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ECONOMIC AND LEGISLATIVE TRANSFORMATIONS: LAND PRACTICES AND MORALITIES IN VILLAGES OF DUSHETI

ABSTRACT

Villages of the Dusheti region face a common issue of diminishing grazing areas. Residents of villages are selling their cattle, resulting in a threefold reduction in the local livestock population. The sight of shepherds and cows has become a fleeting presence in the vicinity of recently constructed infrastructure, which once used to be expansive grazing land for the villages. My primary focus is on examining the impact of economic and legislative transformations on the local economies and moralities. I am particularly interested in investigating land practices and moralities. Transformations brought new concepts and ideas about the land; the land became privatized and commoditized; however, the previous approaches continued. Though old and new concepts of land can be contradictory, in everyday life, they may coexist. In this research, I want to approach land from the perspective of legal pluralism in the anthropological sense. Legal pluralism is the analytical concept for situations where people can draw upon several legal systems in their interaction. The research is primarily based on ethnographic methods, observations, and conversations with indigenous communities of Dusheti villages.

Keywords: Land, Moralities, Legal Pluralism, Privatization, Pasture, Dusheti.

INTRODUCTION

“What we call land is an element of nature inextricably interwoven with man’s institutions. To isolate it and form a market for it was perhaps the weirdest of all the undertakings of our ancestors.”¹

In winter 2022, I went from Tbilisi to the village of Mlashe near Bazaleti Lake in the Dusheti region to meet with Ketino. Ketino is a resident of Mlashe; she participated in the series of protests for maintaining the remains of the sole pasture of village Mlashe and neighbouring villages. I did not know Ketino personally, but I knew Zhuzhuna, her sister, from the village of Aragvispiri. Before meeting Ketino, I met Zhuzhuna, and we went up together to her place. It was a cold winter day, preparing to snow. When we got to Ketino’s house, she came out with her grandson, cheerfully saying they just made churchkhela (traditional Georgian delight), getting ready for the New Year celebration. Zhuzhuna introduced us, and we started talking about issues related to the village pasture; we had spoken on the phone several times, and it was easy to continue the conversation.

We all started going toward the lake to see the remains of the pasture where hotel cottages were being built. On the way, Ketino repeated that the pastureland was sold secretly, and the landowner took possession of the territory based on fake signatures. The suspicion about the sale of the village pasture population got when they noticed strangers measuring the land and suspected that it had been sold. To protect the land, the villagers decided to transfer the territory to a few residents, but they were not allowed to do so by the town administration, saying it would be an illegal grabbing of state property. As villagers say, by then, the land had already been sold. After a while, investors appeared and surrounded the purchased area. “This land has never been cultivated; it never had any other use but always been used as a pasture for neighbouring villages, as we know from our ancestors,” Ketino emphasized. Today, once extensive land is divided into cultivated land and the remaining pasture. On our way, we met cows grazing on the plots of lands on which Ketino told me that from the springtime, cows would no longer be allowed to graze on these areas; by then, wheat, barley and corn would be sown. “At this season, we will be running with our cows until they get to the pasture to prevent them from straying onto others’ property,” Ketino remarked with a mixture of a smile and regret.

When we approached the pasture area where cottages were built, Ketino explained that according to the agreement, the road to the pasture between the cottage gate on the one side and the private land on the other should have been 8 meters, which appeared to be reduced to 5 meters. I paused, and it was a minimal space for leading the cattle. Ketino shared the fear that the village has a bad feeling that the cottage owners will close this road after construction is finished. I asked

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1 Polanyi, K. (2001). *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. Beacon Press. Pg. 187

her why they would think so, and she replied, “Who would want the cattle between the hotel and the lake?”

In the cottage area, we saw people, either owners or workers. Ketino told me that the relationship between the population and the cottage owners ended in a conflict last time, and avoiding them would be better. We stopped near the pasture for just a little while. Ketino showed me the pasture and told me to pay attention to the willow trees. They did not have leaves, and I hardly noticed them. She said the village population brought these trees here for shade in the summer. “This summer, the jeeps of the cottage owners were standing in the shade under the trees,” Ketino said these words painfully. Given the pasture’s tree-planting practice and long-term use history, the village community had a strong emotional connection to this diminishing place.

