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Peasant Oaths, Furious Icons and the Quest for Agency: Tracing Subaltern Politics in Tsarist Georgia on the Eve of the 1905 Revolution

Part I: The Prose of the Intelligentsia and Its Peasant Symptoms

This two-part transdisciplinary article elaborates on the autobiographical account of the Georgian Social-Democrat Grigol Uratadze regarding the oath pledged by protesting peasants from Guria in 1902. The oath inaugurated their mobilization in Tsarist Georgia in 1902, culminating in full peasant self-rule in the “Gurian Republic” by 1905. The study aims at a historical-anthropological assessment of the asymmetries in the alliance formed by peasants and the revolutionary intelligentsia in the wake of the oath as well as the tensions that crystallized around the oath between the peasants and Tsarist officials. In trying to recover the traces of peasant politics in relation to multiple hegemonic forces in a modernizing imperial borderland, the article invites the reader to reconsider the existing assumptions about historical agency, linguistic conditions of subjectivity, and the relationship between politics and the material and customary dimensions of religion. The ultimate aim is to set the foundations for a future subaltern reading of the practices specific to the peasant politics in the later “Gurian Republic”. The first part of the article starts with a reading of Uratadze’s narration of the 1902 inaugural oath “against the grain”.

Keywords: agency, intelligentsia, oath, Orthodox icons, peasantry, political theology, Russian Empire, secular studies, speech-act, subaltern

1.1. The Oath as Event and Metaphor

Unbreakable, solid, unshakeable was this oath, which throughout decades, notwithstanding a thousand hardships, the countryside has kept and still keeps with such firmness...

(Uratadze 1933, 2)¹

Such overblown rhetoric, seasoned with extraordinarily frequent references to oaths, dominated much of the February 1933 issue of the newspaper *Brdzolis Khma* (Georgian for “sound of battle”) published by Georgian Mensheviks in their Parisian emigration. The issue was dedicated to celebrating the fortieth anniversary of the establishment of the Marxist movement in Tsarist-ruled Georgia, which by the turn of the century had joined in the all-Russian revolutionary process. It was only in the wake of the October Revolution that the Georgian Social-Democrats broke with the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party and came to establish, in 1918, the short-lived Georgian Democratic Republic whose politics and public life they dominated until the Bolshevik Red Army occupied the country in February 1921 (incorporating it later into the Soviet Union). It was against this background that the 1933 issue of *Brdzolis Khma* mobilized the notion of the oath as a rhetorical device for upholding the image of a Georgian people persistently loyal to the emigrated Mensheviks despite the Bolshevik yoke. What distinguishes the above-cited piece penned by Grigol Uratadze (1880–1959), however, is that its evocation of oaths is not simply metaphoric but, rather, refers to an actual oath pledged by the peasants of the Nigoiti community in Guria² in the late spring of 1902. This oath marked the start of

1 For their valuable comments on various drafts and/or for support with material, I would like to thank Maia Barkaia, Ia Eradze, Mariam Goshadze, Barbare Janelidze, Tamta Khalvashi, Nino Simonishvili, Zaal Andronikashvili, Akaki Chikobava, Bruce Grant, Giorgi Maisuradze, Florian Mühlfried, William Tyson Sadleir, the participants in the history seminar led by Tamar Keburia and Ana Lolua at Ilia State University as well as two anonymous reviewers. My special thanks to Piotr Kuligowski and Wiktor Marzec for their infinitely patient and encouraging editorship. All translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

2 Now a separate administrative unit in Western Georgia, Guria was a principality that the Russian Empire annexed in 1829. By 1846, it had been integrated into the Kutaisi *gubernya* of the Caucasus Viceroyalty under the name of Ozurgeti *uyezd* (see Church 2001).

the peasant movement in Transcaucasia, which became a turning point in the history of Georgian social democracy.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, three decades after the Emancipation had “freed” the Gurian peasants not only from their subjection to feudal lords but also from the land they had been tilling for their masters, the peasants refused to work the nobles’ lands. Several factors account for their dissent—their land hunger and tensions with the local land-owning nobility in the context of the gradual capitalist transformation of the countryside, their discontent with the corruption and arbitrariness of the local administration and the burden of a number of taxes and obligations (Suny 1994, 166; Jones 1989). The protest eventually became a boycott of all administrative institutions, culminating during the high tide of the 1905 Revolution in full-fledged armed peasant self-government. Admired throughout the Russian Empire as the “Gurian Republic,” it stood out for its exceptional endurance among the many efforts of the Empire’s various subaltern groups to establish “republics” (Jones 1989, 2005; Shanin 1986). In the initial stage of the protest in 1902, it was Uratadze, then a local school teacher, who assisted the Gurian peasants with formulating their demands. Not without some pride, Uratadze implicitly credited himself with having initiated the collaboration between the Marxist intelligentsia and the peasants whom the former designated as “village workers” in an attempt “to square Marxism with organization among the peasantry” (Jones 2005, 143). This collaboration eventually transformed the Gurian peasants into the base of the Georgian branch of the RSDLP and largely determined the political success of Georgians within the all-Russian organization. For, as Stephen Jones has forcefully argued, Georgian Social-Democracy stood out not only due to its unique mixture of social and national/anti-colonial struggle (a trait it shared with the revolutionary groups of other national minorities of the Russian Empire) but, most eminently, for the substantial role assigned to the peasantry based on the Gurian experience. In defiance of all Marxist orthodoxy concerning peasant backwardness, the Georgian position on the peasantry, not to mention the news arriving from Guria, contributed considerably to shaping Lenin’s views on the revolutionary-progressive potential of peasants (Jones 2005).

Uratadze claims that all this started on a hill that later came to be called *napitsvara*, i.e. the place “where an oath was pledged,” on “one dark spring night” when “the entire society of Nigoiti swore to each other fraternity, unity, liberty.” Even as Uratadze refers to one particular

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night, the concept of the oath subcutaneously shifts from a particular event to a generalized ethical and political metaphor.³

This was the *first* oath of the peasantry, pledging that through common struggle they would ameliorate their condition; this was the *first* encounter of Social-Democrats and village workers; this was the *first* foundation of that unshakeable and inextricable union between us and the countryside, which, till this day, no misfortunes of Time have been able to sever. Here, *for the first time*, the peasantry met its protector, the attendant of its illness, the confidant of its intents, the guesser of its heart's desires, the devoted guardian of its interests (Uratadze 1933, 2).

