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Food Security in times of War: Double Discourse and Violent Conflicts. The case of Russia, 2014-2022.

Key words: food security, food sovereignty, grain trade, food crises, trade war.

Abstract

The Food Security Doctrine was adopted by the Russian Federation in 2010. Developed under the leadership of President Dmitry Medvedev, it established food security as a central component of national security. The concept emerged as an issue of global public debate in response to the 2006-2008 hunger crisis in the Global South. In Russia though, the initial interpretation of the concept, which emphasized the accessibility of food resources, was transformed into a slogan advocating domestic agri-food production. The article examines the Russian case from 2014 to 2022. It analyses how the narrative on food security constructs common goods such as 'domestic territory' or 'food sovereignty', and its subsequent implications for the prioritization of certain values (e.g. production, sovereignty), social groups (e.g.

producers over consumers), and roles in economic life (e.g. trade). Finally, this article will incorporate an updated analysis of official discourses on food security produced by the government following the invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Introduction

The blockade of the Black Sea caused by the war in Ukraine has disrupted the world grain trade, which was already weakened by the logistical crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Food prices rose by 30% in just a few months after the invasion of Ukraine (IFRPI, 2023, p.6).

To characterise these fluctuations, the International Monetary Fund mentions the emergence of so-called global inflation (IMF, 2022). Described as a reality unprecedented in the last 20 years, it is fuelled by cumulative and convergent processes in both northern and southern countries, albeit in different forms. In addition to the food component, price increases are being driven by other factors such as rising energy and transport tariffs and currency depreciations, mainly in the South. Food prices are particularly affected: the FAO Food Price Index (FFPI) has risen uniquely since its inception in 1990, reaching a level of 158.1 points in May 2022, 26% higher than its average level in 2021¹. These violent price fluctuations are linked to the sensitivity of the conflict zone to global grain markets, with Russia and Ukraine together supplying 30% of global wheat exports, nearly 80% of sunflower oil exports and a third of global barley exports (World Food Programme, 2022; Abay and ali,

¹ <https://www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/foodpricesindex/en/> (Accessed 8 June 2023).

2022). Both production areas and logistical hubs are severely affected by the conflict in Ukraine and the Black Sea, where maritime transport is the main channel for grain deliveries.

These food shocks have various consequences in developing countries. The prevalence of global hunger has increased, with the proportion of undernourished people rising from a low of 7.6% in 2014 to nearly 9.8% of the world's population in 2022 (International Food Policy Research Institute, 20203, p.6). The number of people facing identified food insecurity situations in 45 countries has doubled since 2016, reaching 205 million in 2022 (International Food Policy Research Institute, 2023, p.6). After decades of progress towards the Millennium Development Goal of poverty reduction, the fight against hunger has lost ground since 2014 (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2022). Despite the hopes pinned on the Green Revolution to eradicate world hunger, global food crises have not disappeared from the global development agenda. In the 21st century, recurrent crises have fuelled fears of renewed global famines. The food riots of 2007-2008 and the health crisis led to a sharp rise in food prices, while the war in Ukraine has had major impact on both energy and food markets, as well on food trade and production.

This context contributes to the return of a concept associated with food crises: food security is at the centre of the international public debate on development, driven by international organisations and political leaders from both the North and the South.

This article examines the reprioritisation of food security on the international agenda since the early 2020s, in times of war, when nearly 40% of the global supply in wheat originates from a war zone. It aims to analyse its modalities and understand its links with global inflation in the context of the health crisis and the war in Ukraine. Does this context change the framing of public debates on the issue? How is the debate on

food security articulated to price increases by experts from international organisations and national authorities in Russia? Does the crisis allow for the creation of a counter-discourse in a country, which is both a global grain supplier and an aggressor in a major production area? What is the role of consumers, inequalities, and inflation in narratives on food security in the international public discourses and in Russia? These are the questions discussed in this article.

This research is based on discourse analysis of reports, documents and grey literature published on food security. Two fields are considered: on the one hand, the arenas of the international organisations in charge of food and development issues, and on the other hand, a national case, with Russia as an example. Russia is an extreme case: it combines the situation of a country targeted by unprecedented trade sanctions that promote the commercial protection of domestic agriculture, on the one hand, and a leading position in global cereal exports, on the other, as well as a country fighting food insecurity at the international level. Comparing the discourses of international public expertise and their discursive translations at the national level allows to illustrate how concepts circulate across institutional spaces. Besides, the comparative and historical insights adopted by this research avoid reifying and naturalizing the object of food security. Instead, they allow to consider historicity, agency and to better articulate narratives on food security and food policies and regimes.

