

Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, FLACSO Ecuador  
Departamento de Estudios Internacionales y Comunicación  
Convocatoria 2022 - 2024

Tesis para obtener el título de Maestría en Relaciones Internacionales con Mención en  
Economía Política Regional y Global

TRANSFORMATIONS IN WORLD ORDER OF FOOD: WHAT THE WAR BETWEEN  
RUSSIA AND UKRAINE CHANGED FOR EGYPT AS A FIRST WHEAT IMPORTER

Kongolo Marie Mavunda

Asesor: Vivares Ernesto Alfredo

Lectores: Hidalgo Romero Pablo David, Quiliconi Cintia Verónica

Quito, abril de 2025

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this work to my children.

## **Table of contents**

<b>Executive Summary .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Chapter 1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>10</b>
1.1. Background.....	12
1.2. Food order.....	13
1.3. Dependent countries' stance .....	16
1.4. Power balance.....	17
1.5. Methodology.....	19
1.6. Relevance of the study and Structure of the dissertation.....	22
<b>Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review .....</b>	<b>24</b>
2.1. World food order.....	24
2.2. Global Political Economy.....	25
2.3. Dependency theory .....	28
2.4. Peripheral & subaltern realisms.....	32
2.5. Geoeconomics .....	35
2.6. Wheat diplomacy as foreign policy .....	37
<b>Chapter 3. Transformations of the world food order .....</b>	<b>40</b>
3.1. Structural change in the world food order .....	41
3.2. Wheat: The rise of Russia and Ukraine as great powers .....	43
3.3. Other participant in the transformation .....	46
3.4. Rises and falls within the European Union .....	50
3.5. Invasion of Ukraine and its consequences.....	53
3.6. Wheat as a geoeconomics tool.....	55
Conclusion .....	57
<b>Chapter 4. The role of Egypt in the world food order .....</b>	<b>58</b>
4.1. The relevance of Egypt.....	59

4.2. Arab Spring in Egypt as a trigger .....	59
4.3. Egyptian domestic policies .....	60
4.4. Egyptian Economic foreign relations and diplomacy of wheat.....	63
4.5. Egypt's role in the transformation of food order (wheat) .....	67
Conclusion .....	68
<b>Final conclusion</b> .....	69
<b>References</b> .....	73
<b>Appendix</b> .....	78

## **List of illustrations**

### **Charts**

Chart 3.1. Fluctuation for wheat exports 2010-2022 .....	44
Chart 3.2. Wheat exports outside of the EU.....	52
Chart 4.4. Ranking of countries from which Egypt import wheat. ....	65

### **Graphs**

Graph 3.1. Ukraine grain exports 2022-2024.....	54
Graph 4.1. Egypt wheat importation evolution 2010-2022.....	61
Graph 4.2. Egypt wheat acquisitions.....	62
Graph 4.3. Wheat price fluctuation 2011-2023 .....	62

### **Maps**

Map 3.1. Supporters UN General Assembly resolution. ....	48
Map 3.2. Cropland damaged by war .....	53

## **List of abbreviations and acronyms**

BSGI	Black Sea Grain Initiative
BRICS+	Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa
COFCO	China National Cereals, Oils & Foodstuffs Corporation
EU	European Union
FOB	Free On Board
GASC	Global Affairs Service Center
MENA	Middle East and North Africa region
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PAC	Political Action Committee
SWIFT	Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications
USA	United States of America
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
WFP	World Food Program
WTO	World Trade Organization

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## **Executive Summary**

Wheat serves as a staple food in numerous countries, making its production and supply crucial for global food security. The (re)emergence of significant producers and exporters such as Russia, Ukraine, and Romania, has notably transformed the global food landscape. Nations faced with food insecurity, like Egypt (the world's largest wheat importer) are particularly affected by these shifts.

Historically, the global food order has undergone various transformations. However, the current trend, especially since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, is characterized by the geoeconomics of wheat and its strategic use as an instrument of war. According to the World Food Program, only seven countries account for 86% of global wheat exports, with three countries holding 68% of the world's wheat reserves. This concentration grants these nations substantial power in the global wheat market. The rise of Russia, Ukraine, and Romania as key players signifies a pivotal shift in the global political economy. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine has dashed aspirations for a liberal world where every deserving country can achieve economic growth. Despite a certain hegemonic stability from the West due to neoliberal globalism, recent political events have contributed to a shift, giving relevance to new power struggles, both politically and economically.

In February 2022, Egypt, like many countries worldwide, was recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic. Its vulnerability to social upheaval, strategic geographic position, exposure to immigration from Arab and African countries, and its Non-Alignment Movement background make it an apt case study. Egypt's dependency on foreign wheat is evident, with imports reaching 12.0 million metric tons in 2022, valued at \$4.83 billion.

The transformation of the global food order necessitates an understanding of the dynamics between dependent and peripheral countries, particularly in foreign economic relations and wheat diplomacy. A new, heterogeneity-centric cooperation for food supply is emerging, shaped by agency and impacting the entire structure of the international wheat market. Structural dependence is emphasized by local authorities' policies regarding food subsidies, contributing to the historical debate on how agency influences international events leading to global order transformation.



## **Acknowledgements**

I wish to thank the teaching body of FLACSO for their dedication. I am grateful to every teacher I had during this programme and for the role they played in my learning process. Most of all I wish to express an immeasurable gratitude to Dr. Ernesto Vivares for providing great supervision and guidance in every step, the value of the knowledge he shared cannot be overstated.

Thanks to Mr. Joaquin Lozano and Mr. Alessandro Dinucci for taking the time to answer my questions and share their valuable knowledge on food crisis and systems.

I would like to thank my father, my husband and Keidy Hernandez who took care of my children while I needed to focus on my Master's degree. I could have not done this without all of you.

Thanks to all of my friends and my FLACSO colleagues, especially Diana Loja, Sthefany Diaz and Santiago Gonzalez, we made it! I wish each one of you a bright career ahead.

## Chapter 1. Introduction

In February 2022, Russia's invasion of Ukraine raised global concerns about the potential end of Western hegemony in the world order. A particularly striking and critical issue was the realization that this conflict could lead to significant food shortages, especially grains, affecting populations far beyond Ukraine and Russia. According to World Food Program (Husain 2022), both these countries account for approximately 30% of global wheat exports. Given that wheat is a primary energy source and a key determinant of human nutrition, this war has the potential to disrupt the global food order.

This dissertation examines the transformations in the world food order resulting from the Russia-Ukraine war, focusing on Egypt as the world's largest wheat importer. The analysis is approached from two perspectives:

1. Geoeconomics of major grain exporters: An exploration of how countries with significant wheat exports influence global food dynamics.
2. Impact on Egypt: An investigation into how the conflict has affected Egypt, the world's largest wheat importer and how this country is managing to maintain its economic diplomacy with wheat providers.

Wheat has been a vital grain for humanity throughout history. In modern times, its demand as a commodity has reached transnational levels. Its cultivation remains geographically concentrated in regions with natural advantages such as temperate climates, water availability, and fertile soils (Abis 2015, 125). As a commodity, wheat has dominated international trade, representing a staple food and a fundamental element of political and economic power.

The culmination of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine in 2022 has affected not only the quantity of wheat available on the market but also the supply chain in terms of transportation and policies, due to sanctions. Concurrently, Egypt's demand has increased because of population growth. As of 2022, Egypt requires 20 million tons of wheat to feed its 105 million population (Egyptian State Information Service 2024). Due to factors such as immigration, the population has grown by 2%, thus increasing the demand. Despite domestic production covering less than 40% of requirements, the remaining wheat must be imported, making Egypt a significant actor in the global food order (U.S. Department of Agriculture 2024).

The share of imports varies depending on factors such as the size of the harvest. This is a key feature among competitors and buyers because it determines the yearly ratio of available wheat and the price dynamics for market participants. For example, in the 2020-21 season,

Russia had a share of 36% of the Egyptian market, while Ukraine had 30%; and 67% in 2021-2022 for Russia and 20% for Ukraine in that same season (Global Trade Tracker 2022).

Abis (2023) considered that Ukraine was the only country that could compete with Russia, but since the invasion and the issues surrounding the Black Sea Deal, Russia is currently the main exporter to Egypt. The observed fluctuation from season to season depends on many factors, but the principal one is harvest. Supposing that in a specific season, the harvest is low in Russia, then Egypt will have to rely on other countries such as France, Romania, or possibly renew dealings with the United States.

Considering the global political and economic importance of wheat, there are many actors to be considered in the food chain. In addition to state tenders such as the General Authority for Supply Commodities (GASC) in Egypt, transnational companies are heavily involved in the agricultural market and in negotiations of grain trade. Among the most prominent Egyptian private importers are Manasek, Medsoft, and Horus, as listed by the World Trade Institute (2022). The GASC, as the government body through which wheat is bought and imported, depends on timely supplies from overseas to ensure food security. It should also be emphasized that the participation of a government body implies that the process of tender is marked by significant bureaucratic procedures and a certain lack of transparency regarding negotiations. Yet, the advantage of having such an institution is having official results, which serve as a benchmark not only for Egypt as a player in the market but also for other participants in the world food order.

This setting underscores Egypt's significant position in the world order, particularly concerning wheat as a staple food. Therefore, the aim of this dissertation is to understand how the transformation of the world food order is affected by the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, starting from the premise that Egypt's political economy and foreign economic relations are linked to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, primarily regarding wheat diplomacy. On one side, as a country that strongly depends on wheat from abroad—mainly Russia, Ukraine, the European Union, and, to a smaller extent, the United States—the dynamics of a market disrupted by conflict are a critical aspect. On the other side, Egypt's behavior in this situation depends on which exporter has a better standing and is able to fulfill the demands to combat food insecurity. In this sense, Egyptian foreign economic relations will be aligned accordingly, defining who is the main ally or who to distance themselves from among wheat producers.

To answer the main investigation question “How has the war between Russia and Ukraine disrupted the world order of food, and what actions is Egypt taking to secure its wheat supplies in response?”, it is necessary to select, evaluate, and compare the most relevant theories of International Relations (IR) that will guide the research. This process involves defining key concepts, analyzing them, and interpreting the results according to the research question. The definition that best describes this investigative work will validate the study. The situation of Egypt regarding wheat importation and food insecurity is a subject best addressed by combining theories in a unique way that will create a substantial dissertation.

Given that Egypt is facing a major challenge in food inflation, with grain prices reaching 76% higher in 2023 compared to 2022 (U.S. Department of Agriculture 2024), and remains the world's largest importer, the contribution of this dissertation is significant. The consumption of wheat is estimated to rise by 2% in the coming year, bearing in mind that Egypt is a country that receives approximately 10 million refugees and migrants from Sudan, Yemen, Iraq, Libya, and Syria (International Organization for Migration, 2022). Food insecurity is such a major issue that the decision to participate or not in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict should be trivial for dependent countries such as Egypt.

### **1.1. Background**

So as to fully grasp the context of how the war between Russia and Ukraine affect the food order, the concepts of structure and agency in IR can be resorted to. Although slightly diverging from the classical theorisation that often presents the two notions by way of dualism, here there is rather an attempt to show how they reticulate. Jørgensen & Hellmann (2015) propose an analysis that fits well with what the dissertation seeks to describe: how wheat reconstructs the narrative of world food order in a post Arab Spring food crisis and post Covid-19 international system. The transformation of world food order stems from both the structure and the agency, through the interaction between states (international relations) and the action of states (the actions of Egypt toward its foreign policies and diplomacy of wheat with exporting countries). Regardless of different standpoints in the world order, Jørgensen & Hellmann (2015) argue in their work “*Theorizing Foreign Policy in a Globalized World*”, that agency and structure/ International Relations and Foreign Policy Analysis are interrelated. Furthermore, Albert & Stetter (2015, 82) argue by affirming that “complementary ways of generating knowledge on how the problem of order in the world system is solved, inter alia, through the construction of agency within that system”.

On the structural level, factors that transform the already established world order of food post World War II until the end of the cold war, are the emergence of new important exporters such as Russia, Ukraine and Romania; the decline of the EU and USA supplies of wheat to Egypt; the role played by the World Trade Organisations and other actors such as Turkey and the United Arab Emirates; and the consequential fracture since the Russian Ukrainian war in February 2022.

On the Agency level, Egypt's bread riots and the Arab Spring are milestones to be retraced to fully understand the role of this country in the world food order; the importance of institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. As well as the General Authority for Supply Commodities (GASC), which is the Egyptian government's body in charge of international calls for tenders, purchases and importations, wheat trade diplomacy and Egypt foreign policies with exporting countries.

## **1.2. Food order**

The post-World War II (WW2) food order driven mostly by the United States of America (USA) and the rise of capitalism, has recently been disordered by new emerging suppliers. This subject is extant since the Cold War, Friedmann (1982) claims that the logic within the dynamics of post-war accumulation of wheat and Cold War politics are very specific, meaning that, by the time that WW2 ended and a bipolar system was created with the two main blocs: United States of America and the Soviet Union, the former used its surplus in wheat to extend aid to most needy nations; leading to an international food order that was based on bilateral settlements between the USA and developing nations' governments. It is worth mentioning that these settlements were configured in such a way that the negotiated price of wheat was inconvertible in national currencies of developing countries, to their detriment.

Subsidies on this scale presupposed American economic strength and the centrality of the dollar internationally. The price effects went beyond specific bilateral aid and trade agreements; continually reproduced surpluses created a chronic downward pressure on the residual "world price" (Friedmann 1982, 251).

The contemporary world food order is based on inequalities and dependency that takes its roots in capitalism, as analysed by Gonzalez (2011). Since the colonial era, an order was designed in such a way that there is diversion in agricultural lands that made it difficult for the Global South to be self-sufficient. Instead, it has depended on imported food, and "improved crops" that were produced and treated with fertilisers and chemical pesticides from the Global

North. Besides, the order is sustained by international organisations such as the World Trade Organisation, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, to mention some:

The WTO Agreement on Agriculture institutionalized these inequities in global agricultural trade by permitting affluent countries to maintain market-distorting subsidies and import barriers. Gonzalez (2011, 478-484)

At that same period of time in Europe, France was one of the 3 major producers of wheat, along with Germany and Poland. France stands out because it was the country that suggested the *Politique Agricole Commune (PAC)*<sup>1</sup>, probably in prevision of a stronger economy for the European Union. In France, wheat is called the “Golden Oil” because of its importance as an international trading commodity. In the past decades, EU countries such as Romania have also stood out as a significant exporter of wheat grain. Although to a lesser extent, Polish and Bulgarian wheat exportations are also considerable in the international market. It has been observed recently that agricultural commodities are not going through a mere crisis, instead, they are part of a recalibration process between supply and demand (Elliott 2023). Therefore, it can be affirmed that there is a transition in food production and distribution. This study takes the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February of 2022 as the trigger event to analyse a new paradigm of the world food order, the consequences on the Global Political Economy (GPE) as well as the behaviours of countries and parties involved. For this purpose, the transformation will reflect the geoeconomics of wheat, that encompass Russia, Ukraine, the EU and the USA.

Since 2010, Russia and Ukraine have emerged as major producers and exporters of wheat. Productions from both countries makes up to 70% of total wheat that is consumed in Egypt, the world first importer (Abis 2022, 4). As a country that is geographically African and a pivotal point for the Arab world, Egypt has had its share of struggles, including those related to food insecurity due to climatic conditions and public agriculture policies, thus revealing itself to be an adequate case study for this investigation. It must be emphasised that in this investigation, the world food order is analysed, rather than the Global Food System (GFS). Considering the definition of the World Food Program (2022), “the GFS are networks that are needed to produce and transform food, and ensure it reaches consumers” as a system, this has got more to do with the rationalisation of the reality. Comparatively, food order will be defined in this dissertation as the position of a country’s producers of a specific staple food in

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<sup>1</sup> French for Common Agriculture Policy.

relation to the country's consumers, according to an established pattern and series of events<sup>2</sup>. In that sense, it is vital to clarify what the concept of world food order is based upon the same as the of world order that formed the central focus of the study by Robert Cox (1981, 126-155) in which the author explains his strong historical perspective and ontological premise on change, that is driven by force, over time. Factually, food order just like world order, never stops and major changes have an impact in world order as well as in the civil society. In other words, the actions taken internationally and nationally, or the structure and agency proposition.

Gaining momentum, the subject of world order has also been analysed by Helleiner & Brauder (1990, 75), who point out that change is related to the “conjunctural time” and the “world of events”, hence, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the impact of climate change as well as the rise in power of emerging countries can be considered conjunctural to the world food order. As a deduction and in accordance with Cox (1987), the change is “*in*” not “*from*”, meaning that the shift in food order has more to do with the construction and maintenance of a specific set of structures, trade agreements, political leaderships and a country's food insecurity, among other factors. In this precise case, change is paired with the “growth of competitive pressure withing the global economy” (Sinclair 1996, 5).

