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RUMORS AS A SOURCE FOR THE STUDY OF WOMEN'S EVERYDAY LIFE IN THE URBAN SPACE OF KABARDINO-BALKARIA

Abstract. The present paper attempts to study a number of sources that examine the daily life in a Soviet and post-Soviet provincial town, in particular its female population, from a new perspective; to turn to events that have not been previously the subject of consideration in the Caucasian studies. The approach used in the history of everyday life makes it possible to identify the quality of life that developed during the Soviet era (the culminating period of which in the context of this article is the Khrushchev Thaw), which subsequently acquired a stable character. It is shown that the ordinary life of women was transformed by the socio-economic and political reconstruction of society. Using these examples of the normal course of life within the transitional periods, it becomes possible to approach the study of the everyday living conditions of the citizens of the republic. The paper focuses its attention on the less popular form of oral sources – rumors. Several rumors of the 1960s and two stories from the preceding and subsequent periods reflect the spirit of the times. Their analysis shows how in the peaceful course of everyday life, in the depths of women's consciousness, emotions mature, seizing the masses.

Keywords: women; urban everyday life; city; rumour; urban rumours; Kabardino-Balkaria; Nalchik.

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СЛУХИ КАК ИСТОЧНИК ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ ЖЕНСКОЙ ПОВСЕДНЕВНОСТИ В ГОРОДСКОМ ПРОСТРАНСТВЕ КАБАРДИНО-БАЛКАРИИ

Аннотация. Предметом настоящей статьи стало исследование ряда источников, позволяющих взглянуть на повседневную жизнь советского и постсоветского провинциального города, в частности его женского населения, под новым углом зрения, обратиться к событиям, ранее не становившимся предметом рассмотрения в кавказоведении. Подходы, применяемые в истории повседневности, позволяют выявить качества жизни, сложившиеся в советское время (кульминационным периодом которого в контексте настоящей статьи является оттепель) – и приобрели в последующем устойчивый характер. Прослежено, как привычный образ жизни женщин трансформируется социально-экономической и политической перестройкой общества. В этих сравнениях нормального течения жизни с переходными периодами становится возможным приблизиться к изучению обыденных условий существования горожанок республики. В настоящей статье внимание сосредоточено на не самом популярном виде устных источников – слухах. Несколько громких слухов 1960-х годов и два сюжета из предшествовавшего и последующего периодов, отражают дух времени. Их анализ показывает, как в мирном течении повседневной жизни, в глубине женского сознания зреют эмоции, овладевающие массами, последствия которых формируют новую повседневность.

Ключевые слова: женщины; городская повседневность; город; слух; городской слух; Кабардино-Балкария; Нальчик.

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One of the forms of existing oral sources are rumors. There have been no comprehensive studies in Caucasiology on this subject until now. However, since the 1990s, a shift took place in anthropology due to the introduction of new types of sources. What had previously not been perceived as informative material was attracting more and more attention from researchers. New sources, one of which is rumors, allow us to recreate in more detail the real picture of a person's ordinary life. Modern science requires the application of interdisciplinarity, the ability of authors to use methods of processing empirical material of adjacent to history and ethnology disciplines [1, p. 52].

The study of rumors has significant heuristic potential. Obviously, it would be naive to reconstruct events basing on them. The value of rumors is different: they show the attitude of their creators, distributors and recipients to reality, reveal their psychological characteristics due to the social and temporal context.

Being an integral part of oral history, rumors occupy a special place in this area of research. Due to their instability, factual unreliability, rumors, nevertheless, reflect the underlying and often not otherwise fixed features and processes of mass and individual consciousness, mental constants and social psychology of an individual or population groups [2, p. 162; 3, p. 20]. In the system of "state-society", rumors become a phenomenon reflecting the perception of power politics by the population, its interpretation in everyday behavioral and communicative practices [4, p. 24; 5, p. 34]. Rumors clearly demonstrate the state of individual and mass consciousness during the period of sharp transformations of this system: wars, revolutions, large-scale reforms [6, p. 81; 7, p. 111]. The present study traces the rumors that arose both during periods of social transformations – collectivization, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the construction of the new Russian statehood, – and during periods of relative stability of the society. The distributors of rumors often propagate fears and anxiety, taking into account mainly negative information [8, p. 113].