The first part of this article provides an historical overview of the productivist bias that has characterised food regimes since World War II. (1). The food crises of the 21st century are bringing back into the public debate fears about the persistent food

insecurity in the South, without reconsidering the neoliberal productivist agri-food model at stake (2). However, the recurrent food crises supported national reformulations and legitimizations of food security doctrines. In Russia, the productivist model promotes grain power through trade abroad and protectionism on the domestic territory. (3). while the war economy promotes a weaponization of agri-food trade at the expense of consumers, whether Russian or from the developing world (4).

Agricultural production at the heart of the neoliberal food security model

The first section starts with some methodological and theoretical precisions. This research is at the crossroads of several sub-disciplinary fields: the sociology of economic policy, the sociology of food systems and the sociology of expert knowledge. This article extends an initial fieldwork conducted between 2015 and 2018 that brought together more than 30 interviews collected in Russian among public officials, union representatives, regional leaders and agriculture experts and economists from public and private organisations in Russia. This fieldwork was conducted in three different regions: The Central region near Moscow, the South, on the border of the Black Sea and in the Don region, near Voronej. From 2019, access to the field has then been restricted successively by the pandemic and the war in Ukraine. Therefore, the update has been carried out using grey literature, public policy speeches on food security issues by executive (Security Council) or parliamentary (Federation Council) institutions. It is complemented by official reports on agri-food trade, production published at the international level by international organizations, (mainly the UN, the FAO) or at the national level.

As shown in the introduction, the concept of food security is at the core of international organizations' narratives on the effects of war. Beyond this, it is an unavoidable element in debates on production models, food policies, and development. In line with major research works published on this issue, the constructivist approach defines food security as a social, political and institutional construct that links discourse and practice, subjective values, and speech acts (for a literature review, see Zhou, 2022b). In addition, it has two other virtues: it makes the context of enunciation an essential component of the analysis. Finally, it articulates the narratives produced with their audiences, and their speakers. (Lawrence and McMichael, 2012; Bernard De Raymond and Goulet, 2022; Clapp, 2015a; Fouilleux and al., 2017; Sommerville and al, 2022; Delgado and Tschunkert, 2022). The concept of framing emerged from the beginnings of constructivism through the influential figure of Erving Goffman. In this research, it is used to demonstrate how public debates produce a specific definition of the situation and the problems identified. Other scholars use similar concepts such as regimes, models, or regimes of justification. Framings result from the mobilisation of actors and struggles based on cognitive, discursive, and political strategies, and representations of public problems that aim to impose one construction of the problem over other interpretations. Dominant narratives can be challenged by alternative framings or counter-framings.

Food security has been extensively investigated by the constructivist stance. According to its definition, it implies feeding the world's poorest people by meeting their basic needs. However, adopted in 1974 at the International Conference on Food organised by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the concept of food

security has undergone many reformulations². Initially understood exclusively in terms of the volume of production and the price of food, under the impetus of the Indian economist Amartya Sen, the definition of food security³ has been extended to take account of situations in which famine is not due to the unavailability of food but to the lack of access to food, as described by Amartya Sen. This reformulation brings the consumer, supply chains, health, and product quality into the food equation. Indeed, four main pillars are identified: 1) physical availability in different quantities and qualities 2) economic and physical access to food; 3) food utilisation 4) stability of the three previous pillars over time.

In what ways is this issue addressed by food systems? This is the focus of this section. Indeed, faced with the challenge of feeding a growing world population, the genealogy of production systems shows the dominance of the agricultural productivist model. From the 1960s onwards, the techniques of the Green Revolution were imposed as an effective solution to food problems in the countries of the South. A neoliberal (Clapp, Moseley, 2020), productivist (Goulet, Bernard de Raymond, 2020), productionist⁴ (Fouilleux, Bricas, Alpha, 2017, Bricas, Daviron, 2008) or corporatist (Friedmann, Allaire, Daviron, 2017) model was imposed: it produces a vision of agricultural problems in which the availability and volume of agricultural production are an effective solution to the problems of hunger in the world. In this model, agri-food multinationals and private companies play a key role thanks to their

² Over 200 have been identified in the last 25 years (Maxwell, 1996)

³ “Food security exists when all people at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” An Introduction to the Basic Concepts of Food Security. Food Security Information for Action Practical Guides. The European Commission (EC) – FAO Food Security Programme, 2008. P. 1, <https://www.fao.org/3/al936e/al936e00.pdf>, (Accessed 6 February 2023)

⁴ The productionist model differs from productivism in its emphasis on the quantity of production, whereas productivism implies the use of technological solutions, including new chemical inputs, mechanical processes, or genetic innovations (Fouilleux, Bricas, Alpha, 2017)

privileged access to the arenas where public agricultural policies are negotiated (Fouilleux and al., 2017).

