

---

# VAŠKO OPRAVLJANJE MED STRAHOM IN UŽITKOM

## Nekaj beležk o ekonomiji čustev v socialni interakciji lokalne tradicije

---

Ana N. Kuškova

---

139

### IZVLEČEK

Prispevek obravnava vlogo čustev, zlasti strahu in užitka pri vaškem opravljanju. Pri tem je avtorica vaško skupnost raziskovala kot celoto, kot skupno telo, v katerem osebna čustva v veliki meri določajo pogoje socialne interakcije in posameznika tudi silijo v sprejemanje določenih strategij skupnostnega vedenja. V prispevku so obravnavani tisti vidiki strahu in užitka, ki jih je avtorica ugotovila med terenskim delom. V letih 1997 do 2003 je raziskovala v kraju z imenom Šola na severozahodu Rusije. Pri tem je raziskovala tudi kontekst interakcije med informatorji in antropologi, da bi ugotovila, kako prisotnost tujcev lahko vpliva na »interno« prakso opravljanja v vasi.

**Ključne besede:** opravljanje, vsakdanja komunikacija, strah, užitek, ugled, spol, terenska raziskava

### ABSTRACT

The paper addresses the role of emotions, particularly fear and pleasure, in the social interaction of a specific kind – village gossip. The author observed the community as a whole, as an aggregate body, where personal feelings are largely determined by the conditions of social interaction and make people adopt certain strategies of communal behavior. In doing this, the author discusses only those aspects of fear and pleasure which she discovered during her field work in the area called Shola, North-West Russia. Apart from analyzing the mechanisms of conflict communication among members of a given community, she also tried to look into the context of interaction between informants and anthropologists – to show how the presence of outsiders may influence the “internal” practices of village gossip.

**Key words:** gossip, everyday communication, fear, pleasure, reputation, gender, field research

### Uvod

Kot pove že naslov, pričujoči članek obravnava vlogo čustev, zlasti strahu in užitka, v socialni interakciji posebne vrste, tj. pri vaškem opravljanju. Pojem *čustva* ne pomeni, da se bomo osredotočili le na enega posameznika ali na vrsto posameznikov in na način, kako pod vplivom faktorjev možnega tveganja ali užitka

oblikujejo svojo komunikacijsko vedenje. Raziskovali bomo skupnost kot celoto, skupno telo, v katerem osebna čustva in spodbude v veliki meri določajo pogoje socialne interakcije in posameznika silijo v sprejemanje določenih strategij skupnostnega vedenja. V nasprotju s trditvijo R. Paine, da “opravlja posameznik, ne skupnost” (Paine 1967: 280–281), bomo tu obravnavali čustva in “njihove odnose znotraj družbenega sistema” (Gluckman 1968: 22).<sup>1</sup>

140

Najprej nekaj besed o metodi raziskave. Opravljanje očitno ni interakcija tiste vrste, za katero bi lahko rekli, da jo lahko “opazujemo in o njej poročamo, tj. da je na razpolago ... kot ustaljena praksa gledanja in povedanja” (Garfinkel 1994: 1). Kadar imajo antropologi to srečo, da postopek opravljanja “ujamejo” *in situ* (kar je zelo redko), se način komuniciranja praviloma povsem spremeni, spremeni se namreč v “navaden” pogovor (glede razlik med “opravljanjem” in navadnim, “vsakdanjim” pogovorom, glej nadaljevanje). Našo analizo lahko utemeljujemo predvsem s terenskimi podatki naslednjih vrst: 1) odgovori na neposredna vprašanja o tem, kaj je opravljanje in kako se v vasi dogaja, 2) pripovedi informatorjev, ki vključujejo zgodbe o vaškem opravljanju, 3) opazovanje postopka izmenjave informacij med informatorji in antropologi. Uporabnost prve strategije je dokaj omejena: med drugim od informatorja zahteva razmišljanje (sposobnost, za katero ne smemo misliti, da je vnaprej dana); njeno uporabo omejujejo tudi zadržki glede pogovora s tujci o “zasebnih” zadevah.<sup>2</sup> Drugi način pridobivanja informacij je bolj “naraven”, ker informatorji pridejo do teme opravljanja po notranji logiki pripovedi, ne da bi jih tako rekoč “silili” v to. Temelj tretje strategije lahko povzamemo s slovitim citatom Maxa Gluckmana, ki je postopek zbiranja terenskih podatkov upravičeno primerjal z zbiranjem čenč: “Antropologija je tesno povezan poklic ... Tesne prijateljske vezi vzdržujemo z ogromno zalogo škandalov, čenč in legend ... Spomniti se moramo, da grški Leksikon opredeljuje “antropologa” kot ... “opravljivca”: /.../ “Ni opravljivec (anthropologos): govoril ne bo ne o sebi ne o drugi osebi”” (Gluckman 1963: 314). Vse to še posebno velja zaradi različnih komunikacijskih sposobnosti antropologov in predstavnikov lokalne skupnosti: ker intervju praviloma ne sodi v lokalni “pripovedni repertoar”, moramo interakcijo prilagoditi “domorodnim” oblikam ustne komunikacije (več o tem v: Briggs 1986: x–26), če želimo, da bo uspešna. Zdi se, da to najlažje storimo tako, da obliko pravega intervjuja spremenimo v obliko “vsakdanjega pogovora” ali “klepeta”. Takemu klepetu, ki se ponavadi dogaja v “zasebnem” ambientu informatorjeve hiše, zlasti takrat, ko se ukvarja z “internimi” vaškimi spori, lahko rečemo “opravljanje”, udeležencem pa začasno “celice opravljanja” (Gluckman 1963: 308).

Naša analiza bo temeljila na zapiskih in na osebnih vtisih pri zapisovanju; z drugimi besedami, raziskovali bomo dva glavna položaja, v katerih se opravljanje dogaja: “informatorji med sabo” in “informatorji in antropologi”.

Glavna teza, ki jo bomo v tem članku preverjali, je naslednja: na strah in užitek lahko gledamo kot na dva vzajemno omejujoča faktorja, ki vplivata na odločitev posameznika, da sodeluje v opravljanju in da to počenja na določen način (tj. ali bo

<sup>1</sup> Članek temeljito obravnava definicijo “psihološkega” v socialni antropologiji .

<sup>2</sup> O možnih načinih oblikovanja intervjujev o vaških sporih glej: Kuškova 2001: 14–36, zlasti 19–25.

neke informacije spravil v promet, komu jih bo zaupal, kako “sprožiti” opravljanje, kako se izogniti temu, da bi škodoval lastnemu ugledu v tem postopku itd.). Z drugimi besedami, skušali bomo pokazati, da sta strah zaradi tveganja in pričakovanje čustvene zadovoljitve dva faktorja, ki določata posebno “ekonomijo” vaškega opravljanja. Pri tem bomo obravnavali samo tiste vidike *strahu* in *užitka*, ki smo jih ugotovili med terenskim delom, tako da je seznam odprt in se lahko dopolnjuje.

### Nekaj beležk o lokalnih tradicijah v zvezi z opravljanjem

Večina gradiva, ki ga omenjamo v tem članku, je bila zapisana v kraju z imenom Šola (oblast Vologda, Belozerski okraj na severozahodu Rusije), kjer je skupina z Evropske univerze v St. Petersburgu več zaporednih let (1997–2003) opravljala terenske raziskave. Šola je sestavljena iz sedmih vasi, ki ležijo na bregovih reke in je od najbližjega mesta oddaljena okrog 100 km.

Kot večina podeželskih območij v Rusiji je Šola skorajda izključno “ženski svet” ali, če smo bolj natančni, “svet starih žensk”: večina informatorjev so bile starejše ženske, stare med 65 in 90 let, katerih moške so ali padli med vojno ali umrli v povojnem obdobju. Moški mlajših generacij, okvirno rečeno pod 50 let, so se preselili v večje kraje, okrajna mesta in velemesta in domov prihajajo samo na obisk mater in zato, da pripeljejo otroke na poletne počitnice. Mlajši moški, ki so ostali, so večinoma socialno neprilagojeni (invalidi, alkoholiki) ali – precej bolj redko – taki, ki jim je uspelo najti zaposlitev v okolici.