During the summer, I revisited this place to see the willow trees (see illustration: willow trees). At that time, the cottage owners had vacated the area due to financial difficulties, and the hotels were up for sale. The atmosphere was tranquil, with a picturesque view of the lake, and the willow trees cast generous shade on the surroundings. It was a sunlit summer day. To escape the sun’s heat, I sought shelter under the shadow of the willows. The gentle breeze within was refreshing. I settled on a handcrafted wooden bench equipped with a table. It was an excellent location for the shepherd to take a break in the middle of the day, especially considering that their work begins at 7 a.m. and ends at 8 p.m. I also recalled Ketino’s remark about cars replacing cattle under the willows. In discussions with the residents of Dusheti, they often shared their feelings about the trees they had planted collectively during the Soviet era, particularly during communal celebrations.² For them, mature trees represented not only pride but also the oldness of the place and a distinct sense of belonging to the place. In conversations with shepherds, this pasture is commonly referred to as the “willow area.” Willow trees have become a symbolic marker of this field to which the villagers have a profound and unique attachment. Looking at the diminishing pasture, I began to ponder what transformations had left the rural population incapable of safeguarding their lands while simultaneously adapting to the challenges of the modern era by transforming their local economies, about which they talk with regrets.

2 In 1982, 11,000 walnut trees were planted in the Dusheti district, and in 1983, we read in the newspaper that the district youth planned to plant 40,000 walnut trees. For more on this topic, see Hamlet Kereselidze, “Sakme Sashvilishvilo” [work of great importance, Soviet journal Droscha, 1983.



Willow Trees, August 2023, photo by the author

In this article, I am interested in examining the impact of economic and legislative transformations, how new conceptualization about the land affects local economies and moralities, and hybridizing old, new, regional, and global attitudes and practices about the land. I link new and global narratives about the land to neoliberal discourses. Old and local narratives to lands I relate with Polanyian understanding of the term embeddedness³ And argue that lands for indigenous populations are more than a means of economy; lands are immersed in social relations and cannot be separated from their social and everyday meanings. Polanyi elaborates that land has always been related to kinship, neighbourhood, beliefs, stability, or physical safety. The economic function is just one of the functions of the land. For him, separating land from all these and organizing society to respond to market requirements was a utopian market economy concept.⁴

During 2022-2023, I visited Mlashe and other villages of Dusheti regularly, talked with village populations, particularly shepherds and cattle owners, about how they adapted to the ubiquitous

3 In the works of Karl Polanyi, the term “embeddedness” is not elaborated as an account. However, it is always clear that he suggests approaching the economy embedded and enmeshed in institutions, economic and non-economic, and including non-economic is vital (Polanyi, 2018).

4 Polanyi, K. (2001). *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. Beacon Press. Pg. 187

shrinking lands, and walked with them in the village, sometimes in the cattle, too, accompanied people to their new workplaces, those who previously had cattle and sold and participated in large and small community gatherings. Within this process, I discovered multiple moralities in the narratives of the indigenous communities about the land; in their moralities, paradoxically, Polanyian and neoliberal narratives coexisted. They all regretted the shrinking lands in the villages and blamed ideologies, new reforms, legislations, businesses, statesmen, economic problems, neighbours, and themselves for modifying and selling lands.

At the outset of this paper, I delve into the existing literature on neoliberal reforms concerning land and the evolving attitudes toward land ownership. Here, I also searched for a conceptual framework for understanding this process. Subsequently, I explore the case of Georgia, focusing on the context of land privatization and addressing various legislative challenges. I expand on my fieldwork findings and conversations in the following two chapters - the first delves into the land division process and the underlying informal practices that shape it. In the second, I discuss the emergence of land sales as a novel economic practice among indigenous populations, especially considering their diminishing land holdings and the need to sell livestock. Finally, I present the concluding remarks.

COMMODIFYING LANDS AND HYBRIDIZING MORALITIES

Some scholars argue that neoliberal reforms enforce conceptual changes regarding the nature of land.⁵ Land is valued more for its role as a trading object rather than its connection to indigenous communities. These conceptual shifts undermine the protection framework for the state, its population, social groups, and individuals, and instead, they benefit those who possess greater financial means and resources.⁶ Those with significant capital and private interests have a privilege and control over land as a commodity.⁷ Millar (2016) argues that global organizations, institutions, and companies use global neoliberal governance's rules and ideas to change how people think about

5 Cotula, Lorenzo. "The New Enclosures? Polanyi, international investment law and the global land rush." *Third World Quarterly* 34, no. 9 (2013): 1605–1629; Millar, Gearoid. "Knowledge and Control in the Contemporary Land Rush: Making Local Land Legible and Corporate Power Applicable in Rural S Tierra Leone." *Journal of Agrarian Change* 16, no. 2 (2016): 206–224.