Historically, Egypt relied on the USA for supply as well as France, which were the main providers for Egypt's General Authority for Supply Commodities (GASC)<sup>3</sup> until they were slowly but predominantly replaced by Russia, Ukraine and Romania. Since the end of the Soviet period, Russia transitioned from an importer of grain to a major exporter internationally and by emerging as such, the country has repositioned its trade balance. During the 1990s, the country decreased its domestic livestock production in favour of importation, subsequently creating more space to propel new output for grain production and sales abroad. This has been the shift that boosted grain exports in the 2000s. Additionally, this was done by offering interesting cost competitiveness in world markets. Wegren and Nilssen (2022) hold the view that the Russian grain production had gradually increased from 2000, accelerating by 2008 and reaching a peak between 2016 and 2019, in which period the annual

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<sup>2</sup> Definition by Marie Kongolo

<sup>3</sup> GASC was founded in 1968 to overcome the crises in the Egyptian market and establish strategic government food stock.

average production doubled compared to the 2011-2015 period, from 34 to 76 MMt average production. The pattern has gone from a hegemonic one to a more liberal market.<sup>4</sup>

Global food insecurity and its relation to world order, is part of a broad line of reasoning in the field of international relations. Gonzalez (2011) highlights this correlation as such:

The global food crisis has its origins in the colonial subordination of the Third World which transformed much of the Global South into “supply zones of food and raw materials to fuel European capitalism”. The agro-export specialization imposed during the colonial era persisted after political independence, and diminished food self-sufficiency by diverting agricultural lands to export production while fostering dependence on genetically uniform export crops (Gonzalez 2011, 78-79).

So far, not much attention has been paid to the role of wheat in balance of power, ergo this investigation specifically engages in understanding how wheat as a tool of power in the international food order. Russia and Ukraine have brought an end to the hegemony of the West, this doesn't mean that the hegemonic character is in the past, the change is in the manner by which wheat is used to exert power on dependent countries such as Egypt. The conflict comes at a time when food insecurity is more acute than ever and Egypt has to review its foreign economic relations in order to provide wheat to its people. In order to achieve the purpose of this work, which is mainly based on an interpretative approach, a selection and analysis of information will be characterised by a critical approach of International Relations realism. Taking into consideration the aim that is mentioned above, as well as the epistemological and methodological approach of Global Political Economy, the theoretical framework proposed will dive into some of the main demonstrators of theories of International Relations. Furthermore, the methodology that will be developed in this work will draw from critical annotative approach of addressing issues of power, also situating this work in an economic, social and historical setting.

### **1.3. Dependent countries' stance**

Given the fact capitalism is still, nowadays, the main economic and political system around the world, recently peripheral and semi-peripheral countries have had a harder time recovering from the sanitary crisis in the world when the COVID-19 pandemic. The outbreak

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<sup>4</sup> Considering USA and the EU as one bloc, countries that previously provided wheat to Egypt until the emergence of Russia and Ukraine as major producers and exporters.



coincidentally exposed the deep asymmetries between rich and poor countries and Egypt is one of them. It is a nation that faces social and economic challenges due to unsuccessful attempts to an industrial expansion as well as a tenacious trade deficit caused by heavy export policies. To fight crises, the country highly depends on foreign aid. It has resorted to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the ADQ, an Abu-Dhabi-based investment corporation that is part of the Emirate Sovereign fund, by means of respective loans of 8 billion and 35 billion American dollars (Reuters 2024). For food security, the dependency is mostly on foreign wheat. The power game is on both sides, although on different levels, because the exporters who need a stable market to maintain their commercial relations and the importer's power, resides in the possibility of sourcing wheat from other supplying countries. According to Santana, et al. (2023) the global economy is a structure composed with various agents who cultivate a relationship of dependence and interdependence among different countries and regions that interact with each other. "Notably, the agriculture sector gains prominence on the world stage as globalization introduces instability in a market player, potentially impacting food and energy production." (Santana et al. 2023, 910).

In the current setting, Russia remains a major exporter and competitor of the EU despite sanctions that have been imposed by the West. However, the situation has accommodated for the Ukrainian government to develop tight relations and to initiate the procedures of joining the EU as a member. Egypt, was one of the countries to call for a withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukraine and voted in favour of the United Nations resolution condemning the invasion. Nonetheless, Egypt did not join in the economic sanctions against Russia and has emphasised the wish to maintain their strategic partnership (Egyptian State Information Service 2023). It is also paramount to be mindful of a probable strategy emanating from the fact that the world is leaning towards a multipolar system, strong blocs such as BRICS+ (of which Egypt is a member since January 2024) are currently an interesting option for international cooperation and a strong investment in Africa. Furthermore, Egypt has, in recent years attempted to recover its role as regional leader of the League of Arab States as well as remaining in the African Union, therefore, monitoring to maintain its position of "no disconnection" with either party (Eleiba 2022).

#### **1.4. Power balance**

As examined by Waltz (2000), in a situation of war, victory is followed by the expectation of a new balance of power. This theory is not specific on the time the balance shifts because it is

determined by the national and international conditions, which are not predictable. The relevance of this work depends upon how the global wheat trade has been reconfigured in the past decades as a response to the Western arbitrary manner of establishing cooperation. The Russo-Ukrainian war has raised many concerns regarding the future of the world order and the power game between countries which have the power of providing food to the most dependents. This is perhaps a challenge of Western hegemony and the beginning of a multipolar world consolidation and a shift in the multilateral relations and diplomacy. In the post-Cold War period, many scholars have deduced that the non-alignment movement became obsolete at the moment the bipolar system ended with the disappearance of the Soviet Union. However, recently there has been a renewed interest in keeping a certain level of neutrality regarding ideological decision.

By using strategic alignment like Egypt has done, while condemning but not breaking all relations. The implication of wheat diplomacy is academically understudied, particularly between Egypt and its suppliers. Within this framework, the awareness is also raised on how Russia has built this dependency from Egypt. This work will generate fresh insight into how it is delicate for the African country to align with Russia while maintaining its historical links with both the USA and France. It will also be demonstrated how political and economic factors lead to the reconfiguration of the international food order and a new balance of power.

Part of the interactions between demand and supply of wheat is that Egypt is automatically a field. The high-level necessity makes it relevant for exporting countries in search of a greater market share. The construction of world order is directly linked to the balance of power and the choices the parties involved make, with regard to their foreign policy choices, i.e., by creating or breaking foreign economic alliances. In the traditional international relations context, geopolitical strategies are basic for power distribution. Here, geoeconomics is also a perspective of analysing balance, especially for food. According to Grinin (2016, 89):

The balance between powers could change due to a number of factors, including internal rebellions, fall of dynasties, etc. Among the long-term factors one should mention different growth rates of population, territory, wealth, industry, and commerce. But all this should be converted into military power.

The above quote applied by demonstrating of structure and agency in international relations, in the sense that factors such as territory, wealth, industry and commerce are on the level of those such as Russia who fight for territory in Ukraine, the EU adding Romania and through subventions improving the agricultural industry of the latter. Commerce that is necessary for

the wheat supply and institutions such as the WTO who regulate, observe and get involved in the matter and process. On the agency level, there is Egypt as a country that has had bread riots, the famous Arab Spring as well as change of political regimes. On the other hand, this is a country that has also been going through persisting economic crises due partly to overpopulation, 105.858mm in 2024 according to the Egyptian State Information Service (2024). This means that there is a market for wheat that has 105.858 mouths to feed, making it a hub and attraction for wheat exporters. Migrations from Arab and African countries in crisis go through Egypt.

On the military power, we witness a war between Russia and Ukraine which encompasses Grin's statement. The invasion of Ukraine can be seen as an offensive to the West in general. As Institute Montaigne's Michael Duclos explained that the Ukrainian war is Russia's duel with the West, especially with Europe (Duclos 2022). The author points out the fact that the autocratic West has recently shown some signs of decadency, which allowed Russia to envisage a way of gaining more space on the international stage. Military power also means the destruction of arable soil and crop, due to munition and chemical contaminations. The war zone covers 7.5% of Ukraine's agricultural land, which is no longer productive (Becker-Reshef & Mitkish 2024).

As far as the balance of power is concerned, it shows also a commercial dimension because this war has a new facet, like Bilal (2021) discusses in an article published in the NATO Review, "the nature of contemporary wars is no longer simply about kinetic operations, instead, non-military strategies and tactics are noticed in the new confrontations". And historically, the economy has played an essential part in war. As Grinin (2016) mentioned, in both World Wars, Germany was defeated mostly due to the coalition of anti-Germans who then had a greater economic power. At the present time, other countries have emerged with a strong agriculture industry. This is a determinant because producing more wheat increases overall economic power of those who are able to supply food.

### **1.5.Methodology**

As stated in the introduction of this dissertation, this work aims to understand how wheat as a staple and commodity is transforming the world food order, the power game between the major exporters on a structural level and how food insecurity also contribute to this change, from an agency level in international relations. Hence, the methodology was conceived

bearing in mind aspects of social sciences evidence. This reflects on how Russia and Ukraine play essential roles in world food production and trade, especially in Egypt, a particular power food order. This investigation will focus on the practises around food power in a context of global vulnerability and food insecurity. Furthermore, to have a more comprehensive view and contextualise a chain of circumstances that led to the prevention of Egypt to take part in the Ukrainian invasion due to a relationship that has evolved between the African country and Russia, as well as interpreting how the construction of this bilateral collaboration and interdependency has been consolidated and which interests are there for each country.

The significance of this work comes from a rising consciousness of food insecurity and its intensification around the world, as well as generating fresh insights into the acute situation in Egypt, post Arab Spring, thus determining the time unit and geography, for the purpose of narrowing this Master's dissertation. Egypt is a good case study for various reasons:

- i) It is the primary importer of wheat in Africa and the Middle East.
- ii) It has shifted from importing from the United States and France to Russia and Ukraine.
- iii) It has a record of political and economic instability due to food prices (Arab Spring for example).
- iv) It is one of the founders of the non-alignment movement, which is important in the decision making of wheat diplomacy.

As per the World Grain (2023), Egypt is facing a major challenge in food inflation with the price of cereals reaching 76% higher in 2023, than in 2022. As the world's largest importer of wheat, the consumption is estimated to rise by 2% in the coming year, bearing in mind that Egypt is a receiving country of an approximate 10 million refugees and migrants from Sudan, Yemen, Iraq, Libya and Syria. Food insecurity is such a major issue that the decision of taking part or not in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict should not be trivial.

According to Lozano (2016), methodology defines the manner in which to proceed while demonstrating and developing the research. This work is mainly based on an interpretative approach and neorealism ontology to address power in the International Political Economy setting. In order to frame the object of this dissertation, information is gathered based on realism ontology and interpretative epistemology. The organisation and analysis of information is characterised by how the given problem is perceived as well as the selected theory to address it. In consonance with Bennet and Elman (2007), the most prominent way of

collecting information to work on a case study is through analysing data. Lamont (2015) claims that a case study is an approach with detailed examination that is done in an organic way in order to provide explanation, that in turn can be transferable to other cases and events. Egypt is viable for this study because of various factors such as:

- a. Its historical relations with both the Western countries and Russia;
- b. The Egyptian food subsidy system that has created dependency on foreign wheat;
- c. Its strategic geographic position;
- d. Its social upheaval due to lack of bread, such was the circumstance that ignited the Arab Spring.

This list is by no mean exhaustive but it shows how rich the subject is. Although the conflict between Russia and Ukraine that started in February 2022 is the point that cultivated interest in starting this investigation, the time horizon that will be taken into account goes beyond. Indeed, the longitudinal nature of data collection will involve the moment at which Russia (re)activated the wheat trade with Egypt, consequently reducing Egyptian import from the USA and France.

The collection method in this work has been mainly qualitative, in order to addresses complex facts and processes while preserving the diligence of the research (Hernandez, Fernández and Batista 2014). In agreement with the aforesaid, the data analysis techniques for the qualitative method will be based on contents, thematic literature and interviews. All the information that is considered in this work has been compiled with scrupulousness, reliability and authenticity requirements (Bryman 2012). Information has been collected from books, scholars who have extensively written about wheat. Sebastian Abis's publications have been an immense source of material to work on. Official documents from different governments websites such as U.S. Department of Agriculture, Egyptian services, French economic and agriculture government websites were used. Many agricultural non-profit organisations such as IFPRI, FAO, etc. Since the subject is relatively new because the war started in 2022, newspapers articles were fundamental for renewed updates on the ongoing situation. Daily information watched on television channels such as EuroNews, also provided an insight on the subject.

Interviews were carried out with Mr. Joaquin Lozano, Director at CGIAR, a global partnership that unites international organisations engaged in research about food security. The second interview was with Mr. Alessandro Dinucci, Deputy Representative of the World Food Program in Ecuador. In line with Corbetta (2003), the interviewees were able to offer a deeper exposition of variables of the Egyptian wheat dependency and further supplement the

documentation archive. The theoretical framework is mainly based on classical IR theories of scholars such as Nye, Keohane, Amin, Escudé, to name a few. Finally, the choice of this case study is made with the expectation of contributing to the academic sphere with a topic that is extremely important, yet not sufficiently discussed. Having collected all the necessary information, an interpretation was done related to the current situation of Egypt and how the conflict between Russia and Ukraine affects the food insecurity. Pertinent quantitative analysis was done in order to produce charts that explain this specific situation, mostly information on wheat exportations and importations in the past decade. Data from the Observatory of Economic Complexity's website was vital for this task. Finally, descriptive statistics were also analysed and interpreted to produce a comprehensive explanation through maps of the geographical situations.

### **1.6.Relevance of the study and Structure of the dissertation**

The context that has been presented intends to lay a background that allows a better understanding of the investigation and highlights the important factors that are taken into account, explain the transformation of the world food order and accentuate the position of Egypt and its historical relevance in the geoeconomics of grain, especially wheat. February of 2022 unquestionably marked a new order on many aspects including food trading and the related geoeconomics, not only for the belligerent but also those relying on resources and commodities, especially for Egypt whose 70 % of wheat importation originates from both Russia and Ukraine (Abis 2022, 5). With globalisation and capitalism, wheat has become a staple food that feeds a fifth of the world population on a daily basis (Reuters 2024), hence feeding the unbalanced system because there is only a handful of exporting countries. The grain industry encompasses more than just the production and exportation of wheat, there is a whole geopolitical/geoeconomics aspect to it that is related to history, alignment of the order that was established post WW2. Grasping how this order is laid out contributes to a holistic interpretation of the world food order.

Focusing on the hegemony of the West and how this has been created is significant especially given France's importance as a precursor in grain agricultural policies in the European Union. The powerful upswing of both Ukraine and Russia is the most important and pivotal aspect that substantiate the work of investigation. For a background to be complete, it is also necessary to consider other actors that are involved in the transformation of this order. Egypt's GASC and the food subsidy policy that are not sustainable without loans from financial

institutions and countries that are involved in the international tender for wheat importations and all related logistics. This background also serves as a scheme with preliminary observations that indicate associations between food insecurity in Egypt, the Arab Spring and how in the meantime the transformation of the order has been shifting. All threat multipliers mentioned are framed in the IR debate of structure and agency as the transformation in question is subject to local Egyptian issues as well as the international structure of the wheat trade.

The geoeconomics and foreign policies/ wheat diplomacy that are involved, are the core of the transformation and it is worth mentioning in the background for an attempted full context of current food insecurity. This chapter positions this study in its rightful economic, political and geographic setting that paves a way for the next chapter that will support the study with academic framework and relevant IR literature review.

The structure of this work is developed around agency and events that participate in the transformation of the world food order regarding wheat. The chapter that follows exposes the theoretical framework and literature review; the main focus is on IR theories that academically rationalise this research. Then comes a chapter on transformation, geoeconomics and power balance between producers/exporters of wheat and the final chapter that constitutes the core of the investigation which focuses on the response of Egypt, its economic foreign relations and wheat diplomacy. Then there is the conclusion and final thoughts.

## **Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review**

Framed in the IR theories of Dependency and Peripheral Realism, this study combines two lines of investigation on one side the Global Political Economy and on the other, the foreign policies of a depend country, in the form of wheat diplomacy as extensively analysed by Abis (2016, 2022, 2023). This approach will permit one to understand on a structural level, how the competition between wheat exporters is shaping the world food order as well as how food insecurity in Egypt is also playing a role in this order, the internal aspects, socioeconomics factors as agency. Being formulated as such in this chapter, peripheral realism is considered to be a critical theory that challenges the traditional ones within the field. Likewise, it broadens scopes by including different regions' reality and diverse topics related to conflicts (Vivares 2020).

### **2.1. World food order**

In the IR literature, there is an imperceptible but still worth mentioning difference between the international order and the world order. International order often refers to a clear order, a system or even a society in which nation-states are the most important actors, as it is conceived in the Westphalian context of sovereignty and the realist theory of IR, in which there is no authority and the world is anarchic (Osiander 2001, 251–287). This way of seeing the world implies rivalries and competitions, using sometimes tough political and economic practices of negotiation. In that sense, the word “order” isn’t always appropriate. Normally, in an order, there needs to be a balance and a hegemon because there are always those who are more dominant than those who tend to lose their autonomy or be dependant. Yet, the notion of world order brings an additional dimension to the international order, as per Kacowicz’s (2012, 686-698) argument: world order takes governance to a level that also includes several institutional forms and “new medievalism” in IR. This view is also supported by Keohane and Nye’s (1977) complex interdependence and Bull’s (1977) anarchical society. Based on Kissinger (1994, 2014) the world order is linked to a balance of power and usually orders are shaped after a period of crisis such as world wars, the end of the cold war and bipolarity. Furthermore, world order has been associated with globalization, as Grinin (2016, 76) argues:

The notions of globalization and world order have become rather closely connected today. Within the political realm globalization considerably affects the transformation of the states' sovereign prerogatives since it contributes to the change and reduction of the scope of the states' sovereign powers (Grinin 2009, 2012a, 2012b). All this gradually creates the



foundations for the world order whose outlines (although discussed since the end of the Cold War) are actually just being formed.