Opisano stanje ima za našo raziskavo dve pomembni posledici. Najprej pomeni, da raziskava opravljanja v lokalni tradiciji neizogibno raziskuje, “*kako je konflikten pogovor povezan s spolom udeležencev*” (Kulick 1993: 512) ali, natančneje, z “ženskimi glasovi”. Čeprav ne izhajamo iz splošnega prepričanja, da je opravljanje nekaj izključno ženskega, je v našem kontekstu nujno tako. Drugič, stereotip “ženskega sveta”, ki je “*bolj skrit, ... ker je tako močno usmerjen v “notranjost”*” (Dubisch 1986: 26), ne velja za običaje, ki jih obravnavamo: v Šoli starejše ženske zasedajo tako “zasebno” kot “javno” sfero življenja.<sup>3</sup> Kljub temu, da ni ovir za sodelovanje v javnem življenju vasi, je udeležba dokaj enaka, tako da ni pravih možnosti za opazno “javno nastopanje”.<sup>4</sup>

Poleg spola in starosti so drugi “*sociometrični*” faktorji (Gluckman 1963: 314), ki vplivajo na naravo opravljanja v tej tradiciji: enako nizek življenjski standard (vsi živijo od državne podpore ali od pokojnin, vsi so močno odvisni od lastnih vrto,

<sup>3</sup> Izjema so vodja lokalne uprave, policaj in duhovnik.— Tako kot se je zgodilo na mnogih drugih podeželskih območjih v Rusiji, je bila krajevna cerkev uničena v sovjetski dobi; nova je še v gradnji. Duhovnik obišče Šolo dvakrat, trikrat na leto, ker primanjkuje duhovnikov in ker slušbuje v številnih drugih cerkvah v pokrajini. Kadar pride, opravi bogoslužje v majhni kapeli, ki so jo odprli pred petimi leti. Vmes med njegovimi obiski tri starejše ženske skrbijo za kapelico, ob praznikih vernikom berejo ustrezna besedila in nadzorujejo gradnjo nove cerkve.

<sup>4</sup> V tem primeru je edina izjema krajevni pevski zbor, ki je bil v preteklosti zelo priljubljen, a sedaj postopno “izumira”. Nekoč so bile ženske zelo aktivne v krajevnih “tovariških” sodiščih (v ruščini: *tovarišeskie sudy*), fenomenu sovjetskega “ljudskega” pravosodja, vendar jih že dolgo ni več. Slišali smo sicer za organizacije kot “Ženski svet” in “Svet veteranov” v vasi, vendar nismo opazili nobene aktivnosti.

samo nekaj jih prejema dodatna sredstva od svojih otrok), tesne sorodstvene vezi (ki segajo v druge vasi izven Šole), obstoj “tradicionalnih” krajev srečanja (npr. klopi ob hišah, kjer se dobivajo sosedi, ali vaške trgovine, kjer se ljudje redno srečujejo). Omeniti bi bilo treba tudi telefon, vendar ga nimajo vse hiše in je torej “alternativna” pot komuniciranja samo za določeno število vaščanov. Upoštevati velja tudi vztrajno vero v čarovnijo, na podlagi katere delijo ljudi na tiste, ki “znajo”, in na vse druge. V vsaki izmed sedmih vasi Šole se za nekaj ljudi verjame, da imajo “magične sposobnosti”, vključno s takimi, ki lahko povzročajo “zlo”, tj. škodujejo s pomočjo čarovnije.

142 Ker socialno okolje določa fenomenologijo in pragmatiko oblik komuniciranja, vsi ti faktorji skupaj ustvarjajo zelo plodno okolje za opravljanje. Šolo bi celo lahko opisali kot “*kronično močno zaskrbljeno*” skupnost (Anthony 1973: 92), kjer je za posameznika opravljanje ena redkih, če ne celo edina oblika uveljavljanja svojega statusa v socialni hierarhiji.

## Vaško opravljanje med strahom in užitkom

### Opravljanje in strah

Strah in/ali podobni občutki kot zaskrbljenost, neodločnost, živčnost in druga sorodna čustva so tako rekoč bolj “otipljiva” in “resnična” kot uživanje. Eden izmed razlogov za to je, da se strah človeka (pred tem, da bo “vpleten” ali da si bo kvaril ugled, da ga imajo za opravljalca itd.) pojavi, še preden začne opravljati. Strah dejansko obstaja kot nekakšno kulturno razpoloženje, v katerem vsako sodelovanje v nekem “skrivnem” početju s sabo prinaša določeno tveganje.

Najbolj razširjeni kazalec strahu v zvezi z opravljanjem je izrecna ali implicitna prepoved: “nikomur ne povej”. Prepoved se nanaša na več med seboj povezanih vidikov opravljanja: a) vsebino povedanega, b) samo dejstvo, da določena informacija kroži, c) vir informacij (imena tistih, ki stojijo za tem). Med našim delom so nam informatorji to prepoved včasih izrecno povedali:

Informator: *Tu na vasi ... samo, pazite, dekleta, da tega ne boste nikomur povedali ...* [Opozorilu je sledila vrsta zgodb: o sinovih in hčerah, ki niso primerno skrbeli za ostarelo mater in kot posledica je eden izmed njih imel nesrečo z motorjem; ali o vaški čarovnici, ki je kravam “ukradla” mleko (tj. vzela jim je sposobnost dajanja mleka); ali o ženah, ki so bile “uročene”, da ne bi mogle zapustiti svojih mož.] (EU–Belozer.–03. FR.3. KNA)<sup>5</sup>. V drugem pogovoru z isto žensko nam je po opozorilu, da je vse to “*samo med nami*”, povedala, kako je sosedova žena več čas skupnega življenja varala moža (EU–Belozer.–03. FR.6. KNA).

<sup>5</sup> Pri navajanju terenskega gradiva v glavnem besedilu uporabljamo naslednje okrajšave: ‘Inf.’ – ‘Informator/ka’, ‘Ank.’ – ‘Anketar/ka’, EU – arhiv Evropske univerze v St. Petersburgu, Belozer. – Belozerski okraj (pokrajina Vologda), Batets. – Batetski okraj (Novgorodska oblast), Khvoin. – Khvoininski okraj (Novgorodska oblast), Gdov. – Gdovski okraj (Pskovska oblast), leto zapisa (zadnji dve številki), TZ – Terenski zapis (sledí zaporedna številka zapisa), začetnici informatorja/ke. Pri polni navedbi terenskega gradiva (v Virih) smo dodali kraj in datum zapisa, leto rojstva informatorja/informatorke in imena anketarjev. Trudili smo se tudi čimbolj ohranjati sintakso govora informatorjev.

Podobne pripovedi so sestavni del “internega vaškega opravljanja” in zato predpostavljajo določeno mero zaupanja med sogovorniki, ki temelji na prepričanju, da besede, ki jih nekdo izreče, ne bodo “*ukradene in javno dramatizirane*” (Abrahams 1970: 292). Zaupanje je odsev mreže socialnih zavezništev v skupnosti, ki so lahko trajna ali začasna.<sup>6</sup> Na drugi strani pa nihče ni tako naiven, da ne bi vedel, da bo prepoved takoj kršena (vsaj glede vsebine sporočila) – konec koncev je to mehanizem, s katerim se novica širi, torej temelj opravljanja. Prepoved ima torej zgolj formalen značaj ali je oblikovana tako: »Nikomur ne povej, da sem ti *jaz* to povedal.«

Zaradi strahu pred tem, da bi obveljali za “obrekljivca/obrekljivko”, je opravljanje lahko zavito v nekoliko “milejšo” obliko, kot svarilo pred tem, da bi z določenimi člani skupnosti imeli kakršnekoli opravke: “... *Pazi se, ja, tudi ti; ... ko greš ven iz hiše, glej, da jo zakleneš, in ključ vzemi s seboj.*” “... *Povem ti, ... vse svoje stvari čim bolj poskrij in ... pazi*” (EU–Belozer.–03. FR.3. KNA). Ponavadi je takim svarilom sledila razlaga, zakaj nekaterim ljudem ne gre zaupati; ta razlaga je imela obliko zgodbe o njihovih slabih dejanjih (v zgoraj omenjenem primeru je šlo za “kriminalni življenjepis” vaškega tatu). Taka svarila niso nujno podana kot izrecni nasvet, ampak so izrečena bolj na splošno, kot če bi bila namenjena naključnemu poslušalcu:

Inf.: *To je tista, nje se je treba bati ...; s pokopališča jemlje zemljo, nekaj naredi [z njo] ... in jo meče ljudem pod noge /.../ in tako pošilja ljudi na oni svet.*

Ank.: *Ali živi tukaj?*

Inf.: [šepeta] *Od tu je. To je V.* (EU–Belozer.–02. KZV).

Prav očitno je, da informatorji tako dajejo duška lastnim strahovom.

