettel and Roque (2012) examine persuasive argumentation and the enthymeme, in which an unstated premise connects an expressed proposition with the conclusion it invites. Their discussion offers a basis for examining how an interpretation can become persuasive through a premise that is not independently demonstrated within the published argument. Narrative coherence and the moral plausibility of a proposed explanation must therefore remain analytically distinct from the investigative procedures required to establish the actor responsible for an event.

In argumentative analysis, presupposition is examined where an earlier relationship enters a new accusation as already established (Polyzou, 2015). The analysis compares that asserted premise with the investigative findings originally advanced to support it. These theoretical perspectives provide the basis for the conceptual framework developed in the following section, which specifies how interdiscursive generativity, institutional authorship, disinformation, propaganda, sedimentation and naturalization are examined in the selected publications.

Given the time and space constraints of the present study, an analysis extending from lexicogrammatical choices through sequences of propositions to the organization of each participating order of discourse lies beyond its scope. The theoretical resources are therefore applied selectively to passages directly relevant to the two research questions, particularly the attribution of institutional authorship and the representation of the persons and events associated with it, while examining selected linguistic and compositional practices in the historical development of the accusations.

2.2. Conceptual Framework

2.2.1. Interdiscursive generativity, symbolic capital and the development of the discursive formation

The present study extends the examination of intertextual and interdiscursive relations to the historical processes of sedimentation and naturalization by operationalizing interdiscursive generativity as a conceptual contribution to Critical Discourse Studies. Fairclough's examination of news discourse provides an important theoretical starting point. He examines news discourse "from the perspective of discourse practice, and more specifically from the perspective of 'discourse process' - in terms of the ways in which genres and discourses available within the repertoires of orders of discourse are drawn upon and combined in producing and consuming texts, and the ways in which texts transform and embed other texts which are in chain relationships with them" (Fairclough, 1995, p. 75).

Interdiscursive generativity refers to the capacity of relations among different orders of discourse to generate further representations and practices. Scientific findings, forensic interpretations and testimony are reproduced or transformed, associated with symbolic biographies and moral evaluations, and presented under the symbolic capital of the institutions from which they originate. Tracing this process requires genealogical examination of the emergent discursive formation and deconstruction of the relations among its constituent orders of discourse.

Symbolic capital contributes to this process beyond the reproduction and transformation of earlier utterances. The prestige and honour associated with an institution, together with its awards and professional status, travel across orders of discourse alongside investigative findings, claims to scientific authority and ideological claims advanced in the name of human rights, contributing to the credibility attributed to subsequent representations and accusations. Fairclough's (1992a) examination of the reproduction and transformation of discourse provides a theoretical basis for understanding these relations. Mutua's (1996) critique of the non-ideological representation of human-rights discourse is relevant to the legitimacy claimed for these ideological evaluations as they enter other orders of discourse.

In the Pegasus controversy, the scientific reputation of Citizen Lab, Amnesty International's prominence in human-rights advocacy and the journalistic prestige of Forbidden Stories contribute to the authority attributed to forensic interpretations, testimonial utterances, symbolic biographies and moral evaluations as they move among the participating orders of discourse. In this historical development, interdiscursive generativity is examined through the production and reproduction of accusations that Moroccan security institutions conducted Pegasus operations, the increasing certainty with which responsibility for these operations and activities is attributed to them, and the subsequent amplification of those accusations in journalistic, institutional and diplomatic discourse.

The principal question is therefore not merely how Citizen Lab's scientific findings enter Amnesty International's forensic and human-rights discourse and subsequently the investigative-journalistic order of discourse of Forbidden Stories and its partners.

The critical examination concerns what these interdiscursive relations generate when the authorship of Pegasus operations and activities, which the findings presented have not conclusively established, becomes the subject of categorical assertions that Moroccan security institutions directed Pegasus operations. The analysis must address both the discursive relations through which those assertions acquire authority and the investigative procedures required to establish the institution responsible.

2.2.2. The discursive construction of institutional authorship

The study examines how Pegasus operations and activities are attributed to Moroccan security institutions through actor designation, grammatical agency, modality, presupposition, evaluation and authorial endorsement. The changing degrees of certainty attached to such accusations are examined across the interrelated scientific, human-rights and investigative-journalistic orders of discourse, rather than treating their respective publications as independent demonstrations of the same proposition.

This examination distinguishes findings regarding spyware activity from propositions assigning responsibility for that activity. The identification of a Pegasus infection, the interpretation of technical indicators, an inferred relationship with an NSO Group customer and the identification of a particular state security institution do not necessarily establish the same proposition. A categorical statement of institutional authorship therefore requires findings and verification procedures capable of supporting that claim. Where a publication uses technical confirmation to support a broader accusation, the critical reading examines the scope of the confirmation, the relations presented between the findings and the accused institution, and the linguistic means through which the broader assertion is communicated.

The relationship between technical findings and accusations of institutional authorship must also be examined within the immediate co-text in which they appear. Technical interpretations may be presented alongside symbolic biographies and moral evaluations. The professional standing of journalists represented as victims, their judicial experiences and accounts of repression may lead readers to interpret the alleged surveillance as a continuation of earlier repression while leaving the identity of the institution directing a particular operation unresolved. Leech's (1981) distinction between conceptual and affective meaning, White's (2006) treatment of evaluation, and Brown and Yule's (1983) examination of discourse comprehension inform the analysis of this relationship. The critical question concerns how readers are invited to interpret an accusation through familiar social understandings of victimhood and repression when the technical procedures necessary for assessing the authorship claim require specialist knowledge or remain insufficiently explained.

The selection and exclusion of social actors, speech acts and circumstances provide the basis for examining how these symbolic biographies are constructed (van Leeuwen, 1996, 2008). Where judicial proceedings enter a narrative of repression, the examination considers whether the actions, participants and allegations necessary for understanding the represented event have been included. The same attention to selection and exclusion applies to testimonial utterances and claims regarding the conduct of Moroccan security institutions. Their significance is assessed according to the proposition each source establishes, independently of the moral force contributed by its position in the wider discourse.

2.2.3. Discourse-immanent critique and disinformation by design, omission and process

The paper's critical perspective focuses not only on the institutions advancing the accusations but also on how representations of Moroccan security institutions and claims regarding their authorship of Pegasus operations and activities are produced and reproduced within Forbidden Stories' investigative-journalistic order of discourse. Discourse-immanent critique compares the procedures and conclusions made available in the published investigations with the ethical standards and methodological requirements of investigative journalism. The comparison addresses hypothesis testing, critical examination of testimony, corroboration, relevant circumstances and the distinction between a technical finding and an accusation that a particular state institution directed surveillance operations. An institution's commitment to human rights cannot substitute for the investigative findings required to establish which state security institutions were responsible for the operations under examination.

In the present study, "disinformation by design" is distinguished from the conception advanced by Krafft and Donovan (2020). The concept is operationalized to examine instances in which the composition, syntax and argumentative progression of a published investigation present Moroccan institutional authorship as established, although the investigative procedures and findings made public do not demonstrate that authorship. Its identification therefore requires a comparison between the proposition supported by the reported investigation and the degree of certainty, agency and responsibility assigned in the published accusation.

Grammatical agency, modality, presupposition, authorial endorsement and the co-occurrence of forensic interpretations with symbolic biographies and moral evaluations are examined as discursive practices through which the accusation acquires greater certainty than the investigation has established. The professional comparison is undertaken alongside the linguistic examination, making the discrepancy between the published findings and the institutional accusation central to the identification of disinformation by design.

Disinformation by omission concerns the exclusion of speech acts, social actors, investigative limitations, reported procedures or circumstances materially necessary for understanding an event or assessing an accusation. In the present inquiry, the examination addresses the representation of journalists' judicial experiences and the selection of circumstances through which their symbolic biographies are constructed, as well as omitted geographical and methodological limitations and unexplained relationships among investigative procedures. The critical examination compares the published narrative with relevant alternative accounts and available

information. The question is whether these exclusions alter the representation of an event or prevent readers from assessing whether the published investigation supports an accusation of persecution, repression or surveillance by a named institution.

Disinformation as process concerns the subsequent circulation, reaffirmation and institutional use of a misleading attribution already examined through the investigative and linguistic comparison. The historical examination follows how earlier propositions enter subsequent discourse, acquire relative stability and become available as apparently established knowledge, while interdiscursive relations generate further representations and practices. New testimony, technical material or documentary findings introduced in a subsequent investigation must be examined within their own historical circumstances and cannot retrospectively establish that an earlier investigation had demonstrated what its published procedures and findings did not establish at the time.

2.2.4. Propaganda, sedimentation and naturalization

Propaganda is examined through organized persuasive communication that promotes an attribution already found misleading through the critical examination of the published investigations. Hellman (2024) connects international news discourse with questions of disinformation and propaganda. The present study therefore examines coordinated journalistic production, simultaneous international publication, the reaffirmation of accusations by institutions with established public standing, and their subsequent use in journalistic, institutional and diplomatic discourse. Coordination and simultaneous publication are not treated as sufficient conditions for identifying propaganda. Rather, the critical examination considers these practices in relation to the content of the accusations, the investigative findings presented in their support, their persuasive construction and their subsequent institutional and political uses.

Sedimentation and naturalization are examined longitudinally through the circulation and reaffirmation of accusations in the public sphere and across orders of discourse. The analysis traces sedimentation through the increasing durability of representations as they are repeatedly recontextualized and become available for further accusations and interpretations. Naturalization is examined where the attribution, or a broader negative representation of Moroccan security institutions, is treated as established background knowledge, permitting subsequent statements to proceed without reconsidering the historical circumstances and investigative findings on which it originally depended. Interdiscursive generativity concerns the further representations and practices arising through relations among orders of discourse and the symbolic capital associated with participating institutions. Sedimented representations may participate in these relations, but their prior stabilization is not a necessary condition of generativity.

The representations examined through sedimentation and naturalization are not confined to the proposition that Morocco conducted Pegasus operations. They also include the broader representation of Moroccan security institutions as agents of systematic surveillance and repression. The analysis therefore follows how accounts of particular surveillance activities, testimonial utterances, symbolic biographies and negative moral evaluations contribute to the development of that wider institutional image.

Across the selected historical periods, the analysis attends to both continuity and change. It examines how an earlier accusation is reproduced, intensified or contested, and whether its investigative origins become less visible through subsequent institutional use. Neither recurrence nor international circulation is sufficient by itself to establish naturalization. The question is whether later discourse proceeds from the earlier attribution, or the broader representation of Moroccan state power, without routinely re-examining the investigative findings and procedures on which it originally depended.

In the present study, Amnesty International's earlier assessments of Moroccan state institutions provide an evaluative setting for subsequent accusations of surveillance and repression, even where the investigative procedures regarding the authorship of particular Pegasus operations remain unresolved. The historical examination considers how these earlier representations are subsequently invoked through presupposition, symbolic biography and moral evaluation within investigative-journalistic discourse. Interdiscursive generativity extends this examination to the further representations and institutional practices arising through relations among the participating orders of discourse. Where these representations enter regional disputes and diplomatic exchanges, their significance also concerns the exercise of symbolic and institutional power through the authority attributed to earlier scientific, human-rights and journalistic discourse. Whether the representations have become naturalized, and whether they have acquired such institutional functions, must be established through their observable use in the relevant orders of discourse rather than inferred from their circulation alone.

The present study's focus on disinformation and propaganda in the attribution of Pegasus operations and activities to Moroccan security institutions necessarily limits the examination of these wider discursive practices. A more extensive critical investigation of how representations of Morocco are produced, reproduced and used within the respective orders of discourse of human-rights advocacy, diplomacy, international economic relations and trade therefore remains beyond the scope of this paper and may constitute the subject of a separate Critical Discourse Study.

2.2.5. The relationship between the research questions and investigative-journalistic genre

The conceptual framework connects the investigative and discursive examination to the paper's two research questions. For RQ1, the analysis follows the movement from forensic findings to categorical accusations that Moroccan security institutions conducted Pegasus surveillance operations, examining the roles of linguistic composition, symbolic biography and omission in producing misleading representations. The professional requirements of investigative journalism are compared with the claims and

procedures described in successive investigations. RQ2 concerns the coordinated production, publication, circulation and amplification of those representations and their subsequent significance within journalistic, institutional and diplomatic discourse.

The findings regarding investigative-journalistic genre follow from these two examinations rather than preceding them. Bakhtin's relationship among thematic content, linguistic style and compositional structure, together with the professional rules governing investigative journalism, provides the basis for examining the designation investigative report against the characteristics of the published discourse and the investigative practices it describes. The blending of forensic interpretation, human-rights evaluation and journalistic narration within a publication may constitute textual hybridity; the participation of different institutions in the controversy concerns interdiscursive relations.

Herrero-Diz et al. (2024, p. 1647), in their examination of debunking news as a journalistic genre, identify "concrete professional routines, a specific structure" among its defining characteristics. Although their study concerns a different journalistic genre, it draws attention to the relationship between the conventions of journalistic discourse and the professional practices associated with them. In the present study, genre distortion becomes a critical question where the investigative practices described in Forbidden Stories' publications are found to depart from the methodological guidelines, professional standards and ethical requirements governing the investigative journalism genre under which those publications are presented. The analysis therefore proceeds from specific cases of disinformation by design and omission to the subsequent circulation of those representations and the examination of organized propaganda, before considering the discrepancy between the claimed journalistic genre and the investigative-journalistic practices realized within Forbidden Stories' order of discourse.