Domestic consumption models in the 1960s and 1970s gave way to free trade policies advocated by international organisations such as the IMF and the World Bank. From 1980 to 1990, productive efficiency was supposed to derive from the integration of agricultural goods into world trade, facilitated by the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. Since the 2000's, the construction of global food commodity chains has integrated small agricultural producers. Besides, it has led to a productive intensification aiming higher yields. The last stage of agricultural neo-productionism introduces a financialization of agriculture in which the production, processing and transport of agricultural goods are subordinated to financial organisations and strategies (Clapp, Moseley, 2020). The technical and productivist paradigm is then imposed without discussing access, distribution or even consumption and food use (Allen, 2013).

The construction of food systems has thus been based on neo-Malthusian models (Sommerville, Le Billon, 2014; Bernard de Raymond, Goulet, 2020), solving the world's hunger problems through intensive agricultural production combined with trade liberalisation. This outcome implies a market-based vision of global food security and a quantitative approach of food problems, based on a global balance between supply and demand (Bernard de Raymond, Thivet (eds), 2021). Issues of revenues, inflation, cost of living have been left behind. The 21st century crises have challenged this model without superseding it.

The 21st century crises have accentuated this dependence.

The global food system has been repeatedly struck by crises since the Second World War. According to the constructivist theory, crises act like tests, or trials challenging the dominant framing in favour of alternative ones (Barthe and al. 2013). While each crisis has its own specific causes, they are exacerbated by a common structure that exposes the shortcomings of the production-oriented agricultural model (Clapp, 2023). The model's vulnerability to disruption stems from three interrelated factors: the concentration of agricultural production in a limited number of countries; the dependence of the world's food supply on a few crops (such as wheat, maize, and rice); and the heavy dependence of certain countries on agri-food imports. As a result, concentration at various levels, in production, agronomic diversity, or trade, generated low adaptability, flexibility and strong dependencies. In fact, the industrialisation and financialization of agriculture have significant environmental, social, and even economic costs. Industrial production has obliterated the diversity of agri-food systems (Clapp, Moseley, 2020), encouraged land grabbing practices (Visser, Mamonova, Spoor, 2012; Sommerville and Le Billon, 2024), and ignored the risks of disruptions in global value chains.

The recurring crises, whether the 2007/2008 financial crisis, the COVID pandemic or, more recently, the war in Ukraine challenge established narratives. Politically, they provide opportunities to question current models and propose alternative understandings of global food systems. Two alternative framings are emerging in this context: food sovereignty and food safety. It is crucial to analyse in what way they challenge the food security models.

The vast literature on food riots demonstrates that the productivist consensus that prevailed from the 1950s onwards is being called into question (Lerin, Louafi, 2009 ; Clapp, 2015b ; Zhou, 2022b). The hunger crisis triggered a shift in ideas and power

relations among stakeholders involved in the public debate on agricultural models. The reversal towards the rights of communities to determine their food systems, based on the idea of food sovereignty, subsequently adopted by many countries is exemplified by the civil society movement *Via Campesina* (Thivet, 2013; Clapp, 2015a). In this interpretation, the concepts of food security are opposed to those of food sovereignty or self-sufficiency (Bricas, Daviron, 2008), while new actors gain prominence in negotiations (Duncan, 2015). Founded in 1993 by farmers' unions, associations and 'landless' peasants, the transnational peasant movement *Via Campesina* has succeeded in shifting the debate from a focus on production supply to one on the food production practices. This alternative frame moves the emphasis from industrial food security to small-scale agriculture, from trade-focused food security to rights-focused food security, emphasising the right to earn from production or the right to consume (Lawrence, McMichael, 2012). The fight against hunger then fosters the empowerment of local communities (Maxwell, 1996; McKeon, 2015). The political impact of this crisis is unprecedented: while it doesn't offer a counter-frame, it creates an alternative to the neoliberal framing. While, still production-oriented, it targets small producers (Sommerville, Le Billon, 2014).

Just over a decade later, the COVID-19 crisis, coupled with the Ukrainian crisis, is once again shaking the global food system and increasing food insecurity. However, discussions on the causal patterns of crises are conflicting: humanitarian interpretations point to the exogeneity of crises, while critical agrarian studies highlight the structures of food systems.