V zvezi z opravljanjem obstaja zanimiv odnos do čarovnije. Ljudje verjamejo, da če oseba zares “zna”, tega ne sme javno priznati, niti ne tistim, ki jim “zaupa”: “*Kdor zna, tega nikoli ne prizna*” (EU–Belozer.–03. FR.1.11. VAD). “Tisti, ki “znajo”, [tega] ne priznajo /.../; *ni v navadi, da bi kdo rekel, da nekaj “zna”*” (EU–Belozer.–03. FR.1.12. VAD). “*Šel sem k I. K., vendar ni takoj priznala, da mi lahko pomaga*” (EU–Belozer.–03. FR.1.9. KSV). Velja, da magija lahko izgubi na moči, če o tem govori oseba, ki jo “ima”; če kdo javno izjavlja, da ima take sposobnosti, je to gotovo znak, da laže (tako so na primer rekli za žensko, ki se je vsepovsod hvalila s svojimi sposobnostmi in ki, kot nam je povedal informator, “*nič ne zna*”, ker “*tisti, ki znajo, tega ne razglášajo*” (EU–Belozer.–03. FR.1.12. VAD). Na vprašanje, kako ljudje potem izvedo, da je X ali Y čarovnica, so nam povedali, da “*drug drugemu povemo*” (ibid.). Če upoštevamo vsebino te informacije in tudi način, kako se širi, gre za navadno opravljanje.

<sup>6</sup> V zvezi s pojmom *zaupanja* je umestno pripomniti, da sodobna angleška beseda *gossip* izvira iz stare angleške besede *godsib*(*be*), ki pomeni ‘boter’ (*god* + *sibb*, v sorodstvu), in ki se je uporabljala tudi za ‘prijatelja, zlasti za žensko’ (Webster 1996: 825) (cf. also *gossipred*, ‘duhovna bližina, prijateljstvo’ (arhaično) (Galperin 1987. I. Zvezek, str. 697). Etimologija kaže na neposredno povezavo med postopkom opravljanja in strukturo socialne skupine, v kateri se dogaja, tj. najprej v družini, vendar tudi v širši skupnosti, ki jo notranje povezuje z medsebojnimi vezmi. Z drugimi besedami, “*Ó* je Y-ov *godsib*(*be*)” pomeni, da možnost komunikacijske izmenjave med njima določa bližje sorodstvo in/ali prijateljski odnosi.

Kar sledi potem iz tega, je pravzaprav paradoksalno. Na eni strani moramo, če je X zares čarovnica, poskrbeti za to, da ne pridemo v spor z njo (kar seveda vključuje, da je ne opravljamo). Na drugi stani moramo širiti to informacijo o njej, če naj bo dejstvo njenega “posebnega znanja” znano po vasi in če naj bo zanesljivo. To je namreč edini način, da se informacija lahko širi, in hkrati edini način, ki potrjuje njeno resničnost<sup>7</sup>.

144 Povezava med vsebino in načinom podajanja lahko v veliki meri pojasnjuje, zakaj se ljudje tako zelo bojijo, da bi jim vaško opravljanje dajalo “status” čarovnice. Ne glede na to, ali se oseba ukvarja s čarovnijo ali ne, “dejstvo” postane ravno zaradi tega, ker se o tem opravlja, in vsi poskusi domnevne čarovnice, da bi to zanikala, samo utrjujejo prepričanje, da res “zna”. Ena izmed informatork je znala neko “molitev” (najbrž je šlo za besedilo ljudskega uroka), ki ji jo je povedal oče, domnevni “znalec”, na smrtni postelji. Nekaj sosedov je izvedelo za to in so žensko začeli nadlegovati s prošnjami za “pomoč”: Inf.: ... *moje ime so obešali na veliki zvon ... In potem so ljudje prihajali ... iz Murmanska, iz Belozerskega, iz vseh mogočih krajev. Jaz pa berem in berem in ... [tj. molitev], trapa neumna! Ljudje se mi smilijo ..., eni so dobri ljudje, drugi so sovražniki. Samo pogledjte, tudi vi ste se pustili ujeti na ta trnek ..., vidite – to je to. Od lani naprej pa nič več. Vsem rečem “ne”* (EU–Belozer.–02. KZV). Kljub temu, da je ženska odločno zanikala, da bi imela kakršnekoli posebne sposobnosti, so vsi v vasi popolnoma prepričani, da je po rodu “čarovnica”.

V drugem primeru je neka ženska skušala pomagati sosedu tako, da ji je na poškodovano nogo dajala obloge z vodko in jo je posvaril celo njen mladoletni sin: “*Mami, pazi, ljudje bodo govorili, da si čarovnica*” (EU–Khvojn.–97. FR.43. ENE); vendar je bilo že prepozno.

Strah, da bi kdo veljal za čarovnico, je nekoliko “sovjetsko” obarvan, ker je v prejšnjem sistemu veljalo, da je širjenje kakršnihkoli informacij že samo po sebi sumljivo, priznavanje “dejstva”, da v vasi živijo “čarovnice”, pa že enako obrekovanju “novega, sovjetskega načina življenja”, in torej tudi nevarno.

Inf.: *Nekoč niso priznavali žensk, ki so “znale” in so jih kaznovali ... Prepovedano jim je bilo izvajati [čarovnijo]. Nekoč ... niti besede ne o tem ..., vsi smo morali biti tiho o tem /.../, vse je bilo na skrivaj, niti besede nisi smel reči ... Zdaj vse to oživljajo ..., pokažejo na televiziji in na radiu so rekli, da je zdaj veliko “povpraševanje” po teh starih ženskah, ki “znajo”* (EU–Belozer.–03. FR.3.9. IZA).

Neka druga ženska je povedala, da njena tašča, čeprav je “znala”, nikoli ni pomagala nikomur izven družine, ker je bil njen sin član partije (EU–Belozer.–03. FR.3.9. BLA). Celo tradicionalno “prisluškanje pod okni” (božična šega: mladi skušajo ujeti prve zvoke izza sosedovih oken, da bi tako zvedeli za prihodnost) v sovjetskih časih ni vedno “uspelo”: “*Moj stari [mož – A. K.] ni bil ravno zgovoren. O Božiču sem imela navado govoriti: “Ne hodite k nam “poslušati” – tu sediva ta starim in sva čisto tiho*” (EU–Khvojn.–97. FR.43. ENE).

<sup>7</sup> Res pa je, da kadar oseba že velja za čarovnico in zlasti če izvaja “črno” magijo, potem tega ni lahko zanikati, niti v primeru, da sama ne govori javno o svojih sposobnostih. Inercija nekega ugleda tu igra pomembno vlogo.

Dandanes – tako je bilo omenjeno v enem izmed intervjujev – pritisk “od zgoraj” ni več tako silen, kot je bil nekoč, in “čarovnice” včasih postanejo tako popularne, da jih hodijo obiskovat ljudje iz manjših in večjih mest. Interna vaška “cenzura” še vedno obstaja, vendar se le spreminja. Najprej zaradi premika v pojmovanju, kaj je “normalno” ali “pravo” vedenje: to, kar je bilo nekoč nedopustno in “grešno” (ločitve, izvenzakonska razmerja, ženske, ki popivajo in preklinjajo ipd.), se vse bolj širi, dogaja se vse bolj javno in ni več tako “vredno” opravljanja.

Inf.: *V preteklosti so [ženske] mislile, da je sramota zapustiti [moža]. Če so živele slabo ali dobro – nikoli niso o tem govorile..., skrivale so to pred ljudmi /.../ Zdaj je pa kar vse javno* (EU–Belozer.–01. FR.8. EAK).

Spremenjena etična pojmovanja, predvsem glede “sramote”, so zmanjšala strah pred obrekovanjem drugih zaradi dejanj, ki so nekoč veljala kot obsojanja vredna in o katerih se je govorilo samo za hrbtom “storilca”. Danes si ljudje odkrito očitajo določeno vedenje in zaradi tega ni nobenega problema. Stalno tarnanje starejših o tem, kako je zdaj vse slabše, je torej povsem razumljivo.

Drug element tega tarnanja pa je, da ljudje sedaj živijo vsak zase, medtem ko so nekoč živeli v “tesno povezanem krogu” (EU–Belozer.–03. FR.1.15. BLP). Ne glede na številne razloge za okrnjeno socialno povezanost v vasi, je to gotovo povezano tudi z vaškim opravljanjem: če je drugim “čisto vseeno”, kaj jaz počenjam, je tudi meni “popolnoma vseeno”, kaj govorijo o meni.