More significantly, in this article, Uratadze omits mentioning that the oath was taken at the emphatic request of the protesting peasants. This we learn only from his book-length Russian autobiography of 1959 (Uratadze 1968), in which he elaborates on the prequel and sequel of the oath, restating with certain minor yet telling changes the earlier short article. This crucial omission invites us to take with a grain of salt the rhetoric with which Uratadze's 1933 celebration of the Social-Democrats' alliance with the "People" tends to reduce the same "People"—to being a passive mass gratefully receptive of the protection and discernment of the Social-Democratic intelligentsia.

In the 1933 article, the narration of the oath on Napitsvara leaves the event as a rhetorically overblown and somewhat farcical occurrence due to the absence of any mention of its preconditions (certainly both for the sake of brevity imposed by the limits of a short newspaper piece and to not obscure the celebratory effect by introducing avowedly ambivalent causal threads). "What did they swear that night and how?" With this rhetorical question, Uratadze jumps from the above-mentioned metaphoric effusion straight into the middle of the plot, where we find him meeting one last time with representatives of peasants in the house of "comrade Samsonadze" to approve the hill as the site of the nocturnal assembly of around 700–800 persons. The ensuing account leading to the solemn gathering on "that holy place" to which he hurried inspired with "faith-like, divine grace" is worth quoting at length:

It must already have been midnight when we reached the appointed place. The majority of the people had already arrived and gathered (*dagubashebulik'o*) on the slope, silently waiting for us. As soon as we were there, there was a whisper: He's here, he's here, but no one really knew who.

3 For a paradigmatic discussion of how a specific event can become a political metaphor, see Amin 1995.

The tide of the people had ceased. Comrade L. Samsonadze asked for silence. Deadly silence set in, interrupted only by the rustling of leaves trembling in the gentle breeze. Except for the guards, everyone sat on the ground. I placed myself in their middle and begun: Comrades! The Day of Judgment has come. Today, we are starting the fight that will give us what is due to us; that will return to us what has been taken away from us... The product of our sweat to us shall belong etc. etc. The workers of all countries are with us – and I read out an old proclamation issued on the occasion of the Tiflis [Railway] Workshop strike. Let us swear to each other that we will stand together, fight together until victory, that we will lynch the traitor and the snitch. Upon these words, everyone, as one, stood up in silence. I began to read the paper with the oath. I was reading by candle light and I noticed that those next to me stood bareheaded, with a raised arm and three fingers extended. The next day I was assured that the entire assembly had been standing like this. When I finished reading, I heard the people whisper in unison the last words of the oath: “May he be cursed. Amen.” The cool breeze caught the whisper of the people, flew it to the clefts of the ridge and from there, as if in confirmation, in the darkness of the night a deaf echo was heard: “Amen. Amen” (Uratadze 1933, 2).

As much as Uratadze would have liked to settle the question, “What did they swear that night and how?,” upon closer inspection, the 1933 article reveals a fundamental ambiguity as to who swore to whom and what kind of oath. This ambiguity only intensifies with the multiplication of factors and protagonists in the later autobiography. Since its publication, Uratadze’s Russian autobiography, *Reminiscences of a Georgian Social-Democrat*, has been one of the most important sources for studying the Gurian movement, not least for the valuable information it discloses concerning its beginnings in 1902, including the inaugural oath in Nigoiti.⁴ However, none of the historians who have consulted Uratadze’s text as a “source” seem to be completely comfortable with the many contradictions, specifically in regard to the “real” or metaphoric quality of the religious component. While Ronald Grigor Suny refers to Uratadze’s account of the very first peasant boycott in

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4 Understandably, before the collapse of the Soviet Union, the autobiography of an *émigré* Menshevik like Uratadze could have been a useful source only for non-Soviet historians, whereas since independence, a general disinterest in the revolutionary past within Georgian academia delegated the peasant movement to near-total oblivion, with the exception of Irakli Makharadze, a film director, amateur historian and author of the only book-length popular monograph on the “Gurian Republic” (2020), which abundantly relies on Uratadze’s autobiography.

Nigoiti without dwelling on the oath at all (Suny 1994, 163; 2020, 282–4), Teodor Shanin treats Uratadze as an “embarrassed young rationalist (...) pressed into acting the way a priest would, administering an oath in a religious ceremony of a most solemn nature” and labels the entire sequence a “tragi-comedy rapidly turned into high drama” (Shanin 1986, 104). As a consequence of the nocturnal oath, a carnivalesque proliferation of misunderstandings and misattributions as to who did what seems to have occurred. As Uratadze recalls the aftermath of the event:

I was dressed in the *chokha*⁵ of someone taller than me; probably that was the reason why on the next day the rumor went around that some priest had sworn the Nigoiti community into an oath against the landlords. Concerning this, all kinds of legends spread. The administration of the *uyezd* searched for this priest for a long time and more than one actual priest was declared suspicious and subjected to surveillance... (Uratadze 1933, 2).

Stephen Jones’ exhaustive assessment (1989; 2005) of the variety of factors that contributed, along with the crucial involvement of the Social-Democrats and their support for the peasants’ demand for land ownership, to making the Gurian peasant movement of 1902–1905 “so organized, powerful and enduring” (Jones 2005, 156–7) duly mentions the “semireligious” inaugural event of Napitsvara (142). However, in the overall explanatory economy, the observation that besides being “frustrated landowners who wanted to legally own land”, “Gurian peasants were religious believers who swore oaths on icons” remains rather inconsequential (156). In both versions of Jones’ study, references to the arsenal of religious items involved in the peasant gatherings leave them in a state of interchangeability. As the swearing on crosses and bibles seems to be as good as the swearing on Orthodox icons to convey the “religious” flair of peasants’ actions, the 2005 version readily omits the earlier casual reference (again, based on Uratadze’s account) to “[t]he religious faith of the peasantry [having been] successfully exploited by the tsarist authorities who, by making Gurians swear on a famous icon, discovered the whereabouts of a number of revolutionaries” (Jones 1989, 416). The only Georgian author currently engaged in the history of the Gurian movement, Irakli Makharadze (2020), extensively relates both the event on Napitsvara and the later incident to

5 *Chokha* is a woolen coat that is a traditional male dress all over the Caucasus.

the much-feared Orthodox icon named “Lomiskareli.” However, he does not go beyond treating it as a zesty anecdote seasoning the legendary beginnings of the movement.⁶