According to the realist theory of power balance which is central to the neorealists such as Kenneth Waltz (1979), the notion of anarchism arises in the international system where nations pursue their survival and retain or accumulate power to self-help. In this system there is no authority that would intervene should a hegemon decide to attack and protect its ground. Basically, it can be understood that Russia is using wheat as a way of balancing power with the West, who utterly dominated the wheat export to Egypt until a decade ago. The concept of hegemony (Keohane 1984; Nye 2011) is essential to mention when studying world order in GPE, as it involves collaborations in the world political economies and different forms of power; in this case the way by which Russia has disrupted the world food order of wheat and who is impacted by the disruption. Resorting back to Waltz's ideas again, it can be expected that Russia is a revisionist state (Lobell 2010) in this case because it has innovated internally its agricultural projects to produce enough wheat to export and create alliances. On the other hand, at least as far as wheat is concerned, USA and France are status quo states, not because they are happy with their place in the current world food order but because their capacity of producing enough to be exported is more limited compared to Russia, at this time. Russia, as new hegemon of wheat in Egypt, is thus restoring the balance. As a convenient conceptual instrument in interpreting the dynamic in the world order, Russia is an emerging power, in consonance with Christensen & Xing (2016), it is one of the largest developing countries who have dramatically risen since the beginning of the millennium. This new form of globalisation that includes emerging powers "are redefining International Political Economy of upward mobility among the core, semi-periphery and periphery countries" (Christensen & Xing 2016, 3).

## **2.2.Global Political Economy**

Global Political Economy is an adequate line of investigation for this dissertation, rather than the International Political Economy because the former has a pluralist nature that includes critical, post-colonial and post-development approaches, as Gilpin (2001) pinpoints. The research goes beyond the mainstream IPE, which is defined as a North-American archetype. GPE includes the important attention paid to domestic economies, financial systems, as well as states and multinationals, for example. To account for this, it is important to stress the fact that IPE and GPE are not considered interchangeable terms in this dissertation for the mere fact that the latter allows for political economy research to be carried out in a comprehensive

manner that surpasses relations between states. Furthermore, GPE encompasses approaches from many regions of the world, which are necessary to interpret this dissertation's topic and Egypt as a case study. In agreement with Vivares (2020), in order to grasp development and conflict, it is paramount to acknowledge the African, Latin-American, Asian, East Asian and Middle Eastern approaches as well. Another important argument in GPE is that, when looking at the IR field of study away from the Anglo-American view point, countries from what is called "The Third World" are placed at the centre of the discussion and there is a recognition that epistemologically, there is less naivety on the reality of the rest of the world and GPE, like other fields of IR should not be a reflective one, instead it should be a productive field. It is also important to underline that GPE is not a field that excludes IPE, as a matter of fact the idea here is to broaden the study to the diversity of the peripheral regions of the world as well as including challenging situations such as conflicts and social movements. If power distribution differs in different parts of the world as the economic development is not the same everywhere, political economy is about the sources of political power and its use of economic ends (Quiliconi & Decienio 2020, 458).

Amin and Ayoob are two scholars who have extensively focused peripheral realism and dependency theories in Arab and African. Their work is analogous to that of Prebisch, Faletto and Cardoso in Latin America. Their literature has been reviewed to frame the subject of this dissertation and embed it in the context of Egypt wheat dependency, high rate of poverty, where 14.4% of the 105.9 million population are food insecure, World Food Programme (2022). The historical context to acknowledge is that Egypt was a protectorate of France and Great Britain (De Gayffier-Bonneville 2017), thus, this chapter will first and foremost justify the use of peripheral realism, in order to create a path that will conduct the exploration of other components of the two lines of investigation. Secondly, it will examine how wheat producing countries have come to bring change in the world food order, to what degree the GPE is affected, and the interdependency between countries. Thirdly, it will seek to understand the influence on Egyptian domestic situation and decision making, a peripheral country whose behaviour toward Russia and the West is expected to pragmatically align with the supplier who is willing to achieve food security.

To learn and research about the GPE, the links between social-historical and geographical context have to be taken into consideration. By doing so, the work will get out of the "conceptual cages and universal affirmations based on assumptions that erases different knowledges of the specificities of context and time" Vivares (2020, 16-17). To put this in an

historical setting, it is undeniable that the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine can be traced back to 2014 when the former invaded Crimea. According to Myshlovska (2022), the culminating point was when Ukraine ruled to put an end to, and criminalise the ongoing anti-government protests, this action was considered by Russia as “Ukrainian aggression against the people of Donbas”. This led to a political, military and humanitarian interference to assist and “protect” the Russian minority of Donbas. Another background to consider is the way in which the agriculture industries in both countries have developed, which is very much related to the collectivisation of *chernozems*<sup>55</sup>, during the Soviet Union. Many characteristics of this new international order of food (wheat), in which the two countries play a more important role, if compared to the post-war order, as studied by Friedmann in 1982, where it can be observed that the balance of power, dependency and the use of food as a weapon, are characteristics that stand out. Historically the Egyptian society has started riots to protest against the lack of sufficient food. The current food crisis and dependency suggest that there is a link between food insecurity and the Arab Spring of 2011 that needs to be redrawn in this dissertation. This academic research seeks to demonstrate that there is a parallel between this event and the shift in international food order, in the sense that the change of order can also originate from local and internal issues of a country in need. Food insecurity is considered to be a specificity of the uprising that reached political and economic dimensions. Even by considering remarkable scholar’s theories such as Amartya Sen, whose prior studies have noted the impact of famine crises in Bangladesh in 1974 for example, and in Africa in the 1970’s, he explains that food strain is more of a solvency issue than that of supply (Gueldry 2013).

The geographical context involves the decision of Russia to informally incorporate Crimea to its territory as well as closing the grain corridor in 2022. Regarding Egypt and its relevance as a culturally Arab and geographically African country whose position links three continents. The country is strategic and pivotal for trade also due to the Suez Canal. It is understood that Russia has become closer to the country during the past decade and provides more than 70% of the wheat needed to fight food insecurity. In spite of its limitations, the academic perspectives of GPE adds to the understanding of this work of investigation. With recent scholars such as Acharya (2011) who have challenged the establishment and contributed to a

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<sup>55</sup> Chernozems (from the Russian words for “black earth”) are humus-rich grassland soils used extensively for growing cereals or for raising livestock. <https://www.britannica.com/science/Chernozem-FAO-soil-group>

new vision of expanding the topics and geographical limitations to areas of the world whose reality does not fit into the classical Western political economy.

### 2.3. Dependency theory

Based on Palestini & Madariaga (2021, 1-25), there are three general reasons to rely on dependency theories to frame this work of investigation:

1. The first reason is that dependency theories, probably more than any other tradition of thought, focus on the inequalities between actors and sectors of the global political economy. Already the concept of dependency (in contrast with that of interdependence) entails the idea that there is a structural asymmetry in the set of relationships that makes up the global landscape.
2. Second and directly linked to the previous point, dependency theories do not entrap the study of capitalism either at the national or international level but strive to connect the two.
3. Third, dependency theories provide a perspective on contemporary capitalism born from the periphery. The point of departure for the *dependentistas* were the social and economic problems of postcolonial societies, and from there, they attempted to reconstruct the causal chains connecting the local with the global.

Built on the premise that peripheral countries are dependent on the core ones, changes in wheat consumption are conditioned by challenges related to the structure of exporting countries and other actors such as financial institutions. The dependency theory is strongly related to food and hunger, in 1951, Josué de Castro published the first edition of *Geopolítica da fome* (Geopolitics of Hunger) at a time where Latin America was introducing the development and dependency theories. The theories would later be adopted by many regions of the world, African and Arab countries included. As a forerunner, Cardoso (1977) addresses post-colonial geopolitics in a context of subaltern agency (Egypt in our case), he argues that the causes and consequences of hunger or food insecurity as referred to contemporarily, are linked to euro-centric processes of development in the South Global, thus creating a dependency. Be that as it may, Elmusa (1986, 254) argues that dependency does not necessary imply a situation in which countries will forever stay poor and underdeveloped. Indeed, dependency can be interpreted as a situation in which the rate and direction of a country is influenced by its function and position in the international economy. This opens a

door to how situations are subject to transformation, like how world food order can be altered by the structure and the agency.

It is also pertinent here to clarify on certain terminologies that are used in the literature, Philips (2005) argues on the difficulty to consider *Third World Country* and *developing countries* as a unit of analysis in world order. Many other scholars have studied the *Third World* for its singularity, whereas Holsti (1995) has reflected on the complexity of the “parochialism” of Sub-Saharan Africa, Middle East and North Africa, suggesting that the Third World is linked to the notion of the two blocs that were formed during the Cold War. Nowadays, this should be obsolete given the multipolarity of world and the creation of regionalism such as the BRICS+.

Back to food and dependency, Egypt can be considered as a semi-peripheral country, although many scholars have disagreed with Wallerstein and his political economy of the world-system. As Baladão Vieira (2018) has explained, the concept of semiperiphery is difficult to quantify and geographically be located. This argument is complemented by the structural changes as the one that emerged after the crisis of 2008 (Baladão Vieira 2018, 36). This argument is here acknowledged and considered relevant, however, going back to Wallerstein (1974, 1984, 2003) who identifies the semiperiphery as an intermediary between the core, and the periphery in a sense that they can be political and economic go-betweens of great powers and the very dependent ones. It is important nevertheless to bear in mind that semiperipheries are exploited by the centre as well. Egypt is a country that geographically is located between Europe, Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa and mitigates many complexities for Europe and the West in general, by receiving a considerable number of migrants and serving as a buffer to Europe especially. Moreover, regarding international trades, many goods have to go through the Suez Canal into Asia. “The semiperiphery is not an artifact of statistical points, nor a residual category. The semiperiphery is a necessary structural element in world economy” (Wallerstein 1974b, 350). Finally, Egypt enters in the semiperiphery category because it has the capacity to produce up to 40% of the wheat needed, but many other factors such as the climate and the population growth, make this country dependent on importation for a vital resource. All the above mentioned validate the suitability of applying the dependency theory in our case.

Preliminary work on dependency theory was undertaken by Singer (1949) and Prebisch (1950) who introduced it in social studies with the main idiosyncrasy of presenting an aspect of development that would be adapted to modern economic rationale. This, in pursuance of

improving productivity and evolving from a status of poor stagnated nations of the underdeveloped world. This theory may also be considered as a continuity of a conduct analysis formulated by precursors such as Max Weber and Karl Marx and the economist David Ricardo. Part of the process of challenging classic theories and capitalism is still ongoing with contributions of scholars from Latin America (Dos Santos 1970), Africa and the Arab World (Amin 1977). On this ground, it is vital to understand the dependent pattern of development which was supposed to bring progress through industrialisation and substitutions of industrial goods. In contemporary era, the dominating structure since the creation of Bretton Wood and the consolidation of global economy as well as international institutions, the West is the “core”. Since this dissertation is formulated on the basis of food power and especially wheat, EU countries, Russia and Ukraine being the main exporters to Egypt in recent years have a high level of hegemony. In line with Thickner (2013) whose analysis on core-periphery and the neo-imperialist international relations, elevates the classic theories with contemporary dynamics and factors such as the asymmetrical knowledge in IR. Then again, as Wallerstein (1984) uses the concept semi-periphery in order to distinguish between the many degrees of dependency, Egypt in our case, is one such country because of its partial production of wheat locally. Thus, it can be agreed that this historical concept has shaped a structure of global economy in which certain countries get more consideration than others and whose subordinate economy is absolutely subject to the expansion of another, stronger economy (Dos Santos 1971).

Amin (1986) as a major contributor of the dependency theory in Middle East and North Africa (MENA) shares a number of key features with the classic Latin American precursors and other scholars such as Blomström and Hettne (1984), by contrasting the modernising paradigm and the dependency approach. Indeed, the background of the dependency theory is critical of the dogma of Eurocentrism and North-American imperialism, as well as the argumentation on underdevelopment (neo-Marxism) that is a basis of the dependency theory is defined by the hereunder keystones: a new ethic of creating awareness on the default in the Euro-American centric theories of economics. The reflections on the basis of Marxism and neo-Marxism school of thought that is related to aspects of the dependency theory (Magdoff reviewing Paul Baran & Paul Sweezy 1966), by affirming that underdevelopment is strongly linked with the extension of industrialized countries:

- (i) development as well as underdevelopment are two faces of the same coin when seen as a universal process: the core countries that have the power and technology

needed to supply wheat have economic interest and opportunities of growth because there is a dependant and food insecure Egypt who buys;

- (ii) (ii) underdevelopment cannot be considered as a fundament for evolution, in a sense that Egypt has a history of being a bread basket and the country has invested a considerable amount in the improvement of food sovereignty, through many agrarian reforms;
- (iii) (iii) dependency is a phenomenon that encompasses many aspects of internal structure such as social, political and ideological (Dos Santos 1971), here the typical case of bread riots, cost of living that led to the Egyptian revolution of 2011 is a good illustration.

Despite the relevance of the above-mentioned, there are shortcomings regarding these typical claims because Egypt introduced agrarian reforms in 1952 and in 1961 (Amin 2014) both were unfulfilled by the government that had no choice but depending on France, the USA and now Russia, Ukraine and other EU members such as Romania.

As with almost all MENA economies there is a strong dependency on import especially for food. This pattern has been unshakable since the seventies when wheat became a strategic crop (Elmusa 1986; Amin 1982); and to this phenomenon is also linked the fluctuation of the rest of the food market which has apolitical character since there is a high food import bill, because the agricultural output does not match the local demand. The climate difficulties of this country do not simplify the situation, despite the many intakes of fertilisers. This is exemplified by the work undertaken by Amin 1982 who affirms that Egypt dependence is total when it comes to intermediate and capital goods imports. Dependency theory in the case of Egypt and wheat is not related to the premises by which poor nations provide natural resources and cheap labour to wealthier countries, instead on the postulate that wealthy nations and related international institutions such as the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF), General Authority for Supply Commodities (GASC) and multinational corporations create and disseminate the conditions of dependence by means of economy, finance and politics (Abis 2003). All the above demonstrate the importance of critical theories in an inclusive GPE, as there is no one-size-fits-all interpretation.

This leads to conclude this section with the 3 aspects of the theory that engenders the concept of centre-periphery as mentioned by Ameh (2013). The first aspect is that dependency has embodied an international order that incorporates two categories of states, with one side being the first world countries or nations of the Organization of Economic Co-operation and

Development (OECD) and, on the other side, there are the less industrialised states who rely on the first category for their growth and survival, i.e., most states of Africa, Asia and Latin America. The second aspect is that it is generally assumed that the satellite states also depend on the external forces such as the international commodity markets, multinational corporations and other mechanisms that the core countries might use to secure their interests through foreign lands. The third aspect is related to the proactivity of both core and dependent states because the more interaction there is, the higher is the level of dependency, leading to a chain reaction situation. The world food order may need to be conceptualised case by case in order to get a more accurate picture, more insights on geoeconomics and diplomacy of wheat will be presented in the two empirical chapters of this dissertation. Finally, there will also be a perspective on how contemporary food order is also sustained from the peripheries, this will be analysed from how local Egyptian problems cross level until reaching the international scale.

#### **2.4. Peripheral & subaltern realisms**

Food cannot be dissociated from development; without food the productivity of a country will suffer. It is as important as being the second goal of the United Nations Sustainable Development: Zero Hunger.

Embodying peripheral ideology, world food order is related to capitalism and brings about a certain polarisation that is translated in cores being more influential than peripheries. Regarding the disparities, Amin (1986) suggests an explanatory theory by describing capitalism and needs as the accumulation of wealth. The argument is that the above mentioned is driven by a global-values dynamic which is based on the exclusion of labour force, and principals that promote the consumption of goods (Amin 1991). This empiricism drives to a decisive theoretical analysis on the political and economic actions of a country such as Egypt in reference to the importation of a staple food. In the rationale of core-periphery, what influences Egypt's domestic strategies are just as much related to the international reality and might be useful in the understanding of competition between core states, in our case considering that the EU, Ukraine and Russia are core. Regardless of the enduring nature of capitalism, a transformation is not ruled out, instead, it is often part of the successive phases (Amin 1991, 24). Industrialised and technologically advanced countries that have been able to successfully carry out agrarian reforms to a full scale of production, doubtless went through a process of evolution. The northern American hegemony that began



after the Second World War has different facets of imperialism that include food aid and its influence on institutions such as the WB and IMF who intersectionally provide loans to the Egyptian GASC.

Raul Prebisch in the mid-1950s and followed by Cardoso and Faletto in the 1960s conducted a series of studies on the centre-peripheral model and dependency theory that aimed to fathom the reasons for which most Latin American countries had not reached a descent level of development, despite political conformation, cultural and commercial exchanges with the West (Cardoso & Faletto 1979). To an extent, this is applicable to post-colonial Africa in general and Egyptian food insecurity in particular, because it is grounded on the premise that the dependency theory, centre-periphery is embedded in the setting of assisting peripheries. Considering that realism is a theoretical framework based on the idea of the world as an ensemble of self-interested states that compete to gain power and obtain an influential position in an anarchic system, peripheral realism as a derivative, also focuses on states as main actors operating in a system shaped by power and a quest of security. In this case, security is transferable with food security and states are divided into cores and peripheries.