Gotovo je res, da spremembe v etiki in socialnosti vasi niso absolutne in da je treba nanje gledati kot na tendence, ker bi opravljanje sicer popolnoma izginilo. Vendar je očitno pomembno, da upoštevamo ta razvoj in to delno pojasnjuje, zakaj raje delamo s starejšimi ljudmi, ki so se socializirali v drugačnem okolju in ki lahko primerjajo preteklost in sedanjost.

Ker je opravljanje “skupna zadeva” in dolžnost vsake skupnosti, si nihče ne more privoščiti, da se mu popolnoma odpove, če želi biti polni član skupnosti. Vendar do neke mere lahko sam odloča o stopnji ali meri sodelovanja v opravljanju. A ta “mera” je tudi odvisna od normativnih pravil, ki jih skupnost uveljavlja, in to je že drug vidik povezave med opravljanjem in strahom: človek se lahko boji, da ne bi kršil prave mere, tj. da bi opravljal “preveč” ali “premalo”:

a) Inf.: *L. je zvita ..., kadar se pogovarja s tabo, vse izvleče iz tebe; /.../ in kako šele obsoja druge – Bog varuj!* [pomeni, da oseba stalno obsoja druge – A. K.] (EU–Belozer.–03. FR.3. KNA).

“Preveč” opravljanja ali “obsojanje” drugih (pojma sta takorekoč izmenljiva) lahko izzove ravno toliko graje skupnosti kot “premalo” opravljanja:

b)... *Imela sem pet otrok in celo naš pastir mi je govoril: “Vsi te obsojajo, ker ne hodiš nikamor, niti k drugim ženskam na klepet, ker k nikomur ne hodiš na obisk.” Odvrnila sem: “Saj veš, kako je z mano – podnevi delam in ko pridem zvečer domov, niti ne vem, kje začeti ...”* (EU–Belozer.–01. FR.24. TNI).

Nezmožnost te ženske, da si ustvarja socialna zaveznitva in mrežo, se še danes nadaljuje; bili smo priče dogodka (o božiču), ko so jo sosedi dolgo časa prepričevali, naj pride na čaj. Njen primer najbrž ponazarja zamisel, da se “*zadržanost lahko obrne proti komu*” (Abrahams 1970: 296); čeprav ženska v opisanem primeru ni popolnoma “izključena” iz lokalne skupnosti, celo njeni najboljši “prijatelji” kdaj “pozabijo”, da sploh obstaja.

Poleg strahu, da ne bi upoštevali “prave mere” opravljanja, kar bodisi prinese sloves “obrekljivca” ali pripelje do popolne izključitve iz vsakdanjega klepeta, obstaja še strah, da bi kakršnokoli opravljanje, “na debelo” ali “na drobno”, lahko povzročilo odkrit spor, ki bi lahko razdvajal skupnost.

146

Splošni mehanizem opravljanja predpostavlja, da je tisti, ki ga opravljamo, izključen iz “izmenjave informacije”. Ta “delna izključenost” je še posebno zanimiva, ker je član skupnosti na ta način “odtujen”, čeprav samo za določen čas. Strah pred tem, da bi bili “izključeni”, iz opravljanja naredi močno orodje normativnega urejanja znotraj skupnosti:

Ank.: *Ali je bilo veliko zlobnih jezikov, veliko opravljanja v preteklosti?*

Inf.: *Takrat in danes /.../*

Ank.: *Ali so se ljudje tega bali?*

Inf.: *Seveda so se. Bali so se ... Človek ne ve, kaj govorijo in počenjajo (EU-Batets.-99. FR.32. SVI).*

“Delna izključenost” se lahko konča na več načinov; za nas je zanimiv primer, ko nekdo izključeni osebi skrivaj zaupa: a) dejstvo, da ga/njo opravljajo, b) vsebino opravljanja. V trenutku, ko se to zgodi, opravljanje preneha biti to, kar naj bi bilo – informacija, ki se izmenjuje in obravnava za hrbtom nekoga in ki lahko preraste v odkrit spor, v katerem tisti, ki so ga opravljali, “obračuna” z opravljevci. Strah pred takim razkritjem je najpomembnejši element “strahu pred opravljanjem”, tako za tiste, ki so bili žrtve opravljanja (ker jih bodo potem morda javno opravljali), in za obrekljivce (če bo žrtev skušala najti “krivce”).

Ank.: *Ali so bili primeri, ko je nekdo namenoma hotel, da bi se drugi sprli?*

Inf.: [se smeje] [neko dekle] ... *je hodilo z nekim fantom, vendar se je ta poročil z drugim dekletom. In kako se je lahko maščevala? Prišla je in ga naredila impotentnega.*<sup>8</sup> /.../ *Ja, in potem so začeli govoriti polno umazanih stvari ..., da je imel dekle v svoji vasi in se potem poročil z drugim ... /.../ Vse to govorijo nalašč, da bi izzvali spor v družini. To se kar naprej dogaja (EU-Khvoin.-99. FR.24. IEI).*

Pozneje se bomo vrnil k “prijateljskemu obveščanju” žrtve opravljanja, ker je lahko povezano z močnimi občutki užitka in zadovoljstva.

Ljudje ponavadi odsvetujejo, da bi kdo skušal “izslediti” neko obrekovanje do izvora in ugotoviti, kdo vse je pri tem sodeloval. Razlog je v glavnem preprost:

<sup>8</sup> V ljudski kulturi je pestra izbira magičnih receptov, kako narediti moškega “nesposobnega”, tj. impotentnega.



od tega ni posebne koristi, ker pač ni trdnih dokazov. Pri terenskem delu smo naleteli na nekaj takih situacij, ko se je nekdo tega lotil in včasih je bilo tudi učinkovito: opravljanje “*se je obrnilo proti opravljevcu*” (Gluckman 1963: 313):

a) Ank.: *Ali ste bili kdaj v položaju, ko je nekdo sprožil opravljanje o vas?*

Inf.: *Zgodi se, da te po krivem obsojajo – in temu nikoli ne prideš do konca.<sup>9</sup> Lani sem šla k F. ... in sem rekla: “Kaaaj? Kdo ti je to povedal?” No, ne spomnim se, na koga je namignila, da je to povedal ... pa sem sama raziskala stvari. Pa so oni rekli, da nimajo nič s tem, rekli so: “Mi nismo rekli nič takega, F. si je vse to izmislila.” /.../ Krivili so F. za čisto vse, vso krivdo so zvalili nanjo. Res je, da si marsikaj izmišljuje.*

Ank.: *Kako to mislite?*

Inf.: *Rada laže, na debelo laže* (EU–Belozer.–01. FR.3. KNA).

b) [Nekdo je povedal, da se je informatorka zaljubila v poročenega moškega in da se bo ločila od moža; vroča novica se je širila po vasi in neko žensko so “zasačili” pri opravljanju.]

Inf.: ... *Jaz pravim: “To bom pa preverila [tj. kdo je sprožil novico – A. K.], naj natančno pove, od koga je to slišala.” [Pod pritiskom je dekle povedalo ime Z., ki dela v vrtcu.] In sem šla tja [v vrtec] in [sem rekla]: “Tako te bom nabila, da boš pri priči krepnila” [To in še mnogo več je govorila v prisotnosti otrok in zaradi opolzosti je morala na sodišče – a ji je bilo čisto vseeno, ker se je maščevala obrekljivki, ki je sama skoraj umrla od strahu in sramote.] (EU–Belozer.–03. FR.1.12. VAD).*

Poudariti moramo, da je VAD ogromna ženska, ki je delala kot kovač od svojega petnajstega (!) leta in v vasi slovi po izjemno sočnem preklinjanju, kakor tudi po tem, da se ničesar in nikogar ne boji. To so morali vedeti tudi tisti, ki so jo opravljali. Da so jo kljub temu sramotili, je primer, ko se ljudje uštejejo ali napačno ocenjujejo moč žrtve opravljanja oziroma primer nezadostnega strahu pred možnimi posledicami.

Strah pred tem, da bi širili opravljive novice, ne temelji samo na možni nevarnosti s strani obrekovane osebe. V primerih, ko je ugled neke osebe že “omadeževan”, se bo ta raje izogibala obrekovanju drugih, ker bi to lahko še bolj spodkopavalo njen ugled v javnosti. Informatorka, ki je na vasi znana po svojem razuzdanem življenju (po zobeh so jo vlačili zlasti takrat, ko je neki ženski in njenima dvema otrokoma “ukradla” moža in očeta),<sup>10</sup> se je nalašč izogibala pogovoru

<sup>9</sup> Nezmožnost “razvozlanja” neke obrekljive novice potrjuje dolga vrsta prispevkov za *opravljanje* v ruščini, ki ustvarjajo podobo spletanja in prepletanja. Podoba se zrcali tudi v številnih razlagah sanj: sanjati o mrežah, o ženski pletenici ali o prepleteni ograji itd. naj bi bilo znamenje dejanskega opravljanja.