Periods of extraordinary historical experience (the need to make a fateful choice, the disorganization of state structures and the hardships of big changes) become fertile ground for the spontaneous or intentional creation and circulation of rumors embodying thoughts, feelings, protest and hopes of various groups of the population [9, p. 47].

The research interest in rumors during the periods of change is explained not only by the possibility of reconstructing consciousness, but also by the real consequences of the dissemination of information contained in rumors, both in people's minds and in external reality. The significance of rumors should not be underestimated. The facts circulating in them are often devoid of the

property of existence, but sometimes they have a very significant potential for action. Unreliable information is subsequently perceived as true.

Rumors are a specific source that “anthropologize” the historical context, when a person with their worldview, axiological and psychological mindset, prejudices, emotional and sensory sphere, level and nature of education comes out in the first place. The study, which is based on oral history, allows to change the research perspective, focus on new and important areas [10, p. 19].

In the context of this paper, it seems productive to use the approach formulated in the 1970s by Alan Dundes, according to whom a researcher should not only study the plot of a rumor or legend, but also interpret its meaning [11, p. 33]. It is necessary to trace why this or that rumor has spread in the urban female environment of such a specific, and at the same time interpolated into the Soviet reality region as Kabardino-Balkaria. Such an operational-theoretical model was called by A. Arkhipova and A. Kirzyuk as interpretive approach. According to it, the procedure of searching for social factors articulated in the female urban space (understood as a complex of factors of female socialization within the urban space) and creating psychological discomfort causing aggression, state of fear and anxiety has been repeatedly carried out in this study [12, p. 28].

Mass riots, which are one of the subjects of this paper, have become the object of V.A. Kozlov’s study [13, p. 10]. He sees their origins mainly in the socio-economic policy of the Soviet state. The specificity of the studied region is the predominant influence of the ethnic factor.

An important characteristic of rumors is its collectivity, deindividualization. According to the British anthropologist and evolutionary psychologist Robin Dunbar, being the basis for building social connections in large communities [14, p. 111], rumor starts to exist independently from the individual who created it, having objectified and becoming part of the collective mind of the crowd. At the same time, a rumor can have a significant rate of propagation. “In 1920s, a prominent popularizer of science Y.I. Perelman showed that a provincial town of 50 thousand people can receive the latest news brought by a metropolitan resident in no time: from 1 hour to 2.5 hours” [15, p. 63].

Rumors are especially important in the mental space of a population under the authoritarian regime. As I.B. Orlov points out, “they are especially common in the authoritarian and totalitarian states that deprive their citizens of the right to open and free access to information” [15, p. 62]. In an unfree society, the importance of rumors increases, which make up for the insufficiency of truthful unbiased news.

There are two components in the structure of rumors. The first is an actualized layer lying on the surface and carrying information content that

reflects the current reality. The second layer of the structure of rumors is an underlying space of archaic, archetypal ideas about oneself, society and the world. It can find its correlation with the image of Fernand Braudel about the “time of structures” – a slowly flowing, non-obvious layer of the “river of time”, which is “an organization, an order, a system of fairly stable relations between social reality and the masses... It is an ensemble, an architecture of social phenomena, but above all it is a historical reality, stable and slowly changing over time” [16, p. 124].

With regard to the subject of our study, it can be noted that being a city (and having to represent the space of modernity), in the 60s of the 20th century Nalchik occupied a leading position in the KBASSR. At the same time, such a large country as the USSR was geographically, culturally and economically in a position to which the concept of a “peripheral town” can be applied, retaining mental proximity to a village. Nalchik had little experience of modernization, becoming a large city only in the time under study. The Khrushchev development began to displace the private sector. Due to urbanization, the population was replenished with newcomers from rural regions, which meant the introduction of conservative mindsets into the social space.