The pandemic is global in that it impacts agricultural supply, demand, and trade. A classic production crisis in the agricultural sector has coincided with a collapse in consumption due to prolonged global lock-downs and a reduction in household

incomes. Finally, the disruption of value chains and the destabilisation of world trade have had a heterogeneous impact on agricultural prices, penalising the countries most dependent on world trade and on commodities subject to export restrictions, such as wheat (FAO, 2022). As a consequence, the health crisis has increased poverty and food insecurity in the global South and, to a lesser extent, in the North. In the urban areas, the decline of subsistence farming had already weakened the population's access to food. The combined effects of the COVID crisis and the war in Ukraine have led to a deterioration in global food security (Ben-Hassen, El Bilali, 2022). The direct impact stems from the central role of Russia and Ukraine in grain supply of southern countries for human (food) and animal consumption (feed) (Ben-Hassen, El Bilali, 2022; Helleghers, 2022). The detrimental effects of concentration in production, trade and diets enhance dependency and vulnerability (Altieri, Nichols, 2020; Van der Ploeg, 2020). In addition, indirect effects are at play through rising energy prices, increased fertiliser costs and the weakening of agricultural commodity logistics. The Ukrainian crisis demonstrated the devastating effects of the interconnection between food and fossil fuel markets through the industrialisation of inputs (Clapp, 2023).

The high expectations placed on production intensification have not prevented the return of food crises. Each crisis in its own way highlights the vulnerability of production systems, while the spread of food crises reflects the globalization of agriculture. However, there is no consensus on the interpretation of food crises. The cognitive construction of food models involves causal patterns as much as specific solutions. Critical agrarian studies question the structures of productive systems, while international organizations suggest the abolition of trade barriers.

According to the former, food insecurity does not result from shortages or supply problems: it lies mainly in the price of agricultural commodities, in both physical and economic accessibility to consumers, (Hall, 2023), and inequalities between the North and the South (Van der Ploeg, 2020). These imbalances may even be due to speculation rather than trade or production failures and have more to do with "the role of Wall Street than Moscow" (quoted in Hall, 2023 ; Baines, 2017). This interpretation shifts the focus from production to consumption, from the availability of agricultural commodities to income inequalities, poverty, and development issues (Power et al. 2020, Van der Ploeg, 2020). It implies to reduce power asymmetries and advocates the development of agroecology in a context threatened by climate change (Ben Hassen, El Bilali, 2022). It suggests reducing the size of value chains, territorialising consumption, and restoring diversity in agricultural production (Clapp and Moseley, 2020; Altieri and Nicholls 2020; Van der Ploeg 2020).

The latter have a different interpretation of the crisis: an exogenous shock combined unfavourable factors, similar to "perfect storms" that affected a productive system that remains beyond question (Hall, 2023). The adverse effect induced is price volatility. The solutions implemented include depoliticised government techniques, such as market devices through early warning systems on price fluctuations, risk management indicators for stakeholders, while advocating the deepening of food trade, the reduction of tariff and trade barriers (Espitia, Rocha, Ruta, 2022), and the continuation of industrialisation, massification and specialisation of agricultural models (IFPRI, 2023; FAO, 2020).

In this conceptualisation, a humanitarian response is needed, involving international organisations, donors, and civil societies (Delgado, Tschunkert, 2022). In addition, hunger and food issues are interpreted by international development organisations

from the perspective of individual responsibility, the self-discipline of food consumption behaviours affected by risks, but without generally challenging the models at work. Indeed, the aim is to make goods accessible to consumers without questioning global production structures, distribution inequalities and power relations between actors (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2022, p.2). Attention to the available food choices reflects this concern and is a focus of contradictions:

« To meet the targets of SDG 2 by 2030, agri-food systems must be transformed in ways that ensure they deliver lower cost and safe nutritious foods that make healthy diets more affordable for all, sustainably and inclusively » (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2022, p.2).

In these arenas, the tensions between the productivist framing and the consumption framing, between an approach based on supply and one that supports demand, between the freedom to produce and the right to consume, are made explicit in these few lines from the 2022 report on food security and nutrition in the world: (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2022, p.15). The humanitarian response to food security relies on trade interdependence:

« Done smartly and informed by evidence, involving all stakeholders, keeping in mind countries' political economies and institutional capabilities, and considering commitments and flexibilities under World Trade Organization rules, repurposing existing public support can help increase the availability of nutritious foods to the consumer. It can contribute to making healthy diets less costly and more affordable all over the world, a necessary – albeit insufficient – for condition for healthy diets to be consumed ».

