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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 II: Agents and Items of (Counter)Insurgent Political Theology on the Imperial Borderland

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 second part of the article delves into Uratadze's account of the aftermath of the inaugural oath and the conflicts it triggered between peasants, intelligentsia and the Tsarist administration.

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

II.1. The Oath as Speech and Act (and Beyond)

The oath on Napitsvara constituted a certain new beginning. But was the *oath* itself the beginning or only a beginning of *something else*? What kind of resistance did it swear? Was it (already) a rebellion, if at all? For Uratadze, a discrepancy already makes itself known when, to his "surprise," the peasants insist on sealing, with a solemn oath, what to him is rather a set of strictly "economic" demands. And yet, the oath contained an ambivalence that turned it into an *insurgent speech*, leading the Tsarist police, in their search for the "instigator," to split the oath into speech and act to preemptively criminalize it as *act*.[1] In the face of the haunting elusiveness of what the oath had "done," what it had spoken and, most of all, "whodunnit," a reflection on oaths as speech-acts would be apposite before we turn to what happened in the aftermath of that "dark spring night" on Napitsvara. Given the historical specificity of the oaths we encountered in the first part of this article, we have to ask: What could speech-act theory offer us, if anything at all?

What do oaths do? Alex Garganigo (2018, 8) has succinctly asked this, hinting at J.L. Austin's foundational work on speech-act theory, *How to Do Things with Words* (Austin 1962), all the while admitting that "[a]part from their scant treatment by Austin and Searle, oaths hardly figure at all in classic speech-act theory" (Garganigo 2018, 10). Even when they do, oaths seem to be considered merely as a variant of promise, a favorite example for theorizing speech acts (as in Searle 2001). When treated in its religious form, the oath is again subsumed under the category of promissory speech acts (see Rebillard 2013). Both the lack of special consideration of the oath as a linguistic phenomenon and its subsumption under assertory/promissory performatives (Austin 1962) could be seen as resting on a secular framework in which a powerful subject uses language as an external "translation" of internal "intentions," turning language into an instrument to "do things with words." Rarely does one ask about "what language does *with* and *to* us" (Asad 2018, 50) or, as in the case of an oath involving holy icons, what certain *things* might *do* with *words* to *us* as linguistic beings.

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1 On the criminalization of certain forms of speech as acts, see Butler 1997.

lities. It has been argued that this loss is due to the loss of the capacity to invoke God as the guarantee for one's word, entailing a crisis of the essence of the political community itself (supposed to have depended largely on oaths in the pre-modern West) as well as of the human as a linguistic being (Prodi 1992, Agamben 2011). To be sure, there have been efforts to philosophically rehabilitate the oath, which, however, tend to fall prey to their own generality, as in the case of Jacques Derrida's identification of oath with the principle of language or, rather, the very basic ethical horizon of language as primordial trust towards one another, as "oath before the letter" (Derrida 1999, 34). The idea of primordial linguistic trust and its fragility transforms the oath into the *différance* of "archi-writing" within language itself, which ends up locating the oath in a purely intra-textual realm "separable from any consideration of the social," as Judith Butler (1997, 148) recognized in Derrida's notion of iterability.[2]

We, therefore, have to shift our attention to the properly political side of the oath as entangled and lived in particular practices and historical conjunctures. Arguably, what makes up the "historical grammar" (Asad 2003, 189), within which the oath of 1902 acquired its unique, unexpected and lived shape and meaning, must be distilled from what went on with the rumor of the oath that spread after Napitsvara, namely, the alleged "comedy of errors" between peasants, Social-Democrats, Tsarist authorities, the mirage of a priest and a miracle-working Orthodox icon. Similar to the critical reading of Urutadze's narration of the event of Napitsvara in the first part, our current task is to recast, into a range of symptoms, what followed Napitsvara, along with indeterminacy and productive misunderstanding between

2 In the face of such want of specificity, Giorgio Agamben's "archeology of the oath" promises to provide a historically grounded philosophical approach. However, as he tries to think of the 'original' truth of the oath as the ethical aspiration of human language to adequate itself to the divine coincidence or unity of words, things and actions, the essential undecidability about whether the oath is trustworthy because it enacts divine perfection or whether God is God because of the possibility of the oath within human language itself (Agamben 2011, 21–2) makes the oath a perfectly auto-referential speech act (54–6). In the end, Agamben's discussion either moves on too broad a philosophical plane or is concerned only with the political practices of the Greco-Roman world. But even then, his exaggerated emphasis on the oath as the ideal of the divine coincidence between words, actions and things leaves out the Schmittian character of the political oath as something which not only unites, but also excludes (Garganigo 2018, 11–3), as was clearly the case in Guria.

peasantry, intelligentsia and the government regarding the oath's limits and meanings.

II.2. Rumored Oaths and Specters of Authorship

As the rumor triggers copy-cat oaths across communities in all of Guria, the police start to frantically search for the "instigator" but fail because the villagers diligently deny that anything like an oath/conspiracy happened. Uratadze becomes increasingly concerned that an over-reaction on the part of the administration might prematurely stifle the movement (Uratadze 1968, 37–40) and decides to seek help from the Georgian Social-Democrats in Batumi. He finds them, however, extremely reluctant not only because of "their Marxist dogma" (42), which denied the peasantry any revolutionary potential, but principally due to the rumor about the priest and the oath. The first important Social-Democrat whom he meets, Isidore Ramishvili (1859–1937),[3] eagerly asks if "it is true that someone *forced* the people to pledge an oath and, if true, *who was it*?" (40, my emphasis). In various meetings in Batumi and then Kutaisi, and ultimately in his decisive conversation with Noe Zhordanya and Silibstro Jibladze, which would bring the peasants under Social-Democratic guidance, Uratadze discovers that the Marxists were obsessed with one question: *Who was it?* Given the rumored involvement of "an icon, a cross and maybe indeed also of a priest" (41), some clandestine subject must have been manipulating the "unwitting" peasants.