Peripheral Realism (PR) as per Carlos Escudé (1992), is a theory that obtained validation by many scholars in IR and subsequently was adapted to different regions of the world beyond Latin America. Sahni (2001) for India, Sun (2003) and Xu (2020) for China as well as Ayoob (2002) for Africa and Middle East. This latter has adapted and presented the case of Subaltern Realism (SR). These aspects of critical IR have been a fundamental contribution to the ongoing debate on non-Western theories as studied by Acharya and Buzan 2009 (Schenoni & Escudé 2016). Schenoni (2016, 2) has been instrumental in order to understand the peripheral realism and the debate established by Escudé's (1995) three critiques: a) the concept of the state as unit of analysis, b) the pre-eminence of security in the definition of the national interest and c) the concept of anarchy as the ordering principle of the international system.

On the first premise, adapted to Egypt, it is worth clarifying that the ambiguity of state-society structure has depended on the political regime in place or government. With respect to Egyptian foreign policy especially after the 2011 revolution, there are different variables. If intended to apply to Escudé's theory, expressly, the social structure and the political regime make the country constant, pragmatic and mostly aligned with the West but opportunist when necessary. Indeed, despite human rights and civil society violation, a good relation has been kept since the 70s with the USA and the EU, this latter being the largest trading partner for various goods and services. Russia also grew its alliances, especially for wheat trade and

tourism (Pena 2014); finally, it is noted that Egypt keeps good relations with other Arab countries as it does not want to lose its central place in the Arab World (Elhadidi 2018), making it a strategic ally whose very specific state-society configuration is valued. On the second premise, security in the case of this dissertation is related to food as a national interest because politics are usually intertwined with geoeconomics. It is important to consider how economy has gain magnitude in the distribution of power. This means that interstate competition depends on the handling of economic resources and this is central to understanding the status of every country involved. Political power relations are in-line with the patterns of trade. On the third premise, peripheral realism is critical of the ordering principals of international system, especially regarding the perception of anarchy where it is correlated to a domestic behaviour. Since the hegemonic status of the West in the distribution of wheat in Egypt has slowly decreased, a new hierarchy is being shaped with the involvement of Russia and other emerging exporters, according to Escudé (1995, 87) this would just be translated as a fact of life.

Food insecurity and Egypt's dependency on foreign wheat can alternatively be explained through Subaltern Realism. As a post-colonial IR realism perspective, Subaltern Realism (SR) was first introduced by Mohammed Ayoob and was later developed as a continuity of his work on the Third World in the system of states. Ayoob (2002) claims that he struggled calling it a theory because SR is considered rather a perspective that can be applied to the general field of IR and was drawn from the classical realists such as Thomas Hobbes and observed in the international order, furthermore considered as contemporary perspective from a post-colonial state. This approach to realism assumes that foreign policy decisions mostly depend on the external motivations rather than domestic forces. This is due to the fact that the concerned states did not have fully self-governing processes at the time that the aforementioned were being formed in the post-colonial era. This is the case of many African and Middle Eastern countries. This conception led to the creation of an elite of leaders who are challenged to govern problematic states, none able to impose an order that meets the requirements of both the international and domestic actors, thus resulting in state failure. With a lack of domestic order comes the opening for great powers to interfere through financial support, aid, ideologies, etc. in order to attain their objectives. While neorealism's main focus is the security problem and conflicts that stem from balance of power, SR looks at the internal dimension of conflict, how the domestic problems can be the origin of shift in the international system. The limitation of SR is found in the fact that this perspective does not

explain the foreign policy in a coherent and systematic manner, beyond the combination of explanatory factors at a different level of analysis. SR, as well as PR claim that the behaviours of developing countries are determined by their dependence, as weak countries rely on great powers, as well as their need for stability and order within. This can be applied when it comes to explaining how social movement like bread riots and the Arab Spring have shaken the stability internally with an international impact. As the precursor of the Subaltern Realism himself says, this is not a coherent theory but a perspective and a complement to Peripheral Realism (Ayoob 2002).

## 2.5. Geoeconomics

Edward Luttwak (1990) first used the word “geoeconomics” in the *article From Geopolitics to Geoeconomics: Logic of conflict, Grammar of Commerce*, in which he claims that the way power in the international system is structured depends on the geoeconomics distribution, meaning that the economic capacities or resources are factors that contribute to the understanding of international disputes and the economic perspective is important to detect power. To further this thought, Grevi (2022, 28) interpreted geoeconomics as a field that “encompasses both the conversation of economic assets into political influence and the mobilization of political power to achieve economic objectives through competitive or cooperative instances”

There is a complementarity between Geoeconomics and traditional Global Political Economy, actually since it is chosen as line of investigation for this dissertation. It is considered that there are convergences, which accentuate the interdisciplinarity of International Political Economy. Geoeconomics can be considered as a continuity of geopolitics and be interpreted as an extension of the scope of the latter, applied to GPE. Having said that, it is important here to clarify that geoeconomics differs from geopolitics in a sense that “Geoeconomics restricts the field of analysis of geopolitics and emphasises the relevance of economic power as a factor of analysis, in this sense it incorporates a special type of geopolitical competition” (Coelho Jaeger & Perreira Brites, 2020, 24). The interconnection might also rise if a parallelism is drawn between “materialistic, unicausal and teleological views of the history they both present” (Mello 1999, 33). Geoeconomics analysis focuses on a geographic and economic situation to understand the world history. Global Political Economy on the other hand, scrutinises economic factors and the discrepancies in the social and international relations. The geographic causality (geopolitics) and the historical materialism that can be

found in Marxism and the theory of imperialism (Leite 2014, 507-534). The research agenda of geoeconomics is still under construction and there are contested visions about what exactly geoeconomics encompasses and there are also gaps in the advancement of the discipline.

Moving on to the actual case study of the dissertation, the invasion of Ukraine increased interest in geopolitics and the conflict has had considerable impacts on the global economy. The case of grain trade is a vital in order to interpret the economic sanctions against Russia, as geoeconomics is usually understood as a way of “using economy for geopolitical aims”. Furthermore, the accent that is put on the implementation of policies makes it more interesting for Egypt to choose who to trade with. In the framework of this dissertation, we mentioned interdependency through the analysis of the dependency theory, as well as geoeconomics. It is usually believed that economic interdependency led to peace in the moment of conflict and the ties with third countries are strong according to economic interest. Nevertheless, in his article *“Geopolitics is “realism.” Geoeconomics is its “economic means.” Understanding the complexity of the world”* Amano (2023) argues that economic partnerships are significant, but when conflict divide, countries resort to international realpolitik to look after their interests. The author further explains that countries are often faced with two types of economic interdependence: “Sensitivity” and “vulnerability”. As the case may be, if a country is heavily dependent on another for a given commodity, it is vulnerable, but if it can easily procure a substitute, it is sensitive. The fact that Egypt relies of foreign grain to feed its people, makes it a vulnerable country in the geoeconomics and world food order. Economic security as well as food security is an issue because vulnerability is increased since the interdependency is greater since globalisation after the end of the Cold War, especially necessary resources such as food/grain. For many countries it is difficult to overcome vulnerability cause by interdependency.

According to Blackwill and Harris (2016), geoeconomics uses economic instruments to defend national interests, while creating a favourable geopolitical outcome, as far as Egypt is concerned, the Covid-19 pandemic, the Suez Canal blockage of 2021 as well as the war in Ukraine are all events that have intensified the economic disruptions and political commotions. The discussion of geoeconomics in the specifics of the case of this dissertation is that exporting countries create an environment where they are capable of achieving their economic goals. Since 2022, Russia has quickly been imposed with sanctions from most countries of the West and Egypt, as a food insecure country and dependent on EU, Ukraine

and Russian wheat could be included in this new framework of how a hegemon in the international system exerts its power within the current order of food.

Transitioning to the next section about wheat diplomacy, it must be observed that through geoeconomics, the traditional geopolitics as an impetus for strategy and foreign policy, in this work, the point is to understand how countries wheat diplomacy, wheat restriction and sanctions to achieve their geopolitical aim. Likewise, how Egypt secures national integrity through food security. The current situation depicts an overrun between the sphere of influence and national interest, weaponised wheat is a strategic instrument to shape Egyptian political behaviour, in accordance with Imessaoudene's (2022, 2) claim: "Geoeconomics has thus become the means through which contesting powers, strategically aligned or otherwise, engage in competition or cooperation".

## **2.6.Wheat diplomacy as foreign policy**

The focus on foreign policy and diplomacy of wheat is an attempt to frame this investigation from the Egyptian perspective and understand how from the agency, the transformation of world food order is generated. Different perspectives exist in literature regarding foreign policy, diplomacy and states 'decision-making. Breuning (2007) has challenged the traditional conception of foreign policy that focuses on decision makers and leaders of states because it actually goes beyond an attempt to understand the behaviours in an international environment, made up of various actors, by addressing wheat diplomacy. We also open the conversation regarding trading relations, commodity diplomacy and ideology-free decision making. The framework to understand the context and the system that surround Middle East and Northern African (MENA) countries such as Egypt and their response to domestic and international challenges, have to come from their perspective on how the international pressure are related to the distribution of power in the region and how domestic pressure that contribute in the shaping of foreign policies. According to Akbarzadeh (2019, 10):

Neoclassical realism represents a powerful explanatory improvement on existing realist, liberal, and constructivist approaches to international relations and the levels-of-analysis problem. It prioritizes structural realism's emphasis on the international system and incorporates domestic political phenomena as intervening variables to explain foreign policy, grand strategy, and international outcomes.

This approach may provide an insight into international interactions in search of opportunity and avoiding constraints, as well as foreign policy choices. However, it neglects the central character of domestic politics and leaderships in these countries which usually are elitist and have a tendency to maintain their power by force, and they struggle to control insurgency, such social dissatisfactions for food insecurity like the one that ignited the Arab Spring in 2011. Structural realism also contains an aspect of *innenpolitik* which favours domestic political actions and processes, however it refrains from the influence of international system and thus removing the many possibilities of applying foreign policies. The relevance of this contribution is to explain in academic terms how, Egypt is managing its wheat diplomacy as part of the foreign politics to overcome its long-lasting food insecurity. The policies that are made in regard with the trading relations with France and the United States and how these policies have evolved to also accommodate Russian relations and agreements with the latter.

In an attempt to keep the key thread that runs through this dissertation, a historical-structural approach is undertaken. As noted by Maradiaga & Palestini (2021), the structural condition is subject to transformation throughout history. Conflicts and social movements are often elements to consider. The work on dependency complements the methodological approach that Cardoso, Faletto (1979) dubbed “*historical-structural*”. This is an important aspect of this investigation because by addressing the structural we seek to encompass the various positions of economic units and countries that shape the world order of food. It is also historical because we strive to interpret the structural positions through the evolution and the idiosyncrasy in time, of the countries that are objects of analysis here. In order to understand how dependency works, agency is integrated by the historical dimension and complement the structural scope which is per se a representation of unbalanced relations and global food order.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter is a contribution to academic work on critical IR as this is a field that keeps evolving with non-classical reflections. There is a world order in general and one that is specific to food and grain in particular as a commodity. Based on conventional notions of precursors such as Keohane and Nye (1998), there is a possibility to adapt to new realities and consider subfields such as geoeconomics that are shaping the current scenery, becoming especially relevant since the war between Ukraine and Russia as well as the emergence of new powers and economic blocs. Dependency theory fuels the way the world order functions, especially in a capitalist system. The new paradigm that is post-colonial, post-Cold War is of

much interest as many factors have come to light as contributors. In that sense, we can mention changes in partnerships and alliances according to what best suits each party's interest. This is mostly evident in the way states chose their foreign politics and in the case of Egypt choosing the caution of not aligning with any bloc, in order to secure wheat supply. In the next chapter, an in-depth analysis on the transformation of world food order will be presented.

### Chapter 3. Transformations of the world food order

Changes in the world food order are not new. What is striking nowadays is the speed of transformation in the past decade. The current geopolitical and geoeconomic landscapes seem to considerably alter the provision of food for all. Wheat is a staple food for many countries, its production and supply is essential in global food security, and in recent years some exporters have changed the direction of provision, selling to the best bidder and also to those with whom commercial relations are more convenient. Some other producers have also appeared, taking advantage of the demands that are not duly fulfilled to position themselves in the global market of wheat. Chris Elliott (2023) claims that “food is the new oil”, thus making a parallel between the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) with countries such as Russia, China, India. Some of the BRICS+ countries, therefore, form an organisation that holds an immense influence on food and a capability to exert the same power as the OPEC does. The World Food Program in 2022 (Husain 2022, 5) points out that only 7 countries in the world make up 86% of global wheat exportations, while 3 countries hold 68% of the world’s wheat reserve. This concentrated market also grants a great power. The ascension of Russia, Ukraine and Romania as wheat power players means a great deal for the future of the Global political Economy and the transition of world food order.

The objective of this chapter is to consider a set of interpretations of the following theme:

**How the geoeconomics of wheat is transforming the global food order for wheat exporting countries as well as those highly dependent on the grain, all this set in an environment of conflict between Russia and Ukraine.** Due to harsh competitions in the wheat market and a Russian domination of production and exportations, a prominence to the change of world food order and created a greater rivalry between Russia and the West. Since the 2008 global financial crisis and new dominant poles that include BRICS+ countries, the panorama has been more focused on economic governance, alliance-centred and a new shape of cooperation that non-Western countries seek. A contradiction might arise in regard of this dissertation’s argument on geoeconomics, in the sense that Russian aggressions and constant threats to use nuclear weapons are military based and a form of hard power toward Ukraine and the West. Nevertheless, we strive to approach the war on wheat as no-negligible interactions, a dimension away from “States as unique actors in an international scenery”. There is an economic scope of global politics that also involves countries in acute need of food and those who are willing to expedite this process. This consideration leads to study further the antagonism between Russia and the West that presently takes place in the South



Global sphere; meaning that geoeconomics of wheat transform relations, respond to policies such as the Egyptian “Baladi” and takes advantage of the geography of this emblematic afro-Mediterranean land. It is worth highlighting that the process of transformation and world food order that are addressed here, are turbulent and depict a never-seen-before perspective of the wheat’s global political economy. The “geopolitisation” of wheat’s production, trade and exportation routes that Russia has established, in order to supply Egypt, involves conflicts with other major suppliers, through “geoeconomics competition” (Gertz & Evers 2020) and “weaponised interdependence” (Firroel & Newton 2019). These are two correlative notions that are the narrative thread of this chapter. In the first section, a description of the post-war food order will be presented, the crisis that led to the moment when a significant transformation became apparent.

### **3.1. Structural change in the world food order**

In the post war era, the USA has been recognized as the greatest power in many aspects, including grain production. The Marshal Plan is the epitome of contemporary food power, from that point onward, many countries around the world have relied on the States for food trade and aid, Egypt has been one of them. In the context of this investigation, the USA, Canada and Australia, while recognized as very important wheat exporters and important players in the world food order, currently mostly supply the rest of the American continent and Asian countries. Indeed, countries such as Mexico, Japan and the Philippines are consistent consumers of this wheat. For this reason, in this dissertation the focus will be directed to the major EU exporters, Ukraine and Russia. This is because important African importers (Egypt being the first one) depend on them. Pinpointing the main subject and considering the case study, the geoeconomics chessboard is laid out between countries such as France, Romania and Ukraine (priority partner of the EU and candidate for membership) on one side and on the other, Russia.

Within this outline, when it comes to world food order and agriculture, the EU is considered a great power for grain. In the 60’s, France pioneered the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP), which was basically conceived in the context of fulfilling food necessities in EU countries and was followed by the Treaties of Rome that established free movement of goods. At that time, it became necessary to impose the CAP to all members in order to implement fundamental fair competitions for food trade. The Policy originally aimed to ensure enough quality food while safeguarding farmers’ income and fair prices, even though this has not really functioned

as planned because of market regulations and fluctuations. In more than sixty years since the creation of the CAP (1962), the European regionalism has also changed because of new members from the Eastern part of the continent, Brexit, etc.

France has been a major player and the first exporter of wheat in the EU, however there was a time when France also depended on importations from the USA. The damages caused by the Second World War created a shortage that led France to the signature of a purchasing agreement entitled “*the International Wheat Agreement*”. According to Angoulvent 1948, the 820,000 tonnes of grain were to be distributed between continental France and French Northern Africa. Magimel (2020) claims that the historical shift for France was in 1949 when food (bread) rationing ended and the country went from an importer of wheat to building its agroindustry, and eventually became the 5<sup>th</sup> producer on the international stage. During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, wheat production in France had been promoted by the state, the European Economic Community and the CAP as mentioned before. Considering the context of the Cold War, it was also important for European producers to ensure food security and avoid socio-political upheaval or having to resort to the Soviet Union grain. Even though the USA and other major producers in those times, such as Australia protested about CAP policies and started a geoeconomics offensive, negotiations on customs tariffs and trade through the WTO settled the rivalries. By the 1990s, the USA were losing competitiveness (Vocke 2001), and through the CAP policy, France transformed the international food order.

France had managed to maintain its position for many decades, however, in the 2000s, an unexpected twist disturbed the production and exports of wheat. Undeniably, climate changes have affected yields and many producers have barely overcome losses. Many experts have argued that there is a correlation between climate, food shortages and geoeconomics of food between producers and dependent countries. For example, Abis & Sadiki (2016) argue that major challenges such as water and soil management as well as the world agricultural tensions are some of the issues that affect wheat trade. The substantial drop in 2016 was remarkable because less than 30 MT was available (France Agrimer 2016), as a consequence of the bad weather conditions. During that year, low temperatures and flood were among the factors that led to diseases for French wheat. It is worth emphasising that 2016 was a very good one for Russia and other competitors, in terms of yields. These facts suggest yet, another shift in the international food order.