The process of urbanization of Kabarda and Balkaria, designated by the Soviet government, manifested itself only in the 1920s with the transformation of Nalchik Sloboda into an urban administrative center. The 1950s and 1960s marked the foundation of new cities (Tyrnyauz, Baksan, Prokhladny, Terek). The integration of the local population into the urban environment was slow; the process intensified after the Great Patriotic War and gained special importance during the “thaw” due to the increase in the personnel of the national intelligentsia, engineers and the emergence of new jobs in production in the city.

The 1950-1990s in Kabardino-Balkaria were a time of replacing many traditional stereotypes of consciousness with modern discourse and complex processes of intertwining innovative and conservative types of consciousness with the revival of archaic cognitive elements in the post-Soviet period. To illustrate the external manifestation of archaism in women’s worldview, it is necessary to dwell on one of the rumors that arose among women in the 1920s. This rumor appeared on the basis of large-scale social transformations undertaken by the Soviet government.

The rumour about the “collectivization of children”

At the end of the 1920s, traditional institutions were rapidly displaced in Kabarda and Balkaria, and manifestations of “remnants of the past” were severely suppressed. Among other things, such events included the closure of mosques. The fight against religious ideology was perceived as an infringement of authentic consciousness and a gross violation of private life, which met strong resistance mainly among women. This was due to the connection between ethnic traditions and spiritual and religious practices. Such a symbiosis determined the main stages of women’s life: birth, marriage, death, regulated the range of her daily cares, and “threshold” events related to childbirth, feeding and raising children [17, p. 306].

The Soviet authorities tried to reformat the life of a woman in accordance with their ideological orientation. In particular, instead of the traditional customs of the children’s cycle – the first swaddling of a newborn in the cradle – gushekhepkhe (Kab.) / beshikge salyu (Balk.)¹ and the celebration of the first step of the child – l’eteuve (Kab.) / birinchi atlam (Balk.)², – alternative ceremonies were introduced, which paradoxically turned out to be similar to Christian ritual practices. Thus, the “red Octobrines”, designed to replace the abovementioned rituals, were in fact a modernization of Orthodox baptisms. These attempts were forced, unnatural and caused a strong rejection among women. The innovations contradicted the mindset of traditional folk upbringing, which is the most important factor of ethnic socialization, the translation of skills and behavioral stereotypes adopted in the archaic ethnic environment [18, p. 151]. These reasons have triggered women’s opposition to attempts to replace home parenting with public education.

The archive of the prominent journalist R.T. Afaunova contains the memories of the organizer of the women’s movement in the Kabardino-Balkarian Autonomous Region Galina Romenskaya:

...The Village Council did not provide us with premises [for nurseries] for a long time, because there were rumors among the population that their children would be sent to Germany (*italics – auth.*), and only a year later [1925] we got a room in a school. Elder children of the age of twelve, thirteen were sent to the playgrounds, as our equipment was designed for preschoolers; we didn’t know whether to laugh or cry...³

In 1928, a rumor began to spread among the women of the North-Western Caucasus that children who were sent to nursery on the instructions of the

1 From Kabardian (lit.) – binding to a cradle; from Balkar (lit.) – laying in a cradle.

2 From Kabardian (lit.) – getting on your feet; from Balkar (lit.) – the first step.

3 From the personal archive of R.T. Afaunova (1932-2013), Nalchik.

authorities would be socialized (i.e. 'collectivized'), taken away from their parents and sent to Germany or China. The uncertainty is emphasized (illiterate women in the region had little idea where these countries were located), and the remoteness of the address, which would make communication impossible and assumed the loss of the child. This rumour is illustrated by Sheila Fitzpatrick's thesis about the dual nature of rumours. On the one hand, rumours had an adaptive function, which allowed them to adjust to the changes carried out by the authorities. On the other hand, when these changes affected or even destroyed the basic ideological constants, rumours acquired the function of a catalyst for resistance [19, p. 184].