Inequalities in income between the North and the South, as well as disbalance of power between consumers and food producers are addressed by the humanitarian approach from the point of view of individual food consumption patterns, consumer responsibility facing risks of obesity and diabetes. A healthy diet implies a change in eating habits towards less meat and less dairy products. This cautious formulation may illustrate Harriet Friedman's comments on the efforts of international organisations to counterbalance the power of food multinationals with the support of international citizens' movements (Friedman, Daviron, Allaire, 2016).⁵

Thus, rather than highlighting its weaknesses and promoting its reform, the food crises of the 21st century have led to the consolidation of the neoliberal food regime (Bernard de Raymond, and Thivet, 2021; Hall, 2023). The notion of food security, initially driven by the goals of reducing poverty and hunger in the world, resulted in an agricultural model that values supply and its distribution around the world through international trade. The neoliberal model of food security closely links food supply to global trade. This nexus follows a path of dependence on the strategies of globalised industrial and financial actors, as studied elsewhere (Fouilleux et al., 2017). The concentration of land has gone hand in hand with the industrialisation of production, processing, and distribution, which has been followed by the financialization of the sector, its specialisation, and the gradual reduction of productive diversity. In this configuration, crises are moments of consolidation and legitimisation of alternative framings. The following developments show that they also open up spaces for local reformulations, national reappropriations and regional contestations. In Russia, food crises have supported a shift from a neoliberal food

⁵ The Civil Society Mechanism of the Committee on Food Security is an example of these experiments (Friedmann, Daviron, and Allaire, 2016).

security doctrine to a hybrid one, where protectionism, national development and trade are intertwined.

Russia 2010-202: the dualization of food security

In Russia in the early 2010s, food security becomes a key word of political decision makers, serving a national ideology of self-centred development prior to the invasion of Ukraine. Although it is difficult to identify a proper influence on Russian debates, this shift follows international food policy debates. As argued above, hunger riots have undermined confidence in the ability of trade to provide good-quality, stable and inexpensive food (Clapp, 2015b). The Doha negotiations breakdown has legitimized food security as a case for trade restrictions.

The Russian Federation's food security doctrine, a keystone for Russian food policy and a main legal basis on the subject, (*doktrina prodovol'vennoj bezopasnnosti in the Russian Federation*)⁶ was adopted in 2010. The revised version dates from 2020, in a context shaped by the international sanction regime following the annexation of Crimea in 2014.

However, the researcher must avoid simplistic and univocal analyses, such as theories on the alleged nationalization of food security (Götz and al., 2022), or the construction of a long-standing grain power deliberately dedicated to the confrontation with the West (Azarieva and ali., 2023). In addition, the food security doctrine creates several available framings that can be activated depending on the context. Ultimately, these framings can be mobilized simultaneously. Hence, a

⁶ Made enforceable by Presidential Decree 120 of 30 January 2010. Accessible at <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/security/economic/document108/> (Accessed 5 January 2023).

proper approach to food policies combines agency, historicity and multiple causality. The nationalisation of food security issues has been explicit since the early 2010s, before the annexation of Crimea. Its implementation takes place in a favourable context: the international sanctions regime. In order to confirm this thesis, we need to take a closer look at the text.

First, food issues are securitised in the classic sense of the Copenhagen school of thought, where security-related issues are removed from the democratic debate to become part of the national security order staged as threatened and requiring countermeasures (Zhou, 2002b). The addition of food issues in the remit of the Security Council, a consultative body established in 1992 to assist the president on security issues of all kinds, exemplify this exclusion. Secondly, food security is subordinated to the notion of sovereignty, the two terms being used synonymously (Article 4)⁷. Agriculture is thus integrated into an overall programme for 'maintaining national security and sovereignty', which explicitly includes the development and modernisation of the Russian agri-food sector. Finally, the text of the doctrine produces indicators that make food security part of the order of governance, of techno-political control of rural areas through figures. The latter provide a quantitative characterisation of the food insecurity situation and ensure that it is properly measured, monitored, and operationalised. Self-sufficiency indicators are defined in relationship to total domestic consumption. Specific production targets are set for basic commodities, including cereals (with a minimum production target of 95%), sugar (80%), vegetable oil (80%), meat (85%) and dairy products (90%). The list of food products subject to food security requirements is extended in the 2020

⁷ <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/council/session/2045/> (Accessed 5 January 2023).

Doctrine to include a diversified diet⁸, confirming the political and technical management of agri-food policy by the state⁹.

The 2020 Doctrine confirms the guidelines defined in 2010 but modifies the definition of the international context: international trade is no longer seen as an opportunity, but as a risk due to the emergence of the international sanction regime, the increased international openness brought about by accession to the WTO in 2011 and the regional integration within the Eurasian Economic Union. Agricultural development has also been reaffirmed as a national political objective, an economic strategy, and a social ambition. It can be based on various dimensions, such as physical and economic access to food (3), security of food and agricultural production, the realisation of export potential subject to the satisfaction of domestic needs, infrastructure development, the development of professional skills in the agricultural sector and technological development, among others.