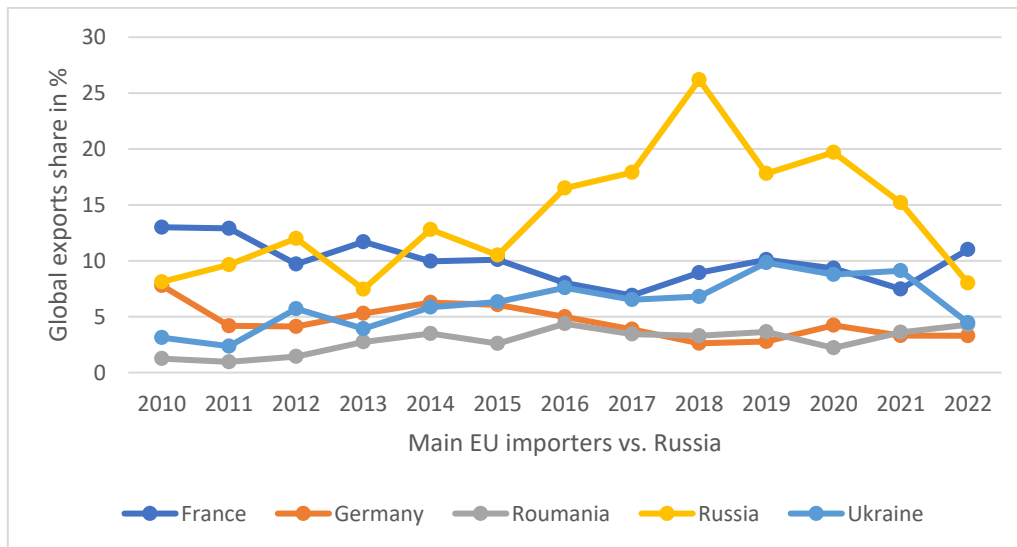
Turning back the clock, the current crises coincide in several aspects of a global search of a new balance, as Grinin et al. (2016) describe in “*the epoch of new coalitions*”. For world food

order as well, many alliances have been created, a new history is being written by means of new geoeconomics of grain. Another tendency that is observed is the flexibility with which these connections for cooperation are being constructed, being more economic than political. Drastic changes often happen in situations of cataclysm and deep crises such as conflicts, acute food insecurity, migrations, etc., like the events that the world is currently witnessing. Players on the international stage seem to have altered the rules in order to obtain the most convenient agreements and coalitions with a less double-standard context than has been observed during the Western hegemony. The pivotal moment or trigger that prompts the beginning of a new order for food and wheat in particular, is the crisis of 2008 that brought about a rise of commodity prices, including crude oil, grain and fertilisers (World Food Program 2022). For wheat and food in general, 2011 was one of those moments, as the world witnessed a significant rise in food costs. The fracture that appeared in the world order after the crisis of 2008, was deeply felt on food markets too, especially with the inflation of 2010.

### **3.2. Wheat: The rise of Russia and Ukraine as great powers**

2010 marked re-emergence of Russia as a grain potency. When President Putin was first elected, his government made a national priority by intensifying the production of soft wheat and reaching 40 million tons (Hunt et al. 2021). During this campaign, the government encouraged investors to be part of the recapitalisation of the agroindustry and thanks to the high-end technicality and favourable climate conditions, the country has become a top producer. Indeed, the reorganisation of Sovkhoz and Kolkhoz (Russian farms) contributed to the flourishing industry, the country holds 29 million hectares of arable land, which is 12% of the world arable land, Food and Agriculture Organization (2015), from the Black Sea to Siberia. With global warming Siberia has become more temperate, creating even more favourable land for cultivating wheat.

**Chart 3.1. Fluctuation for wheat exports 2010-2022**



Elaborated by the author based on OECD 2022

The above figures show how Russia is dominating the global wheat market by augmenting production and exportations. In 2024 the country reached the record exportation of 50MT, which represents 25% of the world market. Of which 400 MT goes to Egypt, Abis (2024). The most compelling observation from the analysis is that Russia has gain importance on the global market despite international sanctions that resulted from invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Below are three factors that could explain the “*Russification*” of world food order (as Abis (2024) nominates this phenomenon):

1. The reconstitution of an agricultural potency.
2. Profiting from the lack of a robust competitor while Ukraine was struggling to rise from the aggression.
3. Manipulation of prices and rules.

2022 was not the year of Russian agricultural reconstitution, instead it was reaffirming this process and securing it. By reforming the productions, the government initially wanted to fight against its own food insecurity, however, the good yield came as a bonus and was an opportunity to conquer the international market. The production surplus was supplied to countries in need and strategically began the weaponization of food (wheat). There is a certain inseparability between politics and economics and taking into account that the tendency inclines toward the liberal economy, it can be agreed that economic interests dominate. In the

case of Russia, agricultural commodities have been used to serve Russian power. One of the country's National Priority Projects (NPP) focuses on agricultural development and competitiveness on the global food market. Furthermore, President Vladimir Putin is revealed to be a major proponent of food security by implementing various plans such as the 2013-2020, that is essentially centred on grain as a vital element of Russian foreign politics. Wheat is among the key commodities in the process of repositioning Russia as one of the Great Powers. The subprime crisis that culminated in 2008 followed by many sanctions for the annexation of Crimea in 2014, created an environment of geoeconomics battle that goes on until the present day.

The dynamic in the international market proves the power of Russia and a potential of instrumentalization as a weapon of mass influence. Aware of this, the Russian government has not hesitated to threaten cutting off supplies to those who intend to sanction or criticise the invasion of 2022. In this same line, this government has gone as far as blaming the West for the current food crisis. This was illustrated in July of 2022 in Egypt, when during the visit to many African countries, Sergei Lavrov, foreign minister said *"The so-called food crisis that is always shamelessly charged on Russia, is a false story, as if the food crisis began the day that we decide to launch our operations in Ukraine. The crisis was aggravated by unlawful Western sanctions against Russia"*<sup>6</sup>. (Nenbrot for TV5 2022).

This type of argument can be interpreted as decisive when it comes to which country is eligible to establish and cultivate commercial relationships and especially significant for non-Western countries who do not feel they are concerned with bloodshed in Ukraine. This is a strong sign of how Russia is using every strategy to disrupt the world food order. Of course there is a possibility that the situation might change at any time but as things stand, no country is successfully weakening this potency. Bringing this section to a close, if Russia has been using wheat as a matter of geoeconomics, Ukraine on the other hand has pursued a rapprochement with Western (NATO) countries in order to seek aid. Hence, the next section of this chapter interprets how Ukraine's struggle to fight back has created an emptiness in the world market and an opportunity for Russia.

As far as Ukraine is concerned, the wheat's production breakthrough in the production of wheat happened in the 2000s as well. At that time, the country reached 31 million tons, a first to be

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La soi-disant crise alimentaire, qui est toujours attribuée sans honte à la Russie, est une histoire fausse, comme si la crise alimentaire avait commencé le jour où nous avons lancé notre opération en Ukraine. La crise alimentaire a été aggravée par les sanctions occidentales illégales contre la Russie <sup>6</sup>. (Translated by Marie Kongolo)

recorded in contemporary times. It was a sum of particular circumstances that created this high level of production, specifically: as part of the Soviet Union, Ukraine was identified as one of the top countries with the potential to produce an immense volume of wheat, so a considerable number of resources were invested in the improvement of grain and the creation of grain hybrid through technical and scientific research. Like Russia, Ukraine also has optimal weather conditions for this type of agriculture. To open a short parenthesis, it is important to mention here that, the Chernozem soil that makes 65% of arable land in Ukraine and Russia. This is a very fertile black soil that contains humus, favourable for agricultural yields. As Ukraine went on to obtain its independence from the USSR, the state developed a whole sector around agriculture by improving infrastructure and increase capacity for more production, even though it took more time to promote the sale of wheat abroad.

### **3.3. Other participant in the transformation**

Russia as an important producer of energy, grain and fertiliser whose accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) is a milestone for the country as well as the global trade system. It has strengthened multilateral trading and defied protectionism. In the case of wheat supply to Egypt this is not applicable because the country has an acute need of foreign grain to feed its population. According to Tochiskaya (2012), US and EU's agriculture sector viewed this new accession to the WTO as an opportunity to lift trade relationships and new trade openings. Obviously, the trade relations between members will have a positive effect on Russia's exports through lower tariffs in countries such as Egypt and promote fair competitions. An important advantage of being a member of the WTO is that Russia became more attractive for foreign direct investments, which helps increase technology transfers, allowing innovation and modernisation of the agricultural industry which, in turn, backs the expansion of grain export. The Russian federation has been a member of the WTO since 2012, following a nineteen (19) years negotiation. Of course, the country is also subject to all regulations and procedure on wheat trade. In this section, quotas on wheat exportation, questionable exports schemes and Russian relations with the WTO will be discussed.

Firstly, as a systematic measure to regulate grain exports and control inflation, the quota is normally set up in the June-July marketing season for the supply to African countries and the Middle East. The period from mid-February until the end of July for 2022 was 25 MT of grain compared to 11 MT, the previous year, Poncelet for RTBF (2022). Secondly, in the WTO as same as other organisations of this scale, there are deficiencies but what is relevant for this

chapter is to point out Russia's threat to leave the organisation and risk of a global food shortages. Since sanctions have been imposed following the invasion of February 2022, there has been a pronouncement to withdraw the status of one of the *most favoured countries*. The fact that many countries have manifested their wish to stop trading, has been considered by Russia as illegitimate by arguing that the WTO often favours the West. The most evident was the way in which many multinational companies have left the country once Ukraine was invaded. According to the Article X of the WTO, whether Russia decide to withdraw or not, as a basic principle, the country should be excluded.

Looking at the Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the WTO, there is no specific provision to exclude a country but "two-thirds of the WTO's 164 members have the ability to alter the rights and obligations of members and, three-quarters of members can expel a member from the organization" (World Trade Organization 2017). Nevertheless, taking into account all the new alliances Russia has made, it is not likely that the WTO would succeed in gathering 123 members to vote for Russian exclusion. Furthermore, The Most-Favoured-Nation "Under the WTO agreements, countries cannot normally discriminate between their trading partners. If a country grants a special favour (such as a lower customs duty rate for one of their products) hence this action has to be done for all other members". Matelly (2007) points out that the Russian economy needs to adapt in order to align with mandatory multilateral rules. The subject of wheat regulation is highlighted here as Russia has managed to be one of the major suppliers to many countries that are facing food crisis, this action represents both a political and a power play. It is indeed difficult to regulate all aspects of trading since in a substantial way, every country seeks to preserve its national interest. Therefore, it may be considered unfair that Russia supports its farmers more than many countries do, this support is done through very high subsidies, leading to bigger production. All the above show a vulnerability in the trading system when countries enter the international competitive market, some with more advantages than others.

It is clear that Russia is re-emerging with strength by positioning itself assertively. Scholars who have addressed the topic of BRICS in International Political Economy such as Quiliconi, Saguier and Tussie argued that:

It is still too soon to tell if these countries can represent an alternative order/dis-order but we can analyse how they have performed in key multilateral forums in which they participate with certain influence given the more equal voting and representative characteristics of the G-20 and the WTO (Quiliconi et al. 2016, 39).

Agreeing with this statement of 2016, these countries have not created a new order that compete as equal with the West, but it can be observed nowadays that they have gained more influences in their alliances with dependent countries. A change of paradigm has been detected more clearly since (and during) the COVID-19 pandemic with the distribution of vaccines as well as in the specific case of this dissertation, the way in which Russia is offering better and cheaper wheat on the grain market.

### Map 3.1. Supporters UN General Assembly resolution

*Source:* Multilateral Dialogue Geneva (2023).



Having a close look at how Russia has diverted from imposed sanctions mostly from the West, some actors such as Türkiye, the United Arab Emirates and some BRICS+ countries who have not clearly condemned Russia's attacks nor challenged its endeavour to position itself as a major food potency. Starting with Türkiye, although at times the relationship between these two countries have been conflictual, their common interest and cooperation is often with the purpose to challenge the West. Earlier in this chapter, it was indicated that Russia pulled out of the Black Sea Grain Initiative (BSGI) and that was an initiative of Türkiye and the UN in July of 2023. Coincidentally at the Russia-Africa Summit, President Putin promised free delivery of wheat to African countries and it turns out that for that purpose, Türkiye was indispensable. Indeed, this country is an intermediary on one side because it is part of the chain by transforming wheat into flour ready to be consumed by African countries who often lack innovative infrastructure. The other strategic point between the two states is the Bosphorus passage that is crucial for transportation (Le Figaro 2023). The Montreux Convention of 1936 gives exclusivity to Türkiye to decide who enters and exits the Black Sea through the passage (Britannica 2022). As one of the first members of NATO, the government in Ankara has defended Ukrainian sovereignty but is not likely to break relations with Russia either because of diplomacy and geoeconomics regarding dependency on Russian gas. Balci (2023) asserts that Türkiye plays a double game and has an ambiguous position in the diversion of the blockade and allies with either camp because of interdependencies on resources or commodities.

The second focus is on the embargo around transnational payments and the SWIFT Blockade. This is one of the most prominent geoeconomics tools and that has been at the core of the Russo-Ukrainian crisis. In 2022, Russia was excluded from the international messaging network as a sanction from the West, in order to encumber Russia's global market integration. Nowadays, there is almost no transnational payment that is done in a transparent manner without going through SWIFT and although it is supposed to be neutral, the control of it is almost fully by western countries (Carroué 2022). Russia has its own system, the SPFS that connects 20 countries but until it gets more important, the "*Unswifted*" banks such as the Russian Agricultural bank, work with intermediaries such as the United Arab Emirates. This country is considered the new hub for the 300 recreated Russian companies in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. As per to Boussois (2023), this is the location from where, henceforth many trading and payments will go through. Before moving to the next segment, it is worth mentioning that since 2023, the UAE is one of the newcomers into the BRICS+, as is Egypt.

### **3.4. Rises and falls within the European Union**

As a region, the EU is considered to be an important player in the order of food and as far as wheat is concerned, France and Germany are traditionally the main producers and exporters. However, at a time where these two declined, there was a rapid emergence of Romania as an important player. The two prominent ones produce millions of tonnes that are sufficient for covering their own food sovereignty as well as being able to spare for exportations. The leader in agribusiness market intelligence, AgFlow (2022) considers that Germany's first importer of wheat is Iran, followed by northern and western African countries such as Algeria and Nigeria on top of the list. Germany also supplies EU countries such as Spain. Unquestionably a large player on the international stage even though it is not one of the main suppliers for Egypt.

Focusing more on France, as an EU major producer and exporter in the very dynamic context of international wheat trade, where few countries have the capacity to avoid falling into shortages, the above-mentioned country has regularly been ranked as a major strategic actor because of its grain power and developed agriculture industry. In spite of this influence, its position has been challenged in the current world food order. Based on Abis studies (2015, 2022) and Abis & Begog (2018) This can be interpreted by certain circumstances:

- a. As far as competitiveness with other countries is concerned, France has the paradox of producing a considerable amount of wheat, with higher cost, in addition to this there are high taxations and environmental regulations amongst the strictest in the EU. This can be a handicap, once the commodity hits the market, that requires a price adjustment.
- b. Compared to other producers, France has been fortunate to have high yields, however the arable land area is not as vast as the ones in other producers/exporters.

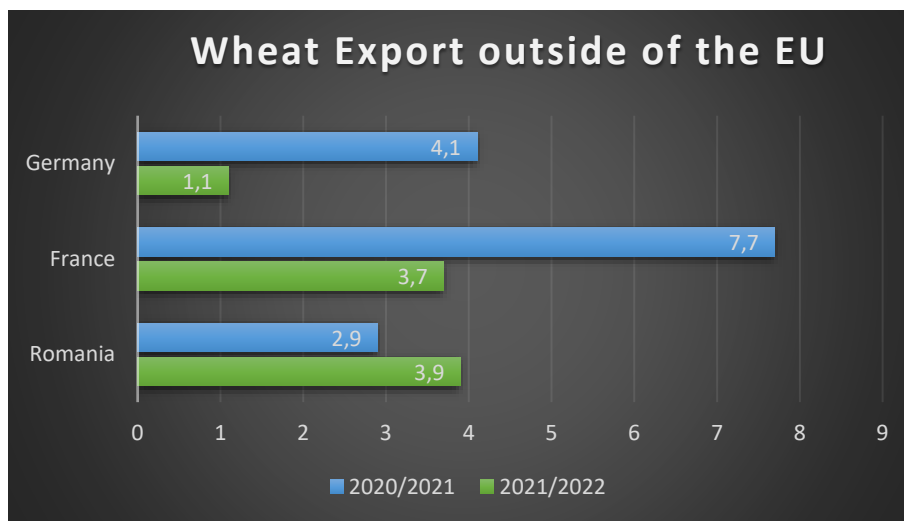
As the forerunner of the EU's PAC, on a structural level, France has had many advantages to be positioned well in the grain world order, i) the fact that wheat is the most cultivated grain by local farmers, ii) the country is also committed to a production excellence, iii) except for 2016, the climate has been mostly favourable for production for many years, iv) France also focuses on milling wheat from which there is high demand internationally. All the above added to an industry filled with cutting-edge technology and a non-negligible capacity of storage. Despite these assets, a decline in exportations hits when the production stagnated because of the climate change shocks in 2016. For the first time the country's wheat

production was destabilised since the 90s. Another factor that contributes is that France has stricter regulations regarding fertilisers and the fact that some areas of fallow soil are used to produce grain. Synacomex (2017) mentioned that in 2016 French production of wheat dropped to a 35% and the following year the production quality was not outstanding. This led to cutting down the exportation by half for the non-EU buyers. This meant that the French economy was also affected, since exports of wheat represent 7 billion Euros every year. The empty bench left by France was filled by eastern European countries, at this point Romania together with Ukraine and Russia completely swamped MENA countries with their grain.