3. Methodology

3.1. Corpus and historical boundaries

The investigation follows the attribution of Pegasus operations to Moroccan state and security institutions through Citizen Lab's scientific publications, Amnesty International's forensic and human-rights investigations, and the coordinated journalistic discourse of Forbidden Stories. The original publications form the principal corpus. Related news accounts and official statements are examined where they expose material exclusions, contest the attribution or show its subsequent political use. Professional investigative manuals and ethical standards provide the criteria for critically examining the publishers' investigative practices.

The documents are examined in the order of publication, rather than the dates of the events they retrospectively describe. Citizen Lab's 2018 investigation and Amnesty International's October 2019 and June 2020 reports form the antecedent period. The next period begins with the consortium's coordinated releases on 18 July 2021, followed by selected circulation in July–August 2021. The selected bilingual Forbidden Stories publication of 16 July 2026 is considered through a limited comparison because it revisits the original attribution while introducing new testimony, documents and technical findings. The October 2026 Amnesty investigation (Amnesty International, 2026) lies outside the detailed textual comparison.

The chronological comparison also requires distinguishing related publications from independent investigations and earlier findings from material published subsequently. The same report appearing in different languages is therefore compared as one publication rather than counted as independent. A March 2026 interview with Laurent Richard is used solely as retrospective testimony about the consortium's July 2021 publication arrangements (Press Room & Forbidden Stories, 2026, 21:44–22:16). Findings published in a later period cannot be treated as available to earlier investigations.

The publication history of two Amnesty International France articles requires particular attention. The article dated 18 July 2021 refers to Monday 19 July as "aujourd'hui"; the available version is therefore examined without assuming that every passage was present at its first publication (Amnesty International France, 2021). The French article about Omar Radi, initially dated 21 June 2020, explicitly indicates an update on 3 March 2022 (Amnesty International France, 2022). Its present text is not treated as an unchanged copy of the publication available in July 2021.

3.2. Analytical procedures

The professional comparison examines the relationship between the designation of the published account as 'investigative journalism' and the investigative practices described in support of its accusations. Drawing on the professional standards examined in Section 2.1.2, the analysis examines the authentication and corroboration of information, the critical assessment of sources, competing explanations, relevant omitted circumstances and the verification procedures presented for identifying Moroccan institutional authorship. It also considers the independence and scope of corroboration attributed to testimony or documents, the treatment of confidential sources and the opportunity given to accused parties to respond. Where a published investigative narrative represents a judicial or other social event, the analysis compares its selection and exclusion of participants, speech acts and circumstances with relevant documentary sources and publicly available accounts of that event. These comparisons establish which elements of the represented event are included or omitted and how their selection or exclusion contributes to the construction of symbolic biographies, representations of repression and accusations that Moroccan security institutions conducted Pegasus operations. Where the published accusation exceeds the findings described, the discrepancy is examined as disinformation by design; where material circumstances are excluded from the representation of an event, the critical examination addresses disinformation by omission.

The linguistic analysis examines how these discrepancies enter the publications through nomination and predication of Moroccan actors, grammatical agency, modality, presupposition, attributed voices, affirmative expressions of confirmation and evaluative choices (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009; White, 2006). The examination also follows the immediate co-text in which forensic descriptions are juxtaposed with selected representations of journalists' experiences and professional identities. Leech (1981), Brown and Yule (1983) and van Cuilenburg et al. (1986) guide the analysis of how meaning is constructed through the co-occurrence of empirical, causal and moral propositions. At the macrosemantic level, the study examines how forensic findings, testimony, symbolic biographies and moral evaluations are organized into a representation of Moroccan security institutions as directing Pegasus operations. At the macropragmatic level, it examines how the complete investigative account performs a macro speech act of accusation through this organization, rather than locating that act in an isolated sentence.

The historical inquiry compares the original propositions with their intertextual use in later publications and with the new discourse made possible by each institutional activity. It identifies changes in agency, certainty, moral evaluation and political function, as well as the persistence of earlier limitations. The analysis follows how the symbolic capital of scientific research, human-rights advocacy and journalism is mobilized in later publications to lend authority to earlier propositions, and how these interdiscursive relations contribute to further accusations and institutional practices. Sedimentation and naturalization are examined as longitudinal processes through both the repeated stabilization of representations and their treatment as established premises in later journalistic and diplomatic discourse, without inferring audience acceptance.

The linguistic and professional examinations are undertaken within the same case analysis. Once a published discrepancy is demonstrated, the discussion states the critical finding and explains how syntax, co-text, symbolic biography or source selection helps produce its persuasive force. The subsequent historical comparison examines disinformation as process and organized propaganda. Only after these findings are established does the study consider what they imply for the genre of investigative journalism claimed by the consortium and the investigative-journalistic practices visible in its publications.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Institutional self-representation, professional authority and the production of discourse

Are the scientific, technical and forensic capacities, human-rights commitments and public-policy purposes claimed by the institutions participating in the Pegasus controversy sufficient to take the attribution of Pegasus operations to Moroccan security institutions as established? How do these institutions publicly represent the knowledge they produce, the professional authority under which they operate and the purposes assigned to their investigations? These questions open a critical examination of institutional self-representation in relation to the emergence, development, evaluation and circulation of Moroccan state authorship. The statements of Citizen Lab, Amnesty International and Forbidden Stories are examined as claims made within institutional discourse, not as independent verification of the activities or responsibilities attributed to other actors. Their significance lies in the relationship between the capacities publicly claimed, the investigative work described and the authority attributed to propositions when they enter other orders of discourse.

The distinction between institutional self-representation and investigative practice finds further support in Hanitzsch and Vos (2017, p. 10), who explain that "what journalists do and what they say they do are not necessarily the same things." Their distinction between practiced and narrated journalistic roles is particularly relevant to Forbidden Stories' presentation of its professional identity and investigative activities. The institution's declared mission, its accounts of collaborative investigation and the professional authority invoked in its publications must therefore be distinguished from the procedures and findings presented in support of particular accusations. This distinction also directs attention to Citizen Lab's claims of scientific competence and independence and to Amnesty International's presentation of forensic investigation within its human-rights mission, without treating these institutions as though they performed identical professional functions. The comparison concerns institutional claims, published investigative procedures and the conclusions presented to readers, while recognizing that not every procedure undertaken may appear in the published account.

Citizen Lab identifies itself as a research unit at the University of Toronto's Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy. On its official website, it states: "Our interdisciplinary research team includes political scientists, digital security experts, data scientists, legal professionals, and computer scientists" (Citizen Lab, n.d.-a). The list of professional fields associates Citizen Lab with scientific inquiry and technical expertise, while its stated research mission includes threats to democracy, human rights and global security (Citizen Lab, n.d.-b). Citizen Lab further states that it "operates independent of government and corporate interests" and that it examines the ethical and legal implications of its projects (Citizen Lab, n.d.-b). Scientific competence, independence and research ethics thus characterize the institution's public identity and contribute to the authority attributed to its interpretations of surveillance activity. These declarations invoke expectations of impartial investigation and professional scrutiny, while the scope of a particular forensic examination or peer review must be determined from its reported procedures. They do not independently establish the identity of a Pegasus operator or the institution responsible for directing an attack.

Amnesty International includes "hackers" among the members of its Security Lab, presenting their expertise as part of its mission to protect civil society from unlawful digital surveillance. The designation invokes specialized technical competence, while the investigative methods employed in particular cases must be examined through the procedures described. The relevant questions concern authorization, the protection of information examined and the procedures through which technical findings were obtained

and verified. These questions arise from the professional and ethical commitments through which the organization presents its work. They become particularly significant when findings produced within the Security Lab enter Forbidden Stories' investigative-journalistic discourse as scientific support for accusations that Moroccan security institutions directed Pegasus surveillance operations.

The relationship between investigation and human rights advocacy is made explicit in Amnesty International's institutional discourse. The Security Lab states that its "research and investigations power our evidence-based campaigns and advocacy efforts" (Amnesty International Security Lab, n.d.). The organization thereby presents forensic investigation as contributing to campaigns against surveillance abuses and to demands for justice and accountability. The blending of forensic investigation and human-rights advocacy within Amnesty International's institutional discourse produces textual hybridity. This hybridity does not invalidate its technical findings; rather, it requires a critical distinction between what the published examination establishes, the human-rights evaluations attached to those findings and the institutional action advocated on their basis.

Mutua (1996) examines the contradiction between the ideological commitments of international human-rights organizations and their claims to impartiality and political neutrality. He writes that "[t]hey use a vocabulary that paints the movement as both impartial and the quintessence of human goodness" (p. 591). Examining the work of international human-rights NGOs, he further observes that "they nevertheless cast themselves as non-ideological" (p. 621). Mutua also identifies the separation of legal authority from political ideology in their institutional self-representation: "The human rights community has created a law-versus-politics dichotomy" (p. 623). His critique directs attention to the relationship between forensic investigation and human-rights advocacy within Amnesty International's Security Lab order of discourse. Such blending may blur the distinction between forensic findings, whose validity and scope depend on the investigative methods and material examined, and human-rights evaluations informed by political and moral values. The relevant question in the present corpus is how these evaluations enter the interpretation of technical findings, the representation of Moroccan security institutions and the subsequent journalistic accusations circulated by Forbidden Stories.

Forbidden Stories presents itself as an international network of journalists whose mission is to "continue the investigations of other reporters who have been silenced" (Forbidden Stories, n.d.-b). Its institutional history relates the organization's establishment in 2017 to threats against journalists (Forbidden Stories, n.d.-a). Its name and the motto "Killing the journalist won't kill the story" (Forbidden Stories, n.d.-b) construct a professional identity in which investigative journalism is associated with the defence of press freedom and resistance to attempts to prevent investigative stories from being published. The moral distinction between threatened journalists and actors represented as seeking to silence them enters the public presentation of the institution itself.

Forbidden Stories also identifies collaboration as its "modus operandi" and states that "[w]hat some want to hide will be amplified" (Forbidden Stories, n.d.-b). Its website presents editorial activities, the SafeBox Network, communications staff and correspondents in different geographical settings (Forbidden Stories, n.d.-c). Investigation, collaboration and international amplification thus characterize the institution's presentation of its journalistic work. Their critical significance lies in the relationship between the findings produced through the common investigation, the authority attributed to its participating newsrooms and the subsequent circulation of its accusations. Collaboration or amplification is not, in itself, evidence of propaganda; the question concerns the proposition promoted and the verification presented in support of its categorical presentation.

Citizen Lab invokes scientific and technical competence and independence; Amnesty International explicitly connects forensic examination with human-rights campaigns; Forbidden Stories associates investigative journalism with international collaboration and the defence of threatened reporters. This last form of self-presentation illustrates Vos and Thomas's (2018) argument that discourse about journalism's institutional mission helps sustain its authority. These differences in institutional self-representation help explain how earlier propositions may acquire further authority as they enter other orders of discourse. The symbolic authority attached to a technical finding may be recontextualized in human-rights and journalistic discourse without enlarging the scope of the original investigation. The historical analysis now turns from institutional self-representation to the published procedures and findings concerning Moroccan authorship.

4.2. 2018–2020: Citizen Lab's initial report and the emergence of the discursive formation of Moroccan authorship

Citizen Lab's Hide and Seek, published on 18 September 2018, marks the earliest identified reference to Morocco in the publicly available reports on Pegasus operations examined in this study. The report identifies Morocco as the suspected country focus of ATLAS, presenting a provisional geographical inference rather than an investigative finding establishing the identity of a Moroccan security institution directing Pegasus operations. ATLAS is the name assigned by Citizen Lab to one of the groups of Pegasus-related infrastructure identified through its technical investigation. The researchers explain that they selected operator names from national symbols or geographical features associated with the countries or regions apparently targeted, while the suspected geographical focus was inferred through the examination of domain names (Marczak et al., 2018, p. 13). The designation distinguishes one suspected operator from others without identifying the person, organization or institution controlling the infrastructure.

Citizen Lab describes its country mapping as "a guide for further investigation, rather than ironclad evidence of monitoring" (Marczak et al., 2018, p. 24). Morocco appears under the heading "Suspected Country Focus" for ATLAS (p. 15), while Appendix A identifies suspected infections in Algeria, Côte d'Ivoire, France, Morocco, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates (pp. 31–32). Its

network observations include two Moroccan networks and four French networks (pp. 31–32). These entries concern the geographical distribution of technical indicators, not the nationality of the operator. Citizen Lab's description that an operator "appears to focus on Morocco" (p. 10) expresses an inference regarding the geographical direction of the observed activity. The published account identifies neither the institutional customer nor a Moroccan security service directing an operation, a limitation that becomes decisive when subsequent publications invoke Citizen Lab to name Moroccan authorities.