These rumors resulted in spontaneous, local protests by women. Passive discontent gradually turned into direct statements in connection with the aggravation of the general situation in the country at the turn of the 1920s and 30s caused by the grain procurement crisis. Thus, at the beginning of June 1928, in the Adyghe village of Blechepsin, a group of middle-aged women gathered at the village council, demanded the cessation of grain procurements, the closure of nurseries and kindergartens, etc. At the same time, a spontaneous rally of women gathered in Baksan (Kabardino-Balkaria), who, armed with kitchen utensils (knives, scissors, grips), behaved aggressively, shouting that they would not give up their children to a nursery or to China [20, p. 87].

Rumors and women's riots from Adygea and Kabarda spread to the territories of other national formations of the North Caucasus. They became an expression of resistance to the socialization of the peasant way of life accompanying collectivization carried out by the central government [20, p. 89].

The rumor about the "seizure" of children, for all its ridiculousness and absurdity, reflected the state of consciousness of traditional society and became an external manifestation of deeper social problems. It was one of the reasons for the anti-Soviet protests that broke out a little later. The gender aspect of this case lies in the fact that it was women who created and spread the rumor about the socialization of children. This rumor became an expression of women's deep anxiety about the loosening of the conservative way of life, the age-old order of things that ensures the continuity of generations. Women feared the loss of ancestral and family memory of the significance of the ancestral experience. Similar protests can be traced in other regions of the country during this period. They reflected the reaction of the traditional peasant world to the loss of communal cohesion, the replacement of traditional values, which were based on family, with abstract state ideals for a small society. This shows the gender unity that can be traced in a quite ethnically and culturally diverse Soviet society. The emergence of this rumor in the 1920s is indicative. In difficult, critical periods for the country, anxiety

for the preservation of traditional values intensifies. Rumors of this kind reflect the struggle of women against innovations coming from a large alien world, more individualized, with no place for close family ties. The difference between urban and rural communication is also indicative here. In the only republican city at that time, women of indigenous ethnicities were surrounded by strangers, unlike Kabardian and Balkarian villages, where people were closely related. The rapid spread of rumors demonstrates this closeness of interactions and the dominance of the rural type of communication. The villagers viewed each other as a collective “we”, opposed to the socio-cultural “they”. The latter is endowed with hostile or threatening characteristics.

The regional specificity of this case lies in the extremely important difference between the social structure of the North-Western Caucasus and the Russian regions. In the vast majority of the latter, rural residents had permanent ties with the city, were familiar with the urban mentality through visits to city markets, seasonal works; immigrants to the cities, replenishing the working class, kept in touch with their home village. In the region described, this connection was absent or minimal. The culture of Pyatigorsk and other settlements of the Caucasian Mineral Waters did not have a significant impact on the consciousness and lifestyle of the mountaineers mainly due to ethnic differences: these cities were originally Russian, inhabited by people whose culture was significantly different from the social world of the highlanders.

In the context of the present paper, this case is important as a preamble, demonstrating the consciousness of the women of the agrarian society. We are not talking about the urban space itself yet, but this case is important as a demonstration of the specifics of the consciousness of the villagers, who would later populate the cities of the republic and form an opposition to the then “indigenous” urban population. The analysis of episodes about the dissemination of deliberately unreliable information by women in the national peasant environment shows how painfully the female consciousness can respond to the dangers from another culture, an attempt by the authorities to encroach on the private sphere, the stability of family life. Social practices of Russian urban everyday life with great difficulty made their way among ethnically and culturally different populations.

The episode at the bazaar

The following case is recorded 40 years after the events described above and refers to the era when Nalchik turned from a settlement at the fortress into an industrial city. This rumor originated in Nalchik, but the setting of the incident was a market – a place where two types of life (rural and urban) and two types of consciousness (archaic and modern) met.

In July 1968, mass riots took place in the central market of Nalchik, which

were suppressed by the military. A local policeman Vladimir Tokarev was beaten to death by the crowd. His death occurred from “multiple extensive traumatic injuries to the head, neck, chest, with damage to large vessels of the neck, multiple fractures of the ribs on the left and right, with a rupture of the pleura”⁴.