By joining the EU, Romania was incorporated into the heterogeneity of agricultural policies and be part of the CAP budget. For the EU, having Romania as a member is a benefit too since this means an increase of agricultural superficies to be exploited. 40% of Romania arable soil is reserved for grain cultivation, Batagoiu (2016). On the other hand, Romania also faced some resistance from other EU members since the potential reforms had to be covered by the PAC budget. It is important here to take into account that an upgrade of infrastructure and modernisation of the sector was necessary. The financial support by instalment to Romania and the various economic and taxation compliances have allowed the country to gain a place on the chessboard and be part of the current shift in international food order Băţgoiu (2016). Furthermore, by being a member of the EU, Romania also benefited from European multinationals partnerships, for example the German giant Bayer.

The entire western region of Romania cultivates a wheat that for bread (the quality needed for Egyptian consumption) Bayer Crop Science saw an opportunity in creating a food chain partnership that centralises its works on improvement of crops and monitoring seed treatment. Through this alliance, Romania can produce a crop with the EU standards, making it easier to commercialise (Bayer 2012). This new key producer timidly made its way in the international market of wheat around 2012-2013 and since then, there has been steady growth. Although the amount of wheat exported is below Russia and Ukraine, Romania has demonstrated its high potential. Since 2018 the surge has been relatively exponential and, on many occasions, the country was ranked as the first EU extra trader whose first importer is Egypt. A milestone happened in the season 2021/2022 when Romania outperformed France and Germany (AgFlow 2023). According to the same source, France and Germany went from 7.7MT and 4.1MT to 3.7MT and 1.1MT respectively, while Romania increased from 3.9MT to 4.7MT.

**Chart 3.2. Wheat exports outside of the EU**



Elaborated by the author based on AgFlow (2022).

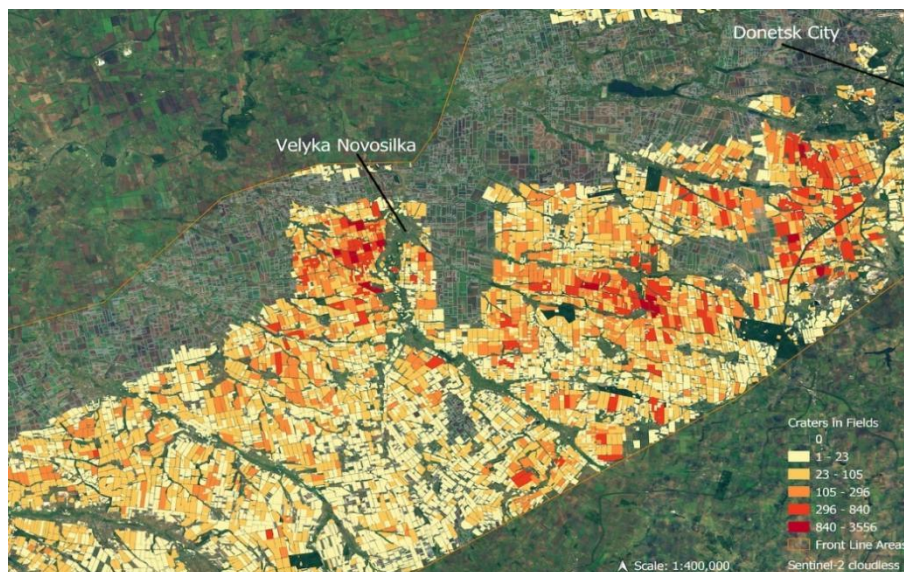
What is observed here is that there is an important drop on French and German exportation in 2021/2022, although the exportations from Romania is not exceptional, the fact is that it surpasses the other two key exporting countries. These numbers are those just prior the invasion of Russia in Ukraine.

In conjunction with production increase, Romania also created an environment that would be fruitful for trade. For example, storage capacities have been improved and expanded, Lyndon (2019) states in the Word Grain magazine that the country's main port of Constanta has gone from a 1-million-ton grain storage capacity to 1.5 million, in 2019. The repurposing and expansion of the port was carried out by Ameropa, a Swiss company. Here again a strategic alliance is observed, owing to many benefits of being a member of the EU. Switzerland is a strategic ally even though not a member, and maintains close economic, political and trading relations (Reuters 2020). This new facility can support up to 10 Panamax vessels. These are the largest vessels, initially constructed to pass through the Panama Canal, they play an important part in the world trade because of their large capacity, design and speed. In the following section, an analysis will be made pointedly on the implications of the invasion of Ukraine. Romania is geopolitically strategic as much as geoeconomics' ally, the canal that connects the port of Constanta (Black Sea) and the Danube River, once considered a canal of death because of all the political prisoners who died during its construction in the dictatorship, has now developed into an economic portal for wheat exports and simultaneously facilitating the positioning of Romania as top exporter in the EU.

### 3.5. Invasion of Ukraine and its consequences

The invasion of Ukraine has many implications, noticeably the economic ones and also the risk of worsening the global food crisis. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (2022), the risks that emanate from the war are directly affecting trade, price fluctuations and logistics. Ukraine's wheat production went from 24.9Mt in 2020, to 32.2 Mt in 2021 and dropping to 20.7MT in 2022 after the invasion (FAO 2022). As far as production goes, the crop has been affected by the military operations per se, that is, munitions and chemical contamination of the soil, in addition to land desertion. According to the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine of the University of Arizona, who have collected satellite-based information using imagery to estimate the area of war zone that is occupying agricultural land, came to a conclusion that 7.5% of cropland in Ukraine is not used anymore, Becker-Reshef & Mitkish (2024).

**Map 3.2. Cropland damaged by war: frontline battlefields of Horliivka, Velyska Novosilka, and Vuhledar in Ukraine in 2022**

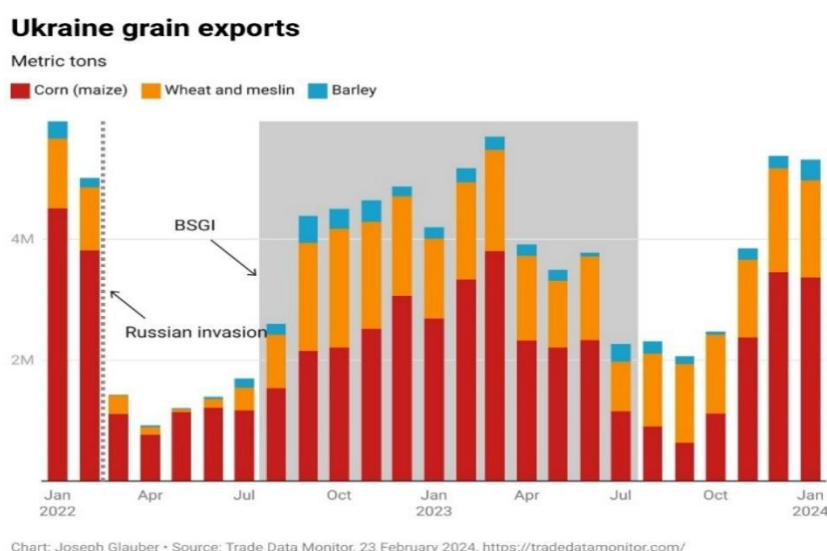


*Source:* ISSUES in Science and Technology (2024).

Speaking specifically of wheat, this means that the harvest drop is of 2.36MT, as estimated by USDA. The impact on trade and exportations since 2022 have also been compelling: the first aspect was the shipping blockade of Odessa port; this shaped the pursuit of new routes. In response to this, Ukraine is since then exempt of custom duties in the EU zone, in order to mitigate the global food crisis. In 2022-2023, the route through Romania and Poland allowed a multiplication of exports of 17 times more than the period before war (FranceInfo 2024). Although this dissertation does not address the ways by which Ukrainian wheat disrupted the

European Union since 2022, it is important to capture here that this change in scenery created a vacant market share to be filled by Russia, especially in the non-European market. Furthermore, another “solidarity lane” was created through the infamous Black Sea Grain Initiative (BSGI), encouraged by the United Nations and Türkiye. If critically analysed, this initiative was an effort for the best interests of African and Middle Eastern countries, a country such as Egypt is so dependent that supplies from both Russian and Ukraine are necessary to fulfil its needs in nutrition. During the 12 months that followed the agreement of the BSGI, it can be observed that exports from Ukraine reached a record of 2Mt (in October 2022). This was beneficial because the global food supplies were sustained and subsequently international prices were controlled (Glauber 2024).

**Graph 3.1. Ukraine grain exports 2022-2024**



*Source:* Center For Strategic & International Studies (2024).

However, in July 2023, Russia decided to terminate the agreement and went back to using its military power to make the corridor an unsafe place for shipment. Countries that mostly suffer from climate change, conflicts or those who are still in a process of recovering from the economic damages of the Covid-19 pandemic, now have to additionally worry about grain scarcity and price rises. Many African countries are concerned, including Egypt. The termination of this agreement was officially justified as a response to the fact that Russia was facing payment restrictions, notably on wheat and fertilisers, due sanctions from Ukrainian allies (mostly Westerners). Actually, pulling from the BSGI tactically suggests that the gap created by Ukrainian grain had to be filled by another producer, and Russia was the best replacement. Although China, India, the USA, Canada, France, Ukraine, Russia and Pakistan

are the most important producers (World Grain 2024), not all are great exporters. Indeed, China is the first producer of wheat but consumes its entire production; India produces a great amount of grain but because of its domestic demand, it does not export unless there is an outstanding harvest in terms of quality and quantities, and this happens very rarely.

As a consequence of the termination of the BSGI, observing the data in Figure 4, from July 2023 onward, Russian wheat exports by sea vessel rose, especially to the MENA region. Besides, at this same period the Russia-Africa Summit was happening in Saint-Petersburg. During the event, President Putin promised to ship free wheat to six African countries (Burkina Faso, Zimbabwe, Mali, Central African Republic, Eritrea and Somalia) (Deutsche Welle 2023). This can be considered a turning point as far as geoeconomics is considered because to a certain extent, Russia gained the loyalty of its “African friends”. To conclude this section, it is worth mentioning that from end of September 2023, Ukraine resumed shipment according to Reuters (2023), the Aroyat vessel embarked with 17.600 MT of wheat, from Chornomosk port towards Egypt.

Another important fact to take into consideration is that two sorts of wheat are utilised for different purposes: soft and hard, each one produces a different type of flour and different finished products. For example, Canada producing a hard type of grain that is mostly used for products such as pasta and noodles, so if Canadian wheat price rises, this will affect the price of pasta rather than bread. Wheat from countries such as France, Ukraine, Romania and Russia, is optimal for bread and especially the type of flat bread “*Aish Baladi*” consumed by the Egyptian population, Kishk (2019). This detail narrows down the countries which can be listed as supplier of wheat for Egypt, unless the Egyptian people move on to a transition of diet. Wheat producers are also linked to fertiliser’s trading, which will be addressed in the next section.

### **3.6. Wheat as a geoeconomics tool**

Several lines of evidence suggest that Russian invasion have changed the world order, Bordachev (2022) reports that:

The emerging international order, in its structure, shows no sign of a leading power capable of acting jointly as a dominant military and economic force. Great powers like the United States, Russia, China and India, are not cooperating. They never shared the same world order view (Bordachev 2022, 3).

Russia, China and India are part of the BRICS and there is the West. There is a difference between these two blocks and the previous bipolar world of West and Soviets. The panorama nowadays is characterised by many emerging powers who do not share the same elemental internal order, nor do they necessarily share the same vision, but they still collaborate when necessary. Turkey is an example as a member of NATO and still support Russia in wheat transformation and access to the Black Sea. There also many signs of heterogeneity and a different distribution of power. For example, the BRICS+ are not a system of unipolar power unlike the EU or USA.

Russia's challenge to the EU and Ukraine as a wheat power e in the Global South, particularly given the vulnerabilities of its competitors, ranging from the climate crisis to geoeconomics and military factors, has effectively turned wheat into a weaponised commodity. Wheat has been king in France and plays a fundamental role in food security and sovereignty. Russia has become the greatest exporter, by producing a sufficient amount but also by championing in disruptive operations, especially in Ukraine and the Black Sea. Russia circumvents sanctions with alternative strategies by excluding the West and attempting to create an alternative global economy of wheat. Weaponization also came in a form of ransacked Ukrainian grain stock by Russian forces, in order to export it to its allies. The effect of bombs and missiles that damage Ukrainian soil is also part of weaponization and finally it is important to mention the blockade on the Black Sea.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, since the beginning of the conflict wheat has been at the centre of the negotiations and geoeconomics strategies. The asymmetry of the market has not changed much, it is the order that is being transformed through power competitions based in this case, the grain market. Aligning with Shneider-Petsing (2016), it can be emphasised that wheat is used as a tool to promote geopolitical objectives and manipulate the outcome of international economic activities for the exporting countries. In the current scenery, Russia and Ukraine have both the capacity to shape a new order and they have been able to modify the distribution of food power, especially across MENA countries. Arguably there is no power dynamic without interdependence. The goal of any geostrategy regarding wheat is to boost national economic interest. However, without alliances like those with Turkey or the UAE, effective wheat diplomacy with African countries, and appropriate statecraft, significant risks could arise for the nations involved. As Breslin and Nasadurai (2023) assert, in order to change the order, it is important for states to take into consideration the motivations (national



economic interests) as well as the outcome and the consequences (position as a powerful food exporter and facing risks such as sanctions and an aggressive response from rivals).

## **Conclusion**

The relevance of researching the transformation of the world food order is clearly supported by findings about the use of wheat as a geoeconomics tool. The findings also demonstrate the real and vigorous balance of power is in neoliberalism capitalism. The findings have also extended the facts on the current context of trade, the EU integrates well the economies that are characterised by free trade and flow of capital, knowledge, etc. amongst countries of the region. Hence, France, Romania and Germany for example have access to resources, labour markets and maximize returns and benefits of wheat trade for the common good of the EU. Ukraine is a candidate to EU membership, which should be considered as a strategy and statecraft on both sides in the sense that by integrating the region, Ukraine will benefit from financial and technological advantages from the EU. The latter will gain an area of soil that will strengthen the agricultural power and reposition the EU as a bloc, to be the first exporter of wheat in the MENA region and Egypt consequently. Russia, on the other hand, is also sustaining the globalization despite claims of an alternative way from the West. There is an intensification of interaction and the creation of dependence from African and Middle Eastern countries for wheat, with the advantage of offering competitive quality and prices. Additionally, having open borders with countries such as Turkey and international cooperation through BRICS+ countries is evidence of a drive in geoeconomics.

There is a growing trend of regional trade and preferential agreements such as BRICS+ and the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement. This can be considered as an effort to strengthen economic interest while the WTO is often standoffish to deal with multilateral impasses and rules. This is noticeable in this time of food crisis, where there haven't been concrete actions to address new possibilities of aligning policies on wheat trade. Beyond economic interests, according to the WFP (2022) the food crisis has worsened in the past years which makes one speculate if after all Russia is just another capitalist state, no different from the West and the change in world food order is just a natural cycle of capitalism and what could the possible alternatives to ensure food security. As per Korobkov, Kingah & Jovic (2016, 94) "Russia's integration within global trends and institutions is motivated and driven by its goal to prevent the further European or Western encroachment into the states in its region or its sphere of influence".

## **Chapter 4. The role of Egypt in the world food order**

Egypt is the best prototype of Russian economic diplomacy because of its dependency on foreign wheat to feed its growing population. The world order is also subject to how dependent countries on an agential level make political decisions to cover domestic necessities. Egypt faces vulnerability to social upheaval and immigration from conflict-ridden Arab and African countries, due to its geographic position and historical leadership. These factors plus the political instability and historical non-alignment, weakens the country and its position of first importer of wheat in the world.

In order to understand how the world order of food wheat is shaped, it is important to take into consideration wheat diplomacy from the perspective of a dependent and peripheral country as well. By this approach, the aim is to understand the geoeconomics of an everyday commodity and its impact in the world order of food. Furthermore, there is a purpose to observe a new heterogeneity-centric cooperation for food supply being shaped from the agency that affects the whole structure of the international wheat market. The production of wheat in Egypt is limited by the unavailability of arable soils, but according to Abis (2022), the country's consumption of wheat has been growing since the 1970s and from then on, the demand has multiplied by six. The structural dependence and importation are also stressed by unsuccessful food subvention policies by the local authorities, but are also bridged by the surplus of Russia, Ukraine and the EU countries that possess enough for their food sovereignty and can spare for external trade. In other words, this chapter provides an exploration of the food diplomacy in Egypt and the response to exporters.