What unites all the above-mentioned historiographies is that, in drawing to various degrees on Uratadze’s text, none of them dwell on its letter (or even have time or space for this within their respective narrative and scholarly agendas). Yet, a close reading reveals that, in its description of the event on Napitsvara, the text not only omits all religious items, but also manifestly engages in an elaborate discursive operation of replacing “religious” gestures and meanings with allegedly “secular,” “revolutionary” ones. No less telling of a certain ideological work underlying Uratadze’s text is his account of the incident with the “Lomiskareli” icon. I argue that the uneasiness of the above-quoted historians with the religious element of peasant mobilization, far from being accidental, is essentially complicit in the epistemological regime established by Uratadze’s own account of the oath insofar as they all share in a basic framework that, following recent critical studies in the anthropology of modernity and religion, we could define as “secular.” This modernist framework readily cuts off a certain self-sufficient realm of the “social”—of human action and agency—from “religion” as a mental state (in terms of “belief”), which is more often than not understood as an “alienated” consciousness finding “symbolic” externalization in “rituals” (Asad 1993, 2003; Taylor 2007; Keane 2007). Such an approach easily tends to reduce religious practices to being nothing more than decorative accessories of some “real,” self-sufficiently “secular” historical processes. Thus, operating within an ultra-modernist framework, Soviet Georgian historiography completely glossed over the practices specific to the Gurians’ mobilization, hastily subsuming any possible reference to its religious character under the rubric of blind ‘spontaneity’, as illustrated by the following laconic formulation from the main late Soviet textbook on Georgian history: “The peasants spontaneously⁷ revolted on the grounds of a dispute over pastureland,

6 In his study of the Georgian Democratic Republic, Eric Lee (2017) also mentions the “religious” beginnings of the Gurian movement. However, due to lack of knowledge of both Russian and Georgian, his discussion is derived entirely from existing English-language scholarship.

7 The Georgian equivalent of “spontaneity” is *stiqiuroba* (derived from the Russian *stikhiinost’*) and bears the connotation of something being “elemental,” blind like the natural elements.

soon the Social-Democratic organization took over the leadership of this revolt” (Kikvidze 1972, 175).⁸

The aim of this article, then, is to take somewhat more seriously the vernacular religious practices and their “messy materiality” (Manning and Meneley 2008) and to answer a number of questions: What could it have meant to a Gurian peasant in 1902 to take an oath? What rationalities were prescribed by the materiality of specific practices of oath-taking? In what power structures were these practices embedded? What were the conditions for specific practices of oath-taking to be translated into metaphors? A more sustained ethnographic research into these matters should enable us to disclose the politics specific to the beginning of the Gurian movement in a somewhat different light from how historians have approached it to the present day. This entails taking time to delve into the letter of Uratadze’s text as a “source” and starts by asking: Why did the peasants want to swear oaths in the first place and what implications does this have for the dynamics of the peasant mobilization as such? In the end, such inquiry invites us to think about the oath as a juncture between religion and political practice that goes beyond dichotomies counterposing tradition to modernity, religious passivity to some “properly” secular political agency, self-contained individuals to collectivities, speech to act and the oral to the written.

In asking these questions, this study does not engage in historiography of the Gurian movement but, rather, aims at a historical-anthropological close-up on a somewhat familiar story told by a prominent member of the Georgian radical intelligentsia in his autobiographic narrative. I understand narrative as an emplotted story with a central character, fundamentally participating in forming a coherent class identity for the narrator and enabling her to make sense of historical occurrences (Steinmetz 1992), whereas the “gaps” in such a narrative point to fundamental contradictions inherent to the social position of the narrator. It is, then, the very discrepancies and omissions in Uratadze’s text that

8 A fundamental factor preventing the proper study of the 1902–1905 revolutionary movement in Soviet historiography even after de-Stalinization was its outright falsification by Lavrenti Beria in 1934. This version not only erased the fact of Menshevik dominance in revolutionary Georgia, but also denied any possible substantial agency to the peasants by cementing the dogma that “the Georgian peasants were led by the local proletariat, led by the Russian senior proletariat, led in turn by the Bolsheviks, led by Lenin as advised by Stalin” (Shanin 1986, 153). Crucially, even after Beria was declared “enemy of the people,” this erasure and the epistemological framework it put in place remained intact and was simply passed down without citation of the original reference (156, 343–4).

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invite us to read them *symptomatically* in the sense of a reading that pays attention to the symptomatic silences (Althusser et al. 2015) of a text, exposing what the text could impossibly have said unless it were to avow its own ideological condition of possibility. Yet, as the silence inherent to such prose always consists of an active effort of *silencing*, it barely manages to hide its power asymmetry in relation to what it tries to silence.

Jones (1989; 2005), while demonstrating the prominence of the Georgian Mensheviks, mostly of Gurian origin themselves, in assuring the longevity of the Gurian movement, has also pointed to the tensions that emerged between the party intelligentsia, peasant “newbies” and those stuck somewhere in between after the Social-Democrats took over leadership of the peasant protest. However, in concentrating on the inaugural oath and its immediate aftermath as a short historical sequence, this article strives to pave the way to a more sustained inquiry into the workings of that hegemonic take-over on the part of the intelligentsia, which Uratadze’s narrative once again naturalizes through the way he frames his narrative while leaving behind symptoms that permit us to trace this work of subordination. What is crucial to my inquiry, then, is not so much whether what Uratadze describes “really happened” but, rather, how his text, as a major document of political commemoration, participates in cementing the subjugation of “the peasantry” by “its protector” and “devoted guardian of its interests.” With archives remaining closed for an indefinite amount of time⁹, Uratadze’s narrative as a document of hegemonic consolidation will be read in constellation with the reports left by the Tsarist administration on the 1902 Gurian disturbances and other accessible sources. The goal is to reconstruct the oath as a multifaceted social practice containing a “trace of independent initiative on the part of subaltern groups” (Gramsci 1971, 55), including traces of peasant realities persisting within the hegemonic effort of the rural intelligentsia itself. What binds these readings is attention to the oath as an embodied utterance fraught with ethical and political concerns for language, and as a contested terrain where the subaltern mobilization of local religious-legal practices interacts with concerns about legality and theological legitimacy raised by various agents of the post-Reform Russian Empire and the local intelligentsia as their conscious or ina-

9 Besides two smaller regional archives in Guria, it is the Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia (an institution whose openness and organization left much to be desired even before the COVID-19 outbreak) that houses the archives of the former Tbilisi-branch of the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute, which includes yet untapped material on the Gurian movement.

divertent allies.¹⁰ As a first step towards exposing this complex interplay of forces, I will set out to problematize “who” swore “what” and “how” on that “dark spring night”.