The reason for such inhuman behavior was the rumors that V. Tokarev killed a certain Nurgali, a young Kabardian man, whom he had detained at the bazaar that morning for minor hooliganism under alcoholic influence and took him to the nearest police office. Nurgali opened the window of the office and began shouting that he was being killed. The rumor instantly spread and was supplemented with information about the death of two more men: Alik and Zhamaldin. Upon hearing this, a relative of one of the men, 38-year-old Zhanzilya Kunizheva, ran through the bazaar shouting about police brutality. The conduct of Kunizheva became the catalyst for actions of an angry mob calling for the punishment of a policeman for reprisal against young people. V. Tokarev, surrounded by a few police officers, received several blows. The absence of Nurgali and Alik in the premises of the police station reinforced people’s confidence in the legitimacy of the rumor about their death, which aggravated the situation.

The rumor spread rapidly and had serious consequences. An angry mob, having lynched V. Tokarev, did not release the body to police officers and the military, did not respond to the exhortations of the first secretary of the regional party committee T. Malbakhov, Chairman of the Government of the Republic A. Akhokhov, secretary of the Nalchik City Committee N. Gromyko. As it would be established at the trial, mass riots took place with a crowd of circa 3,000 people.

The initiator of the “bazaar riot” Zhanzilya Kunizheva was sentenced to fifteen years of general regime colony. The court did not impose capital punishment because of the woman’s young daughter. Zhanzilya was accused of spreading provocative rumors about the murder of her brother, she became one of the organizers of the mob outrages, “...hysterically sobbing, in an inhuman voice she called for lynching. Dragging the crowd with her, she rushed to the police office. She wrung her hands, tore her hair and clothes, and incited a violent crowd for several hours”⁵. Many witnesses and participants of those events highlighted that if it were not for Kunizheva, the riot would have stopped much earlier⁶.

This case is similar to the previous one – false information generated real consequences. According to A. Arkhipova and A. Kirzyuk, “urban legends can be very dangerous, because in panic, another retelling of a “reliable”

4 From the forensic report (cit. by: O. Guseynov. Nalchik, July 68. // Gazeta Yuga. № 24-26. 1998).

5 Guseynov O. Nalchik, July 68. // Gazeta Yuga. № 24-26. 1998).

6 Author's field material. Expedition to Nalchik. November-December of 2020 (Informants: M.A. Daova, born in 1956, B.G. Kagermazov, born in 1935, O.H. born in 1978).

story can push a person or a group of people to violence” [12, p. 50]. In both cases, there is a reaction to the antagonist – an alien culture. However, there are also significant differences. The events of this case took place in a city where the presence of the Russian population is noticeable, the environment ceased to be ethnically uniform, while the villages remained nationally homogeneous. The members of the indigenous population who came to the city felt their unity and, as can be seen, their readiness to actively resist the alien world. Thus, we can distinguish two lines of division here: city vs. village, and Russian-speaking population vs. locals. The marketplace has become a communication platform, a place of junction of the urban and rural worlds. Most of the merchants were rural residents, the customers were townspeople. The rural world of the North Caucasian Republic is characterized by close family ties to a much greater extent than the urban social space, in which the proportion of newcomers is noticeable. It is these connections that largely determine emotions and behavior.

A relationship of mutual threat arises between “we” and “they”. This rumor became evidence of articulation, suppressed problems and emotions that women were not able to express in another way [12, p. 29]. In this regard, it is important to note that the Nalchik city market, like other similar places, was primarily a women’s space – most of the buyers and sellers were women.

The event at the bazaar demonstrated the power of rumor that does not possess the category of truth, but has the property of effectiveness. The women behaved as if the content of the rumor was real; moreover, the rumor caused more consequences than the information corresponding to reality. At the same time, rumors rarely emerge out of nowhere. People’s confidence in the policeman’s guilt and the brutality of the lynching are partly explained by the hatred towards him caused by his extortion from market sellers⁷.

The high rate of rumour propagation is associated with anxiety – a phenomenon that manifests itself in a person’s tendency to often experience severe uneasiness on relatively small occasions. Unlike fear, anxiety is characterized primarily by vagueness and uncertainty [21, pp. 174-180].