As a matter of fact, Uratadze consistently left the Social-Democrats in suspense as to the identity of the priest, inflating, through this travesty, his self-ascribed role of an outstanding individual who kept "pulling the strings." Accordingly, in Uratadze's account, the Social-Democrats' skepsis recedes as soon as they finally learn "whodunnit," as Uratadze unmasks himself in front of Zhordanya and Jibladze in an over-emphasized dramaturgical twist:

> I declared: "*It was I* who administered the oath." Jibladze suddenly became enthusiastic, approached me, put his hand on my shoulder and said with a bright smile: "*So it was you* who made the people pledge an oath of fidelity to the

3 Ramishvili, in his own elaborate memoirs (2012), does not mention Uratadze, nor does he refer to the Napitsvara legend, although he repeatedly addresses the Gurian peasants' practice of taking oaths on icons and their "superstitious" fear of miracle-working icons, to which we will come back in the course of our analysis.

revolution?" and upon these words turned to Zhordanya: "Stand up immediately, we have to talk about this" (Uratadze 1968, 45, my emphasis).

Curiously, in the typescript of the Russian-language memoir, which Uratadze deposited to the archive of the Project on the History of the Menshevik Movement shortly before his death in 1959, the above-cited passage reveals an all too significant "slip of the tongue." While in the published version of 1968 Uratadze's self-revelation vis-à-vis Zhordanya and Jibladze–"It was I who administered the oath" (*Eto ya privodil k prisyage*)–resorts to the correct transitive form of the Russian verb "swear" (making someone swear), the Russian typescript renders it in the intransitive form "*Eto ya prisyagal*" (Uratadze [1959], 40), which literally means: "It was I who swore the oath." Language fails him in the very passage where the agent-subject Uratadze and the specter-object of a priest are supposed to fully coincide as Uratadze triumphantly discloses himself as the disguised manipulator of others ("It was I who administered [*them* into] the oath"). (Made) aware of this linguistic mishap, Uratadze notes, in the margin of the typescript, the proper transitive form. Remarkably, the *intelligent* Uratadze, a Georgian native-speaker, but obviously fluent in the language of empire,[4] misuses the Russian intransitive form of "swearing" while meaning it in the transitive in every single occurrence (around fifteen in total), making it, within the 240 typed pages of the entire typescript, the only major linguistic error to systematically recur and receive correction in the margins. The regularity of the misuse of the Russian intransitive makes one think that it is a mistranslation from Georgian, which, being an agglutinative language with a polypersonal verb morphology, allows both transitive and intransitive actions involving as many as three participants to be expressed in a single word (Boeder 2002). Thus, the complex action "I administered them into an oath" translates as *davapitse*, whereas the simple "I swore" is rendered by modifying a single affix–*davipitse*. In Uratadze's typescript, this leaves us with bizarre formu-

4 Uratadze was the plenipotentiary who went to Moscow in 1920 to sign the treaty that recognized de jure the independence of the Georgian Democratic Republic. In the 1950s Uratadze produced another lengthy monograph in Russian besides his autobiography, claiming, not without some false modesty, that the reason for writing in Russian was that there were many Russophones in the political emigration who had to be properly informed about Georgian history and because "I have sufficient knowledge (*sakmarisad vitsi*) of the Russian language" (Uratadze 1958, 3).

lations like "who swore them?" (Uratadze [1959], 41–2), "who exactly swore the people?" (46) and "So it was you who swore the people to the revolution?" (40), the syntax of which suspends in a state of indeterminacy the directional relation between subject and object, its inherent Georgianization of Russian blurring the very imputability of agency. Importantly, this textological curiosity once again raises the question of how we are to ultimately deal with the fundamental indeterminacy inherent to the Napitsvara event as well as to its rumors.

Through his journey from one group of Social-Democrats to another, Uratadze's discursive effort aimed to bring full circle everything that the rumor had let loose. Uratadze's handling of the priestly "mirage" is a virtuoso endeavor to permit the oath and the untraceability of its author to spread, all the while giving him control of the desired effects of the rumor's contagious anonymity so that he could intervene at the right moment and reveal the truth.

Rumor has indeed been widely identified as the single most powerful carrier of the uncontrollable spread of insurgency across all pre-industrial societies (seminally, Guha 1999, 251–77). However, because Uratadze has to mitigate the scandal of the copycatting of an oath that peasants are rumored to have sworn with the help of a priest, he offers assurances that it was "the text, with which I swore the people [that] was later passed on to other districts to administer the oath" (Uratadze 1933, 2). This assures the reader that the circulated message had a well-defined meaning textually fixated by a reliable author who knew what he was writing, namely, a secularized "oath of immanence" (see I.4). However, this clear "authorization" of the circulated text manages to remedy neither the profound ambivalence of the content of the text, despite Uratadze's insistence that it was reliably secular, nor the blurriness of the entire scenography of Napitsvara (see I.2). Even before the rumor starts spreading the next day, Uratadze's insecure handling of the nocturnal event itself–the dim candlelight, words mumbled under conditions of deficient acoustic control, gestures being made by 700–800 people in the darkness–has already admitted rumor, hearsay and mirages into the very description of the scene.

The traces left by Uratadze's effort at textual fixation, then, seem to participate in the diffusional quality of rumor as an oral phenomenon in which Gayatri Spivak recognizes the workings of an uncontrollably proliferating trace without clear origins or authorship. Spivak advances this vision of rumor against Ranajit Guha's under-

standing of rumor as "spoken utterance *par excellence*" (Guha 1999, 256), which, for her, rests on "a phonocentric concept where authority is supposed to spring directly from the voice-consciousness of the self-present speaker" (Spivak 1988, 24). While Guha is convinced that it is impossible to do justice to the agency of the insurgent peasant "merely as a history of events without a subject" (Guha 1999, 11), making it imperative to ascribe unequivocal authorship even to rumor, Spivak redefines rumor as "primordially (originarily) errant, always in circulation with no assignable source" (23) to foreground its "revolutionary non-possessive possibilities" (24). It is this "non-possessive" quality of rumor that would make the rumored oath essentially complicit with the indeterminacy and suspension of the directionality of the grammatical subject and object in articulating who swore who(m). The intra-textual indeterminacy of the syntax that gets stuck between Georgian and Russian in Uratadze's later narrative, in turn, opens unto the de-subjectivized, de-centered constellation between peasantry, Marxist intelligentsia, Tsarist government and their practices, giving the oath of 1902 its determinate shape and meaning.