6 Izumi, Kaori. "Liberalization, gender, and the land question in sub-Saharan Africa." *Gender & Development* 7, no. 3 (1999): 9–18.

7 Millar, Gearoid. "Knowledge and Control in the Contemporary Land Rush: Making Local Land Legible and Corporate Power Applicable in Rural S Tierra Leone." *Journal of Agrarian Change* 16, no. 2 (2016): 206–224.

land. They are taking it away from its cultural and social context and fitting it into global norms of control and power promoted by those leading the global transition to neoliberalism.⁸

Incredible transformations brought new concepts and ideas about land. Land became privatized and commoditized; however, the previous approaches did not cease. The context in which a new law or reform is placed is not empty but pluralistic, with earlier historical, cultural, legislative, political and economic contexts and moralities. Such layers of moralities about land can be approached from legal pluralism in the anthropological sense.⁹ Another similar concept for describing such a context is “multiplicity of legal orders.”¹⁰ or “multiple systems of ordering.”¹¹ Such legal pluralism or multiple orderings occur when international and transnational laws expand, substitute, or get entangled with national laws, local orderings and informalities. By informalities, I mean shared and ‘widely accepted’ norms and expectations disregarding which may cause social disapproval.¹² Örucü (1996) argues that transplanting law, therefore, always involves some degree of “transposition” or “fine-tuning” in the new social, economic, and legal environment.¹³ The fine-tuning involves complex dynamics of adjustment, reinterpretation, and hybridization. Anthropologists have argued that on a more fundamental level, such transfers entail context-dependent reinterpretations.¹⁴ Behrends, Park, and Rottenburg (2014) have demonstrated that “travelling models,” of which transplanted law is a prominent example, tend to acquire quite different meanings after being disembedded from their previous contexts and then being embedded into new social, economic, and legal environments.¹⁵ As Ong (2007) writes, neoliberalism is not a fixed set of attributes and outcomes but a governing logic that migrates from one political context to another. Thus, she offers analytics of assemblage over the analytics of structure to show its contextuality and ability of its entanglement and coexistence with local moralities and rationalities. For her, neoliberal logic should be understood not as a universally applicable system but as a migratory governing technology that adapts to specific contexts and conditions.¹⁶

8 Ibid.

9 Legal pluralism is the analytical concept for situations where people can draw upon several legal systems in their interaction. See von Benda-Beckmann, Keebet, and Bertram Turner for more on this issue. “Anthropological Roots of Global Legal Pluralism.” (2020).

10 Nader, Laura. “The anthropological study of law 1.” *American Anthropologist* 67, no. 6 (1965): 3–32.

11 Merry, “Legal Pluralism,” *Law and Society Review* 22, no. 5 (1988): 869–96: 878.

12 Helmke, Gretchen, and Steven Levitsky. “Informal institutions and comparative politics: A research agenda.” *Perspectives on Politics* 2, no. 4 (2004): 725–740.

13 Esin Örucü, Elspeth Attwooll, and Sean Coyl, eds., *Studies in Legal Systems: Mixed and Mixing* (London: Kluwer, 1996).

14 von Benda-Beckmann, Keebet, and Bertram Turner. “Anthropological Roots of Global Legal Pluralism.” (2020).

15 Behrends, Andrea, Sung-Joon Park, and Richard Rottenburg. *Travelling Models in African Conflict Management: Translating technologies of social ordering*. Vol. 13. Brill, 2014.

16 Ong, Aihwa. “Neoliberalism as a mobile technology.” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 32, no. 1 (2007): 3–8.