The most convincing of the rumors revolve around basic fears, the main one of which is death. A rumor is a mental virus that thrives because of its ability to create the very anxieties that cause them to spread and change to fit new situations. “The more people are scared by a rumor, the more likely they are to pass it on,” – notes an American researcher P. Kimmel [22]. Social and economic changes in Nalchik, which was becoming an industrial city, were so rapid that they gave rise to a sense of loss of familiar ideological constants among the indigenous population and caused a sense of anxiety before the uncertainty of the future and, as a result, aggression.

The women trading at the bazaar had already been mobilized for social action by the illegal deeds of the policeman. At the same time, the transmission of

⁷ Field material of Tekueva M.A. Informant: B.G. Kagermazov, born in 1935.

the rumor itself was an attempt to verify it: one of the motives for repeating frightening rumors is the hope of discovering that it is false. “By repeating something that makes you anxious, you can learn the opposite fact that will calm you down,” – said Dr. Kimmel. “On the other hand, it can increase your fears if the person you are addressing to believes it.” [22]

It is noteworthy that in this case, the rumor became an alternative to the version produced by the authorities (“there was no murder”). People preferred to draw information from the “black information market”, filling the vacuum. Its informality, perceived as a virtue, was opposed to the information coming through official sources [23, p. 84]. The mundane episode acquired a broader meaning – the variety of individual reactions led to a series of political events [24, p. 316].

Using this rumor as a source makes it possible to understand not only the organization of urban space and its perception by rural residents, but also to trace the fault lines between emancipated and traditional semantic spaces. Nalchik – a developing Soviet city with an emerging industrial potential – engaged both the indigenous population and newcomers in working in the industry. They became carriers of a new type of consciousness. The market was pushing the carriers of urban and rural mentality. The worldview of the collective farm peasantry largely remained traditional, archaic. The vast majority of the urban population was employed in industry, science and administration. At the same time, a significant proportion of the intelligentsia were newcomers Russians – “envoys” of the Soviet government in the 20s and their children, or those who were sent for post-war personnel strengthening in the republic. The urban population was to some extent opposed to rural workers, mainly of indigenous nationalities, which created social tension on ethnic and settlement grounds at the same time. According to V.A. Kozlov, the explanation of mass riots in our country in this era “should be sought ... in more general socio-political factors” [13, p. 111]. An essential feature of Kabardino-Balkaria, as well as other national administrative entities of the North Caucasus, is the determining importance, along with the socio-political, ethnic factor. The lynching at the Nalchik bazaar was atypical and did not correspond to ethnic customary norms. With all the eccentricity of this story, the described case is an indicator of social tension, and women in this situation became a catalyst for a social outburst.

The active role of Zh. Kunizheva was no coincidence. Her behavior became a trigger, aggravating the situation from the latent to the active stage. Rural women were carriers of traditional mindset, among which one of the basic patterns is the opposition “friend or foe” or “ours-theirs”. At the same time, “they” are endowed with the property of malevolence and there is no rational analysis of their “hostile” behavior. In this case, this hostile attitude initially attributed to the opponent was overlaid by a conscious factor – extortion on the part of the policeman. Not being able to solve social problems, women at

the bazaar directed their energy to fight an imaginary enemy endowed with negative characteristics.

The gossip about the actress

Archaic stereotypes of consciousness turned out to be very resistant to change and manifested themselves in philistine morality, which largely retained conservative features in the conditions of “building socialism” and the processes of female emancipation associated with it.

Children born in the villages of Kabardino-Balkaria during the Great Patriotic War or who saw the war in adolescence, in the 1950s and 60s formed a new generation of national intelligentsia. After getting an education and job, they moved to live in cities with traditional values instilled in them and a mental proximity to the countryside, which often conflicted with urban “modernity”.