Ultimately, following Rosalind O'Hanlon's critique (2000) of Guha and other historians of subaltern studies, such entanglement, obliges us to (re)write the history of Napitsvara and its aftermath in a way that enables restoring the subaltern to their place in this history without ascribing to them the formerly denied liberal humanist notions of self-possessive subjectivity and consciousness. Assessing the "revolutionary non-possessive possibilities" of rumor and the specter of the priest amounts to dealing with a fundamental conjunctural entanglement of subaltern and elite politics (the latter comprising both the local intelligentsia and the colonial administration). This urges us to read traces of subaltern politics not as some self-enclosed domain, but as inextricably relational to the elite reactions, preventive or proactive, and, as always, already embedded in a structure of domination, while remaining an intractable element within it. This approach, therefore, also moves away from whatever humanist implications Gramsci's reference to the subalterns' "independent initiative" (Gramsci 1971, 55) might bear.[5]

5 For a recent productive engagement, in the context of modern Russian imperial history, with this approach to subalternity on the basis of later elaborations on the South Asian historians' initial humanist usage of the concept, see Gerasimov (2018, 1–17) and his discussion of Gyan Prakash's conceptualization of subalternity (see Prakash 2000).

In the face of this relational complex, we must now enquire into what was actually at stake in the authorities' concern about individuating the author of the oath and what makes, in the end, Orthodox icons–with their irreducible objectality and the divergent rationalities they develop in different political frameworks–the focal point of the power dynamics constitutive of the "historical grammar" of oaths in turn-of-the-century Guria.

II.3. Icons, Bibles, Crosses and the Oath of Allegiance

Uratadze's narrative insists that the entire "witch-hunt" in the aftermath of Napitsvara gravitated around the authorities' effort to extract from the peasants and himself the one essential piece of information ("Who administered the oath?") so that they could arrest this or another suspect only to eventually let them go (Uratadze 1968, 44). However, this self-aggrandizing emphasis on both the government and the intelligentsia concentrating on finding the one clandestine subject-agent receives ample confirmation from the Tsarist "prose of counter-insurgency." Besides the reports from 1902, as late as 1909 the authorities tried to convince themselves, in a typical elite disavowal of the legitimacy of popular demands, that peasant activism throughout Transcaucasia was "artificially" instigated by "propagandists" from the "outside" ("Saqarthvelos revolutsionuri modzraoba" 1925, 117–41). It is this criminalization that requires individuating the unequivocal source of the insurgent speech, to "pull individuals out of the collective for the purpose of interrogation" (Chakrabarty 2011, 213). Notable in this regard is the first encounter, in mid-July 1902, of the Governor-general of Kutaisi *gubernya* Smagin with the people of Nigoiti, who had gathered at his bequest after the rumors had grown sufficiently alarming. As Uratadze writes, Smagin shouted at the people that they were, in fact, against the Emperor and demanded the "list of rebels" as well as the name of the person who had made them swear. In response, the peasants assured him that they had never been against the Tsar and that they were simply conducting negotiations with their landlords (Uratadze 1968, 47). This refusal to identify a single personality demonstrates what Partha Chatterjee observed about various rebellious peasantries of colonial India, namely, that their ethos of collectivity "does not flow from a contract among individuals; rather, individual identities themselves are derived from membership in a community" (Chatterjee 1993, 163),

preventing the individuating eye of the state from "treat[ing] the collective agent as a collection of so many individuals" (Chakrabarty 2011, 214).

Importantly, besides the Gurian peasants' protest/oath/conspiracy against the local triumvirate of clergy, nobility and village administration, which induces Smagin to point out to the Gurian peasants the *illegality* of their demands and their boycott ("Krestyanskoe dvizhenie" 1940, 93), the reports' emphasis on the regular presence of Orthodox icons in the nocturnal gatherings, as well as Smagin's claim that the peasants engaged in anti-Tsarist activities, opens up an implicit polemics between peasants and high-ranking Russian officials around the political-theological *legitimacy* of imperial rule. Arguably, this double concern is concentrated in the oath insofar as the crime to which Smagin appealed was the peasants' boycott and refusal to pay taxes, which they had sealed with the oath, as well as that the oath itself constituted such a crime, an illegal act touching the very legitimacy of the existing order. This is also why the police effort to individuate the singular instigator(s) of the unrest concentrated on the swearer who was supposed to have administered the strike/boycott by making peasants "pledge the oath on an icon held by the propagandist" (see I.4).

Certainly, the oath was neither an 'everyday form of resistance' of the weak avoiding symbolic confrontation with the powerful nor a rebellion, i.e. an open challenge to the rulers (Scott 1985). At least, it was not intended to be any kind of rebellion against the state and the Tsar, neither by the peasants nor by Uratadze, who was keen on curbing the premature expansion of the demands from "merely" economic to political ones. And yet, the presence of a priest can be said to have made the government immediately read–correctly misread, one could say–the oath as an eminently symbolic, political challenge to itself. Besides the peasants' refusal to pay the burdensome clergy tax, the rumors and reports of the oaths evoked many real and imagined material signs–icons, formulae of oaths, ritual gestures, invocations of God–of which the Orthodox priest was the custodian and executor, contributing to the reproduction of the Empire's political-theological legitimacy by means of sanctioned usages of this inventory. Here again, the prose of counter-insurgency proves to be much more attentive to details, religious materiality and its logic than either the Social-Democrats in Batumi who seemed to have confused "icons, crosses and maybe also a priest" or the historian who tends to treat

icons, crosses and priests as randomly interchangeable objects belonging to an indiscriminate hotpot of Christianity or some other (alienated) "religious consciousness' (see I.1).

We might better understand why, in 1902, Smagin preemptively accused the peasants of Nigoiti of rebelling against the Tsar if we look at the prose of counter-insurgency from the later period, when revolution, particularly in Western Georgia, was in full swing. In February 1905, Lieutenant General Malama sends a telegram to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, in which he reiterates that "the population *is freeing itself* from the oath of allegiance and is pledging to the revolutionary committee" ("Krestyanskoe dvizhenie" 1940, 111, my emphasis). Significantly, his appeal to the inhabitants of Western Georgia contains a more euphemistic formulation: "Having trusted the criminal propaganda, you declared yourselves enemies of state order and public peace and even *dared to speak of freeing yourself* from the oath pledged to the state in order to serve the underground organization ("Zhyteli Gurii" 1925, 98, my emphasis). In talking to the rebels, Malama *must* substitute the reference he made in his report to actual apostasy ("*is freeing itself*") with a double circumscription ("*dared to speak* of freeing yourself"), as confirming to the "enemies of state order" that they have succeeded in freeing themselves of their oath of allegiance to that very same order would amount to the admission of its collapse.