The distinction between geographical activity and customer identity is made explicit in Citizen Lab's response to objections raised by NSO Group. The researchers state that their geographical list "is not a list of suspected NSO customers" (Marczak et al., 2018, p. 27). Suspected infections within Moroccan networks therefore do not establish that the corresponding operator originated in Morocco, just as suspected infections in the other countries do not identify those states as operators. Nor does the politically themed domain "revolution-news[.]co," associated with ATLAS, establish that Moroccan authorities directed Pegasus operations. Citizen Lab states only that the domain "[m]ay indicate political themes in targeting" (p. 32). The association with Pegasus infrastructure, the suspected geographical focus and the identification of institutional authorship consequently remain distinct investigative propositions.

The report nevertheless places the suspected geographical activity beside earlier allegations involving states and surveillance. Citizen Lab refers to "histories of abusive behaviour by state security services" (Marczak et al., 2018, p. 6), while identifying six countries, Morocco among them, associated with previous "abusive use of spyware to target civil society" (p. 6). The co-text joins an empirical inference about possible geographical activity to a negative judgment regarding state security institutions. This association invites readers to interpret the suspected geographical activity through earlier representations of abusive surveillance, although the technical finding does not identify the particular operator. The co-occurrence of scientific interpretation and human-rights evaluation within the same account is an early instance of textual hybridity in the longitudinal comparison; the categorical accusation is developed in later publications.

Amnesty International's October 2019 investigation develops the earlier geographical association into an accusation that Moroccan authorities directed the reported surveillance attacks. This development marks the first identifiable instance of interdiscursive generativity in the corpus. Citizen Lab's provisional geographical inference enters Amnesty International's forensic and human-rights discourse alongside the experiences of named human-rights defenders, allegations of political repression and earlier evaluations of Moroccan state conduct. Within this new discursive context, the suspected geographical focus of surveillance is transformed into a suspicion regarding the Moroccan origin of the operator, while technical interpretations enter the immediate co-text of moral evaluations and representations of persecution. The comparison that follows examines this change in the original proposition, the exclusion of Citizen Lab's geographical findings and methodological limitations, and the expressions of confirmation through which the attacks are attributed to Moroccan authorities with greater certainty than the investigative findings establish.

Amnesty International's October 2019 Summary presents the attacks against Moroccan human-rights defenders as "symptomatic of a larger pattern of reprisals" attributed to Moroccan authorities (Amnesty International, 2019b). The technical investigation concerns malicious messages and possible network-injection attempts against named individuals. The Summary, however, places those findings within an explanation in which Moroccan authorities are already the responsible actors.

The interdiscursive relationship with Citizen Lab becomes explicit when Amnesty International identifies "revolution-news[.]co" among domains found in SMS messages sent to Moroccan human-rights defenders. It associates the domain with ATLAS, previously identified by Citizen Lab, and describes that operator as "suspected by Citizen Lab to be of Moroccan origin" (Amnesty International, 2019b). Citizen Lab had associated "revolution-news[.]co" with ATLAS (Marczak et al., 2018, pp. 14, 32), but had presented Morocco as the operator's "Suspected Country Focus" (p. 15). Amnesty reproduces the proposition "suspected" while entextualizing it into its field of discourse. In Citizen Lab's country mapping, the uncertainty concerns the geographical concentration of activity; in Amnesty's description, it concerns the operator's presumed Moroccan origin. A finding about the possible direction of surveillance is thus represented as a suspicion about the national origin of the actor, which Citizen Lab's report did not establish.

Amnesty's description of ATLAS also omits information relevant to assessing the geographical inference attributed to Citizen Lab. It leaves out the suspected infections reported in Algeria, Côte d'Ivoire, France, Morocco, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates (Marczak et al., 2018, pp. 31–32), the methodological limitations of the geographical mapping (p. 24), and Citizen Lab's explicit distinction between countries with suspected infections and countries identified as NSO Group customers (p. 27). These omissions are significant because the suspected Moroccan origin attributed to ATLAS is presented without the geographical scope of Citizen Lab's findings and the limitations of its investigative method.

By reproducing Citizen Lab's identification of the domain while recontextualizing its geographical inference as a suspicion regarding the operator's Moroccan origin, Amnesty introduces a proposition that the earlier investigation did not establish. The exclusion of the original geographical findings and methodological limitations further restricts the information available for assessing that proposition. Within the developing discursive formation, this transformation constitutes disinformation by design through the attribution to Citizen Lab of a conclusion exceeding its published findings, while the omission of information necessary for evaluating that conclusion contributes to disinformation by omission.

An intertextual relationship appears in Amnesty International's October 2019 Introduction, where the token "context" links to its earlier review of human rights in the Middle East and North Africa (Amnesty International, 2019b). In that review, proceedings involving Monjib and El Bouchattaoui are situated within Amnesty's assessment of restrictions on freedom of expression (Amnesty International, 2019a).

Rost (2002) describes hypertext as a multilinear discursive construction in which interconnected digital texts allow readers to pursue different paths through available material. In its ideal form, hypertext can "emphasize and extend the intertextuality" of digital publications (p. 6) by connecting them with related reports, archives, first-hand documents and other sources. Rost also distinguishes navigation through available material from the retrieval of particular information and relates hypertext to interaction with published content. His account directs attention to the organization of connections between texts and to the paths through which readers encounter earlier publications.

In Amnesty's Introduction, the hyperlink does more than direct readers to another document. Through the expression "context," it connects the forensic inquiry with an earlier human-rights assessment of Moroccan judicial conduct. Readers may follow the link to examine that assessment, but the intertextual reference already invites them to interpret the surveillance allegations through Amnesty's earlier evaluation of Moroccan judicial practices. This relationship contributes to the naturalization of that evaluation within Amnesty International's order of discourse by presenting it as background knowledge rather than as a proposition whose original basis requires renewed examination. The earlier review, however, addresses judicial proceedings and the treatment of human-rights defenders; it does not investigate which institution operated Pegasus. Its assessment of alleged repression thus becomes available as a possible motive for the surveillance attacks without establishing that Moroccan security institutions directed Pegasus operations.

Alongside this earlier human-rights assessment, Amnesty's representation of Monjib and El Bouchattaoui draws upon their selected activities. It identifies Monjib as a historian, columnist and co-founder of organizations concerned with journalism, and El Bouchattaoui through his legal defence of Hirak protesters (Amnesty International, 2019b). These activities present them as defenders of expression and legal rights. Presented beside the forensic account and the characterization of state reprisals, their symbolic biographies make their earlier judicial experiences available as a possible explanation for the alleged surveillance, without establishing who directed the attacks (Bourdieu, 1991; van Leeuwen, 1996).

Amnesty reports that Monjib believed Moroccan authorities were subjecting him to digital surveillance and then states that his fears "were proven to be true" (Amnesty International, 2019b). The forensic findings regarding malicious messages support an important part of his concern, but the reported 'fear' also names Moroccan authorities as responsible. Through the predicate of confirmation, the publication endorses the more extensive proposition without showing an investigative procedure that identifies the institution. The moral context of intimidation and the credibility of the represented journalist bring the reader towards the accusation while its decisive authorship claim remains unverified in the described investigation. This is disinformation by design through affirmative authorial endorsement of an attribution beyond the published forensic result (White, 2006).

El Bouchattaoui's earlier judicial experiences and suspicion of state monitoring enter the same pattern. Amnesty announces that his suspicions are "now definitively confirmed" (Amnesty International, 2019b). The adverb 'definitively' makes the certainty explicit, although the technical material concerns malicious Pegasus-associated targeting, not identification of the Moroccan institution conducting it. The publication therefore makes the confirmation of targeting available as confirmation of a named state actor. The selected biography, negative evaluation of repression and affirmative predicate reinforce one another in the immediate co-text; the misleading extension of investigative certainty constitutes a further instance of disinformation by design.

Amnesty's technical discussion provides a basis for comparing these statements of confirmation with the forensic findings described. It establishes receipt of malicious messages associated with Pegasus infrastructure and distinguishes attempted exploitation from confirmed installation (Amnesty International, 2019b). The report also acknowledges that its findings regarding suspected network-injection attacks were insufficient to establish conclusively that NSO Group's products were involved. Yet its preceding statements of confirmation concern the individuals' suspicions of surveillance by Moroccan authorities. The technical limitations and NSO Group's response appear in the report, but neither establishes the identity of the institution responsible for the attacks.

The comparison with Citizen Lab establishes the first cumulative finding for RQ1. A provisional geographical inference is recast as a suspicion about the operator's Moroccan origin; the named individuals' suspicions of surveillance by Moroccan authorities are then presented as proved or definitively confirmed. Its reports make the accusation persuasive through scientific authority, selected biographies and a prior discourse of repression while communicating institutional certainty beyond what the investigation has established. These are the linked linguistic and investigative operations of disinformation by design, subsequently extended by the June 2020 allegation of a continuing NSO customer relationship.

Amnesty's investigation of Omar Radi, published on 22 June 2020, introduces additional forensic material regarding network-injection attacks and similarities with earlier Pegasus investigations (Amnesty International, 2020). That development strengthens the account of the technology used, while the institution responsible for directing the operation still requires separate investigation. Amnesty simultaneously places Radi's symbolic biography and judicial experiences in the immediate co-text of the attribution to Moroccan authorities.

Amnesty describes Radi as an investigative journalist concerned with corruption, political interests and justice, and recalls judicial proceedings arising from an earlier tweet (Amnesty International, 2020). His professional identity contributes to a symbolic biography of critical journalism exposed to coercive acts. To examine what the account excludes, the original tweet and its reported legal circumstances must be compared with Amnesty's summary of the proceedings.

To examine the speech act performed through Radi's tweet, we return to the original statement reproduced by Mardam Bey (2019), who identifies Lahcen Talfi as the magistrate addressed. Radi calls him "Bourreau de nos frères" (Mardam Bey, 2019), refers to "les petits bras comme lui" and describes the officials concerned as "fonctionnaires sans dignité". The closing expression "Ni oubli ni pardon" further communicates his rejection of the conduct attributed to them. Although the tweet refers to the appellate judgment in the Hirak proceedings, its pragmatic function cannot be reduced to criticism of that decision. Through these expressions, Radi performs an insulting speech act directed against an identifiable magistrate and extends his negative judgement to other judicial officials. This reading is consistent with Krisnawati et al.'s (2026, p. 542) description of positive impoliteness as language that "targets the interlocutor's positive face by ignoring, ridiculing, or undermining their personal or professional identity." In evaluative terms, the attack on the named magistrate's personal and professional standing also expresses negative judgement (White, 2006). Mardam Bey (2019) also identifies Article 263 of the Moroccan criminal legislation, regarding offences against magistrates, as the legal basis invoked in the proceedings. These expressions and the reported legal grounds are central to understanding the judicial event subsequently described by Amnesty International.

Amnesty International, however, describes the tweet as "criticizing the judicial system" (Amnesty International, 2020). This description presents the utterance as criticism of a public institution while leaving out the insulting expressions directed against the magistrate and the reported legal basis for the proceedings. The difference concerns the speech act itself: Radi's statement contains expressions directed against an identifiable magistrate, whereas Amnesty's account presents the judicial proceedings as a response to criticism of the judicial system. By excluding the insulting speech act and its reported legal circumstances, the publication contributes to the discursive construction of Radi's symbolic capital through his portrayal as a journalist subjected to repression. This selective representation contributes to disinformation by omission (van Leeuwen, 1996).

The significance of this omission extends to the wider accusation. In the same publication, Radi's symbolic biography and the judicial narrative present him as a journalist subjected to alleged state hostility, while the forensic discussion describes suspicious activity against his telephone. The co-occurrence of these propositions within the immediate co-text invites readers to interpret that activity as a continuation of alleged hostility by Moroccan authorities, while the omission of the insulting speech act and its reported legal circumstances limits their ability to consider an alternative explanation of the judicial proceedings. The published forensic findings, however, do not establish the institution directing the alleged surveillance.

Under the heading 'Who is behind these attacks?', Amnesty invokes NSO Group's stated policy of licensing spyware to public security institutions, Citizen Lab's earlier association of ATLAS with Morocco, similarities among the attacks and the network access apparently required for injection (Amnesty International, 2020). These premises concern the vendor's customers generally, a suspected geographical orientation and the technical conditions of an attack. Amnesty also leaves unresolved which route of network access was employed. The published investigation therefore does not identify the institution directing the operation against Radi, although it attributes the attack to Moroccan authorities.

Amnesty first states that "we believe Moroccan authorities to be responsible" and then asserts that "the Moroccan government actively remained a customer of NSO Group until at least January 2020" (Amnesty International, 2020). The connective "Therefore" presents the alleged customer relationship as the conclusion of the preceding premises, while "remained" presupposes that the relationship already existed and represents it as having continued uninterrupted until at least January 2020. The premises establish neither the contracting institution nor the particular actor directing Radi's attack. The affirmative statement consequently converts the stated belief that Moroccan authorities directed the attack into an apparently established, continuing commercial relationship. This is disinformation by design in the article's own argumentative and syntactic construction: the presupposition conceals the unproved earlier relationship while the conclusion claims greater investigative certainty than the stated procedures justify (Polyzou, 2015; Reisigl & Wodak, 2009).

Amnesty's references to its earlier publications on freedom of expression provide an additional context for the customer allegation (Amnesty International, 2020). These hyperlinks carry previous accusations of repression into the new forensic investigation. As their evaluative conclusions become the accepted background for Radi's suspected targeting, the published account gives a suspected Moroccan motive the appearance of continuity without establishing the identity of the Pegasus customer through a corresponding investigative procedure.