In the 1960s the A.A. Shogentsukov Kabardian Drama Theater premiered the play “The Drummer Girl”, where a young actress A.B. (initials changed for ethical reasons) played in the positive main role of a partisan. In one of the scenes, A.B. appeared “semi-naked” in front of the audience – her entire body was covered with a tight fabric, over which she wore underwear. In this appearance, the actress performed a dance. This impressed the audience, brought up in a sexually ascetic culture, so much that gossips about the “low social morale” of the actress immediately spread through Nalchik. Unable to withstand these gossips, her husband insisted on divorce.

This case illustrates Frank McAndrew’s idea that the purpose of gossips is to strengthen “morality” and responsibility or punishment for “its absence” and the identification of passive-aggressive behavior, the isolation of moral violators [25]. Usually the subject of gossips is the private life of bright, prominent personalities, going against the traditional consciousness. At the same time, the distributors of gossips pay special attention to intimate details, which become the subject of the greatest attention [26, p. 228].

When analyzing this story about how rumors and gossips reflect the stereotypes of everyday consciousness, how their circulation can affect the life of individuals, it is necessary to pay attention to the ability of the individuals to resist them, developing coping mechanisms and forming new mindset. After some time, they become habitual, ordinary ones and create a new everyday life. Thus, the actress in question, despite the derogatory gossip, did not quit her job, continued to play in that scandalous performance, appeared in public “confident in her rightness and dizzyingly beautiful”⁸, was happy in the second marriage, which, in the end, earned the respect of the townspeople. The philistine gossip turned out to be correlated with an

⁸ Field material of Bitokova T.V. Informant: M.A. Daova, born in 1956.

iconic, well-known figure. According to a study by American psychologists T. Reynolds, R. Baumeister, J. Maner, “the more a woman is generally inclined to compete, the more willing she is to spread gossips” [27, p. 207].

The two above stories related to the same period and characterized the presence of archaic features in the consciousness of society. The first reflected the specifics of the mindset of the rural population, expressed in the emotional form of protest against social problems. The second episode demonstrates how stereotypes about “correct” female behavior turned out to be too straightforward and rigorous and caused gossips about the actress. Both cases had tragic or dramatic consequences for the actors and are associated with the traditional consciousness of their distributors.

The rumor about the “miraculous child”

During the Soviet period, the process of women’s emancipation went far enough, but at the end of the 20th century, the socio-cultural and demographic situation in Kabardino-Balkaria changed drastically. In the cities of the republic, there has been a significant outflow of population to the central regions of the Russian Federation of people who are carriers of modern consciousness, and an influx of rural residents. This process coincided on the one hand with the historical turning point experienced by the whole country, on the other – with the strengthening of the importance of the religious factor and, in general, the rearchaization of the worldview of a significant part of the population of the republic.

On April of 2010, an ordinary day in the republic started with a discussion of the main news: at night a child covered with hair, who had all his teeth in place, was born in the city hospital. In the first minutes of his life, he spoke Kabardian and predicted a great disaster to the people, for the prevention of which he called for “frying lakums”, after which he died unexpectedly. Here it refers to the memorial ritual of Kabardians and Balkars or a kind of female offering. Lakums are puffs made of pastry fried in hot oil, which are given to all neighbors and relatives. It is believed that the smell of fried butter rises to heaven to deliver people’s aspirations there [28, p. 29].

The news about the miraculous child was discussed everywhere and by everyone – from schoolchildren to the elderly people. The rumor captured the minds of the townspeople so much that by evening many women were frying lakums, as the “miraculous baby” had bequeathed. It lasted 40 days. Many people were skeptical about the information described, but they did it “just in case”.

The fantastic plot reflected a serious concern about the threat of terrorism. Shortly prior to that, in 2005, Nalchik survived a terrorist attack, and later a number of closely spaced terrorist attacks were carried out against scientists,

representatives of the traditional Muslim clergy, policemen and officials. The legend about the child was actually an expression of women's anxiety for the life and well-being of their beloved ones. Thus, the distributors of the rumor about the child, transmitting one information, actually implied another "hidden message" [29, p. 165].