1.2. The Protagonists of the “Oath Scene”

In the 1959 memoirs, we learn why the movement was initiated in the community of Nigoiti. Since Emancipation, the largest noble landholdings had been preserved in Nigoiti, making the peasants—the majority of whom were still “temporarily obliged”—ever more dependent on a minority of noble rentiers (Uratadze 1968, 32–3).¹¹ Thus, given that 700–800 persons out of more than 1600 inhabitants of the Nigoiti community allegedly joined the meeting on Napitsvara hill, if we subtract the local noble and clerical minority as well as the women, children and very elderly of the peasant families, we can conjecture that the congregation on Napitsvara consisted of the vast majority of temporarily obliged male peasants.¹² Upon final approval of the peasants’ demands (the right to free grazing, reduction of the land rent, participation of all estates in public works and maintenance of the infrastructure as well as the abolition of a particularly burdensome form of church tax), Uratadze and his comrades proceeded to constitute a delegation that would present these demands to the landlords.

Uratadze emphasizes that he “convinced” the sixteen peasant representatives, “among whom were both youngsters and adults and even a couple of old men,” not to include anything in the list that could have

10 For a discussion of how the Georgian intelligentsia contributed to a certain imperial project of modernization, see the seminal studies of Jersild (2002) and Manning (2012).

11 As much as it is true that since Emancipation, the economic dynamics of the Georgian village were becoming increasingly capitalist, their agricultural “look” notwithstanding, we certainly could not call the Gurians involved in the oath-taking “proletarian peasants” in the literal sense in which Robert Edelman (1987) describes the peasants on the Right Bank of Ukraine around 1905, who were indeed engaged in an agriculture organized along capitalist principles.

12 According to available sources, in 1886, Nigoiti, an ethnically homogeneous community (*sel'skoe obschestvo*), counted 1929 inhabitants (from the total population of Guria, which did not exceed 100,000 people), with the majority belonging to 205 households of temporarily obliged peasants, among them 820 men and 733 women (see *Svod statisticheskikh dannyx* 1896, Part II, 9). In 1897, 179 households of temporarily obliged peasants were counted, all of them working for the big landholding princes Machutadze, as opposed to 20 households of free peasants, 4 households of high nobles, 12 households of petty nobles and 15 clerical households (see Jorbenadze 1897, 241–2).

led from a purely “economic” set of demands to “political” ones, drawing excessive attention from the government at a premature stage of the peasants’ mobilization (Urataдзе 1968, 32–4). In the narrative, the well-known conceptual dichotomy between “economic” and “political” struggle overlaps with that of sustainable “organization” and “spontaneity,” which was common parlance among Russian Marxists (Haimson 1955). This is how Urataдзе frames the peasant representatives’ urge “to call in a general meeting of all peasants in order to take, *as they said*, an oath of ‘fidelity to the peasant movement.’” Urataдзе, as if excusing himself, adds: “I was unable to convince them to refrain from such an oath. They categorically declared that without it they refused to continue participating in this affair. *I had to give in.*” To Urataдзе’s “surprise (*ke moemu udivleniyu*)”, in the subsequent meeting with more than fifty people, all those who were ready to fight once again “unanimously professed the necessity of an oath”. It is during this meeting that, Urataдзе claims, he was “entrusted with the preparation of the text of the oath” (35, my emphases), without, however, specifying who exactly entrusted him—and why *him*?

It is important to bear in mind that for the most part, this revolutionary intelligentsia “who gravitated toward Marxism in the 1890s were not the product of the established intelligentsia of urban Georgia, but rather neophytes who emerged from the most backward rural districts of western Georgia, most often from Guria” (Suny 1994, 156). They were either the offspring of peasant families, like Urataдзе, or came, like Noe Zhordania, the leader of the movement, from families of impoverished gentry, which “were all but indistinguishable in their economic position, their mores, their economic, social, and political aspirations from the peasant population of their native villages” (Haimson 1968). Instead of thinking of Urataдзе’s relationship to the peasants in terms of a stark dichotomy between intelligentsia and peasantry, we should instead read the tensions and ambiguities in his narrative as part of the retrospective autobiographical effort of an *intelligent* to disentangle himself from his provenance in a lowly differentiated rural community and the condition of subalternity to which the Gurian village of Urataдзе’s youth seemed to condemn its poor majority. Amidst this desolation, the prospect of one’s child becoming a “student” was charged, as in the case of Urataдзе’s mother, with dreams that could be regarded as phantasmagoric, as becoming a real university student was a rarity in the Gurian village towards the end of the nineteenth century (Urataдзе 1968, 2–6). Urataдзе dropped out of the teachers’ seminary, much to the regret of his father, who would have liked him to become a teacher—“the most hono-

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rable of deeds” (6)—insofar as this type of rural intellectual represented “a social model for the peasant to look to in his aspiration to escape from or improve his condition” (Gramsci 1971, 14). After an academic detour in St. Petersburg, Uratadze, in fact, returned to Guria to become a village teacher in Lanchkhuti without, however, losing an eye toward “professionally” dedicating himself to “revolutionary activities” (21–2).

As a rural intellectual, Uratadze found an established intelligentsia culture of printed public discourse, of which the newspaper *Kvali*¹³ constituted a Social-Democratic variety and to which Uratadze also used to contribute. This culture provided the infrastructure of what Barbare Janelidze, drawing on Paul Manning’s seminal book on the formation of the Georgian intelligentsia in late nineteenth-century Georgia (2012), calls the “advent of secularity”¹⁴ as a distinct regime of knowledge and sensibility. This new horizon generated a possibility both for the integration of Orthodox Christianity into the secular temporality of Georgian nationalist history and the development of materialist-humanist atheism and for cultivating a modern subjectivity capable of producing the autobiography of a self-sufficient “I” (Taylor 2007, 714). Whereas Manning has thoroughly analyzed the infrastructure of such public discourse in its formative decades of the 1860–1880s, when the intelligentsia, for the most part, fulfilled the cultural-nationalist task of transcribing “the unlettered voice of the people” (Manning 2012, 79), Uratadze’s encounter with the peasants is both formative and part of the historical moment at the turn of the century when the “neophyte” *intelligently*, emerging from that same “people” for the first time formed an actual political alliance with the “people.”