Malama's reference lays bare one of the main political-theological pillars of order in Tsarist Russia since Peter the Great, namely, the oath of allegiance to the Tsar and to his heir, which, as already mentioned, was also a crucial part of Russia's effort throughout the nineteenth century to stabilize its rule in the Caucasus (see I.3). According to Inna Barykina (2015, 265), as an instrument for ensuring the continuum of power, the oath was of considerable importance to late Tsarism as a regime not interested in cardinally transforming the existing system. Before the Great Reforms, the oath had been obligatory for all adult men except serfs (Gerasimov et al., 2017, 200; Barykina 2015, 261). However, even after Emancipation made peasants into "equal citizens," the rule was not modified until the 1884 Manifesto of Alexander III, leaving the great rural majority of the population as the only ones not having pledged allegiance to the "liberator" upon their emancipation (Barykina 2015, 264). We might then conclude that the Gurian men who by the turn of the century were participating in the revolutionary movement would have pledged allegiance to Nicholas II upon his intronization in 1896, indu-

cing Malama to acknowledge their deed as proper perjury.[6]

Against the oath of immanence which only recognized secular human beings swearing *before* each other *to* each other, both the peasant oath and the oath of allegiance to the Tsar constitute what I call the "oath of transcendence" insofar as they both rely on a commitment before God (see I.4). However, there remains a fundamental difference between their theological and political implications, which ultimately pertain to who holds the prerogative of punishing the breaking of an oath of transcendence.

Given that, as a rule, a "full" oath involves invoking a supra-human punishing force in case of perjury (see I.3), it seems highly consequential that, besides the invocation of the Last Judgment, the Tsarist oath of allegiance did not contain an explicit reference to perjury or self-curse as the condition for punishment. The reason for this might be that state power, and an absolutist one at that, could not have relegated the punishment of state treason to superhuman justice. On the other hand, any explicit reference to perjury and its punishment on the part of the state would have amounted to integrating into the foundation of the Tsarist order the possible collapse of the stability that the oath guaranteed. At the same time, one cannot doubt the sincerity of the peasants' conviction that in pledging an oath to a cause against landlords they–at least initially–did not mean to de-legitimize state authority; for some time, they even seem to have thought that the Emperor himself had sent the "students" (the "propagandists" in the officials' language) to incite them to rebel against nasty landlords and clerics (Kavshiris Komiteti 1904, 24). However, crucially for the authorities, the Gurian oath rested on a self-curse which, via its vertical connection to a divine force mediated by a holy icon, left the earthly Leviathan offside in case of the need to punish perjury.

Since Peter the Great, the Russian imperial model combined the Byzantine sacralization of the monarch and the Synodal organization of the Orthodox Church with the Protestant primacy of the secular

6 Herein lies the fundamental difference to the Tsarist government's reaction to the rebels' oaths of unity in the Gurian uprising of 1841 (see I.3). In 1841, the authorities defined these oaths as "contrary to God" (*bogoprotivny*), i.e. injurious to the order established by God, but not as perjury in the proper legal sense, for pre-Emancipation peasants had been excluded from the "all-national oath" (*vse-narodnaya prisyaga*) to the Tsar (Akty, 174–7). In 1841, the government simply acknowledges the need to symbolically integrate an evasive peripheral population and resorts to the oath of allegiance as an exceptional measure.

sovereign and his domination of the church (Uspenskij and Zhivov 2012, 38). As "limbs" of a state attempting to enclose divine transcendence in its all-engulfing immanence, high-ranking Tsarist officials like the generals Smagin and Malama were right to flare early on that the Gurian peasants were constituting themselves as a self-sufficient God-sanctioned community by pledging an oath that, with its political-theological thrust, competed with the oath of imperial order. By pledging a "full" oath, the peasants created a theo-anarchist community independent of legitimation and enforcement by state institutions and their "legal violence."[7] It comes as no surprise, then, that when, at the onset of the government's bloody reaction in the "Gurian Republic," the punitive expedition "arrived in a village, they would call on a meeting and *at first* force [the peasants] to pledge an oath of allegiance to the Emperor, and *then* advance the demands" (Uratadze 1968, 122, my emphasis), such as the disarming of the population, the restoration of state institutions, the payment of all state taxes left unpaid during the peasant self-government and the handing over of the leaders of the rebellion.

Yet here we should ask what exactly the political-theological mindset was that enabled an act like forcing the Gurian peasants to re-pledge their allegiance in the first place. Arguably, such a possibility rests on a specific understanding of religious "faith" that becomes the precondition of the political trustworthiness of imperial subjects only insofar as trust and loyalty constitute the very meaning of "faith." This ethical semantic horizon is clearly at work in a report of the punitive expedition sent to Guria in February 1906:

> The majority of the villages pledged their oath of fidelity to the Sovereign and promised to the head of the expedition unit that they will fulfil all of his demands. But the promises of the Gurians do not mean anything, for among them there are very few faithful (*veruyushchikh*). The Gurian people are unfaithful. The Gurians give promises, but fulfil them only under the pressure of force (cited in Uratadze 1968, 122).

Dorothea Weltecke has convincingly argued that in the pre-modern Latin period, *fides* and *infidelitas* signified not so much "belief," "convictions held" or the lack thereof but, rather, trust, loyalty and, respectively, disloyalty or the breaking of an oath (Weltecke 2008, 108–10; see also

7 In this framework, the execution of punishment remains in the hands of human beings, but here human agency becomes merely the articulation of a collective will sanctioned by some transcendent, divine power.

Agamben 2011, 32–8). Following her call to broaden the research of this semantic question beyond the limits of Latin Christianity (Weltecke 2008, 114), we can attest to the fact that in both Russian and Georgian, the original meanings of "faith" and "faithfulness" (*vera, verny, rtsmena, sartsmuno*) were indeed "trustworthiness" and "loyalty" (Nadareishvili 2005, 26; Imnaishvili 1986, 513). Far from being an epistemological category (Asad 2011, 46) and a cognitive condition relegated to the "interior" psychological realm of a "buffered" self (Taylor 2007), "faith" embodied the ethical practice of loyalty that would bind a certain community through God. In this, Gurian peasants and Tsarist administrators shared an ethical understanding of faith as what made oaths of transcendence ensure communal unity. Divergent, however, were not only their political aims, but also the material practices involved in such oaths.