It is noteworthy that this rumor became a self-sustaining one and capable of developing mental structures. After a while, it received a new development. People said that the previous rumor had been started by the widow of the leader of a religious underground organization liquidated by the special services in order for the whole republic to make a memorial offering for him.

In neighboring North Ossetia, this rumor was adapted to the peculiarities of local consciousness. The content suitable for the culture of this region was borrowed from the said rumour. Ossetian writer A. Gabuyev in his book "A Cold Day In The Sun", writes about the residents of Vladikavkaz:

...Dzera told this wild story. About a hairy boy from Kabarda. It is said that he was born last week or a little earlier, in Nartkale or somewhere there, and uttered in Ossetian: "Pray for the Ossetian people", and shortly after died... It turned out that many people had heard it. Vika said that the child's parents were Ossetians – Ozrek Digorians and Regina – and that the real father was not a human at all, but a dalimon⁹.

This development of the rumour illustrates the thesis about the ambiguity of the rumor's content, which, along with the original component, includes additional details [30, p. 165]. The ritual and memorial component was reduced, and a character of Ossetian folklore appeared.

Based on the conducted research, we have come to the conclusions formulated in the following theses:

1. Using rumors as a source for historical and anthropological research, we have been able to trace social interactions in the urban environment. Rumor as an information structure has two interrelated functions. Firstly, it forms and expresses not so much the events that actually happened as their perception by the mass consciousness. This is a passive function of a rumour. On the other hand, rumour can be a call for social action, it forms public mood and encourages certain actions.

2. The study of rumors makes it possible to determine the content of the space of everyday life, to identify the main components (modern and archaic socio-cultural mindsets), to trace their complex interactions (relations of conflict and synthesis).

Urban women's space is a complex system. Possessing the features of modernity, the city destroys archaic traditional mental structures, replacing

⁹ Dalimon is the lord of evil (translated from Ossetian).

them with the system of meanings of industrial society. At the same time, traditional structures are not completely destroyed, forming a latent, underlying layer of symbols and socio-cultural ideas. Ethnic features have an implicit influence. Under the influence of certain grounds that blow up the surface layer of modernity, it breaks through, actualized in the form of spontaneous, little-thought, suppressed social protest. The latter, however, most often does not have far-reaching political and social consequences. Urban space brings modern and archaic components to a new level. The case of the Nalchik bazaar in 1968 demonstrates this moment of social outcry. If in the Soviet era there was a consistent modernization of women's urban space, then in the post-Soviet period there are phenomena of rearchaization, which is demonstrated by the case of the "miraculous child" of 2010.

3. The study of rumors makes it possible to determine the specifics of the female urban space of Kabardino-Balkaria allows us to talk about a weak degree of modernization, a large influence of traditional patterns characteristic of the Caucasian agrarian society.

Women took an active part in the described cases. At this stage of societal development, they were carriers and implementers of conservative models of behavior. Women, especially rural women, later than men adapted to a new system of meanings, often painfully reacting to changes and performing the function of stabilizing and sometimes preserving society.

4. Anxiety plays an essential role in the spread of rumors as a cultural and psychological basis for their appearance and circulation.

These cases confirm the mindset of everyday consciousness that it is women who are carriers and catalysts of anxiety and actors in the proliferation of rumors. They are more capable of generating and modifying rumors. Women have an emotional influence on the living space, encouraging ordinary people to social actions. Rumors in a concentrated form express the anxiety of society and allow one to adapt or, on the contrary, resist changes.

5. Forming and expressing traditional attitudes of consciousness, rumours often carry an ethical function, provoking actions and forming an environment corresponding to traditional rigorous moral foundations. Being carriers of more traditional categories of thinking, women are especially careful about them. At the same time, the 20th century for mountain women was a time of emancipation, sometimes voluntary, sometimes conditioned by state policy. In these conditions (as illustrated by the rumor about the actress), women began to have the opportunity to break out of the shackles of traditional morality and insist on their right to live in accordance with a broader socio-cultural framework. Urban space made it possible to increase the degree of this freedom, singling out women from their environment, able to accept new, broader conditions of existence, thereby marking landmarks for other women.

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