It is, then, precisely because of the ambiguities and tensions inherent to the respective positions held by the members of this alliance that the discrepancies in Uratadze’s retrospective account of the Napitsvara oath become symptomatic. This begins with Uratadze’s recasting of a collective initiative into an individual endeavor of an autobiographical “I.” With evident pleasure, he indulges in his incognito, which only boosts the importance of his persona to the entire happening (“He’s here, he’s here, but no one really knew who”). Alongside the heroic pathos, the description of the event bears a disrespectful and farcical quality: When talking about the gathering of the peasants, he employs the rare dialect

13 *Kvali* (Georgian for “track”, “trail”) was, since 1896, the first legal Marxist newspaper in the Russian Empire (Jones 2005, 66–71).

14 I want to thank Barbare Janelidze from the University of Kassel for sharing her manuscript, which is part of her doctoral thesis, working title: “Umstrittene Säkularität: Religion, Politik und Öffentlichkeit in Georgien”.

tal verb *dagubasheba* from Upper Guria (Uratadze's point of origin) specifically reserved for designating the gathering of livestock. By reading out a proclamation issued on the occasion of a past strike in Tiflis, he admittedly tricks the assembly into believing that their struggle was supported by “workers of all countries.” However, it is his excessive emphasis on his authorship of the content of the oath that most forcefully demonstrates Uratadze's urge to impose a directorial script on the entire happening to identify himself as the one agent fully in control of the circumstances, consciously producing them and, therefore, able and willing to take over the responsibility of speaking for them (Asad 2003, 67–9). It is, then, all but accidental that, in both versions of the story, the precise wording of the oath is missing, as Uratadze (having to reconstruct the speech from memory) cites only part and offers an indirect account of the rest. In 1933, he writes that after the final council in “comrade Samsonadze”'s house,

everyone left to take care of their business. I stayed and went about to compose the text of the oath, but this proved quite hard. I struggled for hours; how much did I write only to rip up each version. In the end, I managed to compose the text, with which I swore the people who came on that night in crowds and which was later passed on to the other districts to administer the oath (Uratadze 1933, 2).

In one of the rare amendments to the body of the 1933 text, in the 1959 autobiography Uratadze explains why it was so difficult to compose it: “What was I supposed to write in the text? *It had to be neither churchly nor Marxist (ni tserkovnym, ni marksistkim)*” (Uratadze 1968, 36, my emphasis). But the solution to his dilemma, which Uratadze believes he has found in a simple semantic substitution, only makes things more complicated:

We swore that we would be together and not betray each other, not give each other away and if among us a traitor and a snitch were to be discovered, he would be anathematized, banished “in the name of the People” (instead of “in the name of God”) – and it ended like this: “Be cursed the traitor and the snitch. Amen. Amen. Amen” (Uratadze 1933, 2).

Is this secularizing substitution of the traditional formula “in the name of God” with “in the name of the People”, fashioned after the language of the French Revolution, the gist of the entire text? Clearly, Uratadze deems it necessary to let the readers know that he made that substitution. He does not stop at simply stating that he wrote “in the name of the

The oath forcefully demonstrates Uratadze's urge to impose a directorial script on the entire happening to identify himself as the one agent fully in control of the circumstances, consciously producing them and, therefore, able and willing to take over the responsibility of speaking for them.

People”; he *must* let us know that it is nothing less than God that he substituted. In the face of this neat semantic secularization, we have to complement the earlier question of *who* assigned him to compose the text of the oath with another question: Is such a secularized oath what the “peasant representatives” would have wanted/meant when insisting on pledging an oath?

Uratadze seems to be driven by the modernist paradigm of novelty: The oath simply cannot have been the usual, “churchly” one if it was to mark the beginning of a historical turning point, for, in such modernist reasoning, “history is not made unless significant change occurs” (Asad 1993, 14). As I will argue below, it is rather improbable that the peasants would have requested that the text of the oath exclude references to the transcendent, as that would have invalidated the very principle of the oath, which would have moved them to pledge it in the face of the challenges ahead. What or who, then, gave Uratadze the prerogative to effectuate this fundamental shift in the semantic horizon? When trying to “convince them” to drop the oath, did he also negotiate the content with them? Did he try to “convince them” that in such an unprecedented struggle no old formulas would do? If he did, why does he not mention this in the expanded narrative of 1959? Most importantly, we have to ask that one basic question that Uratadze himself seems to be unable to ask, as his “surprise” in the face of the peasants’ initiative forbids him to question the very thing that conditioned his “surprise”: *Why* did the peasants deem it necessary to pledge a collective oath in the first place?

We might be able to at least partially answer this question if we bring Uratadze’s narrative of the oath of 1902 in constellation with another major event from the first half of the same year. In February and March, massive strikes in the port and oil refinery of Batumi, a major port city on the Black Sea coast to the south of Guria, led to violent clashes with the police and the subsequent repatriation of hundreds of workers of Gurian descent to their home villages, resulting in a considerable politicization of the countryside. As Uratadze himself relates, this was of immediate import to the formation of his own political position, as his encounter with those legendary semi-proletarian, semi-peasant figures whom the peasants themselves reverently singled out as the “Batumi workers” opened his eyes to the revolutionary potential of the village (Uratadze 1968, 21): It was their initiative to launch revolutionary activities among the peasantry, and it is with them that he chose Nigoiti as the most fecund place for sparking the protest.

What now needs to be scrutinized is the profound entanglement of peasant and worker social-cultural conditions in turn-of-the-century Georgia, which gave its shape to the peasant movement, with the institution of the oath fulfilling a productively multivalent function.

1.3. Peasant-Workers, Oath-Strikes and Strike-Boycotts

Gurian peasants working in the urban industries were not different from other workers in other cities across the Russian Empire in that they were mostly either first-generation immigrants or seasonal workers who, thanks to the geographical proximity of their home villages, maintained close contact with their communities and traditions (Jones 2005, 80–2). In this regard, it is noteworthy that many of the first significant strikes that took off in the 1890s (arguably, before the Social-Democratic propaganda introduced new understandings of “organization”) involved the workers swearing an oath of loyalty to each other in a church, which, in Stephen Jones’ formulation, “reflected village traditions of oath taking” (Jones 2005, 97–8). In fact, the current common Georgian word for “strike”—*gapitsva*—literally signifies “taking an oath” or “creating a bond through an oath,” although today this original semantics rarely springs to the minds of most of the speakers of the Georgian language. In the late nineteenth century, this word won the race against other words that were competing in public discourse for designating the new social-political phenomenon starting to proliferate in various industries. Before *gapitsva* asserted itself, the other words would sometimes appear together in a single paragraph and either denoted cessation of work (*mushaobis aghkvetha*, *shek'eneba*) or of conspiracy (*shethqmuloba*).¹⁵

The oath had been a fundamental part of the legal, political and everyday culture of feudal Georgian principalities, including Guria (Church 2001, 165–7), and remained so even after their gradual integration into the Russian administrative system after their incorporation starting in 1801. As a rule, the oath was pledged on an Orthodox icon, given the exceptional importance accorded to icons in Eastern Christianity (Kenna 1985) and consisted, as did most oaths in non-secular settings, of invoking “powers greater than oneself to uphold the truth of a declaration, by putting a curse upon oneself if it is false” (Richard Janko cited in Sommerstein und Torrance 2014, 1; see also Agamben

¹⁵ This is the case in an article in the newspaper *Iveria* (“Mushaobis aghkvetha” 1894, 2).