This strategy ultimately reshapes the relations of power in the contemporary restructure of the global grain trade. So far, scholars such as Abis (2016, 2022, 2023), Friedmann (1982) and Gonzalez (2011) have addressed the food regime and order from the dominant producers and recently the focus has been on Russia and its food power, making it more relevant for this investigation to understand how from agency, Egypt also plays a role. As The primary wheat importer in the world, the country must surely have its influence on the order, even at a smaller scale, it also shapes the current order. This is what will be analysed and interpreted according to its foreign relations and trading with suppliers. This fits into the historical debate of how the agency relatively weighs on the tailoring of international events that lead to a global change. The internal circumstances of a country and the economy of everyday things such as the subsidised bread. The study of specific events such as the war between Russia and

Ukraine, other patterns of social interactions such as the Arab Spring or the mass immigrations from different countries in conflicts such as Syria and Yemen, can bring the agency to the fore.

#### **4.1. The relevance of Egypt**

Egypt's regional power is probably not considered very influential compared to other countries who possess resources or economic influence. However, it has a certain importance given that the country is well positioned enough to have its say in most regional matters. Egypt is widely recognised as a leader who played an important role in the post-war period by forwarding and advocating for decolonisation as well as movements such as non-Alignment. Additionally, the Arab League has its seat in Cairo and Egypt is also a member of the African Union of which it was president from 2019 to 2020. Despite its importance, this is a country that has also been going through persisting economic crisis due partly to overpopulation, 105.858 million people in 2024 according to the Egyptian State Information Service (2024). This means that there is a market of wheat, hub and attraction for wheat exporters.

#### **4.2. Arab Spring in Egypt as a trigger**

In this section, initial observations suggest that there is a link between food insecurity and the Arab Spring. This also accords with the general reflection of this chapter, which shows that there is a parallel between this event and the shift in international food order, in a sense that the transformation can also originate from the local and internal issues of a country in need (dependent). The beginning of the Arab Spring was marked by the self-immolation of a fruit vendor, subsequent to police harassment (Yom 2015). Nevertheless, the capstone of the revolution is mostly considered to have been reached when the regime of Egypt, as the most important country of the region, collapsed in 2011. The lack of bread has been an indicator of political volatility for a long time and here are the links that may seem indirect and unmechanical, one of them being the economic crisis that created food price inflation. Likewise, Egypt is known for being a country with agri-food problems which are related to its climatic condition, mostly dominated by desert. According to Johnstone and Mazo (2010, 13) “the proximate factor behind the unrest was a spike in global food crises, which in turn was due in part to the extreme weather throughout the globe over the past year”. The author considered this to be a threat multiplier. According to Brun (2022), the unusually low harvest

of grain in 2010, due to heat wave led the Russian government to impose a wheat export ban and subsequent price rises and contribution to tensions, conflicts and social upheaval in some Arab countries Brun (2022).

Stepping back in recent Egyptian history of food crisis, the driving force for wheat's importations is the Egyptian subsidised bread as a response to the population's demand to have access to a basic right. There have been many reforms to try to avoid social problems and secure food sovereignty. The bread subsidy system in Egypt is a social contract to maintain peace, it has a symbolic meaning for the Egyptian people, according to Institut du Monde Arabe (2018), bread "el Aish" also means life. De facto, establishing such subsidies contributes greatly to the local government search of social stability in Egypt. Nevertheless, political interests to abandon the system in the interest of market-based efficiency have emerged. This represents a shift in contemporary economic ideology historically focused upon maintaining calm after Cairo's 1977 bread riots. Furthermore, international pressure to 'liberalise' the Egyptian economy paradoxically conflicts with Western desires to suppress religious fundamentalism in the region. These incongruities are largely ignored by Egyptian and Western research.

#### **4.3. Egyptian domestic policies**

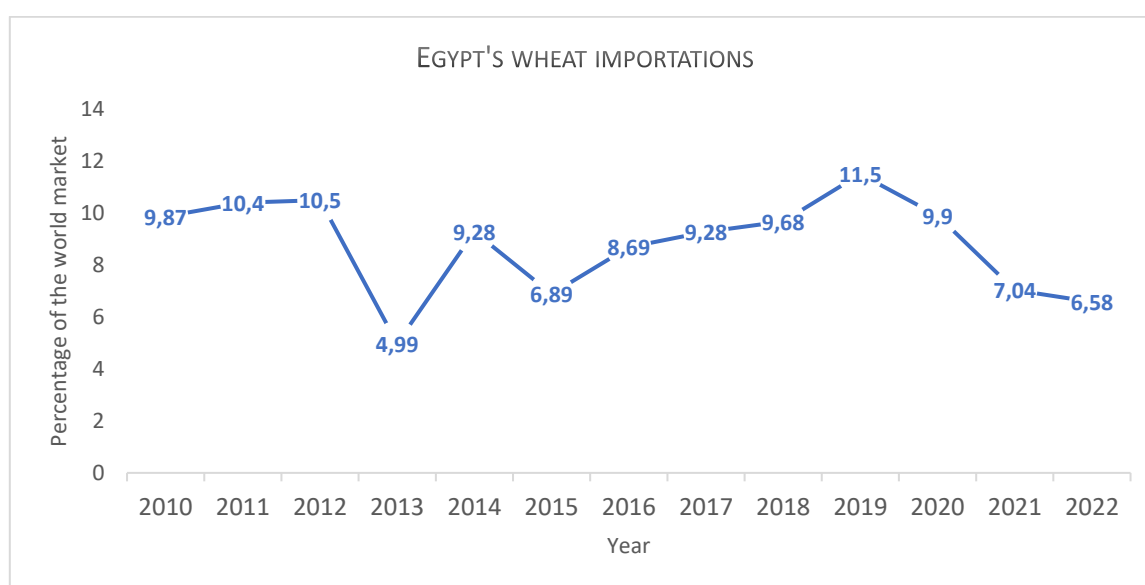
As a response to food crisis, the Egyptian government has established the *Baladi* Programme, which according to IFPRI, comprises of two components: a smart card that allows to have access to subsidized commodities such as wheat, sugar, etc. (*Tamween ration card*) and a bread allowance of five loaves per day and each household can have up to four beneficiaries Breisinger et al. (2023). According to the Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI) (2018), the GASC is responsible for ensuring that the rise of wheat price does not affect the people of Egypt. The 70 million people who benefit from the *Tamween ration-card* cost about USD 5.5 billion. From the entire subsidy system, 61% covers bread. Like many countries around the world, Egypt was recovering from the Covid Pandemic when War struck between Russia and Ukraine.

Following many social upheaval and internal conflict due to rises in food prices, the change of governance in Egypt, in 2014 the right to food and food sovereignty enters into the country's Constitution because of all the concerns regarding the sufficient production and consumption of bread. From 2014, article 79 of the Constitution stipulates that:

Each citizen has the right to healthy, sufficient amounts of food and clean water. The state shall provide food resources to all citizens. It also ensures food sovereignty in a sustainable manner, and guarantees the protection of agricultural biological diversity and types of local plants to preserve the rights of generations, FAO (2022, 18).

The measures regarding food insecurity that have been taken, do not only concern basic human rights but they also serve as a tool to solidify the political economy and sustainable development of the country. While implementing the constitution, the government must also focus on maintaining on sustainable finances to address the enduring dependence on wheat imports. Here are some numbers to show importations of wheat since 2011.

**Graph 4.1: Egypt wheat importation evolution 2010-2022**

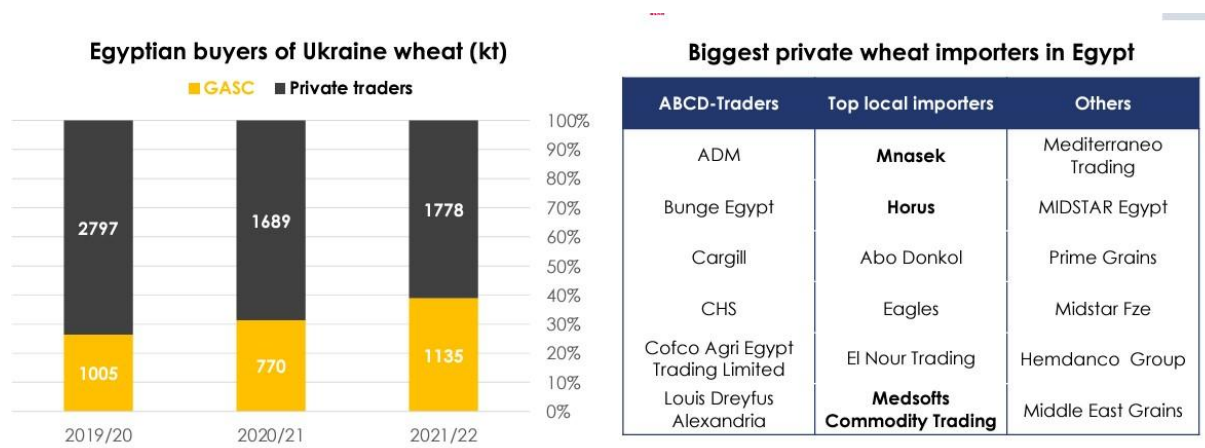


Elaborated by the author based on OECD (2022)

It is understandable that if food prices go high the entire economic balance is altered, being a country with an important public debt (10% of GDP) and high amounts of expenses due to importation of wheat, inter alia. In addition to procuring strategic agricultural commodities, the GASC also have the role of encouraging fair international competitiveness, while restraining from monopoly in supply. The most interesting function of this institution, in regard to this work of investigation, is to understand how the tenders are made and how decisive they are when choosing wheat suppliers. In that sense, the war between Russia and Ukraine has disrupted the grain market and others traders have been considered in order to respond to the crisis. According to Reuters (2022), the GASC had cancelled all international purchasing tenders in mid-July of that same year. Alternatively, and cautiously, buys were made through direct talks with global companies and private traders. According to the World Trade Institute (2022), apart from state tenders, the

authority also explore transnational companies that are active in the agricultural market. Some companies such as COFCO have branches in Ukraine and Egypt through which all negotiations, buys and importations are accomplished. Major private importers also include companies such as Horus, Manasek, etc. Here is an illustration of what the market looked like up until 2022:

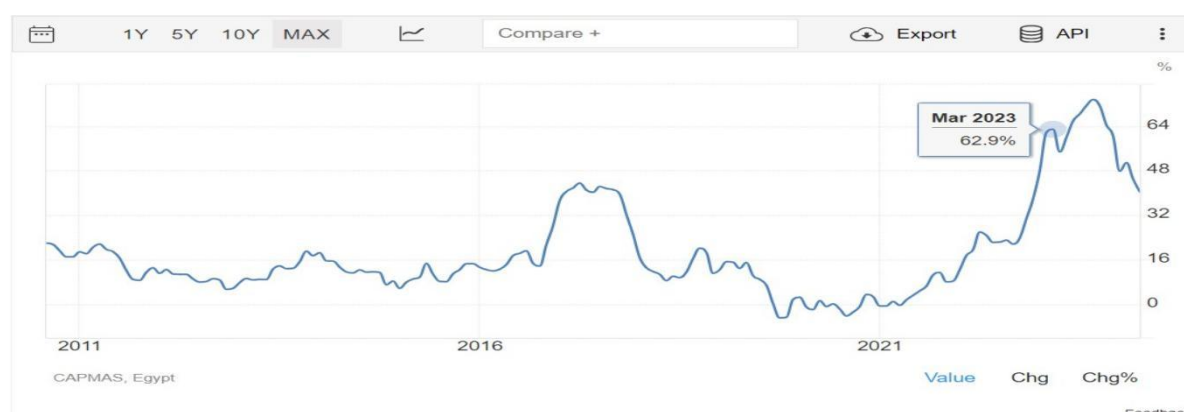
**Graph 4.2. Egypt wheat acquisitions**



Source: World Trade Institute (2022).

Internally, there have been many reforms, the latest one being in 2014 which aimed to reduce activities in the black market of bread, reduce food waste and face international food price volatility. Domestic food policies and foreign diplomacy to fight food insecurity are a response to the country's food inflation. Aligning with Trading Economics with data from the World Bank (2024), The cost of food has gone up 40.50% compared with 2023, creating an inflation of 18.31%.

**Graph 4.3: Wheat price fluctuation 2011-2023**



Source: Trading Economics (2024).

#### 4.4. Egyptian Economic foreign relations and diplomacy of wheat

The current world context of scarce nutritious resources and the economic power balance between those who can export, it becomes challenging to feeding a growing population. Wheat is considered a commodity of first order to fight food insecurity. What makes it even more relevant is how disparate such an important resource is distributed, making it a strategic commodity for importing as well as exporting countries. Egypt is an historical ally of the USA and France (Ukraine supporters) and also rely on a wheat from Russia for food security. This segment of the dissertation will analyse the relationships between Egypt and its main suppliers of wheat. In the EU, there is France of course which has more than a commercial relation, Romania and to a smaller extent, Poland and Bulgaria who have occasionally supplied their wheat. Then there is Ukraine, as mentioned before, a country which was in the past part of the Soviet Union and since 2022, has approached the EU and is now a candidate for membership. The relationship with the USA will also be considered briefly. Last but not least, there is the relationships that have been built with Russia.

**Egypt and the EU:** one of the main axes of the relationship with the EU is economy. France has a stronger bond with Egypt than the other EU exporters, the two countries are linked by a solid strategical partnership, through their historical connection that extend on political, cultural, military and commercial aspects. Throughout the years, they have had various diplomatic agreements because of the geography of Egypt, for example, very recently an agreement regarding immigration. Indeed, according to the Mixed Migration Center (2024), the EU and Cairo signed a new agreement aiming to cut down and manage irregular migrations to Europe and in parallel, Egypt obtained financial support for its ongoing economic crisis. As for the economic cooperation, according to the French *Ministère de l'Economie des Finances et de la Souveraineté Industrielle et Numérique* (2024), the year 2022 had a volume of bilateral trade of EUR 4.5 billion, mainly due to the cereal exports and this was the highest in the last ten years, due to the crisis between Russia and Ukraine. Indeed, France has stepped up in order to avoid any further food crisis and in figure 3 (chapter 3), it can be observed that France was the second supplier in 2022. As per the same source, French direct investment in Egypt has attained 550 million USD in 2022 in various sectors from which the agri-food stands out. Egypt is the sixth importer of French wheat with 9 million metric tons between 2010-2022 (Abis 2023). It is part of France's southern Mediterranean grain circuit. it can be argued that the quantity of wheat exported to Egypt is not massive and not regular, however it is important to keep in

mind that the link between France and Egypt as with other African countries is historical, political and related to Francophonie<sup>7</sup> as a catalyst for cooperation.

The other two EU countries with whom Egypt has sought an approach, mostly for trading cereals and receiving aid in renewable energies and digital transformation, are Romania and Poland. The former being more noticeable for importations. Beside this change in food order, Romania has obviously been affected by the war that started in Ukraine in 2022. First of all, the exports decreased and the Free On Board (FOB) prices “surged” and exports flow is complicated as far as logistics are concerned. Egypt is the main consumer of Romanian wheat, although the country shares borders with Ukraine, it has not been affected by the war, nor was it directly involved in the Black Sea Initiative. FOB prices of wheat in Romania can be considered to be the main issue. As per Bayer (2012), the particularity of Romanian wheat on the international market and Egypt as main importer, is that the crop is easy to market but there is a permanent and significant price fluctuation on the 50% of the produced crop that is exported. The other fact about Romanian wheat is related to limited stockage, usually in the first days of the month of July, the harvest has to be sold, whatever the price is.

Due to decreased exports and production in Romania caused by drought in 2022/2023, Egypt may face wheat supply shortages. Consequently, Egypt will need to diversify its consumption or strengthen existing trade relationships, particularly with reliable suppliers like Russia. This demonstrates once more how the power struggle of food/wheat is still ongoing between the EU and Ukraine vs. Russia.

**Egypt and Ukraine:** Ukraine has less power aspirations and for that reason, bilateral relations with Egypt translate mostly in the commercial, economic and tourist sectors. For commercial, the country has settled its effectiveness on wheat, which is highly necessary for Egypt.