The implementation of political technologies of food security with the adoption of the import substitution policy fulfil the protectionist agenda set by the doctrine. Following Western sanctions against Russia, the Medvedev government adopted retaliatory measures in August 2014. They introduced an embargo on imports of agricultural products from countries that had imposed sanctions on Russia. These sanctions contributed to the adoption of a concept of food security integrated into the government's management of agricultural change, known as 'Via Kremlina', in contrast to '*Via Campesina*' (Spoor and al., 2013). The geopolitical context is favourable: the rouble has undergone significant currency depreciation, creating an

⁸ Vegetable oil, fish farming products, potatoes, fruit and vegetables, seeds for essential agricultural crops, and edible salt.

⁹ It should be noted that the effectiveness of this public policy is a notable exception among public policies in Russia. (Gel'man, 2022).

additional protective barrier against imports. The counter-sanctions adopted at the time of the annexation of Crimea therefore represent a window of opportunity to enact the protection of the national agricultural sector and support a self-centred and authoritarian agrarian development project based on industrialisation, financialization and concentration of production and land¹⁰.

In this new context, food security appears to be a reaction to Russia's international marginalisation. Alternative approaches are peripheral, hence supported by players who are not involved in agricultural policy-making. The example provided below of alternative framings developed in an authoritarian regime such as Russia, which is also at war, shows the complexity at work. They are formulated by research institutions, independent researchers (Filimonova, Ozoreva, 2022; Shagaida, 2021)¹¹, or circles of academic expertise. The report of the committee of the Council of the Federation on the implementation of the food security doctrine, published in October 2002, includes contributions from various public institutions (ministries, public agencies), academic bodies (agronomic institutes, specialised research centres and universities), private enterprises (companies and economic groupings) and farmers' unions. This document allows to compare the formulation of food security issues within a common framework and timeframe. The food security-inflation nexus made by the contributions of the research organisations point to a 'minor' risk of inflation for farmers (Committee of the Council of the Russia Federation, 2022, p.112). The contribution of the Russian Academy of Sciences is critical, stressing that domestic

¹⁰ This development is the result of joint public and private investment. On the one hand, farm subsidies have been supported by state policies, while on the other, agro-holdings have supported the increase in production (Wengle, 2021). Massive financial flows from the oil sector helped to diversify economic development and restore the agricultural power of Russia.

¹¹ See, for example, the wording used by the centre for agri-food policy under the aegis of the presidential academy for executive training. See <https://ipei.ranepa.ru/ru/cap>. (Accessed 4 June 2023).

production indicators must be supplemented by consumption indicators. From this point of view, the Academy's Department of Agricultural Sciences deplores the deterioration in consumers' economic access to food between 2014 and 2011. According to statistics based on Rosstat data, the consumers' total purchasing power, calculated in kg, decreases between 2014 and 2021 as a result of rising meat prices, despite price regulation measures adopted by the government (Council of the Federation, 2022, p.112). However, the report does not derive this trend from the import substitution policy. Consumers are the ultimate and central target of food security, but public support and funding is directed at producers. The food import ban adopted by the Russian authorities have increased the price of food, which is now imported from further afield, reduced competition within the agricultural sector and lowered the quality of goods. Invisibilised in this national Doctrine, consumers are being sacrificed on the altar of domestic production and agricultural development (Gel'man, 2022).

This historical configuration contrasts with the debate of the 1990s when the nexus food security-inflation was dominant. Economic liberalisation led by transition reforms triggered food shortages, rationing and the deterioration in the nutritional content of diets (Wegren, 2010). In this context, the notion of food security promoted by agrarian communist MPs in support of domestic agricultural production was rejected by President Boris Yeltsin in favour of massive food imports. At the time, food security in the broadest sense was provided by food aid, international trade and large-scale imports, encouraged by low tariffs. Food supply to the cities had to be ensured in order to limit social unrest and lower food inflation.

The shift to a protectionist food security framing dates back from the early 2010s in the wake of the global food crises. This conceptualisation was further reinforced by

the wars in Ukraine in 2014 and 2022, against the backdrop of international sanctions. The perception of increased risks to the food supply from the 2010s onwards has led to the producer rather than the consumer being placed at the centre of the national food equation, sustaining an authoritarian productivist and protectionist compromise. Alternative approaches are underused. Conversely, the massive use of the global food security discourse by the Russian authorities in the context of the war in Ukraine places the food problems of the so called “global South” at the centre of the Russian grain game.