2011, 43; Prodi 1992, 22–3). The most important document of local legal culture from the pre-Tsarist period, the Code of Laws (1704–09) of Vakhtang VI, was itself a compilation of pre-existing customary law (Nadareishvili 1963, 43). It featured oath-taking by both accusers and accused as one of the main forms of proof as well as a highly elaborate system of co-swearers (*thanamopitsari*) whose number would go up to twenty-four males if the cause was particularly grave. The custom excluded women on principle, for an oath sworn by a woman was deemed untrustworthy (26–30), making our entire inquiry essentially a male-centered account. The high importance accorded to the oath meant that people reverted to it only as a last resort. Oath-taking was preceded by a long process of spiritual preparation (21), for exposure to divine punishment through the self-curse implied a full ethical engagement of the human as a being essentially constituted by language in approximating himself to the divine coincidence of words, things and actions (Agamben 2011).

In Guria, the customary legal framework maintained its importance within the Russian administrative system, both in its everyday social function as a set of rules for legal litigations and in its political function insofar as oaths of allegiance constituted a local tool of political legitimation on which the Russian Empire continuously relied to ensure the loyalty of the Gurian elites (Church 2001). The oath as a pledge of unity also became an instrument of consolidation for the lower classes when they rebelled in the 1841 Gurian uprising before being crushed by the Russian forces and coerced to pledge allegiance to the Tsar (see Akty 1884, 174–7; Church 2001, 317–24). Having “heralded the establishment of an idiom of revolt among the lower echelons of Gurian society, particularly the gentry nobles and serfs” (Church 2001, 17), at the end of the nineteenth century, the memory of this rebellion was vivid enough among Gurians, so much so that it inspired Egnate Ninoshvili (1859–1894), a realist writer of Gurian origins and one of the founders of the Georgian revolutionary movement, to use it as one of the main sources for his novel *The Uprising in Guria* (Khundadze 1932, 288), which *Kvali* started to posthumously publish in early 1902 before the series was terminated due to censorship immediately after the very first chapters were published.¹⁶

Besides obtaining allegiance through oaths in the process of Guria’s

16 It is precisely in these first chapters that Ninoshvili describes rebels pledging oaths of unity on icons. Given the intense circulation and avid consumption of *Kvali* in turn-of-the-century Guria, both Uratadze and the literate peasants would most certainly have read the mentioned chapters in early 1902.

complete integration into the imperial system in the mid-nineteenth century, the Tsarist Empire continued to rely on and institutionalize the operation of local custom as a means of stabilizing imperial rule (Church 2001). Yet, one should bear in mind that while the “imperial rights regime” endowed all of its subject populations with differentiated/unequal rights based on ethnicity, religion, sex or other factors (Burbank 2006) and allowed for the integration of the respective local “customs” (Jersild 2002), in Transcaucasia the Tsarist state implemented Alexander II’s legal-administrative reforms in only a severely truncated form. As this included the imposition of Russian as the exclusive language of judicial procedure, the language barrier created a fundamental obstacle for the local populations to benefit from whatever rights the Great Reforms had granted them (Bendianishvili 1970; Sadleir 2020), whereas low-level courts remained in the hands of the police (Jones 2005, 138–9).

Thus, it seems all the more likely that, alienated as they were from the modernized legal order (to be sure, not because of some immutable incompatibility of “the peasant” to modern forms of law, but because of the inconsistent character of the reforms), at the turn of the century the Gurian peasants’ tools of resistance and sense of justice continued to rest on the lived memory of (however transformed) customary understandings. In this sense, the shifts and subversions in the semantics and practices crystallized around the word *gapitsva* are symptomatic of state-sponsored “belated” modernization. Partha Chatterjee suggests that as the modernizing state fails to impregnate the entire social body—notably, the lower classes on the peripheries (like the peasants in Guria)—in a “capillary” manner with the bourgeois regime of legality that was supposed to complement and foster economic transformation, a condition of fundamental indeterminacy emerges, creating room for “many unexpected possibilities” in regard to “the political role of the peasantry” (Chatterjee 1988, 389).

The difficulty of assessing the novelty of the Gurian mobilization, in contrast to Uratadze’s model of authorial innovation, lies in understanding the shifts within the framework of the customary law itself, which enabled the peasants to resort to old means in order to achieve new ends. In fact, what happened in Guria in 1902 could be considered an explosive symbiosis of *gapitsva* in the sense of urban strike and *gapitsva* in the sense of rural boycott. Peasant boycott indeed became one of the most powerful tools of the people’s self-empowerment, culminating in absolute self-government in the “Gurian Republic” and the refusal to work the lands of the nobles, serve in their households or engage in any traditional form of loyalty such as participating in the funeral ritu-

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als of a noble (Makharadze 2020, 45–9; Jones 2005, 147). While “boycott” as a loanword had already entered the vocabulary of the Gurian Georgians by the beginning of the twentieth century, boycott as ostracism for breaching customary norms had been an integral part of Gurian customary law (Davitashvili and Zoidze 1991, 177). Because, in principle, the customary boycott targeted only individuals (or, at most, an incriminated family) found guilty of breaching the order of a community, the novelty of the 1902 conflict resides in the extension or transfer of the boycott to a *collective* challenge against an antagonistic group within a community torn (and structured) by relations of domination and exploitation.