Examining the Egyptian State Information Service, it can be noticed that the relationship between the two countries was consolidated in 2008, when a series of conversations began between the Foreign Ministries of both countries and were followed through in 2010. By 2015, Egypt was ranked as Ukraine’s third receiving country for crop and it was reported that the exchanges only for agricultural goods reached 1060 billion of USD in that year. There is a relatively small body of literature that is concerned with the evolution of bilateral relationship between these two countries, however, Garcia Carceres (2018) claims that a marine cooperation agreement was signed between the two countries with the intention to improve

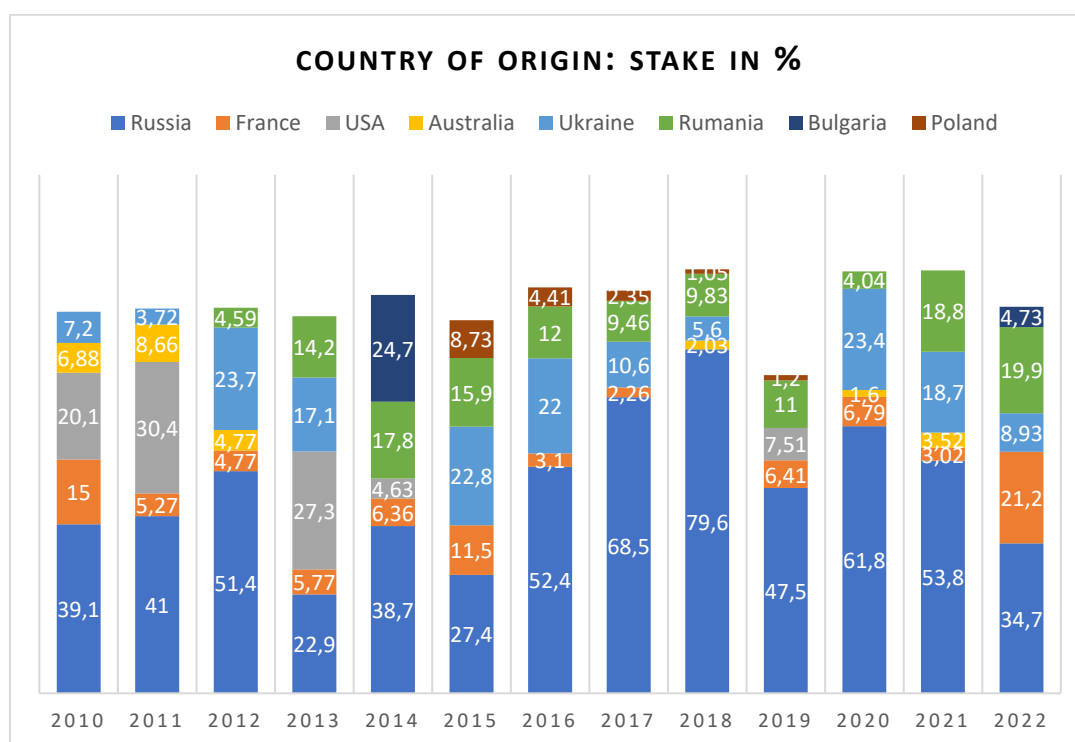
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<sup>7</sup> International organization that promotes French as a common language as well as cooperation, sustainability and solidarity.



trading of goods that enters through Damietta and Alexandria ports, this latter being the second largest city of Egypt and main port that connects the Nile and the Mediterranean Sea. A compelling fact here is the geographic location that gives the country a strategic and unique position. These two ports are gems for the country in a sense that there is the entry to many African, Arab and Asian countries. It is a strategic competitiveness for Ukraine to strengthen this relationship.

**Chart 4.4. Ranking of countries from which Egypt import wheat.**



Elaborated by the author based OEC World (2023)

In order for the government to solidify its power and prove its capability to avoid social unrest, it is essential to pursue a strategy of heterogeneity of wheat suppliers, carefully choosing its allies.

**Egypt and Russia:** The relationship between these two countries is a significant and historical one, like many countries of the world, Egypt was torn between the bipolarity of the Cold War, the connection that was built under Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1960s paved the way to a return decades later. Although there was a stagnation, Russia remained one of the main associates on the African continent until 1990s. 97 facilities of technical assistance of the Soviet Union were built in Egypt (Abramova & Futini 2019). It can be considered that; a

symbolic foundation of a long-term economic cooperation was laid at that time. According to Purat & Bielicki (2018), from 2000 President Putin took steps to reach again bilateral exchanges, which influenced the gradual detachment of Egypt from the USA. One of the key aspects of the new interactions is cooperation in the field of agriculture and grain in particular. Nowadays, as far as agriculture is concerned Egypt is the 5<sup>th</sup> importer of Russian agricultural goods and wheat ranks as the second. Russia is also a major importer of vegetables and fruit and Egypt went as far as to improve their agricultural research in order to satisfy the demand and adapt some products to Russian tastes (Belova & Al-Hamati, 2020).

The World Trade Institute recognises the 1997 agreement between the governments of the Russian Federation and the government of the Arab republic of Egypt on the encouragement and mutual protection of capital investment, which is a legal basis of their cooperation. This is also relevant because it preceded the Agreement on Comprehensive Partnership and Strategic Cooperation, which was signed by the presidents of both countries in 2021, just a year before the invasion of Ukraine, Abduljalil Al-Hamati (2022). Although the trading is faster and more direct between Russia and Egypt, it is also essential to consider the investment cooperation, as this is part of the economic foreign relations. The memorandum of understanding that was signed between the Egyptian National bank and the Russian Direct Investment Fund in 2016, has led, as of 2017 to USD 62 million of Russian investment in Egypt and includes an agreement on the construction of a grain terminal that will allow grain supply for Egypt as well as other African countries (Volkov & Tkachenko 2019). The improvement of the infrastructure in the Suez Canal such as Port Said is part of the Agreement to have a functional Russian Industrial Zone that will benefit the rest of Africa. All this shows how political and economic relations between these two countries is in excellent shape and it is a bonus point for wheat diplomacy.

**Egypt and the USA:** The long-lasting and eventful relationship between the USA and Egypt that started in the 1950s with the aim to support the “modernisation” Egypt, this has been a pillar of the country’s foreign policy in many sectors. This strategic partnership also involved crops, at a time when the USA was considered the bread basket of the world, Egypt was also dependent on wheat. With every change of regime, Egypt also changed its alignment. lines many times from the Soviet Union alignment to the Camp David Accords<sup>8</sup>. With these

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<sup>8</sup> The Camp David Accords, signed by President Jimmy Carter, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin in September 1978, established a framework for a historic peace treaty concluded between Israel and Egypt in March 1979. (<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1977-1980/camp-david#:~:text=The%20Camp%20David%20Accords%2C%20signed,and%20Egypt%20in%20March%201979>)

changes came also shortcomings in wheat supplies. Meanwhile, the USA diversified its wheat exports to Asian and Latin American countries. Egypt was still the most important importer and thanks to the globalisation, pursued other alliances with exporting countries. Observing figure 9, there is a reduction in 2017 from the USA. One of the likely causes for this is that the competitive situation in Egypt paired with the high demand to offer subsidised bread, led the USDA Foreign Agricultural Service to be unable to compete fiercely.

#### **4.5. Egypt's role in the transformation of food order (wheat)**

The importance of the food for the Egyptian society underlies the implementation of bread subsidy and the conundrum for those who manage the country. Egypt has had many social upheavals due to food shortage and high prices; subsidised bread has therefore been a “solution” for the government to maintain internal peace. Wheat has become a strategic commodity internally and externally and this reflects on the political choices and diplomacy. Whether bread subsidies are sustainable or not for the finances of the country, is not the matter of this work, however the importance of wheat and the role that plays, the GASC and other actors involved in the trade are part of the change in the world food order (wheat).

On the basis of the above, Egypt plays an important role, strategically because of the very high amount of grain to be bought, being a country that connects through the Suez Canal to many other countries and also as a country that blocks illegal immigration toward the North. Egypt's historical economic relationship with the West and its recent “neutrality” toward the Russian-Ukrainian war is a significant point to take in consideration. With Russia as most important player in the wheat market has Egypt as one of its most important buyers, Egypt's role becomes weighty in the reconfiguration of the international order of food. Based on the premise that foreign economic policies have a practical rationale and, in our case, intending to prove that there is a domestic effect to the transformation of the world food order especially on, grain that is linked to the responses of Egypt that link the state's decisions and the society is a determinant of the degree on which the country's internal movement has an impact on international trading.

The GASC has the responsibility to provide wheat to the people and since the current reality is set in a neo-liberal model, the prosperity of those demand and supply wheat are interconnected. According to Katzenstein (1976), prosperity in the neoliberalism paradigm is

affected by the interconnection of different societies and states and is defined in terms of mutual sensitivity of behaviour. Morse (1972) was one of the first scholars to interpret the increase in awareness of how domestic and foreign affairs change the international relations between states. Egypt has chosen not to break any relations with those who are involved directly or indirectly with the Ukraine Russian war, making it a non-aligned country which will still play an important role in the food order as the first importer. As of 2024, entering into the BRICS+ has proved how strong this country is, and a strategic ally for the emerging powers but this move may also be considered as a sign of a not so neutral Egypt.

## **Conclusion**

Egypt has managed to maintain relations with its allies, although the dependence on the West has weakened since Russia re-emerged and through a strong necessity of fighting food insecurity, other allies such as Ukraine have also maintained a commercial bond. Despite disruptions related to the conflicts that began in 2022, Egypt has managed to maintain a stable flow of wheat import and attract foreign investment in the Suez Canal. The dependency of Egypt has shifted and there are many other aspects besides the one on food, the USA for example remains the provider of significant aid, including military assistance. Egypt is thus a good example of wheat diplomacy and a country that has succeeded to maintain its relations with great powers of all blocs by knowing how to making itself indispensable and quietly being flexible in terms of geoeconomics.

## Final conclusion

This investigation exposes the balance of power in international relations, underlining the importance of wheat in Global Political Economy. The background is set in order to answer the main research question: **How has the war between Russia and Ukraine disrupted the world order of food, and what actions is Egypt taking to secure its wheat supplies in response?** The historical situation and status of main wheat importers and exporters is in constant evolution, making it all the more relevant to study how the order of food, and grain in particular, transforms. The conflict that started in February of 2022 triggered many issues related to food insecurity and it is worth examining a post-war order of food and factors that are part of the transformation. For Egypt whose 70% of wheat importation originates from both Russia and Ukraine. With globalisation and capitalism, wheat has become a staple that feeds a fifth of the world population, on a daily basis (Reuters 2024), hence its importance in the transformation of food order. To understand this change it is important to consider both the structure and agency debate in IR in order to identify the factors that shape the behaviours of both exporters and importers, as well as sellers and consumers of wheat as a commodity. A resource of such importance is strategic for all participants involved in the production, logistics, financing infrastructure improvement, and those reliant on it, as wheat consumption is the basis of human survival and productivity.

The fluctuations of economic politics and alliances are exhaustively considered since the end of the Cold War, when Russia prominently developed its grain and fertiliser industries, taking advantage of the favourable climate conditions as well as great investment in high end technology. Furthermore, the country has managed to create new geoeconomics strategies by targeting countries that have been exploited and also marginalised by the West as a platform for creating a new base of trusted economic partners. While the USA, Australia and Canada, countries that are amongst the major producers of wheat focused on other regions of the world to sell; and European countries such as France which is historically a great agriculture nation faced production crisis, countries such as Poland, Bulgaria and Romania rose as producers. Romania also makes headlines because it has managed to find a market in the MENA countries who are the major importers of wheat in the world, with Egypt ranking as the primary. Most importantly and centre to this work of investigation is the understanding of the political economy around the trade of Ukrainian and Russian wheat and the significance of the war between these two countries.

This work of investigation chose Egypt as a case study from an agential level because of its particular position as a geographically important country connecting 3 continents and its cultural influence of African and Arab countries that are in turn also dependent on foreign wheat. The historical and food crisis and riots of this country, as well the whole political economy and economic foreign relations around it, has been traced as part of the narrative that shapes the current transformation of the world food order of wheat. As a country that has often avoided to clearly align with any blocs when great powers were divided into bipolarity, and a nation that is often receiving migrations from surrounding countries in conflict, Egypt has managed to quietly mature regarding wheat diplomacy and it shows in how the GASC, however controversial it might be in its choices of policies, have managed the international tender for wheat, often staying open and leaning toward those in a position of providing wheat.

The world food order is certainly not limited to grain trade but in this case, it is conceptualised with the specifics of this commodity, acutely needed in Egypt and provided mainly by two countries at war with each other. Hence making the subject an insightful one for geoeconomics and diplomacy of wheat that has been presented in the two empirical chapters of this dissertation. Finally, there has been a perspective on how contemporary food order is also sustained from the peripheries, analysed from how local Egyptian problems escalated until reaching the international scale.

The main concept of geoeconomics used to frame this investigation is based on the traditional geopolitics as an impetus for strategy and foreign economic relations. In order to understand how countries, use their economic and policy instruments such as wheat diplomacy, wheat restriction and sanctions to achieve their geopolitical aim and on the other hand, how Egypt secures national interest through food security that brings domestic social stability. The current situation depicts an overrun between the sphere of influence and national interest where weaponised wheat is a strategic instrument to shape Egyptian political behaviour. From the Egyptian perspective, the focus on wheat diplomacy aims to understand the transformation from an agential level and to study the decision-making process of such a country. By addressing wheat diplomacy, there is also an opportunity to open the conversation regarding trading relations, commodity diplomacy and ideology-free decision making. The framework to understand the context and the system that surround Middle East and Northern African (MENA) countries such as Egypt and their response to domestic and international challenges, have to come from their perspective of how the international pressure is related to the

distribution of power in the region, and how domestic pressure that contributes to the shaping of foreign policies.

Within the hegemonic international order of food, wheat trade to dependent countries such as Egypt, is governed and conditioned by the coercive material and ideological power of the West. The dynamic of trade as well as the financial institutions; then there is the emergence of Russia and Ukraine and other EU countries such as Romania and Poland which came to replace the historical France, Germany, USA, Canada and Australia in the Egyptian market. These emerging producers and exporters of wheat outside the Western Sphere of influence have power that outperform and shape the structure of the world food order.

As an agent Egypt, even though not a “great power” in the traditional sense of the term, plays an important role. It has been indispensable to identify elements that shape the options to reinforce economic relations with certain countries despite political alignment, from the agency point of view, overcome certain limitations that may result in shortages and eventually internal upheavals and other social disturbances. Egypt has managed to maintain relations with its allies although the dependence towards the West has weakened since Russia re-emerged and through a strong necessity of fighting food insecurity other allies such as Ukraine have also maintained a commercial bond. Despite disruptions related to the conflicts that began in 2022, Egypt has managed to maintain a stable flow of wheat imports and attract foreign investment in the Suez Canal. The dependency of Egypt has shifted and there are many other aspects besides the one of food. The USA for example remains the provider of significant aid, including military assistance. Egypt is thus a good example of wheat diplomacy and a country that has succeeded to maintain its relations with great powers of all blocs by knowing how to make itself indispensable and being discretely flexible in terms of geoeconomics.

In recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic has been the most impactful confirmation that the world is demarcated by record degree of global interdependence that is perceived at every level from individuals, multinational corporations, international institutions and of course nation-states and their national domestic and foreign policies. Other factors such as the enlargement of BRICS+ who are setting a new paradigm for globalisation is not trivial and should be looked into more. In order to observe whether the increased politicization of food and wheat in particular, in international economic relations entails actions away from the free-market mindset with the aim to protect the supply of wheat from the greedy exporting countries. These actions need to be done with a collective effort to avoid the exploitation of the

current situation of controlling wheat-importing countries such as Egypt which is in an acute need of supply. The current structure needs to be rethought through the strengthening of infrastructure and creating new economic coalitions that regulate issues related to disruption in wheat supply. For the particular case of a strategic country such as Egypt, new proposals that are more aligned with diplomatic solidarity of food and exchange of expertise, rather than creation of dependency through grants and string-attached investments will be more efficient for agricultural and food supply cooperation.

To conclude, this investigation has illustrated the complex dynamics surrounding the war between Russia and Ukraine, and how this conflict has disrupted the world order of food, particularly the global wheat market. Egypt's role as a key wheat importer highlights the fragility and interdependence within the global food system, especially in light of shifting geopolitical and geoeconomic realities. The research demonstrates that the disruptions caused by the war have not only emphasized Egypt's dependence on wheat imports but have also underscored the growing influence of emerging wheat exporters, particularly those outside traditional Western spheres of power.

By examining Egypt's nuanced approach to wheat diplomacy, this investigation underscores how Egypt has managed to navigate these disruptions, utilizing its strategic position to maintain a steady flow of wheat supplies while balancing relations with multiple global powers. The dependency theory and the balance of power theory have provided insightful frameworks to understand how Egypt, despite not being a great power, has leveraged its geopolitical and economic agency to safeguard its national interests, particularly in food security.

Moreover, the findings point to the importance of rethinking global food order and advocating for a more collective and equitable approach to food security. Egypt's experience highlights the need for deeper regional cooperation, better infrastructure, and less exploitative dependencies in the face of global challenges. Moving forward, a paradigm shift towards greater solidarity in food diplomacy and a focus on long-term partnerships that prioritize agricultural cooperation over short-term geopolitical maneuvering could serve as a foundation for a more resilient global food system. This work adds to the growing body of scholarship on food geoeconomics and offers valuable insights into the intersection of food security, international relations, and geopolitics.



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## **Appendix**

### **Interview with Joaquin Lozano, Regional Director of CGIAR**

The purpose of this interview is to identify and explain the relationship between the current global food crisis and the global food order, particularly in light of the war between Russia and Ukraine and its consequences. This interview will specifically address the use of food as a geoeconomic strategy by producing countries.

The information and subsequent results of the interview will be used primarily for the development of the thesis for the Master's Degree in International Relations with a major in Regional and Global Political Economy at FLACSO Ecuador.

- Is there a link between the transformation of the current world food order and food insecurity?
- While conflicts create vulnerability in dependent countries, can social movements and internal conflicts over food shortages also be considered key elements in the transformation of the world food order?
- Apart from Russia and Ukraine, who are the new actors in the grain supply chain? How?
- In areas affected by food insecurity, how is the power dynamic perceived in the relationship between food supplying and receiving countries?
- How do you think Russia and Western countries use grain as an instrument of power?

Considering the importance of Egypt in the MENA region, both for African and Arab countries:

- Can current conflicts influence the increase of the food crisis in Egypt? If we take into account factors such as migration and the country's geopolitical situation.
- When it comes to food insecurity, do you think that the neoliberal system with its free trade agreements, balances of power and geo-economics worsens the situation in dependent and vulnerable countries?

The interview will be used for academic purposes only.