The movement from forensic investigation to human-rights advocacy also reveals how Amnesty International mobilizes its institutional symbolic capital to exercise symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1991). Its authority as a human-rights organization lends force to a directive speech act through which the accusation that Moroccan authorities directed the surveillance against Radi becomes the premise for demanding action from other institutional actors. Amnesty instructs NSO Group and Novalpina Capital to "[t]erminate or suspend its contract with the Moroccan authorities" (Amnesty International, 2020). The imperative proposition presents the alleged contractual relationship as already established and assigns the participating actors distinct positions:

Moroccan authorities as the customer implicated in surveillance, NSO Group as the technology provider held accountable for misuse, and Novalpina Capital as the controlling investor expected to intervene.

The report describes correspondence with NSO Group and an unanswered request to Moroccan authorities, documenting efforts to obtain replies. Amnesty also presents the forensic findings associated with the attack on Radi's telephone on 13 September 2019, three days after NSO Group and Novalpina Capital announced plans to implement a human-rights policy, as "further evidence that there is a significant gap between the company's stated policy and actual practice" (Amnesty International, 2020). Although the technical examination supports the reported attack, it does not establish whether the announced safeguards were operational at that time or permit an independent assessment of the measures NSO Group states it subsequently undertook. The published procedures likewise do not establish the asserted contractual relationship. The movement from forensic investigation to an authoritative directive regarding an unestablished contractual relationship illustrates how disinformation by design acquires further institutional use within Amnesty's order of discourse.

The 2018–2020 sequence answers the first part of RQ1 through cumulative cases. In 2018, Citizen Lab identified a suspected Moroccan focus and associated the technical finding with negative evaluation of state security practices. In 2019, Amnesty changed that focus into suspected Moroccan origin and used affirmative expressions of confirmation to endorse allegations that Moroccan state institutions directed the attacks. In 2020, its customer argument presupposed an earlier contract and presented the Moroccan government as a continuing NSO customer. Amnesty's 2019 and 2020 publications thus attribute surveillance attacks to Moroccan authorities with a degree of certainty that the investigative findings presented do not establish, constituting disinformation by design. The omission of the expressions central to Radi's judicial proceedings establishes disinformation by omission and strengthens the symbolic biography through which the Moroccan accusation is presented. At the level of the historical chain, however, this sequence also marks an early phase of disinformation as process: the attribution begins to acquire continuity through the relationship between scientific inference and human-rights evaluation before the July 2021 consortium publications. The consortium inherited an attribution whose investigative support and asserted certainty still required independent examination.

4.3. 18–19 July 2021: The attribution of Moroccan state authorship in Forbidden Stories' investigative order of discourse

The July 2021 consortium publications mark another cycle of interdiscursive generativity in the hybrid discursive formation surrounding the Pegasus controversy. Earlier accusations attributing Pegasus surveillance operations to Moroccan security institutions are recontextualized within Forbidden Stories' cross-border investigative-journalistic order of discourse and acquire wider international circulation.

Forbidden Stories' institutional presentation, "About the Pegasus Project," distinguishes leaked telephone-number data from the examination of devices. It reports 37 infections or attempted infections in a particular group tested, described as 85% of that group (Forbidden Stories, 2021a). That percentage cannot be extended to all 50,000 numbers. The presentation then turns from the number of possible targets to customer identification.

In its English version, Forbidden Stories attributes the selection of more than 10,000 numbers to "NSO Group's Moroccan client"; the French version refers to "le seul client marocain" (Forbidden Stories, 2021a; 2021b). Both statements present the customer as identified, with the French version additionally describing it as the sole Moroccan customer. The consortium's Pegasus Project presentation does not describe a separate procedure connecting the selected numbers to the named client. This categorical attribution of customer identity, without a documented verification step sufficient to establish it, constitutes disinformation by design.

The institutional presentation quotes NSO's objections regarding "wrong assumptions" and "uncorroborated theories" (Forbidden Stories, 2021a). Its reply invokes an informant familiar with NSO systems who explains the possible role of HLR lookups in assessing a telephone before targeting. That testimony concerns a technical activity associated with the data; it does not identify the Moroccan customer assigned to the relevant numbers. The response addresses part of the company's objection but does not explain the investigative step needed to substantiate the categorical attribution of institutional authorship.

Forbidden Stories presents the Pegasus Project as an undertaking involving more than 80 journalists across 17 media organizations, technical participation by Amnesty International's Security Lab and reference to Citizen Lab's peer review (Forbidden Stories, 2021a). This description establishes the scale and organization of the consortium, not the independence of its participants' conclusions. Because the newsrooms worked within a common project and relied on shared materials, their separate bylines cannot, without further evidence, be counted as independent confirmations of Moroccan state authorship. The consortium's professional reach and the scientific standing of its contributors confer symbolic authority on the account; the scope of the actual forensic review must be assessed separately (Bourdieu, 1991). Herrero-Diz et al. (2024) report that the fact-checking editors they interviewed directed them to sections of their websites describing the verification procedures followed by their journalists, the decisions made during the investigation and the review undertaken before publication. The authors explain that "the open explanation of this methodology" (p. 1643) contributed to the recognition of these outlets as verification media. Although their study concerns a different journalistic genre, their discussion raises a question relevant to the Pegasus Project: what investigative procedures were undertaken by the institutions whose scientific authority Forbidden Stories invokes, and which findings did those procedures establish? This question becomes particularly important in assessing the scope of Citizen Lab's peer review and its relationship to the accusations of Moroccan institutional authorship.

Citizen Lab's July 2021 peer review explicitly states: "No additional context or information about the devices or the investigation was provided to us" (Citizen Lab, 2021). The reviewers confirmed Pegasus infections in four device backups and assessed Amnesty International's detection methods as sound. The review did not examine the leaked telephone-number dataset or identify the institution responsible for the operations attributed to Morocco. The information made public does not permit readers to assess why those backups were selected or the wider circumstances of the investigation. The question is therefore not whether the infections were correctly identified in those devices, but whether the scope of the review supports the wider attribution.

Invoking Citizen Lab's peer review beside "NSO Group's Moroccan client" (Forbidden Stories, 2021a) places a confirmed forensic finding in the immediate co-text of an institutional accusation that the review did not examine. This juxtaposition transfers scientific authority from infection detection to customer identification, although the peer review does not support that extension. The publication's claim to independent verification therefore exceeds the scope described by the reviewers. The mismatch constitutes disinformation by design because limited technical confirmation is positioned as support for a categorical claim of authorship.

In Rueckert's article for Forbidden Stories, Pegasus is introduced as a "global weapon for silencing journalists"; the French title, La nouvelle arme mondiale pour faire taire les journalistes, expresses the same negative evaluation (Rueckert, 2021a; 2021b). The title frames Pegasus through threatened journalism before the article sets out the investigative basis for attributing a particular attack. The moral evaluation of spyware and its use prepares the immediate co-text in which named journalists, forensic findings and accusations against Moroccan authorities subsequently appear.

Rueckert then refers to the leaked telephone-number data and the forensic examinations undertaken by Amnesty International's Security Lab (2021b). Selection for possible targeting, attempted intrusion, confirmed infection and customer identity concern distinct investigative propositions. The volume of the dataset does not identify the institution responsible for selecting the Moroccan-related entries. The relevant published methods therefore concern how the consortium distinguished infection from possible selection and assigned the latter to a purported NSO customer.

Rueckert's Introduction places Morocco among states described affirmatively as autocratic NSO customers (2021b). The article also reproduces NSO Group's objections to the interpretation of the leaked dataset and its refusal to identify customers. The affirmative designation of Morocco as a customer precedes any procedure linking the numbers or verified infections to the specific Moroccan institution. This imbalance between actor designation and investigative explanation constitutes disinformation by design in the Introduction: the customer is presented as known although the available technical material has not established its identity.

In the Moroccan section, Rueckert presents the Security Lab's finding of more than twenty Pegasus infections on Mansouri's former iPhone between February and April 2021 before recounting his investigative work, imprisonment, exile and reported repression (Rueckert, 2021b). The forensic result establishes that the device was compromised during the period examined; it does not identify the operator or customer. The article subsequently states that Mansouri continued to be targeted by Moroccan authorities, moving from a finding about the device to a claim about the actor responsible.

The English and French editions bear the same byline and publication date, while the French edition credits a translator (Rueckert, 2021a; 2021b). Their comparison reveals differences in the grammatical construction and degree of certainty attached to Moroccan authorship. Regarding the selection of at least 35 journalists in four countries, the English version identifies "an NSO client that appears to be the Moroccan government", whereas the French states categorically that "Au moins 35 journalistes basés dans 4 pays ont été sélectionnés comme cibles par le Maroc". The modal expression "appears to be" marks customer identity as an inference, although the English Introduction has already identified Morocco affirmatively among NSO customers and the account states that Mansouri was targeted by Moroccan authorities. The French passive construction directly assigns responsibility for the selection to Morocco. A comparable difference appears in the discussion of Citizen Lab's 2018 investigation: the English edition refers to "NSO clients in these countries", whereas the French attributes selection directly to the countries through the expression "Ces trois pays ont sélectionné". These differences concern not merely linguistic variation but the identity of the attributed actor and the degree of certainty communicated to readers. They therefore raise questions of investigative accuracy and transparency in the publication of the same findings across languages.

Alongside these accusations attributing Pegasus surveillance operations to Moroccan authorities, Rueckert (2021b) identifies Mansouri through his investigative-journalistic activities and Plenel through his position as a co-founder and director of Mediapart. These symbolic social identities are constructed within narratives of reported persecution and surveillance targeting journalists in connection with their professional activities. Their symbolic capital contributes to the credibility attributed to the journalists. Within the immediate co-text, the conceptual meaning of the Pegasus findings overlaps with the affective meaning of the journalists' reported persecution. This relationship may lead readers to interpret the confirmed infections as a continuation of persecution attributed to Moroccan authorities, although neither the biographical accounts nor the forensic findings establish the identity of the NSO customer directing the operations (Leech, 1981; Brown & Yule, 1983; Bourdieu, 1991; van Leeuwen, 1996).

The distribution of social actors, events and propositions in Forbidden Stories' investigative-journalistic discourse is significant for the attribution of the attacks to Moroccan authorities. In the Moroccan section, the forensic finding of repeated Pegasus infections on Mansouri's former iPhone precedes the account of his imprisonment, exile and reported persecution (Rueckert, 2021b). The article subsequently presents Moroccan authorities as responsible for his continued targeting. This sequence brings together distinct investigative propositions whose relationship requires examination. The critical question is not whether the investigators

may have undertaken additional examinations, but whether Forbidden Stories' published account explains the procedures through which the confirmed infections were attributed to Moroccan security institutions, allowing readers to distinguish the detection of Pegasus from the verification of institutional authorship.

Forbidden Stories' account of Mansouri's 2015 arrest identifies "armed intelligence agents" as the actors entering his apartment at "9 a.m." and describes the woman with him as "a female friend" (Rueckert, 2021b). It acknowledges an accusation of "adultery", then proceeds through imprisonment, relocation to France and asylum. These selected elements situate the judicial episode within the symbolic biography of a journalist represented as a victim of state repression. A comparison with an earlier publicly available account of the intervention reveals circumstances and participants excluded from this biographical narrative.

An earlier statement issued by the Rabat police service and reported by Le360 through MAP presents a different account of the same intervention. According to the statement, the arrest was carried out in "exécution d'instructions écrites du parquet compétent", following instructions to investigate the suspected use of an apartment for prostitution (Le360, 2015). The police attributed the intervention to the Rabat judicial police, identified the woman accompanying Mansouri as married and stated that material seized during the intervention had been submitted for technical and DNA examination. The statement further indicated that the woman's husband subsequently filed an adultery complaint. These circumstances differ materially from Forbidden Stories' account of an intervention by armed intelligence agents involving a female friend.

Forbidden Stories does not mention the written instructions reportedly issued by the prosecutor or the police statement identifying officers of the Rabat judicial police as those who carried out the arrest. It also omits the police account that the woman accompanying Mansouri was married and that her husband subsequently filed an adultery complaint. Nor does it examine the police statement regarding the material reportedly seized during the intervention and submitted for technical and DNA examination. These omissions exclude social actors and circumstances relevant to understanding the judicial proceedings (van Leeuwen, 1996). The exclusion of this competing account leaves readers without material circumstances needed to assess Forbidden Stories' representation of the arrest as an episode of political repression. Although the police statement does not independently establish the legitimacy of the intervention or exclude political motivation, its omission limits the examination of an alternative account of the judicial event. Under the investigative-journalistic criteria applied in this study, this selective representation constitutes disinformation by omission and raises a question concerning the professional requirements of fairness and completeness (ProPublica, n.d.).

Through this selective representation, the judicial episode becomes part of Mansouri's symbolic biography as a journalist subjected to persecution by Moroccan authorities. In the immediate co-text, the association of imprisonment, exile and Pegasus infection, together with negative evaluations of Moroccan state conduct, invites sympathy for Mansouri and encourages readers to interpret the surveillance as a continuation of political persecution. This association draws attention away from the limitations of Forbidden Stories' investigative procedures, which do not establish the Moroccan institution responsible for the reported Pegasus infections.