Arguably, a feudal tool of ostracism could not have transformed into an instrument of class struggle had customary law, and oaths as its integral part, not been inherently constituted by what E.P. Thompson has called “the social dialectic of unequal mutuality” (Thompson 1993, 344). Such was the institution of co-swearing as the main form of “proof” in customary litigations. In the institution of co-swearing, the oath of the litigant parties established them as equals before God. However, this equality drew its legal force from a complex process of additively equalizing incommensurate, unequal individuals segregated into different estates. Thus, the higher the rank of a noble, the greater the value of his word and the greater the number of peasants whom the opposing party would have to present as co-swearers if no nobleman could be found (Nadareishvili 1997). The oath of two “grand nobles” equaled the oath of twenty “middle nobles” or, respectively, that of sixty “petty nobles” (Nadareishvili 1963, 63–7). The more unworthy one was, the greater the need to ally with equally unworthy individuals to prove, through sheer number, the value of one’s word. It is then safe to assume that, in sealing with an oath the demands formulated with Uratadze’s help, the temporarily obliged peasants of Nigoiti, former serfs, were behaving like co-swearers in customary litigation with former masters, with the difference being that no particular individual acted as the principal litigant. While, given the subsequent developments, the oath on Napitsvara might certainly be called one of “secrecy” (Jones 1989, 416), the peasants nevertheless seem to have meant it to be apprehended by the landholding noble minority as a challenge to a litigious dialogue.

However, it remains to be clarified where the peasants of Nigoiti came up with the idea of *collectively* refusing to work the nobles’ lands as a tool of protest. What is at stake in the tectonic shifts inherent to the notion and practice of *gapitsva* clearly calls for a different paradigm than that of an encounter between tradition and modernity in the con-

text of what Eric Hobsbawm has called the “adaptation of popular agitations to a modern capitalist economy” (Hobsbawm 1971, 9), which suggests that either a modern “form” remolds a traditional “content” or a modern “content” is being poured, at a “primitive” stage of encounter with forces of modernization, into a “yet” traditional “form.” Tradition thus acquires the meaning of only appearance and garb, while the process of modernization becomes the “real” work being conducted beneath those somewhat exotic traditions and rituals. I argue that the urban oath-strike or the rural oath on Napitsvara eludes any attempt to establish causal precedence, disqualifying on principle the stark dichotomy between tradition (conservation) and modernity (innovation). Instead of stating that “the peasants successfully internalized from the workers the method of striking” (Kikvidze 1972, 174), one ought to emphasize that the famed “Batumi workers” could not have introduced the idea of collectively withdrawing from sowing the landlords’ lands without the experience of peasants-turned-workers resorting to—and, in the process, transforming—the village custom of oath-taking as the practice that gave its historical shape to strike in turn-of-the-century Georgian industries. The “destabilization” of “spiritual life” experienced by the peasants who, in migrating to alien, urban spaces, became disembedded from their familiar environments might, thus, be said to not have followed a trajectory of neat “secularization” but, rather, to have conditioned a specific “recomposition” of rural forms of spirituality (Taylor 2007). A separate study would be needed to find out, without resorting to facile schemes of secularization, exactly when and under what circumstances the religious connotations of the word *gapitsva* receded to the point of total oblivion in its contemporary usage.

I.4. The Prose of the Intelligentsia and the Prose of Counter-Insurgency

We have been tracing, within Uratadze’s text, the work of silencing peasant initiatives and practices, questioning his secularization of the oath on Napitsvara. We tried to recover the relevant legal and religious context that might disclose the rationale behind the initiative of the Nigoiti peasants. What best reveals Uratadze’s work of erasure, however, are the reports of Tsarist officials on the “disturbances” that proliferated from the spring of 1902. Famously named “the prose of counter-insurgency” by Ranajit Guha, these reports are productive to a critical historian in that, while systematically denigrating the rebel, they “can hardly

Constitutive of such prose, among other elements, are the belated comprehension of the actual nature and scale of the popular discontent on the part of those in power and their gradual discernment of a set of repetitive practices on the rebels’ side.

afford a discourse that is not fully and compulsively involved with the rebel and his activities” (Guha 1999, 15), thereby yielding precious clues about the rebelling opposite. Constitutive of such prose, among other elements, are the belated comprehension of the actual nature and scale of the popular discontent on the part of those in power and their gradual discernment of a set of repetitive practices on the rebels’ side. The “prose of counter-insurgency” meticulously tracks these patterns and makes them readily available for the historian in the absence of documents left by the rebels themselves.

Having drawn a generalized picture of the peasant gatherings in Guria that proliferated after Napitsvara, a report to the Ministry of Internal Affairs from September 1902 stated that “the decisions of these gatherings were formulated similarly, were accompanied by a vow to each other (*klyatvoi drug drugu*) and an oath on icons (*prisyagoi pod obrazami*)” (“Krestyanskoe dvizhenie” 1940, 97). Later, in 1909, an official survey of the spread of the revolutionary movement in Transcaucasia distinguished a particular organizational pattern by highlighting ‘similarities’ or even the “exact repetition” by non-Gurian rural communities of protest measures first implemented by Gurian peasants (boycott against landlords, oaths, refusal to pay the clerical tax, arson, etc.). Thus, examining the activities of a “secret delinquent society” in Guria in 1902, the survey emphasized that “the orators requested that the peasants pledge an oath that they would fulfil what the propagandists told them. In fact, the peasants used to pledge the oath on an icon held by the propagandist” (“Saqarthvelos revolutsionuri modzraoba” 1925, 117).

Adding this official evidence to our earlier discussion of the customary legal-religious practices that most likely shaped the peasant initiative, it seems unlikely that the “*first* oath”, as Uratadze calls the Napitsvara assembly, would, of all things, have lacked an oath on icons. In this regard, reading the prose of counter-insurgency against the grain turns out to be a rather straightforward endeavor due to the unambiguousness of its language, whereas a narrative like Uratadze’s proves to be far more difficult to decipher. Not only does the latter operate through factual omissions and semantic appropriations but it is also shot through with a modernist teleology of a Marxist engaged in the political and autobiographical effort to bring together the peasantry and a (proto)revolutionary cause. As the Tsarist reports reveal precisely what Uratadze silences, the critical historian discovers that the prose of counter-insurgency can be a better ally in deciphering how the peasants organized than what we could call “the prose of the intelligentsia.” Intended to be a partisan of the peasant cause, the distance of the prose of the intelligentsia from

the prose of counter-insurgency might, in reality, be only “a declaration of sentiment” (Guha 1988, 84). If, in fact, Uratadze forcefully removed icons from the narrative, his text can be considered fairly representative of the “mixture of myopia and downright refusal to look at the evidence” (Guha 1988, 82) that Guha identifies in leftist historiographies whenever it comes to the non-secular character of popular protest.