PRIVATIZATION AND NEOLIBERAL REFORMS IN GEORGIA

One popular understanding of neoliberalism is that unambiguous property rights and maximum alienability to property objects, through the market's invisible hand, lead to economic growth; privatization represents neoliberalism in practice.¹⁷ In the Soviet Union, the land belonged entirely to the state. Collective farms managed it. In Georgia, one of the turning points for the privatization of land was the resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Georgia dated January 18, 1992, "On reform of agricultural land in the Republic of Georgia". Agricultural plots were allocated from state lands for land reform, and a land reform fund, i.e., a privatization fund, was created. The subject of land distribution was the household, which was divided into categories. The process of privatization was carried out in the field of animal husbandry as well. This is how the private sector of the agrarian economy was created.

Privatization reform has many critics because it was carried out quickly. Also, the fragmentation of large farms into small farms focused on meeting personal needs was mainly done, which led to a significant decrease in the volume of agricultural production. The production's material-technical base was destroyed, and agricultural production's technological-organizational and ecological unity was violated; in many cases, the new owners could not maintain the farms.¹⁸ This is also a time of massive economic decline. In 1994–1995, downward social mobility was a serious phenomenon in Georgia. In a 1996–1997 World Value Survey, 90% of respondents in Georgia reported relying on relatives for economic support. The same survey found that 96.5% of Georgians believed they lived in worse poverty than ten years earlier.¹⁹ Following the Rose Revolution in 2003, Georgia underwent an economic revival associated with adopting neoliberal reforms. At that time, the appointed Cabinet of Ministers in Georgia made the "energetic" privatization of the remaining state-owned enterprises a top priority in their economic policy. This matter has stirred up debate within society, with one side advocating for the state to retain ownership of objects deemed strategically crucial for the country while another - supporting their transfer to the private sector.²⁰

The alterations in the political-economic landscape have resulted in numerous gaps within the legal framework concerning land and pasture management. There needs to be a comprehensive

17 Hann, Chris M. "Property Relations: The Halle Focus Group, 2000-2005." (2005).

18 Lominadze, M. (2021). *Privatizatsia da Kerdzo Metsarmeobis Ganvitareba Sakartveloshi*, doctoral dissertation, Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University.

19 Aliyev, H. (2015). "Institutional Transformation and Informality in Azerbaijan and Georgia." In *Informal Economies in Post-Socialist Spaces: Practices, Institutions and Networks*, edited by Jeremy Morris and Abel Polese, 51–69. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pg. 56

20 The Minister of Economy asserted, "My perspective, which advocates selling everything, should not be deemed eccentric. The ultimate goal is for the state to secure the highest possible returns and maintain a profit." <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/132727>

land management policy, with regulations dispersed across various statutory acts, leaving many aspects unaddressed.²¹ There needs to be accurate data on the state and private agricultural land distribution; one of the reasons for this is that during the privatization of land in the 1990s, land plots were distributed without conducting field planning works. The conditions for the privatization or leasing of state-owned pastures have yet to be developed to date.²² Changing the status of agricultural land into non-agricultural land resulted in the loss of agricultural land, including pastures. The status change was carried out by the public registry in case of necessary state or social needs, and the specification of this need is nowhere to be found. Regrettably, information about the pastures whose status changed over the years and were reclassified as non-agricultural land still needs to be available.²³ As per specialists, issues about land management are associated with the decreasing regulations that began in earnest after the Rose Revolution and have persisted up to the present day.²⁴

LAND DIVISION AND LOCAL ORDERINGS

On one of my visits to Mlashe, I met with Kviria, a man engaged in the land division process in the late 1990s. Kviria and other Khevsurs settled in Mlashe in 1967 from Arkhoti (a village in Khevsureti). The village's side of Mlashe, where Kviria lives, is called the district of Khevsurs. As he told me, there were 25 households initially in this district, but 3-4 remain, mainly due to economic problems in late Soviet times. As Kviria told me, here in Mlashe, there was a poorer collective farm than, for example, in Tsiteltskaro (municipality in Kakheti), where families moved. Because of this and general poverty issues, as Kviria emphasized, Eduard Shevardnadze, the president at that time, gave the people the right to divide the lands, cultivate them, grow products and survive economic problems that way. During the heydays of the Soviet Union, Mlashe gained renown for its pastures, shepherds, wheat fields, and the picturesque route to Bazaleti Lake, which evolved into a popular

21 Society for Nature Conservation – Sabuko, Sadzovrebis Martvastan Dakavshirebuli Kanonmdeblobis Mimokhilva [An overview of the legislation related to pasture management], https://sabuko.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/sazovrebi_kanonmdeblobis-mimoxilva_GEO.pdf