Laurent Richard and Sandrine Rigaud published "The Pegasus project: A worldwide collaboration to counter a global crime" under Forbidden Stories' institutional name on 18 July 2021. Richard is its founder and director, while Rigaud served as editor-in-chief at the time. The publication states, "This piece was published in the Guardian" (Richard & Rigaud, 2021a, editorial note). The Guardian presents their commentary under the title "Spyware can make your phone your enemy. Journalism is your defence" on 19 July 2021 at 00:01 BST, equivalent to 23:01 UTC on 18 July (Richard & Rigaud, 2021b). Forbidden Stories displays 18 July without specifying an hour. The different displayed dates do not establish the precise sequence of publication. The shared authorship and explicit editorial acknowledgement establish an intertextual relationship, while publication through Forbidden Stories and the opinion section of a participating newsroom extends its institutional discourse into another journalistic setting. These appearances belong to the same consortium activity, rather than independent investigations.

In the Forbidden Stories presentation, Richard and Rigaud describe a "worldwide scandal" (Richard & Rigaud, 2021a, para. 1); its title announces a "global crime". These expressions place a moral evaluation beside the reported investigative findings. A difference in linguistic certainty becomes apparent when the two publications are compared. Forbidden Stories states that "All of these individuals were targeted by states using the same spyware tool" (Richard & Rigaud, 2021a, para. 3), whereas The Guardian states that "All of these individuals were selected for possible surveillance by states using the same spyware tool" (Richard & Rigaud, 2021b, para. 3). The Guardian version distinguishes selection from completed surveillance, while both statements present states as the actors responsible for selection or targeting. In neither sentence does the grammatical attribution demonstrate which Moroccan institution directed an operation. The difference thus concerns the degree of certainty expressed about the activity, while the identity of the responsible state actor continues to be communicated affirmatively.

This evaluative framing must also be read in relation to Forbidden Stories' institutional self-representation. The organization connects its investigative identity with the defence of threatened journalism. Its motto, "Killing the journalist won't kill the story" (Forbidden Stories, n.d.-b), and the statement that its mission is "to pursue – collaboratively – the work of threatened, jailed or assassinated journalists" (Richard & Rigaud, 2021a) place these moral commitments in the immediate co-text of forensic findings. Leech (1981, p. 16) observes that "to express our emotions we rely upon the mediation of other categories of meaning", including conceptual, connotative and stylistic meaning. In the publications examined, technical findings regarding Pegasus infections in

selected devices are placed alongside representations of threatened journalists, allegations of persecution and moral evaluations of state conduct.

The co-occurrence of conceptual and affective meanings is not, by itself, a breach of investigative journalism's professional requirements. The problem arises when the conceptual meaning of forensic findings, which establish the presence of Pegasus without identifying the institution responsible, is blurred with the affective meaning associated with the persecution of journalists. At the macrosemantic level, the distinction between verified findings and unresolved hypotheses recedes as the investigation is framed through a narrative of persecution and alleged surveillance by Moroccan authorities. At the macropragmatic level, the investigative account performs a macro speech act of accusation through the organization of forensic findings, journalists' symbolic biographies and assertions that Moroccan security institutions directed Pegasus operations, although the forensic findings do not establish that attribution.

The claim's persuasive force also depends on its circulation among the newsrooms participating in the Pegasus Project. The Guardian identifies the July 2021 investigation as the work of "the Guardian and 16 other media organisations" (Kirchgaessner et al., 2021). Its account explains that Forbidden Stories and Amnesty International first obtained the leaked telephone numbers and shared them with participating newsrooms. The subsequent publication of the accusation by different newsrooms therefore reflects their participation in a common investigation, although their articles appeared under separate bylines. Within this consortium, quotations and references to other participating newsrooms constitute intertextual relations through which the accusation is reproduced and circulated. Such relations contribute to the accusation's persuasive force but cannot be treated as independent confirmation that Moroccan security institutions directed Pegasus operations without separately documented investigative findings.

The Guardian's opening presents the Pegasus investigation through an affirmative attribution of surveillance to state actors. Its lead states that human-rights activists, journalists and lawyers "have been targeted by authoritarian governments using hacking software" (Kirchgaessner et al., 2021). The following paragraph, however, describes an investigation that "suggests widespread and continuing abuse" of Pegasus. These statements concern related but distinct propositions: the first assigns responsibility for targeting to governments, while the second presents the extent and continuity of abuse as an investigative inference. The categorical agency expressed in the lead acquires particular significance when compared with the subsequent account of the leaked telephone-number data, the forensic findings and the procedures described for identifying the responsible NSO customers.

The Guardian acknowledges that the presence of a telephone number in the leaked dataset does not establish an attempted or successful Pegasus infection. Its country-by-country presentation lists "more than 6,000" numbers under Algeria and attributes the selection of more than 10,000 numbers to Morocco (Kirchgaessner et al., 2021). The article also states that the data "does not say which NSO client was responsible for selecting any given number". It nevertheless reports that the consortium identified ten governments believed to be NSO customers by examining patterns in the dataset, adding that Citizen Lab had found evidence of all ten being customers. The forensic examination concerned 67 phones, of which 23 were confirmed infected, 14 showed signs of attempted penetration and 30 yielded inconclusive results. The article further reports temporal correlations between entries in the leaked data and Pegasus activity on some examined devices. These findings provide a basis for associating the dataset with surveillance activity in particular cases, but the publication does not explain the investigative procedures through which the alleged Moroccan customer was identified or establish that the numbers listed under Algeria were selected by that customer.

The critical question concerns the relationship among the successive investigative propositions. The presence of a number in the dataset, its possible selection for surveillance, the identification of an NSO customer, the forensic confirmation of Pegasus activity and the attribution of an operation to a particular state security institution constitute distinct hypotheses requiring corresponding examination. Investigative journalism requires these hypotheses to be tested through relevant sources, corroboration and verification before their conclusions are presented as established findings (Hunter et al., 2011; Environmental Justice Foundation & Tempo Institute, n.d.; Canadian Association of Journalists, 2004). Forensic examination may establish infection or attempted intrusion, while customer identity and institutional responsibility require findings directed to those separate questions. The Guardian describes pattern analysis and invokes Citizen Lab's earlier work, but does not make available the investigative steps connecting particular entries in the dataset with the alleged Moroccan customer. Its explanation of HLR lookups likewise acknowledges that they "can sometimes be used" in preparing surveillance and may serve other purposes, rather than establishing a necessary connection with Pegasus targeting (Kirchgaessner et al., 2021). An unresolved proposition in this investigative sequence cannot acquire the status of a confirmed finding merely because another proposition has been established. The movement from acknowledged uncertainty concerning customer identity to categorical attribution of responsibility, without a corresponding explanation of the verification supporting that transition, constitutes disinformation by design in the argumentative construction of the published account.

The persuasive construction of the accusation must also be examined through the relationship between the forensic material and the surrounding representations of threatened journalism. The Guardian identifies more than 180 journalists whose numbers appeared in the dataset, associates them with internationally recognized news organizations, and recounts the case of a Mexican journalist murdered after his number had appeared in the leaked material, while acknowledging that his device could not be examined (Kirchgaessner et al., 2021). These representations introduce professional identities, victimhood and threats to

journalistic activity into the immediate co-text of technical findings and accusations concerning authoritarian governments. The symbolic capital associated with journalism and the affective meaning of persecution contribute to the interpretation of findings whose conceptual meaning does not, independently, establish the identity of a particular state actor (Leech, 1981; Brown & Yule, 1983; Bourdieu, 1991). The co-occurrence of forensic descriptions, morally significant biographies and categorical grammatical agency gives the accusation an apparent coherence that the published investigative procedures do not fully establish. Readers are thus invited to interpret unresolved questions of institutional authorship through an already familiar account of abusive state surveillance and threatened journalists. This discursive relationship concerns not only the extension of investigative certainty through linguistic and argumentative construction, but also the orientation of the reader's interpretation through the immediate semantic context in which the accusation appears. The distinction becomes particularly important when Amnesty International France's publication proceeds from suspected customer identity to categorical statements attributing the attacks to Moroccan security institutions.

Amnesty International France identifies Moroccan intelligence services as the actors responsible for Pegasus surveillance: "les services de renseignements marocains ont utilisé le logiciel espion Pegasus" (2021). The article also presents Morocco as an NSO customer, while using "aurait" for the allegation that it selected 10,000 telephone numbers. Its opening thus moves between categorical institutional authorship, an asserted customer relationship and the conditional presentation of telephone-number selection. Although the article distinguishes potential targets from devices examined by Amnesty International's Security Lab, it does not describe the investigative procedures through which the alleged Moroccan customer and the institution responsible for the reported surveillance were identified.

In its account of Edwy Plenel, Amnesty International France places a reported Pegasus infection beside his professional standing at Mediapart, his participation in a cultural event in Morocco and his criticism of repression during the Hirak demonstrations. The article reports that the dates of his visit and the infection correspond, but this temporal relationship neither identifies the NSO customer nor establishes a political purpose. The selection of these professional activities and experiences contributes to Plenel's symbolic biography (van Leeuwen, 1996). Within the immediate co-text, the conceptual meaning of the forensic finding and the reported temporal correspondence overlaps with the affective meaning associated with threatened journalism and political repression. This relationship invites readers to interpret the infection as a continuation of alleged repression by Moroccan authorities, although the published findings do not establish the institution responsible for the surveillance.

The association between Pegasus surveillance and the alleged repression of journalists continues in the section "Les journalistes marocains visés sont en danger", which opens with "Le Maroc est tristement célèbre pour la répression menée contre les journalistes indépendants et les dissidents" (Amnesty International France, 2021). The article then states, "Nous avions déjà documenté, avec Citizen Lab, l'utilisation du logiciel espion Pegasus contre le journaliste Omar Radi." The past perfect "avions déjà documenté" presents the earlier investigation as completed work undertaken with Citizen Lab. Yet the hyperlink attached to "Citizen Lab" directs readers to its institutional homepage, rather than to a report documenting its participation in the forensic examination of Radi's telephone. This differs from the article's references to Le Monde and Franceinfo, which direct readers to specific investigative publications. The hyperlink concerning Radi instead leads to Amnesty International France's earlier article, "NSO Group : son logiciel espion cible un journaliste marocain", which attributes the examination of his iPhone to "nos équipes d'Amnesty Tech" (Amnesty International France, 2022). The original English investigation likewise identifies Amnesty International's Security Lab as responsible for that examination (Amnesty International, 2020). The two publications do not explain the particular contribution attributed to Citizen Lab.

The distinction between technical cooperation and participation in the examination of a particular device becomes clearer when the available Citizen Lab publications are compared. In Hide and Seek, Citizen Lab identifies Morocco as ATLAS's suspected country focus while recording suspected infections across several countries and expressly distinguishing the locations of suspected infections from the identity of NSO customers (Marczak et al., 2018). Published in September 2018, the report does not concern the subsequent examination of Radi's telephone. Citizen Lab's July 2021 independent peer review confirms the soundness of Amnesty International's forensic detection methods and the identification of Pegasus infections in four iTunes backups, while acknowledging that no further information concerning the devices or the wider investigation was provided (Citizen Lab, 2021). The report also records mutual sharing of Pegasus Version 4 domain names between Citizen Lab and Amnesty Tech in July 2020. This establishes technical cooperation between the institutions, but does not document Citizen Lab's participation in Radi's February 2020 forensic examination. The Canadian Association of Journalists (2004, p. 3) states: "Even information from a reliable site -- such as a reputable news organization or government ministry -- should be checked." Hunter et al. (2011, p. 17) similarly emphasize the importance of testing investigative hypotheses against findings that may disprove them. The critical distinction therefore concerns the relationship between the cooperation documented by the institutions and the specific investigative participation attributed to Citizen Lab in Amnesty International France's publication.

The invocation of Citizen Lab introduces the symbolic capital of scientific research into Amnesty International France's discourse, which combines forensic investigation with human-rights advocacy (Bourdieu, 1991). This illustrates interdiscursive generativity through the subsequent use of scientific findings and the institutional authority associated with them. The hyperlink operates as a form of 'discursive doping' of Amnesty's discourse: it directs readers to Citizen Lab's official website, making the institution's

scientific standing available in support of the earlier accusation without identifying a report establishing its participation in Radi's forensic examination. The distinction between documented technical cooperation and the particular investigation attributed to Citizen Lab consequently remains unexplained. The negative evaluation "tristement célèbre" presents Moroccan repression as familiar background, while "avions déjà documenté" invokes the earlier accusation as established investigative knowledge (Amnesty International France, 2021). Their recurrence contributes to sedimentation, while their use as premises for subsequent accusations illustrates naturalization. The misleading relationship between the asserted cooperation, the hyperlink and the available scientific documentation contributes to the presentation of institutional authorship as established. This concerns the attribution of investigative authority and responsibility for Pegasus operations, not the independent technical confirmation of Pegasus infections.