Uratadze’s narrative could not have possibly accommodated an icon, for his is an enactment of the Feuerbachian restoration of self-conscious collective human agency (“in the name of the People”) from its false self-projection unto superhuman beings (“in the name of God”) and their material carriers like icons. Even if we suppose that the oath on Napitsvara had “secularized” content, the admission of an icon would have reintroduced the interaction between humans, divine actors and deified objects that Uratadze is so keen to exclude in his “work of purification” (Latour 1993), which seeks to disentangle the human from the non-human to unequivocally establish one’s modernity. One could say that from the double gesture of a “vow to each other and an oath on icons,” noted in the report of September 1902, Uratadze is keen to keep the secular, *horizontal* “vow to each other” while discarding the *vertical*, God-oriented “oath on icons.”¹⁷ The “vow to each other” in this case embodies what I call an *oath of immanence*, following Taylor’s understanding of the secular horizon as the “immanent frame” (Taylor 2007). The “immanent frame” envisions a self-sufficiently human, social realm of action and fulfilment without any reference to divine transcendence or accepts religion only as a product, again, of the same immanent humanity. In an oath of immanence, people can swear *to* each other *before* each other “in the name of the People,” whereas the “oath on icons” consists of what I call an *oath of transcendence*, in which people swear to each other *before God* through the mediation of an icon as the career of divine grace, arguably inaugurating a completely different political trajectory.

What Uratadze’s text accomplishes, then, is not only a rhetorical transformation of the event of oath-taking into a metaphor for the alliance between peasantry and Social-Democracy but, also, a metaphORIZATION of the very substance of the oath. The text depicts, with poetic emphasis, the traditional gestures of anathema, with which the peasants unanimously repeated the last words of the curse and the final “Amen.”

17 Many similar references to horizontal oaths can be found in militant texts like the 1904 brochure on the Gurian protests issued by the Caucasian Committee of the RSDLP (Kavshiris Komiteti 1904) or in the standard late Soviet textbook for Georgian history (Kikvidze 1972, 177).

However, by focusing on these “religious” attributes and seasoning the entire narrative with quasi-religious references to nature, his own “divine” inspiration or the “Day of Judgment” for the exploiters, Uratadze creates the impression that the gist of the entire event lies elsewhere. Namely, it is supposed to lie in his authorship of the new, “secular” content of the oath that is simply adorned with the “old language” of religion, the choreography of the “people” performing certain religious gestures and a quasi-pantheistic complicity of Nature with man’s goals.

Given the heavy theatricalization of the scene, which the metaphoric or analogic appropriation of religion makes possible in the first place, it is all the less surprising that, in the darkness of the night and under acoustic conditions that could hardly have been advantageous for communicating with 700–800 people, the entire happening becomes an outright travesty, as Uratadze claims to have been misidentified as a priest because of his oversized *chokha*. The “mirage” of a priest, however, would not have arisen without reason. Uratadze, the school teacher and atheist *intelligent*, might have inadvertently fulfilled the task of a priest in the popular perception and memory of peasant mobilization. As also attested to by various first-hand reminiscences, literary accounts or police and media reports about similar oaths of unity, whether in the countryside or among urban workers, a priest would have effectively been expected to side with the exploited, provide the sacred text, read it out to the mostly illiterate or only insufficiently literate people,¹⁸ supervise the proper repetition of the formula and engage in the obligatory bodily interaction with the icon. By transforming the figure of a priest into a carnivalesque outfit, however, Uratadze would like to keep the agency of his autobiographic ‘I’ focused as the clandestine guarantee of the proper course of action.

Yet, this unambiguous agency becomes increasingly destabilized by the gradual appearance of an ever-greater number of individual or collective characters: Uratadze’s to-be Marxist colleagues, Tsarist administrators and the miracle-working Orthodox icon named “Lomiskareli.”

18 The level of literacy of the Gurian peasantry by the very end of the nineteenth century is supposed to have been considerably higher than that of the lower classes in the rest of Georgia as well as in the entire Russian Empire (Jones 1989, 413–4; 2005, 139–40), although it cannot be determined definitively and the information is sometimes exaggerated. In the Nigoiti community, two schools were operating: one single-class school founded in 1872, which in 1899 taught 62 pupils, and one two-class school founded in 1894, which in 1899 taught 128 pupils, providing an education that with all probability was not more than rudimentary. For the data see *Otchet popechitelya*, Appendix 2, 50–4.

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The second part of this study will explicate the implications behind Uratadze's removal of icons from the main event on Napitsvara as well as the vigorous comeback of the icon in the aftermath, when "the rumor went around that some priest had sworn the Nigoiti community into an oath against the landlords" (Uratadze 1933, 2). In looking at this aftermath, the various actors, notions and experiences (described above as decisive in making the oath the historically determinate form of the Gurians' incipient protest) will be recast in an explosive conjuncture, where incompatible forms of political legitimacy and community clash with each other over what is to be done with oaths and how.

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Tytuł: Chłopskie przysięgi, wściekłe ikony i zagadka sprawczości. Na tropach polityki podporządkowanych w carskiej Gruzji w przededniu Rewolucji 1905 roku

Abstrakt: Ten dwuczęściowy, interdyscyplinarny artykuł przygląda się autobiograficznej relacji gruzińskiego socjaldemokraty Grigola Uratadze, opisującej przysięgę chłopów Gurii w 1902 roku. Przysięga ta rozpoczęła rebelię w carskiej Gruzji, kulminującą w 1905 w samorządnej chłopskiej „republice Gurii”. Studium to ma na celu historyczno-antropologiczne badanie asymetrii w aliansie zawiązanym przez chłopów i rewolucyjną inteligencję oraz napięcie jakie wywołała owa przysięga między chłopami a przedstawicielami carskiej władzy. Próbując odsłonić ślady chłopskiej polityki w relacji do różnych hegemonicznych sił na modernizującym się imperialnym pograniczu, artykuł zachęca czytelnika do ponownego rozważenia założeń na temat historycznej sprawczości, językowych uwarunkowań podmiotowości i relacji

między polityką a materialnym i zwyczajowym wymiarem religijności. Ostatecznym celem jest wypracowanie lektury praktyk typowych dla chłopskiej polityki w Republice Gurii z perspektywy podporządkowanych.

Pierwsza część artykułu rozpoczyna się analizą pod wólos narracji pozostawionej przez Uratadze na temat przysięgi z 1902 roku.

Druga część artykułu poświęcona jest relacji Uratadze na temat następstw przysięgi oraz konfliktów i rozbieżnych interpretacji, jakie wywołała pomiędzy chłopami, inteligencją i carską administracją.

Słowa kluczowe: akt mowy, chłopstwo, Imperium Rosyjskie, inteligencja, prawosławne ikony, przysięga, sprawczość podporządkowanych, studia sekularne, teologia polityczna