The invasion of Ukraine and the weaponization of grain trade

The use of grain trade as a weapon does not undermine the productivist model at stake. The end of the grain deal signed in July 2022 to protect grain trade corridors in the Black Sea leads to the bombing of storage capacities, logistics infrastructures, and even grain stocks by Russia (Parasecoli, and Varga, 2023).

These concerns were rekindled in 2022 by the war in Ukraine, which destabilised both grain production and transport, already weakened by the health crisis. The outbreak of a major war in Ukraine in February 2022 ushered in a period of recovery, with Russia asserting its geopolitical power through massive grain exports¹².

¹² Some precisions on the history of Russia ‘s grain production recovery are needed. In the span of two decades, between 2000 and 2020, Russia went from being a net importer to becoming one of the world's leading wheat exporters and a leading competitor to the traditional cereal powers in Europe and the rest of the world. At the same time, Russia's WTO membership has opened up export markets, facilitated by the devaluation of the rouble in the late 1990s. Cereals are now traded in an open, integrated, and interconnected market, with Russia's main clients being countries on the Mediterranean Sea borders and in Africa.

The adoption of Western economic sanctions against Russia in 2014 and their tightening in 2022 are creating new conditions for Russian agricultural trade. Trade restrictions are leading to a dualization of the movement of food: crops for export and the aforementioned food for domestic consumption. This distinction allows the materiality of the goods to be considered in the analysis. Grain is both power and development, circulation and restrictions, trade and politics. The aim of these developments is to analyse the way in which military conflicts influence the framing of international food issues, and to understand how Russia reconciles its status as the world's leading exporter with its position as a belligerent in a high-intensity conflict where food security discourses threaten human security.

These tensions have led to significant recurrent pressure on global grain prices, as in the spring of 2022. International organisations issue multiple warnings. The excessive price volatility of a limited number of commodities central to human nutrition is attributed to maize, wheat, soybeans, and rice (IFPRI, 2022). The FAO and the World Food Programme warn of threats to Ukrainian and global food security (2022a, 2022b). In Ukraine, the problem is not food availability, but access to food due to the disruption of supply chains, mass migration and the disorganisation of agricultural production (FAO, 2022). Globally, the risks identified are trade disruptions, price increases, logistical risks, production risks, energy risks and humanitarian risks. Besides, about fifty countries are identified as being most vulnerable due to their dependence on wheat imports from the conflict zones in Russia or Ukraine. Among the African countries dependent on wheat imports, in diminishing order, are Eritrea, Somalia, Madagascar, Egypt, and in the Middle East, Turkey and Lebanon; a third region is the former USSR with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Belarus (FAO, 2022b, p.11). The food situation is considered to be

worsened by additional trade restrictions and export embargoes imposed by Russia and Ukraine during the armed conflict (IFPRI, 2022). Recommended solutions are varied, but among them the restoration of agricultural trade is essential:

“To prevent or limit the war’s harmful impact on the food and agricultural sectors, every effort should be made to keep international trade in food and fertilizers open. Supply chains should be kept fully operational, including by protecting standing crops, livestock, food processing infrastructure and all logistical systems” (FAO, 2022 b).

Putting global food security on the agenda has led to an international mobilisation to broker an agreement that would open a humanitarian corridor for agricultural goods¹³ : the Black Sea Grain Initiative. The United Nations is one of the architects and signatories of this agreement with the warring parties and Turkey as mediator. This renewable agreement creates a humanitarian corridor for grain, food, and fertiliser from three Black Sea ports. A monitoring and control mechanism have been put in place¹⁴ : The Joint Coordination Centre controls the origin, destination and nature of the goods transported. It is worth noting the exceptional nature of food: it is subject to controlled trade in an area where there is a serious risk of material and physical damage to goods and transporters. Global food security has a central place in this agreement: as the ultimate legitimation of a temporary, limited, and fragile peace, it is also the subject of conflicting definitions between Russia and Western countries. From the point of view of pragmatic sociology, the disputes that it gives rise to confront different regimes of justification.

¹³ Put as follows by the Joint Black Sea Grain Initiative: The JCC was born out of the recognition of the critical importance of global food security, and its significant dependence on the supply of grain and other foodstuffs produced in the region.

¹⁴ <https://www.un.org/en/black-sea-grain-initiative/vessel-movements> (Accessed 20 June 2023).