Across the Orthodox Christian populations of the Empire, peasants tended to confer to the icon an excessive agency that, during the late Tsarist period, both the state and the Russian Orthodox Church (to which the Georgian Orthodox Church had lost its autocephaly in the first half of the nineteenth century) strove to contain in their parallel effort to institutionalize and control peasant religious practices while keeping up divine order against the onslaught of atheistic scientificity and revolutionary doctrines (Shevzov 1999; Frank 1999; Chulos 2012). Thus, out of all obligatory oaths, the imperial law prescribed that subjects of Christian faith should pledge them by kissing the cross and the Gospel (Svod zakonov 1857, 56). This said, Stefan Kirmse suggests that "the influence of religion on state policy in the late nineteenth century must not be overstated. The use of religious symbols continued to be largely instrumental: more than anything else, it expressed the elites' desire to visualize and reinforce the state's authority and unity" (Kirmse 2019, 44–5). Yet, Kirmse explicitly refers to the pre-revolutionary, "normal" period, in which a largely symbolic function of officially sanctioned religious items in officially sanctioned circumstances seems to have been complemented by the gradual implementation of more privatized notions of religiosity, such as "freedom of conscience" as part of the post-Reform project of promoting "civic-mindedness" (*grazhdanstvennost'*). The disturbing effect that the oath of the Gurians had on the government clearly suggests a more than "instrumental" concern. Arguably, the local administration itself "discovered" this concern only when it encountered the icon–a familiar religious object and one of the pillars of Orthodox Christianity–being appropriated by the peasants in a counter-hegemonic way. This was, moreover, occur-

ring in a region of the Empire's special interest due to Georgia's perceived centuries-long history of uninterrupted Orthodox Christianity, which provided the perfect civilizational pretext for Russia's geopolitical aspirations in the Caucasus (Church 2001; Jersild 2002).

In fact, what the government deemed an emergency in the face of the oaths proliferating from 1902 on was, as William Sadleir shows (2020), frustratingly experienced daily by "enlightened" judicial employees in the dysfunctional post-Reform courtrooms of Transcaucasia. One such agent of the modernizing empire was the Russian jurist of Lutheran faith, August von Raison, who, between 1893 and 1898, had acted as President of the Court of the Kutaisi *okrug* in today's Western Georgia. His text explicitly links the concern over the seeming ubiquity of false testimonies (*lzhesviditel'stvo*) to the local Christians' disloyalty, in the judicial setting, to the religious symbols of Empire due to their customary attitudes towards icons and oaths. Referring to his own legal practice among Orthodox people, von Raison claims that, besides other reasons, they tend towards perjury

> because the form of the oath itself established by the Court Regulations [of 1864, L.N.] for Christians, does not correspond to the religious beliefs of the local population: namely, in the past they used to swear in front of (*pred*) icons that were specially venerated by the people, in which case the testimonials could have been given full credence, whereas witnesses do not bestow much importance onto oaths in front of the Cross and the Gospel and do not consider this oath obligatory. (von Raison 1899, 221–2)

Von Raison admits that the cross and the Gospel are inefficient because they are Russian "imports." The perceived power of oaths on "specially venerated" icons[8] even led certain district courts to use the customary oaths as means not simply of ascertaining the truthfulness of testimonies but also of resolving relatively large numbers of civic litigations (225–6), attesting to the "legal pluralism" of the post-Reform judicial system in Georgia (Sadleir 2020).

Essentially, what made the cross and the Bible sanctioned items for oath-taking was that they were conventional signs. This made them substitutable and multipliable, allowing for their implementation in the everyday religious reproduction of imperial legitimacy. Their conventionality implied that, as substitutable symbolic objects, they

8 On "specially venerated icons" in late Tsarist Russia, see Shevzov 1999.

were detached from the sacralized autocrat as the guarantor and personification of the God-sanctioned order. In contrast, the essentially non-conventional character of Orthodox icons, already pushed to its limit in folk usage in the judicial practices that von Raison observed in 1899, was inherently prone to a politicized excess like the oath(s) of protest in 1902.[9] Here, not only was the icon used to delegate the mentioned guarantee immediately to God and his saints but, more importantly, the (imputed) anti-imperial usage of this most eminently Orthodox item scandalously overlapped with another pillar of Tsarist political theology–the notion that the Tsar himself was a "living icon." As this notion too dangerously vacillated between canonical and heterodox, official and vernacular understandings, with peasants seen lighting candles and crossing themselves if they were to behold the Tsar (Uspenskij and Zhivov 2012, 47), it seems all the less surprising that Tsarist officials facing peasant unrest in Guria did not hesitate to homeopathically revert to the same heterodox usage of icons, which until then had been confined to customary legal litigations.

One particular icon that lent itself to the counter-insurgent appropriation of its customary legal functions was the wondrous icon of St. George called "Lomiskareli" (translatable as "lion's gate"), which was much-feared and particularly respected in Guria. Around 1902-1905, the government instrumentalized Lomiskareli to make the sworn Gurian peasants pledge a counter-oath in order to extort from them "at least for the fear of the oath" (Uratadze 1968, 52) the truth about the whereabouts of hidden revolutionaries. Not accidentally, in narrating this incident, Uratadze's autobiography allows for the icon that had been suspiciously absent from his preceding account to receive, as if in a compensatory move, an excessive presence.