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Interview with expert, Fall, 2023.

destination for leisure and recreation.²⁵ Today, the lake is frequently described as a swamp due to its diminished size and deteriorating water quality.²⁶

Soon after the collapse of collective farms, Kviria became part of the land division committee. For this purpose, Kviria had a particular notebook, and it was written there how much was distributed to whom. There were 1st, second and third categories. 1500-2000 sq.m. was allocated to the third category. This category included those who no longer lived in the village but had an origin from here or could prove it. According to Kviria, lands were wasted on this category of people; some got land through acquaintances, and later, these people started selling the lands and changed the local context. Kviria says, “All these chaotic processes led to the problem of pastures”.

Western land privatization reform was entangled with local informalities and became an assemblage of global and local moralities. Throughout my field research, I came across numerous accounts where villagers recounted that, by land division regulations, they had anticipated receiving more extensive plots in favourable locations. However, they were only able to secure these by resorting to bribery. “There was favouritism and bribery involved during the land division process. My father owned goats, and they demanded goats in exchange for a better land plot. However, my father refused, asserting that he deserved a fair share of land since he had spent six years in the war, defending not just his village but the entire nation of Georgia. Despite his emphasis on this, my father received only 2000 square meters in a less desirable location, instead of the 7000 square meters he believed he deserved.”²⁷

For Kviria, irregular land distribution deprived people of their right to land. Kviria told me he chased authorities for three years to allocate land for the cemetery and barely managed 3 hectares because no more land was left. I asked Kviria to show me the notebook where he had all this information. He said that after the struggle for the pasture, an investigation started, and they took his notebook, where it has been written that the territory where hotel cottages were built was defined as a village pasture. As per Kviria and local village representatives, the village of Mlashe has undergone significant transformations over the past few decades. During a period when the village had a 50-hectare pasture, each family maintained a herd of 10-12 buffaloes. However, as the available land and grass resources dwindled, families were compelled to sell their buffaloes to combat poverty, as buffaloes required more extensive amounts of grass. Subsequently, families transitioned to maintaining an equivalent number of cows, but many were also sold due to further reductions in available land. Today, each family in the village typically keeps 1-2 cows, and the primary source of sustenance and income for these families remains the sale of dairy products. Animal husbandry

25 I encountered such narratives in old magazines while doing archival work, for praising Mlashe pastures see *Komunisti* (1955), *Sazamtro Sadzovrebze* [on winter pastures], for praising Bazaleti Lake as a popular recreational destination see: *Komunisti* (1959), *Bazaletis Tbis Piras* [On the edge of Bazalet lake].

26 When I walked with the villagers, they consistently reminisced about the lake’s former size and how children and young people from nearby villages arrived early in the morning, staying throughout the day.