As of June 2023, almost 32 million tonnes of goods had benefited from this mechanism, but a number of objections have been raised. The UN authorities regret the slow procedures for checking goods carried out by Turkish customs¹⁵ and the slowdown in the loading of cargoes. Russia, for its part, has refused to re-sign the agreement in July 2023. The official justification put forward by Russian authorities was the mismatch between the destinations of the shipments and the objective of the agreement, which is to supply the countries of the South, and which allows this trade in times of war. Other reasons were given, such as the logistical and financial difficulties faced by Russian exports. At a session of the Russian Security Council in September 2022, President V. Putin declared:

"As we have already said, in this case we are prepared to supply all the cereals supplied by Ukraine to the poorest countries. And it's only four per cent: the entire deal was concluded under the guise of food security for the poorest countries, but only four per cent of the grain was shipped from Ukraine to the poorest countries. These are the poorest countries according to the United Nations classification. The rest, over 40%, 46%, went to the European Union"¹⁶.

In practice, a restoration of a liberalised, interconnected, and integrated world trade is legitimised by global food security. Negotiations and discussions on the conditions for this restoration are complex and require the intervention of mediators: exceptions are negotiated on the basis of a limited timeframe and can revert at any time to trade disruption and discrimination between partners; proof of its fragility in times of war¹⁷, when disruption and trade discrimination are the rule. The difficulties encountered in the Grain Deal negotiations stem from the coexistence of two separate

¹⁵ <https://www.un.org/en/black-sea-grain-initiative/update-15-june-2023> (Accessed 20 June 2023).

¹⁶ <http://kremlin.ru/supplement/252> (Accessed 20 May, 2023)

¹⁷ <file:///C:/Users/c.dufy/Zotero/storage/5H7U9LU9/69744.html> (Accessed 20 June 2023).

trade regimes: one of exclusion, disruption, and restriction¹⁸, and the other of standardised, open, and interconnected circulation.

As a result, the protests highlight the tensions between the international integration of the grain trade and national priorities, between nationalisation and geopoliticization of food security. They also turn food security into a lever for national power politics. From this perspective, the COVID-19 pandemic, like the Ukrainian crisis, highlight in different ways an order in the global food system in which control over the movement of goods is a state prerogative that derives its power from the ability to define, restrict, redefine, or expand the standards and conditions for the movement of goods, to close borders and to discriminate against trading partners. In contrast, the neoliberal regime seeks to standardise goods and transport procedures, reduce tariff and non-tariff barriers, and deregulate to facilitate the flow of goods. The nationalisation of food security in Russia in the contemporary period in favour of a protectionist regime has gone hand in hand with the assertion of a grain power based on exports. In the international context, access to food is seen as a vector of state influence aimed at strengthening Russia's position against that of the Western countries, with the support of developing countries. Challenging the agricultural dominance of the American food-export superpower opens up an available space. By using the concept of global food security, the Russian

¹⁸ Another example is the export ban imposed in spring 2022 following the invasion of Ukraine. Under the sanctions policy, exports of agricultural commodities and foodstuffs are subject to restrictions and, for a number of strategic agricultural products, bans. For example, from 15 March to 30 June 2022 included, exports of wheat, meslin, barley and maize from the Russian Federation were temporarily banned, and from 15 March to 31 August 2022, exports of sugar and raw cane sugar were too. In the long term, however, agricultural exports should remain a strategic goal, with adjustments. Russia is not currently dependent on food imports. Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 362 of 14 March 2022 (amended on 31 March 2022) "On Introducing a Temporary Ban on the Export of Crops from the Territory of the Russian Federation", Rossiyskaya Gazeta. 2022.

government is able to organise power relations between spaces, countries, and peoples by labelling everything outside them as a threat or a risk. The operators of this organisation are the institutions of power, of which the Security Council is one of the most eminent.

Conclusion:

Ensuring global food security in the midst of a war that directly affects the production and transport of foodstuffs central to the diets of the world's poor countries is a major challenge. Food security is at the heart of the discourse of world leaders and international organizations. However, the meaning of this concept is highly fluid, unstable and contradictory. The concepts promoted by the international community are based on a humanitarian, cooperative and trade-based perspective, in which food security is underpinned by the production-exchange nexus. In the Russian setting, a proper understanding requires a combination of two visions of food security in the context of armed conflict: the domestic conception and its national use, on the one hand, and a geopolitical use of global food issues, on the other. It is driven by modernisation and domestic industrialisation on the one hand, and by the exercise of traditional state power on the other, based on war, violence and physical coercion. Food security mobilises a productivist, authoritarian and state-centric project; a cloak that makes the political issues of the micro level of the consumer, of distribution and inequality, invisible and transfers them to the macro level. The double discourse on food security thus makes it possible to create a consensus through national debate, while at the same time supporting a policy of external power. Despite this, many analyses of food security have considered the linkage between food policy and trade. However, the central

role played by geopolitics, violence and conflict in the nutritional status of vulnerable populations deserves to be developed further.

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