<sup>10</sup> V zelo nazornem primeru je ženska imela vzdevek “učiteljica”. Če ne poznamo konteksta, bi lahko mislili, da v tem ni nič slabšalnega, celo nasprotno: vzdevek bi lahko pričal o poklicnih zaslugah ženske, ki je desetletja učila v krajevni šoli z internatom. Nekega dne pa smo izvedeli, da so ji ta vzdevek dali, ker je bila kot mlada vdova po vojni po vasi znana zaradi tega, ker “*je učila vse mlade fante, kako se ONO dela*” (EU–Belozer.–01. FR. 13. BLP). To tudi pojasnjuje, zakaj se vzdevek uporablja samo, kadar je ni zraven, in zakaj smo morali dati “časno besedo”, da tega ne bomo “povedali naprej”.

o “nevarnih” temah v zvezi s prekrški drugih – pač zato, da ne bi na neki točki začeli naštevati njenih lastnih grehov. Vsaj trudila se je dajati vtis, da je vaše aferice niti najmanj ne zanimajo, in to med drugim zato, da bi opravičevala svojo lastno preteklo ravnanje.

Inf.: ... *Ne morem ..., ne morem obsojati ljudi ..., ker tako kot živijo; ... pravijo, da če človek nekaj hoče, pa naj to naredi ..., saj imamo samo eno življenje ...* (EU–Belozer.–01. FR.8. EAK).

Domnevni odpor proti temu, da bi obsojala druge ali samo poslušala, kaj se dogaja na vasi, je ženska zelo spretno razlagala: ker je življenje vse težje in težje v primerjavi z življenjem v njeni mladosti, se raje ne muči in ne obiskuje sovaščanov:

148 Ank.: *Ali pogosto obiščete druge vaščane?*

Inf.: *No, ... zdaj ne hodim nikamor več. Prvič, ni mi do tega, in drugič, ljudje so postali tako ..., ne vem, zakaj ... /.../ kogarkoli srečaš tu, ali pije ali je v solzah ... in potem ti pade morala ... Komu pa je do tega? Doma ne slišiš ničesar in nekako imaš ... več miru v svoji duši /.../ Samo želim si, da je vse dobro z otroki ...* (ibid.).

Glede vloge opravljanja v procesu poenotenja skupine je M. Gluckman zapisal, da “*njenim članom ustvarja preteklo zgodovino*” (Gluckman 1963: 313). Dodati moramo, da opravljanje lahko oživi spomin na stare škandale, ki bi jih nekateri člani najraje pozabili. Star spor lahko preraste v novega in strah pred tem je pomemben faktor v ekonomiji opravljanja.

Nekaj pozornosti moramo posvečati temi “otrok”, ki je bila omenjena v zadnjem intervjuju. Tesna povezanost ljudi, ki živijo v majhni skupnosti, zlasti za družinske odnose ustvarja stanje, ko se sramota prizadeta enemu družinskemu članu razširi na vse člane. Dejstvo, da ima nekdo očeta tatu ali jezиковo mater pijanko, gotovo vpliva na njegov ugled v javnosti. Zaradi tega je še en možni razlog strahu pred tem, da bi bili povezani z opravljanjem, želja, da “ne bi škodovali otrokom”. Nekoč, ko so ljudje imeli več otrok kot danes in ko so vsi živeli v ozkem krogu, je to moralo biti močan razlog za zadržanost v vseh mogočih vaških škandalih:

Inf.: *Nekoč ..., nekoč je bilo bolje – ljudje niso opravljali ali vsaj niso opravljali toliko. Ker so vsi imeli ta male ..., v vsaki hiši po tri do pet deklet ... Zato je mati, so vse matere molčale, ker so vedele, da je pri njih doma ravno tako ... Prepovedano je bilo govoriti o tem.*

---

Očitne analogije v komunikacijski pragmatiki med opravljanjem in slabšalnimi vzdevki, in tudi njihova povezave s sfero konfliktov, lahko kažejo pot nadaljnjim raziskavam (opravljanje bi lahko raziskali kot potencialno neskončno “širjenje” konflikta, iz katerega se je rodilo, slabšalne vzdevke pa kot največjo redukcijo, ki lahko vodi v nov konflikt, podobno kot opravljanje lahko preraste v odkrit spor).

Opozoriti moramo tudi na to, da pravo naravo vzdevka (tj. ali je slabšalen ali ne) lahko ugotovimo samo v kontekstu, ki ga je ustvaril. Dejstvo je, da slabšalni vzdevki (*surnoms péjoratifs*) ne vsebujejo nujno žaljivih sestavin oziroma ponovadi vsebujejo samo nevtralne sestavine (*des noms neutres qui n'ont rien d'injurieux*), tako da njihovo “slabšalno” naravo prepoznamo šele zaradi intonacije, s katero se izgovarjajo (*par le ton moqueur avec lequel on les emploie*), glej: Fonseca 1984: 2227.

Ank.: *Ali to pomeni nekako, da če ti danes opravljaš nekoga, bo jutri nekdo opravljal tebe?*

Inf.: *Da. Jutri bo tebe nekdo opravljal. Mati je vedno govorila: "V naši vaši sta samo dve, ki lahko obsojata druge – ... K. in O. V. – ki nista imeli otrok. Onidve, je rekla, lahko obsojata, ker nimata nikogar. In vsi mi, je rekla, moramo biti tiho. /.../ Kako naj obsojam druge, ko pa sem v istem položaju? ... Ljudje so se bali (EU–Khvoin.–99. FR.24. IED).*

Zadnji vidik, ki ga bomo obravnavali, je povezan s spolnimi razlikami. Čeprav so moški "glasovi" v današnji ruski vasi tako rekoč "ukročeni", smo vendar posneli nekaj intervjujev z moškimi, v katerih so pokomentirali vaško opravljanje.

149

Iz gradiva, ki smo ga zbrali, izhaja, da se s prepričanjem, da je opravljanje tipična "ženska" lastnost, popolnoma strinjajo tako moški kot ženski člani skupnosti:

Inf. [ženska]: *Ljudje vse vedo ... Eden pove drugemu, ta pa naprej ... in potem vsi vedo ...*

Ank.: *Ali to počenjajo ženske ali moški?*

Inf.: *Ne, moški tega ne marajo početi, ženske pa zbirajo prav vse informacije [se smeje]. Nekateri pa še kaj dodajajo [se smeje]. Vse mogoče laži ... (EU–Belozer.–03. FR.3. KNA).*

Inf. [ženska]: *No, v naši vasi je bilo 14 hiš in jasno je šlo vse iz ene v drugo ... nekaj se je zgodilo v eni hiši, nekdo iz te hiše je povedal komu in tako je prišlo do vseh sosedov ...*

Ank.: *Ali so to počeli moški ali ženske?*

Inf.: *Ne, moški tega ne delajo, so bolj resni ... (EU–Belozer.–03. FR.1.6. RTA).*

Inf. [ženska]: *Za moškega se ne spodobi, da opravlja, ženskam pa se odpušča. (EU–Belozer.–03. FR.1.12. PEA).*

Nekaj pogovorov je nakazovalo, da se prakse komuniciranja pri moških in ženskah ne pokrivajo povsem:

Ank.: *Kaj pa ženske? O čem se pogovarjajo?*

Inf. [moški]: *Ženske ... Ne vem, o čem se pogovarjajo ... Čim začnejo brbljati ... [Nič več ne razumem.] (EU–Gdov.–00. FR.7. MNP).*

Ženske, na drugi strani, kdaj pravijo, da ne vedo, o čem se pogovarjajo moški: "[Moški] niso opravljalci ... Mogoče kdaj opravlja, ampak samo v moški družbi. Nikoli ne bodo opravljali skupaj z žensko. Pogovarjali se bodo med sabo ... o težavah, mogoče ..., a da bi opravljali nekoga ali nekaj ..., to pa ne" (EU–Belozer.–03. FR.1.6. RTA). "Moški so imeli svoja pravila ..., a jaz nisem hodila v njihovo družbo" (EU–Belozer.–03. FR.1.10. VAN).