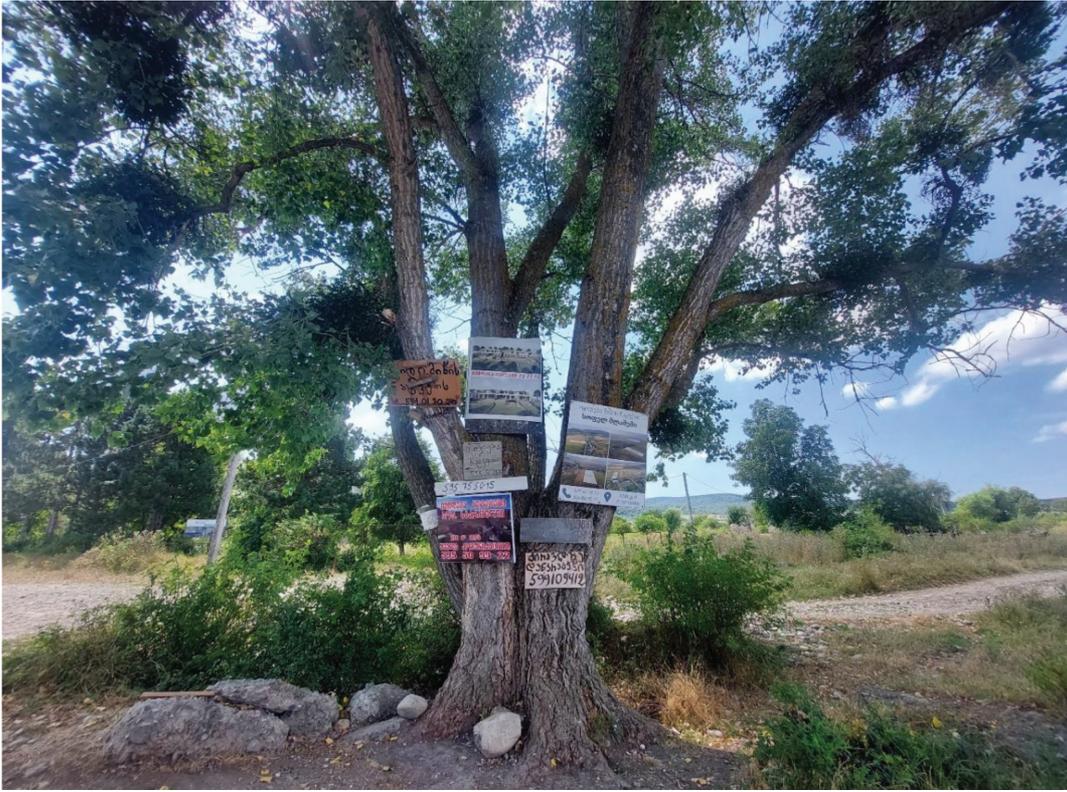
27 Interview with the shepherd in village Aragvispiri, Summer 2023.

held the foremost position in the economic activities of the mountainous regions in Dusheti.²⁸ I also encountered such a drastic decrease in animal husbandry in different villages of Dusheti. Along with shrinking lands and economic problems, people have been selling cows. The sight of shepherds and cows has become a fleeting presence in the vicinity of recently constructed infrastructures, which once used to be grazing lands for the villages.

LAND SALES AS A CONTEMPORARY LOCAL ECONOMIC PRACTICE

In the summer of 2023, on my way to Mlashe, I encountered an old poplar tree standing on the roadside with many posters about village land plots being on sale (see illustration: Poplar tree, resembling a billboard). The tree stood somewhere between two pastures, which in old times used to be one large grazing land; now, on the one pasture, about 2,500 square meters are remaining where hotel cottages are being built and on the other pasture - about 18 hectares, which is also under danger of getting lost. As shepherds told me not so long ago, someone also came, measured, and fenced this pasture. Then, the village population came out and did not give him the right to continue his work; they ruined the fence. Nevertheless, one shepherd told me regrettably that people do come out and protest land grabbing, but still, no one would have asked the village if the buyer or some company wanted the land and paid good money for it. He added that the village population is responding to economic hardships by selling lands, too; new neighbours who have less attachment to these lands do not know the prehistory of these places and care less about the changes – new moralities and economies in the village.

28 Losing access to the pastures has become a reason for the Dusheti peasants to protest movement in the XIX century; more on this issue, see Akhobadze, M. Glekhta Modzraoba Saqartveloshi XIX Saukunis 60-90-ian Tslebshi [Peasants' movement in Georgia in the 60s-90s of the 19th century], pg. 40



Poplar tree, resembling a billboard, photo by the author

For me, the contrasting moralities of those villagers who protest losing lands and those villagers who sell lands for income are worth exploring from the perspective of an assemblage of moralities. In one family, I also encountered contradictory moralities where a wife wanted to sell the land to renovate the house. At the same time, the husband and son were against this idea, wanting to maintain the land left by the ancestors. One of the shepherds I had a long conversation with told me: “This pasture sustains us, *Mamapapuri*²⁹ land is our heritage, a legacy from the past, now entrusted to us. We must pass it on to our children for safekeeping, yet it slips through our fingers as buildings encroach upon Bazaleti Lake. Who could have foreseen this? Everything is being sold, and we are realizing it too late. We cannot defend it with our swords, can we?”³⁰ During my field visits, I encountered many posters in different villages about lands being under sale. Selling lands has become a newer means of income for the villagers. I met with villagers who spoke to me about

29 “Mamapapuri” is a Georgian word that literally translates as – father-grandfatherly – also denoting “old style”, something left by ancestors. When I examined the narratives of people from Dusheti villages, the term “mamapapuri lands” meant not only their land, which they had from their fathers and grandfathers but also meant previous relationships with the land, the way it has always been, some local commonsense about lands - local traditions and economies.