II.4. The Fury of Icons

While accommodating local customary law within the "imperial rights

9 Around the turn of the century, both peasants and workers participated in oaths administered with crosses and Bibles, as suggested by various kinds of evidence. However, if an oath did not involve the usage of icons, it was conditioned by the unavailability of a particularly venerable icon as a shared item of communal veneration. This was the case, for example, when oath-strikes happened far from home, i.e. when peasants went to cities for work. In other words, it is not *any* Orthodox icon that would do for an oath-strike but, rather, only a "specially venerated" one whose force consisted of being bound to a particular rural locality and constituting the cohesion and boundaries of its community. However, by the same token, both the icon and "its" community remained determined by "territoriality" and "localism" (Guha 1999, 278–332).

regime" (Burbank 2006), as shown, among other evidence,[10] by recourses to icons in district courts mentioned by von Raison, the deficient implementation of legal reforms in the Caucasian colony denied the local populations justice in the vernacular language(s), besides the introduction of trial by jury. The language barrier led to the diffusion of perjury within a judicial procedure which the majority of non-Russian-speaking locals neither respected nor trusted or understood (Sadleir 2020). It is in this context that a "specially venerated" icon like "Lomiskareli," a trustworthy item for swearing a trustworthy oath in an understandable language, i.e. in a language capable of speaking the truth, acquires its crucial function. Uratadze relates that whenever there was no written or oral proof between litigants, they would resort to swearing on "Lomiskareli." The one who declined to swear would be found guilty by the rural judges. Importantly, "people claimed that someone had sworn a lie on "Lomiskareli" and won the cause, but in a week that someone walked about and screamed that he had told an untruth and until he hadn't corrected his mistake, he could not calm down and screamed incessantly that he had lied" (Uratadze 1968, 51).

It is precisely such a maddening effect that makes von Raison resort to the civilizational argument that if fear of the despotic fury of icons "is effectively the provenance of their veneration, then this evidently does not flow from the rules of faith, but from superstition, and the latter ought to be exterminated with time" (von Raison 1899, 223). Speaking from the point of view of the modernizing center keen on controlling the proper usage of religious symbols, von Raison emphasized that such oaths were "not required by the rules of the Orthodox church" (224), which, instead, instructed that icons were "to be treated not as powerful in their own right but only as 'channels of grace'" (Kenna 1985, 346). Following von Raison, in the Caucasus, the Empire found itself in a different "time zone," surrounded by populations who lacked a propensity towards "civic-mindedness" for the very basic reason that they were, in Charles Taylor's terms, "porous" selves, lacking the kind of "buffer" (Taylor 2007) that would distance them from an "immediate" impact of an icon invested with special agency.

Curiously, von Raison corroborates his argument about the Christian Caucasians' "time lag" by appealing to the *Journal du voyage* of the seventeenth-century French merchant Jean Chardin, whose lengthy descriptions of various Georgian regions include the report of

10 See, for example, Ramishvili 2012, 121.

a Theatine missionary regarding the "idolatrous" veneration of icons among the Mingrelians.[11] In evaluating the heterodox attitudes of late-nineteenth-century populations of today's Western Georgia towards Orthodox icons, what better ally and witness can a Lutheran enlightener from late Tsarist Russia find than a Catholic merchant relating how a Catholic missionary describes and condemns the fetishism of Mingrelians in seventeenth-century Western Georgia? From Chardin's work, von Raison cites a passage in which the traveler says that the Mingrelians particularly revere icons

> that are reputed to be Cruel, easily Provok'd, and apt to Kill those against whom they are Incens'd (…) They are Horribly afraid to swear by those rever'd Images, and when they do, there is no gainsaying such an Oath. For they believe whatever is sworn by those Images. Some there are that will not call these Images to Witness the most certain Truths, for fear of being Kill'd by 'em (Chardin 1686, 98)

The folk usage of icons and oaths was no less forcefully denounced by the local enlighteners of the peripheries as both a pagan distortion of "true" Christianity and a superstitious projection of special agency onto particular icons. In participating in this hierarchization of folk practices into "customs," "beliefs," "religion" and "idolatry," the Georgian intelligentsia partook in the Russian imperial project of mastering, through the production of knowledge, the wealth and hybridity of regional, ethnic and religious specificities in the Caucasus (Jersild 2002). Guria was one of the hotspots for such taxonomic work. Before Russia took over the region of Adjara on Guria's south-western frontier (so-called "Ottoman Georgia") as a result of its victory in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78, Guria had been a frontline against the Muslim enemy (Church 2001). After it had ceased to be a spatial frontline, local enlighteners started pulling down the temporal frontlines as well. Thus, in depicting the vernacular veneration of icons, school teachers such as Uratadze or, a generation earlier, Isidore Ramishvili, who persistently combatted the "harmful customs and traditions" of the peasants (Ramishvili 2012, 176–7, 220–2), betray a general affinity with Chardin's relation of the Mingrelian "idolatry." It could even be argued that the same type of discourse provided the blueprint for the internal colonial gaze of Gurian enlighteners and von Raison alike. While von Raison

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11 Mingrelians are considered an ethnic sub-group of Georgians originating from a region in contemporary Western Georgia to the north of Guria.

cites Chardin in the French original, the Gurian radical intelligentsia will have been aware of the Russian translation of the Caucasian episode of the travelogue, first in the monthly journal *Kavkazsky Vestnik* in 1900–1901 and then as a book (Chardin 1902).

Ramishvili, in describing a post-Emancipation Gurian folk culture, where the demarcation line between the agency and functions of lay persons, priests and sacred objects was impermissibly unclear to modernist sensibilities, explicitly referred to "Lomiskareli," which was housed in the church of his home village, Surebi. Ramishvili describes it as a big cross fully embroidered in silver, draped in a "shirt of red broadcloth" and popularly designated as a "saint" (*tsmindani*). He adds to Uratadze's reference to the peasants' fear of swearing on "Lomiskareli" that

> not only a liar, but *even the righteous one* hardly dared to swear on it, to touch it with his hand–"Lomis Kareli will make you scream," so they said, and if one were to believe the legend, certain people in fact "swore" on the icon, went mad and used to *interminably repeat this single word*: "Lomis Kareli, Lomis Kareli" (Ramishvili 2012, 120–1, my emphases).

Ramishvili's reference to the madman screaming nothing but "Lomiskareli" embodies the destruction of reason, language and their universality insofar as the madness-of-the-icon strips language of its very conventional generality, forcing it to utter nothing but the one unsubstitutable name of the one unsubstitutable icon. Other sources acknowledge that not only was Lomiskareli mad in the sense of being irascible like the icons in Chardin's travelogue, but its maddening impact would make even the truth-tellers scream ("Lomis Kareli" 1925, 3). The question to be asked, then, is whether one is to treat such excess as yet another illustration of a 'porous' consciousness reduced to utter cognitive misery or as an extreme experience of "linguistic vulnerability" (Butler 1997)–of being *taken by the oath* instead of taking it–in the face of the fear of ethical failure in keeping one's word or of saying the truth even when one is free of fault.