Moški so sami poudarjali, da njihov "moški klepet" nima nič skupnega z opravljanjem: "... tam je klopca, tam včasih posedamo, kadimo in se pogovarjamo ... O čem se pogovarja moški z moškim? ... Kje bi dobila kaj za na zob ... Oni pravi

“Včeraj sem se ga napil, glava me boli,” jaz pa pravim “Saj sem se ga tudi jaz napil”. Brez ficka sem in nihče ne daje več zastonj. Tudi trgovina ne daje več na kredo ...” (EU–Gdov.–00. FR.7. MNP).

Zgoraj navedeni primeri kažejo, da “solidarnost in članstvo v skupini” (Pilkington 1998: 254) v moškem delu skupnosti vzdržujejo na specifičen način, zlasti s popivanjem (napiti se je docela “moško” opravilo), medtem ko opravljanje, tipično žensko opravilo, okrne “podobo moškosti”. Od tod strah moških, da bi njihovo vedenje imeli za “žensko”: “Če moški opravlja, ljudje pravijo “Tak je kot ženska!”” (EU–Belozer.–03. FR.1.12. PEA).

150 Ker niso pripravljeni opravlјati “kot ženske”, niti niso tega sposobni (ker ni pogojev za “družbeno prilagoditev” moškega opravljanja), se moški bojijo vaških obreklјivk in pogosto niti nočejo povedati njihovih imen:

Inf. [moški] *So taki, ja... Ne, ne bom govoril o njih ... Če hočete, da vsa vas nekaj zve – povej [jim] samo besedo ali dve ..., naslednji dan bodo vedeli vsi. So taki ljudje. Samo, ne ..., ne, nočem ... ne, ne bom ...* (EU–Khvoin.–00. FR.15. IVE).

Z drugimi besedami, vaško opravljanje velja kot zavestna strategija ženskega dela skupnosti in deluje ustrahovalno na moške v vasi, ki tega močnega orožja nimajo: “Ženski pogovori o odnosih med ljudmi vzbujajo strah, ker ogrožajo moški družbeni red. Ženski pogovori so lahko usodni ...” (Romaine 1999: 152).

### Opravljanje in užitek

Na začetku te razprave o opravljanju in strahu smo omenili, da je strah bolj “otiplјiv” faktor in da je v intervjujih lažje “zaznaven” kot užitek, ker se v dejanski interakciji najprej pojavi strah, celo preden se oseba sploh vključi v opravljanje, medtem ko je užitek “odložen” in ni “zagotovljen”. Drugi razlog, zakaj je manj opazovanj o užitku v kontekstu opravljanja, je stvar vidika.

Poglejmo, kako ljudje govorijo o opravljanju v svoji vasi.

Prvo skupino tvorijo splošni opisi postopka opravljanja; njegov izvor in/ali udeleženci so predstavljeni nedoločeno, množinsko in brezosebno (npr. “sliši se”, “širi se govorica”, X “vlačijo po ustih”, “pravijo, da itd.).

V drugi skupini informatorji govorijo o lastnem sodelovanju v opravljanju. Izrazi, ki jih uporabljajo, so bodisi nevtralni ali označujejo govornikov bedni položaj, ki ga sili v to, da se obrača k drugim: informatorji so vključeni v “pogovore”, “klepet”, “izmenjavo” ali v to, da svoje težave “zaupajo” dobrim sosedom ali pa tudi “razkrivajo” nekaj, da bi našli čustveno tolažbo. Ni bilo niti enega primera, da bi kdo rekel “opravljal/a sem”.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> V enem primeru je anketiranka posebno poudarjala, da to, kar nam pripoveduje (o osebi, za katero smo vedeli, da velja za “čarovnico”), nikakor ni opravljanje. “Saj ji tega gotovo ne boste povedali, kajne? ... Velja? Samo mimogrede vam to povem; saj veste, ne zato, da bi kogarkoli opravlјala ...” (EU–Belozer.–01. FR.13. BLP)

Tretja in največja skupina opisov je “posvečena” načinom, kako drugi širijo govornice. Tu je besednjak presenetljivo bogat: “obsojajo”, nekoga “obrekujejo”, “lažejo”, “izmišljujejo si”, “potvarjajo resnico”, “napihujejo” in “klevetajo”, “obračajo” stvari, “vse pomešajo”, “blebetajo”, “čenčarijo”, “svinjarijo”, “izmišljotine prodajajo kot čisto resnico”, pripovedujejo “vse mogoče svinjarije” itd.

Ta kratek pregled pripovednih strategij nam omogoča nekaj pomembnih zaključkov: a) informatorji skušajo, kolikor le morejo, zanikati svojo odgovornost za sodelovanje v opravljanju (zato nevtralne izraze brez vrednotenja uporabljajo tudi v prvi skupini – kot član skupnosti je sogovornik lahko vključen v opravljanje znotraj skupnosti); b) razpon in pestrost izrazov v tretji skupini ne razkrivata samo neodobranja vedenja sovaščanov, ampak tudi zelo močno, skrito bojazen pred tem, da bi postali tarče tega opravljanja. Oba faktorja skupaj kažeta na vase usmerjen odnos informatorjev, kadar govorijo o vaškem opravljanju, in na to, da na opravljanje najraje gledajo s posebnega vidika.

151

Ta vidik bi lahko opisali takole: “strah” pred opravljanjem je v prvi vrsti “moj strah” (ali vsaj “naš strah”, tj. strah vseh spodobnih ljudi v skupnosti z mano vred) in “užitek” je vedno “njihov”, tj. “zlih jezikov”, ki nam, spodobnim ljudem, naredijo življenje tako neznosno.

To, čemur smo rekli “užitek opravljanja”, je torej v zgodbah informatorjev skoraj izključno “uživanje drugih pri opravljanju”, in ker “uživajo” na moj račun, je to “zlobno” in vredno moralne graje. Graja tudi prevladuje v pripovedih o “užitku opravljanja”, ker če bi govorili o “čistem” užitku opravljanja, celo ko gre za nekoga drugega, bi to takoj pomenilo, da je sogovorniku vsaj na skrivaj všeč. Tudi takrat, ko so informatorji namigovali na pozitivna čustva pri ljudeh, ki opravljajo, so tok zgodbe takoj preusmerili k pogubnim posledicam opravljanja.

Vse to pojasnjuje, zakaj smo imeli toliko težav pri izvajanju kontekstov za “užitek opravljanja” in zakaj jih je tako malo. V nadaljevanju članka bomo skušali razmejiti te kontekste in pri tem ne bomo pozorni samo na primere, ko je sogovornik izrecno omenil motiv “uživanja”, ampak tudi na tiste, ko nam je bil “užitek” bolj ali manj očit.

V vrsti pogovorov o vaškem opravljanju so se ljudje celo smejali, čeprav je bilo opravljanje v njihovih zgodbah povezano z “neprijetnimi občutki” in s “škandali”:

[pogovor o ženskah, ki so zapustile moža]

Ank.: *Ali ljudje radi govorijo o tem, radi opravljajo te primere?*

Inf.: *Vsi. Vendar tako, da onadva [tj. mož in žena] ne bosta zvedela [smeh].*

Ank.: *Ali je opravljanje na splošno prijetno?*

Inf.: *Če bi zvedela, bi te prijavila in potem imaš težave – to se je že dogajalo /.../ vse mogoče grdobije – vse to govorijo nalašč, samo zato, da bi naredili škandal /.../.*

Ank.: *Ali ljudje to kar verjamejo?*

Inf.: *Kaj pa naj?* [smeh] (EU–Khvojn.–99. FR.24. IEI)

ali:

Inf.: *Ne, moški tega ne marajo, ženske pa zbirajo vse podatke* [smeh]. *In jih še nekaj dodajajo* [smeh], *vse mogoče laži ...* (EU–Belozer.–03. FR.3. KNA).

Informatorji gotovo doživljajo pozitivne občutke, kadar govorijo o opravljanju, tudi če ima negativne posledice. Zdi se, da je za to več razlogov. Prvič je tu občutek neprizadetosti ali odmaknjenosti: negativne posledice so prizadele druge ljudi, ne pripovedovalcev, in/ali je od tega minilo že veliko časa. Drugič gre lahko za element ironije do antropologa, ki se trudi, da bi zvedel stvari, ki jih vsi (celo iz lastnih izkušenj) poznajo in ki res niso nič posebnega. Vendar se zdi, da obstaja še tretji in verjetno najpomembnejši razlog. Ljudje predstavljajo opravljanje kot nekakšno igro, igro o “skrivnosti”, ki ni več nobena skrivnost in je njeno razkritje predvidljivo, prav tako tudi posledice: usodne ne bodo niti za neposredne udeležence. Zgodbo bomo pač pozabili in naredili prostor novi.