The subsequent assertion that "Le Projet Pegasus vient confirmer que les autorités continuent de surveiller des journalistes marocains" presents the earlier accusation as confirmed by the Pegasus Project (Amnesty International France, 2021). The article further states that "Le nombre de journalistes identifiés comme cibles montre que Pegasus a été utilisé comme outil d'intimidation des médias critiques du pouvoir." The verb "montre" presents the reported number of journalists as demonstrating a political intention. Yet the inclusion of a telephone number among potential targets, forensic confirmation of infection, identification of an NSO customer and establishment of an intention to intimidate concern distinct investigative propositions. The article does not explain the procedures connecting these findings to categorical accusations against Moroccan authorities. The movement from the reported findings to affirmative institutional responsibility and political intention constitutes disinformation by design, while the unexplained investigative participation and exclusion of material necessary for examining the attribution contribute to disinformation by omission. The reaffirmation of earlier accusations illustrates disinformation as process, through which scientific findings and human-rights evaluations enter further representations of Moroccan state conduct. The subsequent demand for "un moratoire sur la vente et le transfert d'équipements de surveillance" extends these representations into an appeal for institutional action. Its significance for the examination of propaganda lies in the persuasive presentation and promotion of accusations whose investigative basis remains insufficiently explained, rather than in the demand for restrictions on surveillance technology itself.

4.4. July–August 2021: The circulation of Moroccan authorship and its recontextualization into interstate relations discourse

The consortium's international circulation was deliberately synchronized, according to Laurent Richard's retrospective account in an interview published on 29 March 2026. Describing the release in July 2021, he states, "On a cliqué pour mettre en ligne à la même heure, en juillet 2021, dans plein de pays", recalls the countdown "5… 4… 3… 2… 1… c'est parti", and adds "Tous en même temps" (Press Room & Forbidden Stories, 2026, 21:44–22:16). His accompanying statement, "On savait que ça allait être un scoop mondial" (Press Room & Forbidden Stories, 2026, 22:01–22:16), identifies worldwide attention as an anticipated consequence of the release. The countdown demonstrates a common intended publication moment, though it does not independently establish the instant at which every website became publicly accessible. This testimony connects the coordinated release with its expected international reach and provides a direct basis for examining organized circulation under RQ2.

On 19 July 2021 at 12:40, TSA Algérie published Riyad Hamadi's "Scandale Pegasus : des milliers de téléphones algériens ciblés". The article introduces the consortium's revelations through Le Monde, Forbidden Stories and Amnesty International, and declares that "des dizaines de milliers de téléphones ont été espionnés" (Hamadi, 2021). Yet the Algeria-specific figure, attributed to The Guardian, concerns "plus de 6 000 téléphones algériens" that "ont été sélectionnés pour être ciblés." Selection in a telephone-number dataset and completed surveillance are different propositions. The Guardian participated in the same consortium, so TSA's citation of its figure is an interdiscursive transfer, not a separate investigation of the Algerian numbers. The opening affirmation of espionage consequently extends the certainty expressed beyond what the cited figure establishes.

The article then extends the attribution to Algeria through its sequence of statements. TSA first attributes surveillance of critics and journalists abroad to Moroccan "services de sécurité"; it then states, "L'Algérie est également touchée, et à large échelle semble-t-il, par cette opération d'espionnage" (Hamadi, 2021). The demonstrative "cette" connects Algeria to the operation previously attributed to Moroccan services, while "semble-t-il" concerns its apparent scale rather than the identity of the actor. No separate procedure is described for associating the Algerian numbers with a Moroccan NSO customer. The article acknowledges that no names of the allegedly surveilled Algerians had emerged. An unnamed Amnesty International source says that Algerian journalists were targeted but adds, "Mais à ce stade, on ne peut pas livrer plus de détails." This further assertion does not establish that any particular Algerian device was examined or infected, or identify the institution directing the alleged activity.

A source at Amnesty International also identifies "clients potentiels de NSO" in eleven countries, including Morocco (Hamadi, 2021). This differs in number and expressed certainty from The Guardian's earlier account of ten governments believed to be customers; the two statements cannot be treated as independent demonstrations of the customer responsible for the Algerian numbers. Here disinformation by design concerns the passage from selection and potential customer identity to assertions of espionage by Moroccan services. Disinformation by omission concerns the unexplained transitions between the dataset, examination of devices and identification of the actor. Disinformation as process is visible as the consortium's accusation enters Algerian national reporting. The accusation now acquires interstate significance: Algeria is represented as the object of surveillance by a neighboring state.

The Moroccan government's response to the Pegasus Project accusations, attributed to Maghreb Arabe Presse and published by SNRT News on 19 July 2021 at 13:47, rejects the allegations and denies the acquisition or use of software for infiltrating communications devices. It challenges the publishers to present "preuves réalistes et scientifiques" open to "une expertise et d'une contre-expertise professionnelles, impartiales et indépendantes" (Maghreb Arabe Presse, 2021). This response documents the public contestation of Moroccan authorship and the demand for independent examination of the accusation.

On 22 July 2021, Le Monde answered the denials under the collective byline of its editorial staff, declaring that it maintained its reporting (La rédaction du Monde, 2021). The available page indicates a subsequent modification on 22 August 2025; absent an archived copy, the precise continuity of its present text with the original 2021 version cannot be established. Its account refers separately to the Moroccan embassy's reply to Forbidden Stories on 17 July, the government's declaration issued through MAP on 19 July and a further Moroccan statement of 20 July. The newspaper brings these distinct interventions together in its defence of the Pegasus Project. Under the heading "Une même signature sur plusieurs téléphones", the article places technical findings and the identities of affected individuals together to support the assertion that the materials "montrent très clairement que le Maroc est client de NSO." The intensifier "très clairement" presents customer identity as settled.

Le Monde invokes Citizen Lab, described as "l'un des principaux centres de recherche au monde sur les logiciels espions", as having identified Morocco as a very probable NSO customer in 2018 and states that more recent analyses confirmed the activity of a Moroccan customer in France (La rédaction du Monde, 2021, pp. 4–5). Citizen Lab's 2018 Hide and Seek investigation, however, identifies Morocco as ATLAS's suspected geographical focus; its records of suspected infections also include Algeria, Côte d'Ivoire, France, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates (Marczak et al., 2018). Citizen Lab explicitly distinguishes the locations of suspected infections from the identities of NSO customers and warns that its geographical mapping is a guide for further investigation, not conclusive proof (pp. 24, 27). Le Monde provides a hyperlink to the 2018 investigation when presenting Morocco as "un très probable client" but identifies no corresponding investigation or hyperlink for the subsequent assertion that more recent Citizen Lab analyses "ont confirmé" the activity of "le client marocain". The movement from a suspected geographical focus to a probable customer and subsequently to an identified Moroccan customer is presented as a progression towards confirmed institutional authorship without specifying the investigation through which that identification was established. Citizen Lab's scientific standing and symbolic capital are thus invoked to reinforce the accusation while the procedures underlying the claimed confirmation remain unexplained in the newspaper's account.

The newspaper attributes to Amnesty International's Security Lab a "signature technique distinctive d'un même client" on the telephones of Edwy Plenel, François de Rugy, Claude Mangin and Omar Radi (La rédaction du Monde, 2021). A common signature may support an inference concerning shared technical infrastructure or the same operator; without a further investigative step, it does not identify that operator as a Moroccan security institution. The article's preceding passage describes "de nombreuses victimes" who "ont eu maille à partir avec le renseignement marocain", referring to journalists and activists supporting "the independence of 'Western' Sahara." The article then singles out Mangin and Radi as two people of particular interest to Moroccan intelligence services. This immediate co-text places forensic language beside victimhood, symbolic biographies and alleged political persecution. The co-occurrence of the technical finding with these representations invites readers to interpret the detected similarities through an already negative portrayal of Moroccan security institutions, while the identification of the operator remains unresolved in the published investigative explanation. The juxtaposition illustrates the hybridity of the editorial defence, in which scientific investigation, symbolic biographies and moral evaluation contribute to the apparent coherence of the attribution.

Le Monde subsequently declares that "Les preuves matérielles sont toutes publiques" and invokes independent validation by Citizen Lab (La rédaction du Monde, 2021). The same passage states that the report's seriousness was "unanimement salué", reinforcing an appeal to professional consensus without identifying the participants in that assessment. These emphatic evaluations accompany the assertion of technical validation, presenting the accusation as firmly established despite the unresolved question of customer identity. Citizen Lab's published peer review found Amnesty's forensic methods sound and independently confirmed Pegasus infections in four iTunes backups, but it received no additional context about the devices or the wider investigation (Citizen Lab, 2021, p. 3). The review therefore does not constitute an independent examination of Moroccan customer identity or of the provenance and selection of the full telephone-number dataset. The newspaper also acknowledges that the leaked list contains numbers associated with infection, numbers associated with targeting and numbers not targeted by Pegasus; it notes that more than half of the devices tested by Amnesty International's Security Lab had been infected or displayed traces of Pegasus (La rédaction du Monde, 2021). Without an explanation of how those devices were selected, the proportion cannot establish the status of the larger dataset or the institution responsible for the confirmed operations.

Le Monde's editorial defence brings together Citizen Lab's scientific standing, Amnesty International's forensic findings and the representation of individuals allegedly persecuted by Moroccan intelligence services to reaffirm Moroccan customer identity in response to the government's public challenge. At the macrosemantic level, the article organizes these elements around the assertion that Moroccan authorities directed the Pegasus attacks, presenting the attribution as scientifically established although the cited investigations do not identify the responsible institution. The movement from Citizen Lab's earlier geographical inference to confirmation attributed to unspecified subsequent analyses, the presentation of a common technical signature alongside negative representations of Moroccan security institutions, and the invocation of independent scientific validation

contribute to the apparent coherence of this proposition. At the macropragmatic level, the editorial defence performs an act of authoritative reaffirmation: it answers the Moroccan denials by presenting the accusation as settled and invokes the scientific standing and symbolic capital of the institutions concerned to reinforce its credibility. The selective provision of references, the omission of investigative steps necessary to verify customer identity and the categorical presentation of scientific confirmation operate together within this argumentative progression. Disinformation by design and omission thus extend beyond individual assertions to the semantic and pragmatic organization of the editorial defence, through which an accusation exceeding the demonstrated investigative findings is communicated as established knowledge.[1]

The reaffirmation of Moroccan authorship in the preceding journalistic publications provides the immediate background for examining its subsequent use within Algerian news and diplomatic discourse. TSA Algérie's reporting introduced the Pegasus accusation into Algerian national news discourse, while Algérie Patriotique's later publication reproduced the official declaration of the Algerian foreign minister, Ramtane Lamamra. The distinction between journalistic reporting and reported diplomatic speech is important because the accusation enters an existing Algerian discursive formation in which Morocco is already represented through historical disputes, allegations of hostility and conflicting political interests. Understanding the historical constitution and development of this discursive formation, and how it is manifested within Algerian political, media and diplomatic orders of discourse, requires situating these representations within the broader historical and political context of the dispute concerning the Moroccan Sahara. A fuller examination of this relationship belongs to the broader doctoral thesis project of which the present paper forms part. The present analysis is limited to the entry of the Pegasus accusation into Algerian news and diplomatic discourse and its subsequent use within the existing representation of Morocco.

On 24 August 2021, Lamamra announced the rupture of diplomatic relations with Morocco in a declaration reproduced by Algérie Patriotique (2021). The publication presents the minister's statement rather than an independent journalistic or forensic investigation. Speaking on behalf of the Algerian government, Lamamra begins his historical account with "Il est historiquement et objectivement établi", presenting alleged Moroccan hostility as an established feature of relations between the two countries. His declaration refers to the armed conflict of 1963, the rupture of diplomatic relations in 1976, the subsequent normalization of relations and disagreements concerning the Moroccan Sahara. These references precede the Pegasus allegation and situate it within an already established diplomatic representation of Morocco as a hostile state. The minister names the "scandale Pegasus", but does not identify The Guardian, TSA Algérie or a particular forensic investigation as the source of his assertion. The relationship with the earlier publications can therefore be examined through their chronology, shared accusation and institutional attribution, without assuming that the declaration was derived from any one of those reports.

The Pegasus accusation appears among allegations concerning Moroccan collaboration with MAK and Rachad and their alleged involvement in the fires affecting several Algerian provinces and the killing of Djamel Bensmaïl. Lamamra introduces the surveillance allegation through "Pour sa part, l'affaire, non moins grave" and states that the scandal "a révélé au grand jour" an "espionnage massif et systématique" directed against Algerian officials and citizens by "les services de renseignement marocains" (Algérie Patriotique, 2021). The verb "a révélé" presents the alleged surveillance as an accomplished investigative discovery, while the grammatical agency attributes responsibility directly to Moroccan intelligence services. The earlier Guardian and TSA publications, however, concerned more than 6,000 Algerian telephone numbers appearing in the leaked data, without establishing that the corresponding devices had been infected or identifying the Moroccan institution allegedly responsible (Kirchgaessner et al., 2021; Hamadi, 2021). Lamamra's declaration does not identify a subsequent forensic investigation establishing those propositions. The movement from possible selection for surveillance to an assertion of systematic espionage by a named state actor therefore marks a further increase in the certainty communicated about Moroccan authorship, although the declaration does not establish whether the minister relied on additional information unavailable in the preceding journalistic publications.