A cognitivist mindset clearly prevails in Uratadze's own description of the popular attitudes towards "Lomiskareli." Once again, his usual detached "surprise" at what he does not (want to) understand in the peasants' behavior stands out: "One cannot say that Gurians are a very pious people"–he notes –"on the contrary, they are rather atheists (…) but for some reason they were very afraid of this icon. (…) I was unable to find out why this icon had such an influence and why they

were so afraid of it" (Uratadze 1968, 52–3). As his understanding of peasant religiosity is essentially conditioned by the modernist semantics of "faith" as an internal, cognitive state cut off from the practical ethical realm or at least from any "authentic" form of social practice, he fails to understand the intrinsic complicity of the administration's and peasants' attitudes towards oaths even as their political aims diverge. This also explains how both Uratadze and the administration, in the earlier-cited 1906 police report, can advance identical statements–"The Gurian people are unfaithful", "One cannot say that Gurians are a very pious people, on the contrary, they are rather atheists"–and nevertheless arrive at divergent conclusions. While Uratadze is left "surprised" by the peasants' fear of the icon *despite* their alleged "faithlessness," for the administration, the Gurians' faithlessness/secrecy is a reason for not trusting them *and* for enforcing an oath of allegiance as an embodied act, in Asad's sense, that ought to practically induce faithfulness/loyalty and extract the truth out of the peasants. While the possibility of going mad was what, in the customary setting, assured the delegation of punishment of perjury immediately to the invoked divine power, it is precisely the vulnerability of this anarchistic moment in the customary legal practice that the empire managed to capitalize upon. Having been denied proper participation in the reformed legal system, the peasants had even their customary juridico-religious practice turned against them by the colonial state.

But what actually happened after the government decided to use the icon for its counter-insurgent aims? Of this, Uratadze offers a particularly symptomatic account. He claims that as soon as the revolutionary committee had learned about the government's intention, they gathered to discuss what was to be done, for they were sure that some people would not dare pledge a false oath on "Lomiskareli." According to Uratadze, his proposition, advanced out of 'respect for the religious feelings of the people', to clandestinely transport the icon to some other church until the danger had passed met with the greatest approval. As with the task of composing the text for the Napitsvara oath, allegedly it was him to whom the committee assigned the evacuation of the icon (53–4). After having negotiated with a priest (yet another hypothetical priest!) to shelter the icon in his church, Uratadze says, he entrusted the abduction of the icon to three valorous comrades. However, when they entered the Church of Surebi to seize it, "they didn't even dare to approach the icon. 'It shone so powerfully that it seemed that it was about to scream at us. The main thing is that it looked at us with such ire that we preferred to leave the church and go home'". Uratadze says

he was ultimately obliged to order other comrades to do the job.

A huge scandal ensued upon the discovery that "Lomiskareli" had disappeared. With rumor once again asserting its special power, two conflicting legends are supposed to have engaged in a "hushed anonymous polemic" as to why the icon had left Guria. According to one version, the icon had emigrated in protest against the emergence of godless revolutionaries in Guria and preferred to move to a more god-fearing place. Uratadze individuates the Tsarist administration as the force behind this rumor. As for the alternative version, "Lomiskareli is supposed to have said that 'he is leaving Guria because the police want to use him against the people, but he will never go against the people and therefore is leaving Guria until a people's government is established'" (54).[12] In this deliberately comical tone, Uratadze ends the story of "Lomiskareli." Thus, "Lomiskareli" flies away like the "formidable" icon of St. Job whom, as Chardin says, the Mingrelians, "these blind people", particularly feared: "They relate how this Image being one day carry'd a Journey, and passing by a Lake or Marsh full of Frogs, the noise of the Frogs so amaz'd it, and put it into such a Fury, that it flew away to a Church that stood upon a Mountain. They report moreover, that it Kills all that approach too near it" (Chardin 1686, 99). Uratadze's discourse seems to mime the modernist/colonial gaze of Chardin on "the fetishist non-European," with, however, one fundamental difference: While Chardin treats the icon that is irritated by quaking frogs as fantastic hearsay, Uratadze positions himself as the emphatic first person who pretends to be pulling the strings behind the demonstrative emigration of "Lomiskareli" and the ensuing rumors. However, this trick of reasserting his unipolar agency over the vertiginously a-polar "comedy of errors" turns out to be profoundly self-defeating. For, to the misfortune of the truth-value of Uratadze's account, the hiding of "Lomiskareli" in some unnamed church with the clandestine support of some unnamed priest neither is the end to the incident nor corresponds with other testimonies about the fate of the icon.

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Uratadze claims that the icon was hidden *as soon as* the administration decided to instrumentalize it. Because he was sent into exile in September 1903, having already spent some time in prison before that, the kidnapping of "Lomiskareli" must, therefore, have occurred

12 Although the gender of the Russian word for icon (*ikona*) is feminine, Uratadze systematically uses the masculine gender when referring to "Lomiskareli," the icon of St. George, an eminently masculine saint.

sometime between the second half of 1902 and early 1903. However, all the other sources unanimously affirm that it was in 1904 when, upon the recommendation of a local spy-priest who was later liquidated by the revolutionaries (Ramishvili 2012, 293), "Lomiskareli" effectively "entered into counter-revolutionary service" and was successfully used by the government to uncover the identity of many a revolutionary and the whereabouts of rebels and conspiratorial gatherings (415). According to Ramishvili, just before the 1905 Revolution, "five revolutionary peasants entered the Surebi Church, took the icon, smashed it, bereft it of its riches and made the icon disappear without a trace" (122). Parmen Tsintsadze, another Gurian revolutionary, attests to the smashing of the icon (Tsintsadze 1923, 184), while Silibistro Todria, later Bolshevik and head of the Union of the Militant Godless of Soviet Georgia, claims the icon was melted down („Lomis Kareli" 1925, 3). To the secularist socialists, "Lomiskareli" manifested the monstrous objectal excess of divine agency in the folk version of Eastern Orthodox Christianity. It was, then, with explicit pride that they announced the icon's evident impotence to retaliate.