152

Z drugimi besedami, na opravljanje se lahko gleda kot na neke vrste zabavo.<sup>12</sup> S sodelovanjem v opravljanju ljudje, tako kaže, vsaj delno kompenzirajo splošno pomanjkanje zabave v današnjih vaseh.

Vztrajno zanimanje za erotične vidike življenja mladih je zabava posebne vrste za nekatere starejše ženske (npr. EU–Belozer.–01. FR.12. I.; EU–Belozer.–01. FR.13. BLP; EU–Belozer.–03. FR.1.7. GAP itd.). Zanimivo je, da so to ravno starejše ženske, med katerimi jih je več znanih zaradi posebnega nagnjenja do opolzkih izrazov in petja. Domnevamo lahko, da gre tu za psihološki mehanizem kompenzacije, pri katerem je kršenje “spolnih tabujev” v pogovoru edini preostali način za uveljavljanje lastne “spolnosti” in “ženskosti”. V tem primeru “*predsodki o starih ženskah in njihovem blebetanju*” in zlasti očitki o “*pasjih babah*” (Romaine 1999: 152) niso povsem brez osnove.

R. Abrahams v svojem delu o opravljanju omenja drug vidik “kompenzacije”, ki jo je mogoče doseči s sodelovanjem v opravljanju: “*Mnogo posameznikov opravlja delo, ki ni ravno v očeh javnosti in ti uporabljajo mrežo opravljanja za to, da govorijo o svojih poslih in se tako počutijo bolj polne članke mreže in skupnosti*” (Abrahams 1970: 293). Tako vedenje niti ne izzove nasprotovanja, če strategijo uporablja samo omejeno število ljudi; a če bi se večina skušala uveljaviti na ta način, bi se vsekakor povečala splošna raven “tekmovalnosti” v skupnosti, posamezni udeleženec opravljanja pa niti ne bi imel večjih možnosti postati bolj “polnovreden član”. Opravljanje je “izravnalen” postopek, ne samo zato, ker vsak posameznik prej ali slej lahko postane njegova tarča, ampak tudi zato, ker so vsi člani skupnosti lahko enako pripravljeni sodelovati v njem in imajo enako ali primerljivo komunikacijsko sposobnost, da ga nadaljujejo.

<sup>12</sup> V nasprotju s pričakovanji naša raziskava o vsakdanjih vaških sporih v 20. stoletju kaže, da je v teh sporih nekaj elementov uživanja: tako npr. pogosto omenjajo javne prepire kot “najbolj približljive predstave” pri kmetih, “sramotilno kaznovanje” vaških tatov in prešustnikov pa je pogosto preraslo v veselico s petjem, plesom in popivanjem itd. Občutek neprizadetosti je tu seveda ključni element – “publika” je tista, ki uživa v postopku in sprošča svoje frustracije.

Vendar se zdi, da je v delovanju opravljanja vsaj ena specifična vloga, ki omogoča tistemu, ki igro igra, da se razlikuje od vseh drugih opravljalcev. Tu se vračamo k osebi “ovaduha”, ki “ukrade” njej zaupane podatke in jih sporoči obrekovani osebi. Zdi se, da ima oseba, ki tako postane “izvor” informacije (in tu gre za primer “*prestiža zaradi omenjanja njenega imena (ki tako postane znano)*” (ibid., 292)) in hkrati napeljuje k odkritemu sporu, ima dobre možnosti, da kompenzira svoje sicer pičle možnosti javnega nastopanja.

Ni dvoma, da gre za nevarno igro in da jo imajo na splošno za nespodobno (od tod strah, da bi jo igrali), a če je tveganje večje, so tudi možnosti za zadovoljstvo, ki naj bi sledilo, večje.<sup>13</sup> Tu velja posvečati nekaj pozornosti dejstvu, da je sam trenutek “ovadenja” včasih opisan z besedami, ki kažejo na “estetski” užitek “ovaduha”: KIY, ženska stara nad 90 let, je prišla k najboljši prijateljici in sosedi AAM in ji je “zapela” naslednjo zgodbo: AAM–ina sedemnajstletna vnukinja ne hodi tako pogosto v bližnje mesto zaradi študija na visoki šoli, ampak zaradi “moških”, ki jo tam čakajo (EU–Belozet.–01.Fr.12. I.). AAM je sosedi verjela in to je povzročilo veliko težav vnukinji, ki je bila vsaj toliko presenečena, ko je slišala to “novico”, kot je bila njena babica ogorčena.<sup>14</sup>

Pri tem velja opozoriti na to, da je v zadnjem primeru plemenito vlogo pri “razkrivanju bridke resnice” igrala najboljša prijateljica. Motivacija za tak korak pa je vendar lahko različna: “ovaduh/inja” morda v zamenjavo za dragoceno informacijo računa na hvaležnost prijatelja/prijateljice, ki bo krepila sicer razrahljane vezi. Pri tem lahko domnevamo, da antropologi (mladi, izobraženi ljudje iz velikih mest) v vasi veljajo za nekakšen “simboličen kapital” in da interna (vaška) konkurenca lahko nekatere vaščane spodbuja k temu, da si skušajo pridobiti posebno naklonjenost s tem, da nam razkrivajo najbolj intimne podrobnosti življenja v vasi (o opravljanju, na primer).<sup>15</sup> Razen tega je možnost izkazovanja in potrjevanja “kulturne kompetentnosti” v lokalnih zadevah sama po sebi užitek, zlasti kadar razen tujcev ni drugih vnetih poslušalcev ali kadar je nekdo iz kakršnihkoli razlogov potisnjen na rob skupnosti.

Če se zdaj vrnemo k internim vaškim odnosom: kadar komu sporočajo, da ga ljudje opravljajo, potem ta oseba lahko skuša slediti verigo opravljanja vse do njegova izvora. Kot smo že omenili, je to zelo kočljivo početje, zato se lahko vprašamo, če je v tem kakršenkoli užitek.

<sup>13</sup> Ni izključeno, da so nekatera pozitivna čustva povezana z občutkom nevarnosti za lastno sposobnost in da se strah pri tem pretvori v vir posebnega užitka. Morda gre pri (starejših) ženskah, ki kršijo spolne tabuje, za podoben mehanizem.

<sup>14</sup> Povsem očitno je, da vsako opravljanje ne temelji na neki “resnici” in tudi to, da se njegova vsebina med širjenjem vse bolj izkrivlja “z izmišljenimi dodatki ali celo z zamolčanjem dejstev” (Gluckman 1963: 307). Zdi se, da dodajanje novih podrobnosti in “motivov” neki informaciji daje človeku občutek “avtorstva” in tako doživlja veselje in užitek ustvarjalnosti.

<sup>15</sup> Prim. komentar o “številu obiskov etnologov” kot o enem izmed faktorjev, ki ustvarjajo “neenakopravnost” v vaški skupnosti (tisti, ki niso deležni pozornosti etnologov, postanejo zavistni, ostali se veselijo), in ta neenakopravnost poraja novo opravljanje (Fonseca 1984: 2231).

Kaže, da tiste, ki skušajo najti izvor opravljanja, poganjata dve med seboj povezani želji: kaznovati krivce ("obrekovalce") in dokazati svojo nedolžnost.

V enem takih primerov so žensko "obvestili", da o njej kroži naslednja govornica: kadar njenega moža ni, naj bi v hišo vabila moške in ženske in naj bi "popivali" in počeli "bogvekej". Dobila je tudi nasvet, naj nikar ne skuša ugotoviti izvora obrekovanja. Vendar nasveta ni upoštevala in je hodila od ženske do ženske, da bi le dognala izvor obrekovanja. Pri tem je kar naprej ponavljala, da ne hodi nikamor razen v trgovino, da ima malega sina, ki hodi zgodaj spat, da pije zelo zmerno itd. Ko je v teku preiskave prišla do neke gospe L., ki je bila v vasi znana zaradi svojega razuzdanega življenja, ji je rekla: "*Poslušajte, gospa, če moški hodijo k vam na orgije, moje ime pa le pustite pri miru*" (EU–Batets.–99. FR.29. VNA). A se je izkazalo, da L. vendarle ni bila "zadnja sled" v preiskavi, ker ji je povedala drugi naslov. Na koncu je odkrila, da je "avtorica" obrekovala njena lastna sestra, s katero je bila takrat v napetih odnosih. Sestra je priznala, med njima je izbruhnil hud spor in za več let sta prekinili vse odnose.