The significance of this development becomes clearer within the immediate co-text of the diplomatic declaration. Before introducing Pegasus, Lamamra accuses Morocco's "appareils sécuritaires et de propagande" of conducting a hostile media campaign against Algeria and places subsequent allegations within a historical account of threats to Algerian sovereignty and security (Algérie Patriotique, 2021). The expression "non moins grave" associates the Pegasus accusation with the seriousness attributed to the preceding allegations of violence and hostile conduct. The surveillance allegation consequently enters a representation of Morocco whose meaning is established through earlier historical and political accusations rather than through the forensic question of who directed a particular Pegasus operation. The earlier attribution developed within scientific, human-rights and investigative-journalistic discourse thus acquires a further function within Algerian diplomatic discourse. This illustrates interdiscursive generativity as the accusation becomes available for interpreting relations between the two states and for

[1]These findings provide a basis for examining the convergences and divergences in Le Monde's broader representations of Morocco, as further investigation into its editorial stance is of empirical and theoretical significance within Critical Discourse Studies. This inquiry also extends to Amnesty International's order of discourse, given that the present study identified a significant number of reports concerning Morocco published by both institutions.

supporting an official account of Moroccan hostility. The surrounding historical and moral evaluations contribute to the apparent coherence of the assertion of systematic espionage without resolving the investigative questions concerning the identity of the responsible institution.

The declaration concludes with "C'est pourquoi, et sur la base de tous ces facteurs et de toutes ces données", followed by the announcement that Algeria has decided to rupture diplomatic relations with Morocco with immediate effect (Algérie Patriotique, 2021). The plural reference to the preceding factors is significant: Pegasus appears as one allegation within a wider diplomatic argument, rather than as the demonstrated sole cause of the decision. Its significance for RQ2 lies in the use of a contested attribution within an official justification for state action. The assertion of systematic surveillance by Moroccan intelligence services, communicated without a corresponding account of the investigation establishing institutional authorship, extends the earlier movement from uncertainty to categorical certainty into diplomatic discourse. The accusation acquires a new political function within the existing representation of Morocco as a threat to Algerian sovereignty and security.

The answer to RQ1 for the period extending through August 2021 follows from the changing degree of certainty attached to Moroccan institutional authorship in the successive publications. Citizen Lab's 2018 investigation identifies Morocco as the suspected geographical focus of a Pegasus operator; Amnesty International's 2019 publications present the fears of named individuals as confirmed; and its 2020 investigation asserts a continuing relationship between Moroccan authorities and an NSO customer. Rueckert's English "appears to be" (2021b) contrasts with the French "par le Maroc" (2021a), while Forbidden Stories and Amnesty International France identify a Moroccan customer and Moroccan intelligence services categorically. Citizen Lab's independent peer review confirms Pegasus detection in four device backups and assesses Amnesty International's forensic methods, but does not establish the identity of the customer responsible for the attacks (Citizen Lab, 2021). Le Monde subsequently invokes Citizen Lab's scientific authority to reaffirm Moroccan customer identity, moving from an earlier suspected geographical association to an assertion of confirmation by more recent analyses without identifying the investigation supporting that conclusion. Alongside these changes in investigative certainty, the omissions affecting Radi's tweet and Mansouri's judicial history alter the representation of social activities, while Amnesty International France's invocation of Citizen Lab leaves the institution's particular participation in Radi's examination unexplained. The Algerian news and diplomatic publications subsequently reproduce and extend the already asserted attribution within different institutional settings. These comparisons identify disinformation by design in the movement from unresolved investigative propositions to categorical accusations, disinformation by omission in the exclusion of material circumstances and unexplained investigative procedures, and disinformation as process in the successive publication, reaffirmation and institutional use of Moroccan authorship.

For RQ2, the propaganda finding concerns the organized production, persuasive presentation and international promotion of accusations attributing Pegasus operations to Moroccan security institutions. The synchronized July 2021 publications extend the accusation across participating newsrooms, while the presentation of forensic findings alongside symbolic biographies, accounts of persecution and negative moral evaluations contributes to its persuasive force. The relationship between conceptual and affective meaning is significant: technical findings concerning Pegasus are presented within an immediate co-text that invites readers to interpret them through already established representations of threatened journalists and Moroccan political repression, although the investigative procedures made public do not consistently establish the institutional authorship asserted. The scientific standing of Citizen Lab, Amnesty International's forensic authority and the professional reputation of participating newsrooms contribute symbolic capital to these representations, strengthening the presentation of Moroccan authorship as established knowledge. Le Monde's subsequent editorial defence reinforces that attribution through the invocation of scientific confirmation, while its circulation in Algerian news discourse and its subsequent use in Lamamra's diplomatic declaration extend its political significance beyond the original investigations. In the latter setting, the Pegasus accusation enters an existing representation of Morocco as a hostile state and becomes one allegation among several advanced in support of the rupture of diplomatic relations. The distinction between the news outlet's circulation of the declaration and the minister's diplomatic speech remains important, as does the wider historical setting of Algerian–Moroccan relations, particularly the Moroccan Sahara dispute, whose fuller examination lies beyond the scope of this study. Propaganda thus emerges from the relationship between the accusation's political content, its persuasive construction, its coordinated international circulation and its subsequent use across different orders of discourse. This historical development demonstrates how disinformation as process contributes to propaganda as Moroccan institutional authorship is repeatedly reaffirmed, acquires greater apparent certainty and enters further political and institutional practices.

4.5. 16 July 2026: The continued attribution of Moroccan authorship in bilingual Forbidden Stories reporting

The Forbidden Stories article of 16 July 2026 returns to the attribution of Moroccan institutional authorship presented categorically in the consortium's July 2021 publications, introducing additional insider testimony, internal materials and technical analysis (Bautista et al., 2026a). As a later moment in the historical development of the controversy, the publication allows the examination of how earlier accusations are reaffirmed and recontextualized through newly presented material. Its relationship with the 2021 publications constitutes a further instance of intertextuality within Forbidden Stories' investigative-journalistic order of discourse, while its use of earlier scientific research and Amnesty International's forensic work continues the interdiscursive development of the hybrid formation. Following the accusation's circulation through international journalism and Algerian news and diplomatic

discourse, the July 2026 publication returns to Moroccan authorship within Forbidden Stories' own reporting. The additional materials must nevertheless be assessed according to what they establish about particular surveillance activities and the institutions directing them, rather than treated as retrospective confirmation of the conclusions advanced in 2021. The comparison therefore examines how these findings are related to the earlier accusation without undertaking a separate investigation of every alleged operation.

Hicham Mansouri is named alongside José Bautista, Eloïse Layan and Guillaume Vénétitay as a co-author. The article also presents him as an exiled investigative journalist, a person described as having been affected by Pegasus and an interviewee, while crediting him with initiating the documentation of Safir's account (Bautista et al., 2026a). These overlapping positions bring together his participation in the production of the investigation, his symbolic biography and his relationship with a confidential informant. The significance of this relationship concerns how the testimony obtained through his participation was independently examined and distinguished from the accusation already advanced in the earlier publications. His simultaneous representation as an investigative participant and a person allegedly affected by Pegasus makes that distinction particularly relevant, without establishing that he alone controlled access to the informants or determined how their accounts were examined.

A further intertextual detail concerns the historical representation of the investigation's authorship. The English article describes Radi's Pegasus experience as having been revealed by Amnesty International and the Forbidden Stories consortium in June 2020; the French edition likewise attributes the June 2020 reporting to both institutions (Bautista et al., 2026a, 2026b). The original report published on 22 June 2020 presents Amnesty International's examination of Radi's telephone and does not establish a jointly published Forbidden Stories investigation at that date (Amnesty International, 2020). Forbidden Stories' principal consortium publications followed in July 2021. The retrospective attribution may reflect the subsequent investigative partnership, but it extends that association to the earlier publication without explaining the distinction between the original investigation and the later collaboration. This difference matters because the July 2026 article invokes earlier investigative work while presenting new testimony and technical findings in support of the continuing accusation.

Radi and Mansouri also reappear through their professional identities, judicial experiences and alleged persecution, while Moroccan security institutions are represented through surveillance and repression (Bautista et al., 2026a). These recurring symbolic biographies place the new testimony within the moral opposition already established in the earlier publications. Their affective significance accompanies the presentation of additional investigative material, raising the question of whether the new sources were examined independently of the existing attribution or interpreted principally as further confirmation of it. The question of confirmation bias therefore concerns the examination of testimony and documents against plausible alternative explanations, rather than the presence of these biographies itself. The portrayal of former agents disclosing internal practices also presents the institution as accessible to outside scrutiny, but this representation does not establish actual fragmentation within the intelligence services or a loss of operational control.

Forbidden Stories develops a continuous representation of Moroccan security institutions through its account of successive surveillance practices. The article opens with Radi's interrogation, the seizure of his telephone and surveillance allegedly directed at him. It subsequently describes the distribution of pre-infected Samsung telephones in the Rif, the monitoring of internet cafés and field operations attributed to the DGST, before turning to the alleged adoption of Pegasus (Bautista et al., 2026a, 2026b). The telephones and internet cafés are associated with the Remote-Control System marketed by Hacking Team, rather than Pegasus. The publication thus presents different surveillance technologies within a wider account of Moroccan intelligence activity. Their succession gives the later Pegasus attribution a historical and political context, reinforced by the accompanying accounts of threatened activists. Yet findings concerning one surveillance system cannot independently establish which institution operated another or directed particular attacks. The narrative continuity among these practices must therefore be distinguished from the investigative procedures required to establish their institutional authorship.

The distinction extends to the visual materials accompanying the investigation. The photograph of the Samsung installation screen and the account of Sofiane concern an allegedly pre-infected telephone and its owner, while the photographs of an internet café refer to another asserted surveillance setting (Bautista et al., 2026a, 2026b). The Pegasus interface images, by contrast, are described as having been obtained from Panama. Their correspondence with Safir's recollection and earlier descriptions may lend credibility to his account of the software's appearance, but it does not independently establish that a particular Moroccan institution operated the depicted system or directed an identified attack. Within the same publication, these illustrations appear alongside attributed internal materials and representations of political persecution, encouraging a continuous interpretation of findings arising from distinct investigative circumstances. Their co-occurrence contributes to the apparent coherence of the account, while the findings themselves concern different questions: the use of surveillance technologies, the credibility of a witness's description and the identification of the institution responsible for particular operations.

The extension of the accusation to higher levels of Moroccan state authority becomes apparent in the report's representation of the institutional hierarchy. Alongside allegations concerning DGST personnel involved in surveillance activities, the journalists describe relationships within the senior intelligence hierarchy and introduce claims implicating advisory structures associated with higher levels of state authority (Bautista et al., 2026a). The authors nevertheless acknowledge that a particular allegation concerning involvement at this higher institutional level could not be independently verified. This distinction is significant because the

representation of relationships within the intelligence hierarchy does not itself establish participation in, or authorization of, particular Pegasus operations by higher state institutions. The accusation thus extends beyond the conduct of an intelligence service towards alleged relationships among institutions occupying different positions within the organization and exercise of state power. Its political and security significance increases with this extension, particularly where allegations concerning higher state authority appear alongside accounts of surveillance activities presented as established findings. The immediate co-text may consequently encourage readers to interpret an unverified allegation through the authority attributed to the preceding investigative material. The critical issue concerns the relationship between the findings supporting each institutional attribution and the political significance acquired by accusations that implicate the Moroccan state's highest institutions.

The bilingual publication also communicates different degrees of certainty concerning the same alleged surveillance activities. The English headline contrasts Morocco's denial with documents and insider testimony, whereas the French headline announces revelations concerning Moroccan mass surveillance (Bautista et al., 2026a, 2026b). The English article states that Morocco "has targeted close to 13,000 phone numbers", while the French uses the conditional "aurait ciblé près de 13 000 numéros". The English affirmative construction presents telephone-number selection as an established activity, whereas the French conditional leaves the assertion open to uncertainty. Both versions nevertheless acknowledge that the consortium cannot establish how many telephones were actually infected and that some entries may have been made to test vulnerabilities. These differences do not represent independent investigative findings, but contrasting degrees of certainty within the same bilingual publication. The affirmative attribution of telephone-number selection must therefore be distinguished from forensic confirmation of infection and the identification of the institution responsible for the alleged operations. The relationship between these propositions becomes particularly relevant to the subsequent account of internal tests involving DGST personnel (Bautista et al., 2026a, 2026b).

The account of purported internal tests illustrates the distinction between telephone-number selection, reported testing and institutional authorship at the level of a smaller set of numbers. The journalists identify eight Moroccan telephone numbers associated with five DGST personnel in the Pegasus Project material and describe 26 supposed tests involving one officer's telephone between 2017 and 2019 (Bautista et al., 2026a, 2026b). Safir interprets the officers' inclusion in the material as part of internal testing. The association with identified personnel and the repetition of entries warrant closer examination of this interpretation, but the presence of these numbers in the dataset does not independently establish the purpose of each entry or whether the reported tests resulted in successful infections. Nor does the association with DGST personnel, without further investigation, establish which institution authorized particular surveillance operations against other individuals. The reported findings thus extend the investigation beyond the earlier geographical associations, while leaving distinct questions concerning internal testing, customer identity and responsibility for particular attacks.