In this chorus of iconoclasts, why is Uratadze the only one to claim that instead of being destroyed, "Lomiskareli" was hidden and that this was done before the administration could use the icon for their reactionary aims? With his version of the story, Uratadze shields not only those who broke their oath of secrecy by pledging a counter-oath on "Lomiskareli," but also "Lomiskareli" itself from the shameful "counter-revolutionary" role to which the retrospective accounts of the Bolsheviks and the Menshevik Ramishvili equally condemned it. Uratadze's solution to the secret of "Lomiskareli" leaves the icon the option of being restored to its former glory. His talk about the peasants' "religious feelings" as the reason for evacuating "Lomiskareli" as well as his condescension towards his revolutionary comrades who feared kidnapping the icon might simply be another manifestation of the modernist urge to fantasize about fanatical others "who are naive enough to believe" (Dolar 1998, XXIII) while unburdening "the secular, disenchanted subject of the weight of his own less than limpid relations with political authority" (Toscano 2010, 168). By storing "Lomiskareli" in a secret shelter of which only he and his confidant priest are aware, Uratadze tries to provide closure to the sequence leading from the drafting of the peasants' demands via the oath on Napitsvara to the witch-hunt in its aftermath. Yet, the closure remains deeply ironic as it only pushes

the agency that he would like to firmly locate in his own intentions further into inscrutable indeterminacy. As Uratadze's syntax gets lost in translation somewhere between Russian and Georgian, suspending the directionality of subject and object (II.2), what makes his narrative "scream" might be the living trace of his own peasant subalternity that he, as a rural *intelligent*, is repeatedly obliged to overcome in order to assert his modernity.

II.5. Towards a Subaltern Reading of the "Gurian Republic"

In critically re-telling Uratadze's story about the inaugural oath on Napitsvara, this article strove to detect politics–the event of initiating a new challenge to existing power relations and forms of human togetherness–in places where it tends to be overlooked. By washing away the weight of particular legal-religious forms, we might lose sight of the practices which, in 1902, came to constitute a historically determinate beginning. Beneath, around and in the very heart of what Uratadze's 'prose of the intelligentsia' narrates, there is an entire dimension of the materiality of religious items and signs that follow their own ethical and political logic. In suppressing or trivializing them, he misses the political dynamics that unfold around the oath. He is eager to emphasize that the initial demands he claims he elaborated with/for the peasants were purely economic (I.2) and that it was only after the intensification of Tsarist repressions that peasants became convinced of the government's affiliation with the landlords (Uratadze 1968, 51). However, in concluding this, Uratadze ignores that the peasants' initiative to pledge an oath that he tried to discursively secularize and domesticate inadvertently constituted that *excess* of the political, which, notwithstanding the narrow breadth of the actual demands, launched a revolutionary dynamic–i.e. a dynamic perceived as revolutionary by the authorities–which from the very start deprived him of control over the entire development. The icon that Uratadze thought he was manipulating might be the ironic symptom of this loss of control.

The method this article pursued relied on identifying what the work of silencing in Uratadze's discourse reveals of the subalterns' actual share and position in that historical conjuncture. However, it is hardly enough to simply unmask the intelligentsia's discursive work of erasure as long as one continues to equate "consciousness" with the written word, as Gramsci seems to be doing. In a famous passage on spontaneity from the *Prison Notebooks*, he claims that, as the

subaltern "have not achieved any consciousness of the class 'for itself' (…) it never occurs to them that their history might have some possible importance, that there might be some value in leaving documentary evidence of it" (Gramsci 1971, 196). Here, the description of an alleged fact inadvertently becomes an accusation against those underprivileged who did not produce documents, and such an approach essentially fails to consider the specific *ethics* inherent to the orality of the oath as the condition of a subaltern politics, in which pledging oaths in a complexly embodied and envoiced interaction with icons shaped communities and their struggles.

In this sense, the phenomenon of the oath that this article followed in as "total" a manner as possible certainly represents but one particular trace of subaltern politics as it was enacted in the famed "Gurian Republic." It might nevertheless bear a paradigmatic function in opening up the path for future engagement with the subaltern practices of this peasant republic. When, at its height, the peasants indeed rendered inoperative all Tsarist administrative institutions,[13] in judicial matters, they are said to have abolished all paperwork, substituting it with the oral enactment of justice in long, inclusive debates (Marr 1905, 16). More literate than any low-class community across the Russian Empire, this animosity towards the written cannot, however, be reduced to "the peasants' hatred for the written word" (Guha 1999, 52) perceived as a manipulative tool in the hands of the masters. Having acquired literacy from the various Ramishvilis and Uratadzes, the peasants seem to have decided to break with that one pathology of post-Reform modernity that they experienced in the endless kafkaesque regime of paperwork, bureaucracy and waiting in the empty time and corridors of a modern law conducted in the unintelligible language of empire. They thus fulfilled the Georgian nobles' earlier timid pleas to the imperial government to allow the administration of justice in the language(s) understandable to the local population(s) and to shift the emphasis from formalities and paperwork to the "living word" (*zhyvoe slovo*) as enacted in the process itself. This solution, which, according to the noble petitioners, would undo the locals' mistrust against the judicial system as well as their tendency to pledge false oaths of testimony (Tumanov 1903; Bendianishvili 1970; Sadleir 2020), culminated in the popular courts

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13 This might only be another way of saying that the peasants in fact took over and made actually operative the rural self-governing mechanisms (inefficiently) put in place by the Great Reforms (Jones 2005, 139).

of the "Gurian Republic" as the site where the peasants celebrated the "living word", reclaiming their right and desire to engage in the fulfillment of justice as linguistic beings.

Our historical-anthropological reading against the grain of the various proses of the intelligentsia, of counter-insurgency, and historiography that engaged with the legendary oath on Napitsvara, thus serves as a point of entry into the complex world of self-organizing Gurian peasants. The future inquiry into that historical sequence and complex of practices called the "Gurian Republic" will have to foreground how the peasants were productively entangled in and influenced by various intellectual, political and institutional forces of modernity and forms of organization while retaining a fundamental dimension not so much of independence as of intractability in their relation to the respective hegemonic projects,[14] be they imperial or socialistic. The oath on Napistvara on that "dark spring night" in 1902 stands as an exemplar of such intractability, calling upon the critical historian to indefatigably track its traces.

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14 In using the concept of subaltern intractability, I take inspiration from Prakash 2000.

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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 napięć 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 pomiędzy 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 włos 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