30 Interview with the shepherd in village Mlashe, Summer 2023.

the benefits of having lands near newly built large infrastructural projects as the land prices have increased, and they sold or would sell their land for better prices. “Some benefited from the large economic and infrastructural project.”³¹ However, according to my interlocutors, there are more frequent cases when the conditions of the population change negatively with new economic and infrastructural projects.

In the summer of 2023, the population of Choporti (Dusheti village) organized a large-scale protest. Lands of the Choporti indigenous population near which the Natakhtari-JINVALI new highway will pass were transferred to “GWP” with the “management” right.³² The water company extended its “sanitary zone,” because of which the population’s right to construct houses on their lands was restricted.³³ Choporti’s population also thinks the company is artificially reducing land prices. During my fieldwork in 2023, people I met participated in the Choporti protest, supporting the local population. In their opinion, “no one knows when our “mamapapuri” lands became the property of the private company”. Inga, a shepherd lady, talked to me about the ambiguities the new highway plan brings to the indigenous communities of Dusheti. Considering the case of Choporti, she and her villagers in Bichnigauri (a village in Dusheti) need clarification; they need to figure out what to do with their lands: sell them or wait until the new road is built. Confusion is doubled because people are still determining exactly where the new highway will pass and whether it will bring benefits or challenges to the communities of Dusheti, which already face many difficulties.

CONCLUSION

In Georgia, the privatization process and reforms occurred swiftly at the local level, with little consideration or caution. It was implemented without acknowledging the pre-existing local orderings and informalities. Consequently, there was a hybridization of socialist, capitalist, and local moral systems. This hybridization is particularly intriguing from the perspective of legal pluralism. It shows the entanglement of multiple moralities, most vividly of formal and informal, global and local systems and within local–diverse moralities.³⁴ Such entanglements of travelling reforms and laws

31 I was interviewed by a gatekeeper from village Sakramuli, a neighbouring village of Mlashe, and married in Aragvispiri in the summer of 2023.

32 Company in the Georgian water supply market. The company provides drinking water to the population of Tbilisi and the city of Mtskheta, state institutions, and industrial and commercial facilities.

33 Construction rights revoked, formula.ge, https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=605682384504370&extid=CL-UNK-UNK-UNK-AN_GK0T-GK1C&mibextid=2Rb1fB&ref=sharing

34 For more on the entanglement of formal and informal, see Darchiashvili, Mariam, and Elene Gavashelishvili.

with national and local orderings and moralities have been elaborated by many scholars, speaking about processes of adjustment, context-dependent reinterpretation, and hybridization (Örücü, 1996; Behrends et al., 2014). Ong (2007) suggests the concept of assemblage for approaching such entanglements, which I find related to legal pluralism in the anthropological sense.

In this context, the concept of land has transformed. The land has become a commodity for trade but has retained its traditional significance, closely associated with ancestral heritage, something to be preserved for future generations. What is of note is that varying moral attitudes towards land can lead to conflicts among groups at the local level. These conflicting values may sometimes coexist within the same group and vary according to context. Regarding the topic of land, there is a consensus that land should be available to the people, especially when it involves a foreign party or company in the village. In such cases, even people from neighbouring villages stand with communities at risk. The protest in Choporti is a good illustration of such solidarity. The example of the struggle for pasture in Mlashe shows the broader importance of land than its economic purpose. This protest and the narratives surrounding it show the unique attitude and attachment of the indigenous communities to the land, which is equally linked to traditions, respect for ancestors, local economies, and tree-planting practices.

It is acknowledged among many scholars that today's neoliberal laws have left individuals in a vulnerable position when it comes to protecting their land, placing them in an unequal and unjust position in comparison to wealthy corporations (Izumi, 1999; Cotula, 2016; Millar, 2016). This situation underscores a global issue that researchers in this field often write about: the neoliberal shift has eroded the protective framework for indigenous groups, instead favouring those with more significant financial means and resources (Izumi, 1999; Povinelli, 2020).

"Entanglement of the Formal and Informal in Everyday Surrogacy Negotiations: The Case of Georgia." *Studies of Transition States and Societies* 15, no. 1 (2023).