The article also presents additional scientific findings concerning the relationship among surveillance operations. It attributes to Amnesty International's Security Lab an examination of Apple accounts associated with attacks on Moroccan journalists and foreign targets and reports that examinations undertaken by the French national cybersecurity authority identified some of the same accounts and email addresses (Bautista et al., 2026a, 2026b). Unlike the earlier reliance on Citizen Lab's 2018 ATLAS investigation, these findings introduce technical relationships among particular attacks that may contribute to identifying shared infrastructure or operational connections. Their significance for institutional authorship nevertheless depends on establishing who controlled the accounts, how they were used and whether the same actor directed the operations associated with them. The identification of common accounts or email addresses may connect separate attacks, but it does not independently identify the Moroccan institution that commissioned or directed each operation. The article moves from these reported technical connections to the assertion that Moroccan authorities' direction of attacks against foreign targets has been proved, without explaining the investigative steps through which control of the accounts was established and related to the responsible institution. The distinction therefore concerns the findings established by the technical examinations and the further conclusion drawn about Moroccan institutional authorship.

The attribution of responsibility is also supported through confidential testimony. Forbidden Stories reports that Safir's account was corroborated by other former intelligence personnel and documents described as internal to the DGST. Another former officer is said to confirm his assertion that only the DGST had access to Pegasus (Bautista et al., 2026a, 2026b). Safir's alleged former position within the institution may have provided him with knowledge of surveillance practices, but the scope of that knowledge depends on his responsibilities, direct involvement and access to the particular operations described. The claim that the DGST alone had access to Pegasus is also distinct from the identification of personnel responsible for authorizing individual attacks. The reported internal documents concern different surveillance practices, while the article expressly acknowledges that the alleged involvement of a senior adviser in requests concerning foreign targets could not be independently verified. The publication does not sufficiently explain which assertions were independently confirmed by the former officers, which were supported by the internal documents or how the independence of the accounts was examined. Protecting confidential sources may justify withholding identifying information, but it does not remove the investigative requirement to distinguish direct knowledge, second-hand testimony and corroboration. Mansouri's participation in obtaining Safir's account, alongside his position as a co-author and a person represented as having been affected by Pegasus, makes the independent examination of the testimony particularly relevant. The witness performs an important function in connecting the reported technical findings with the alleged internal practices of

Moroccan intelligence. This function does not establish that his testimony was invented or deliberately selected to support a predetermined accusation; it requires that the conclusions attributed to his account remain within the limits of what his knowledge and the independently examined material establish.

The investigative significance of these findings becomes clearer when they are examined as successive hypotheses rather than as interchangeable demonstrations of Moroccan authorship. As Hunter et al. (2011) explain, investigative quality control concerns the relationship between the sources, the verification undertaken and the conclusions advanced. The reported use of earlier surveillance technologies, access to Pegasus, internal testing, technical connections among attacks and authorization of particular operations concern different investigative propositions. Each requires findings directed to the question it raises, while the verification of one does not establish the others. The July 2026 publication introduces testimony and technical findings relevant to several stages of this inquiry, but does not consistently explain how they were independently examined and connected to the categorical attribution of Moroccan institutional authorship. The interruption is especially significant where shared Apple accounts are presented as proof of attacks directed by Moroccan authorities without an account of how the control and use of those accounts were established. Similarly, testimony concerning access to Pegasus does not by itself establish responsibility for every operation attributed to the institution. The professional requirement is therefore to examine each relationship between hypothesis, investigation and finding before extending the conclusion to another claim. The coherence of the published account cannot substitute for verification of the successive propositions upon which its attribution of institutional authorship depends.

The investigative distinctions established above become less apparent within the semantic and pragmatic organization of the publication. In the immediate co-text, the account of shared Apple accounts and the alleged DGST hierarchy is followed by a discussion of restored French–Moroccan diplomatic relations, Radi's sense of injury and Safir's condemnation of his former colleagues as "cold-blooded monsters" (Bautista et al., 2026a). These elements concern different aspects of the investigation: the technical findings indicate possible relationships among surveillance operations, the testimony concerns access to and practices within intelligence institutions, while the representations of personal suffering and moral responsibility contribute to the evaluation of the actors concerned. At the macrosemantic level, their succession establishes a continuous representation of Moroccan security institutions through surveillance, political relations and alleged persecution. The conceptual meaning of the scientific findings thus overlaps with the affective meaning associated with victimhood and moral condemnation, inviting readers to interpret the technical material within an already established representation of Moroccan institutional responsibility. Safir's description of his former colleagues is a moral judgment rather than a finding identifying those responsible for particular operations. Its proximity to the investigative material nevertheless allows that judgment to contribute to the negative representation of the institution with which they are associated. At the macropragmatic level, the publication performs a renewed act of reaffirmation, drawing on additional forensic findings and former intelligence personnel's testimony to reinforce the accusation advanced categorically in 2021. The resulting hybridity brings scientific investigation, confidential testimony, symbolic biographies and moral evaluation into the same account, while the distinctions between their respective investigative significance and the conclusions concerning institutional authorship become less apparent. Disinformation by design concerns this presentation of distinct findings as a continuous demonstration of Moroccan responsibility, while disinformation by omission concerns the investigative relationships that remain unexplained between technical findings, witness accounts and the identification of the institution directing particular attacks. The renewed assertion of Moroccan authorship also contributes to sedimentation and disinformation as process within Forbidden Stories' continuing order of discourse.

The additional testimony, documents and technical findings presented in July 2026 may strengthen particular accusations, but they do not retrospectively establish that the investigations published in 2021 demonstrated Moroccan institutional authorship. Their significance for RQ1 depends on the specific investigative propositions they support, particularly the distinction between the detection of surveillance activity, access to Pegasus and responsibility for particular operations. The subsequent use of these findings within the earlier accusation illustrates interdiscursive generativity, while the reaffirmation of Moroccan authorship contributes to its sedimentation within Forbidden Stories' investigative-journalistic order of discourse. For RQ2, the renewed presentation of the accusation, supported by the scientific standing of the participating institutions and the affective significance of the accompanying representations, extends the persuasive practices examined under propaganda. The July 2026 publication therefore marks a further moment in disinformation as process, in which additional investigative findings are presented within an accusation whose earlier institutional attribution remains insufficiently established by the procedures made public.

5. Conclusion

The longitudinal analysis traces the changing attribution of Moroccan institutional authorship from Citizen Lab's 2018 identification of Morocco as the suspected geographical focus of the Pegasus operator ATLAS to the later journalistic and diplomatic assertions of state responsibility. Amnesty International's 2019 and 2020 publications present allegations concerning named individuals alongside affirmative statements attributing surveillance to Moroccan authorities and asserting a continuing NSO customer relationship. The July 2021 Pegasus Project extends these accusations through coordinated international reporting, followed by their reaffirmation in subsequent journalism and their use within Algerian news and diplomatic discourse. The July 2026 Forbidden Stories publication returns to the earlier attribution, introducing additional testimony, internal materials and technical findings whose relationship with the previous accusations requires separate examination.

The answer to RQ1 emerges from the differences between the findings reported in these investigations and the certainty attached to their subsequent assertions. Disinformation by design is identified where suspected geographical associations, telephone-number selection and forensic confirmation of Pegasus activity are presented alongside categorical accusations of Moroccan institutional authorship without the investigative steps connecting these distinct propositions being established in the published accounts. The movement from an alleged customer relationship to the attribution of particular operations, together with differences in certainty between the English and French publications, further demonstrates how linguistic and investigative practices contribute to the construction of Moroccan authorship. Disinformation by omission concerns the exclusion of speech acts and judicial circumstances material to the representations of Radi and Mansouri, as well as the unexplained investigative participation attributed to Citizen Lab in Amnesty International France's account of Radi's surveillance. Le Monde's subsequent invocation of Citizen Lab to reaffirm Moroccan customer identity similarly leaves the investigation supporting its asserted scientific confirmation unidentified. These findings do not negate the forensic confirmation of Pegasus infections; they concern the further investigative propositions through which responsibility is assigned to Moroccan institutions. The July 2026 publication presents additional technical relationships and former intelligence personnel's testimony, but the distinctions among access to Pegasus, shared operational infrastructure and authorization of particular attacks remain necessary. Disinformation as process arises as earlier accusations are repeated, defended and extended through subsequent journalistic publications and institutional discourse, allowing unresolved attributions to acquire increasing apparent certainty.

For RQ2, the propaganda finding concerns the organized production, persuasive presentation, international promotion and subsequent political use of accusations attributing Pegasus operations to Moroccan security institutions. Forbidden Stories coordinated an international investigation and synchronized publication across participating newsrooms, as later described by its founder (Press Room & Forbidden Stories, 2026, 21:44–22:16). The persuasive construction of the accusations also depends on the relationship between their conceptual and affective meanings. Forensic findings and technical descriptions appear in the immediate co-text of symbolic biographies, accounts of persecution and negative moral evaluations, inviting readers to interpret the reported surveillance through representations of threatened journalists and Moroccan political repression. Citizen Lab's scientific standing, Amnesty International's forensic authority and the professional reputation of participating newsrooms contribute symbolic capital to these representations. The consortium's findings subsequently circulate through Algerian news reporting, while Le Monde's editorial defence reaffirms Moroccan customer identity through appeals to scientific confirmation. The accusation later enters Lamamra's diplomatic declaration as an assertion of systematic espionage by Moroccan intelligence services, advanced among several reasons for the rupture of diplomatic relations. The propaganda finding therefore concerns the relationship between the political content of the accusation, its persuasive construction, its coordinated circulation and the further institutional purposes for which it is used. Synchronization and repeated publication contribute to this process, but their significance derives from their relationship with the representations and investigative practices examined in the study.

The use of the Pegasus accusation within Algerian diplomatic discourse must also be understood in relation to the existing historical and political representation of Morocco. Lamamra's declaration of 24 August 2021 presents allegations of Moroccan hostility through references to earlier conflicts, diplomatic relations and the dispute concerning the Moroccan Sahara before introducing systematic espionage as a further accusation (Algérie Patriotique, 2021). The Pegasus controversy thus enters an already established diplomatic account of interstate antagonism, rather than creating that representation. Its publication by Algérie Patriotique also distinguishes the news outlet's circulation of the declaration from the minister's diplomatic speech and the official decision it announces. The Moroccan Sahara dispute constitutes an important part of the wider historical setting in which these representations develop, although the constitution and subsequent development of the Algerian discursive formation cannot be established through the selected publications alone. A fuller examination of that historical relationship lies beyond the scope of the present study. The finding established here concerns the entry of the Pegasus accusation into Algerian news and diplomatic discourse, where it acquires a further political function within an existing representation of Morocco as a threat to Algerian sovereignty and security.

The preceding findings raise a final question concerning the relationship between the investigative practices of Forbidden Stories and its partners and the ethical principles, methodological requirements and conventions of investigative journalism. The issue is not the absence of forensic findings, confidential testimony or documentary material, nor does it require every detail of an investigation involving protected sources to be disclosed. It concerns whether the investigative procedures and findings presented to readers support the categorical conclusions communicated through these publications. The longitudinal analysis identifies successive movements from suspected associations and technical findings to accusations of Moroccan institutional authorship, accompanied by omissions of material circumstances, insufficiently explained relationships among investigative hypotheses and the persuasive use of scientific authority, symbolic biographies and moral evaluations. Assessed against the requirements of investigative journalism examined in the theoretical framework, these discrepancies reveal a difference between the investigative authority claimed by the publications and the procedures through which their conclusions are publicly established. Drawing on Bakhtin's (1986) theory of speech genres, this difference concerns the relationship between the genre through which the publications present themselves and the communicative practices demonstrated in their reporting. The findings reveal a hybrid discursive formation in which scientific investigation, human-rights advocacy and journalism intersect through investigative,

linguistic and compositional practices. Hybridity does not itself constitute a departure from investigative journalism. The finding of genre distortion instead concerns the discrepancy between the ethical and methodological requirements associated with investigative journalism and the practices through which Moroccan institutional authorship is presented with a degree of certainty exceeding what the published investigative findings establish.

The contribution of the present study to Critical Discourse Studies lies in examining investigative practice alongside linguistic choice and compositional organization within the historical development of the Pegasus controversy. The analysis shows how scientific findings, forensic interpretations and testimony enter different orders of discourse, where they are associated with symbolic biographies, moral evaluations and the symbolic capital of participating institutions. Interdiscursive generativity accounts for the further representations and practices arising through these relationships. Sedimentation develops through the repeated assertion and reaffirmation of Moroccan institutional authorship, while naturalization becomes apparent when that attribution is treated as established background knowledge in subsequent journalistic and diplomatic discourse. The July 2026 publication illustrates the continuation of this process within Forbidden Stories' own order of discourse, although its additional investigative material must be assessed according to the particular operations and institutional relationships it can establish, rather than treated as retrospective verification of the 2021 investigations. The historical examination of disinformation and propaganda consequently brings the persuasive coherence of an investigative account into relation with the verification of the propositions upon which its conclusions depend. This distinction provides the basis for the finding of genre distortion and demonstrates the importance of examining the practices of investigation, verification and publication when studying how accusations acquire authority and become established within and across different orders of discourse.

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