154

Naši informatorki pa je vendar uspelo dokazati svojo nedolžnost in sestrično krivdo in oboje ji je prineslo, če že ne "užitka", vsaj notranje zadovoljstvo. Kar je v tem primeru tudi pomembno, je njen komentar o sestrični motivaciji za obrekovanje:

Inf.: ... *preveč divje živi ..., nikoli je ni doma, ves čas preživlja pri prijateljih, /.../ zaslužila si je pošteno lekcijo ...* (ibid.).

Z drugimi besedami, obrekovanje "zle sestre" je zrcalilo tisto, česar je bila sama osumljena, tj. izvenzakonskih razmerij (prim. tudi obtožbe naše informatorki proti L.).

Širša domneva, na kateri temelji ta argument, je ta, da ima vsak nekaj, kar ga lahko spremeni v tarčo opravljanja (prim. "opravljajo zato, ker sami niso "čisti"" (EU–Belozer.–03. FR.1.7. GAP). Če se lotimo nekoga drugega in tako opravljanje preusmerjamo na to osebo, s tem ne odvrnemo samo potencialne nevarnosti od nas samih (čeprav samo začasno), ampak tudi pridobimo simbolično moč manipuliranja z imenom izbrane osebe. Dobro vemo, da je moč neločljivo povezana z užitki, in če tarče ne izberemo na slepo, ampak nalašč (npr. starega sovražnika, s katerim imamo še neporavnane račune), so v igri še dodatni užitki.

Zaradi dejstva, da človeka opravlja vrsta ljudi, ki imajo vsi nekaj, za kar nočejo, da bi kdorkoli zvedel, je ta oseba tarča ali žrtev iskanja "grešnega kozla", torej "svetovne" prakse (Gluckman 1968: 24), ki se ji vdajajo *mnogi* ljudje in v tem uživajo, ker jim daje začasno "dovoljenje" obsojati *enega*.

## Zaključek

V tem članku smo obravnavali nekatere vidike *strahu* in *užitka* v raznih pojavnih oblikah v kontekstu vaškega opravljanja. Namenoma smo se odločili, da se ne bomo osredotočili na en sam primer, ne glede na to, kako obsežen bi lahko bil, ampak na čim več pomembnih plati problema, kolikor nam je omogočilo terensko gradivo. Poleg tega, da smo analizirali mehanizme konfliktna komunikacije



med člani dane skupnosti, smo skušali raziskati kontekst interakcije med informatorji in antropologi, da bi ugotovili, kako prisotnost tujcev lahko vpliva na "interno" prakso opravljanja v vasi.

Ugotavljamo, da sta strah in užitek lahko dve vrsti socialno pogojenih čustev, ki določata ekonomijo vaškega opravljanja, pri katerem ljudje iščejo zlato sredino med možno kaznijo, ki jih lahko doleti, in možnimi koristmi, ki so jih lahko deležni.

Zavedamo se, da je to samo en način gledanja na opravljanje kot na "samouravnlalni" sistem ravnovesja, in upamo, da bodo nadaljnje terenske raziskave prinesle druge perspektive za interpretacijo opravljanja.

## LITERATURA

- ABRAHAMAS, Roger D., 1970. A performance-centered approach to gossip. *Man* 5, št. 2, str. 290–302
- ANTHONY, Susan, 1973. Anxiety and rumor. *The journal of social psychology* 89, febr., str. 91–99
- BRIGGS, Charles L., 1986. *Learning how to ask: a sociolinguistic appraisal of the role of the interview in social science research*. Cambridge
- DUBISCH, Jill (ur.), 1986. *Gender and power in rural Greece*. New Jersey
- GARFINKEL, Harold, 1984. *Studies in ethnomethodology*. Oxford
- GLUCKMAN, Max, 1963. Gossip and scandal. *Current anthropology* 4, št. 3, str. 307–317
- GLUCKMAN, Max, 1968. Psychological, sociological and anthropological explanation of witchcraft and gossip. *Man* 3, št. 1, str. 20–34
- FONSECA, Claudia, 1984. La violence et la rumeur. *Les temps modernes* 40, št. 455 (jun.), str. 2224–2235
- GALPERIN, Ilya, 1987. *Big English-Russian dictionary*, vol. 1. Moscow
- KULICK, Dan, 1993. Speaking as a woman. *Cultural anthropology* 14, št. 4, str. 510–542
- KUSHKOVA, Anna, 2001. Village quarrel: techniques of field questioning and modeling of the communicative situation. V: *Anthropology, folkloristic, linguistics: collection of articles. Book 1*. St. Petersburg, 2001, str. 14–36
- PAINE, Robert, 1967. What is gossip about? *Man* 67, št. 2, str. 278–285
- PILKINGTON, Jane, 1998. "Don't try and make out that I'm nice!": the different strategies women and men use when gossiping. V: *Language and gender: a reader*, str. 254–270. London
- ROMAINE, Suzanne, 1999. Gendered talk: gossip, shop talk, and the sound of silence. V: *Communicating gender*, str. 151–187. London, New Jersey
- WEBSTER, 1996. *Webster's new universal unabridged dictionary*. New York

## VIRI

- EU-Khvojn.-97. FR.43. 07.07.97. Vas Spasovo. Inf.: ENE, r. 1925. Ank.: A. Pančenko, S. Štirkov.
- EU-Khvojn.-99. FR.15. 07.07.99. Vas Zadelie. Inf.: IVE, r. 1930. Ank.: A. Lvov, A. Kuškova.
- EU-Khvojn.-99. FR.24. 14.07.99. Vas Zadelie. Inf.: IEL, r. 1930. Ank.: A. Lvov, A. Kuškova.
- EU-Batets.-99. FR.29. 04.08.1999. Vas Melkoviči. Inf.: VNA, r. 1972. Ank.: A. Kuškova.
- EU-Batets.-99. FR.32. 04.08.99. Vas Melkoviči. Inf.: SVI, r. 1928. Ank.: M. Vadejša, A. Lvov,
- EU-Gdov.-00. FR. 7. 11.07.2000. Vas Lunjovšina. Inf.: MNP, r. 1928. Ank.: A. Kuškova.

- EY-Belozer.-01. FR.3. 01.07.2001. Vas Verhovie. Inf.: KNA, r. 1924. Ank.: S. Žavoronok, A. Kuškova.
- EY-Belozer.-01. FR.6. 03.07.2001. Vas Verhovie. Inf.: KNA, r. 1924. Ank.: A. Kuškova.
- EY-Belozer.-01. FR. 8. 03.07.2001. Vas Verhovie. Inf.: LŘE, r. 1921. Ank.: A. Kuškova.
- EY-Belozer.-01. FR.12. 05.07.2001. Vas Mitino. Inf.: L, r. 1983. Ank.: S. Žavoronok, A. Kuškova.
- EY-Belozer.-01. FR. 13. 06.07.2001. Vas Esino. Inf.: BLP, r. 1927. Ank.: S. Žavoronok, A. Kuškova.
- EY-Belozer.-01. FR. 24. 09.07.2001. Vas Zubovo. Inf.: TNI, r. 1928. Ank.: A. Kuškova.
- EY-Belozer.-02. 07.07.2002. Vas Sosnovij Bor. Inf.: KZV, r. 1931. Ank.: S. Žavoronok, N. Slavgorodskaja.
- EY-Belozer.-03. FR. 1.6. 16.07.2003. Vas Zubovo. Inf.: RTA, r. 1924. Ank.: N. Slavgorodskaja, A. Kuškova.
- EY-Belozer.-03. FR. 1.7. 11.07.2003. Vas Zubovo. Inf.: GAP, r. 1947. Ank.: S. Žavoronok, N. Slavgorodskaja, Yu. Knjazkina, A. Kuškova.
- 156 EY-Belozer.-03. FR. 1.9. 13.07.2003. Vas Zubovo. Inf.: KSV, r. 1951. Ank.: S. Žavoronok, N. Slavgorodskaja, Yu. Knjazkina, A. Kuškova.
- EY-Belozer.-03. FR. 1.10. 14.07.2003. Vas Zubovo. Inf.: VAN, r. 1925. Ank.: A. Kuškova.
- EY-Belozer.-03. FR. 1.11. 15.07.2003. Vas Zubovo. Inf.: VAD, r. 1932. Ank.: A. Kuškova.
- EY-Belozer.-03. FR. 1.12. 17.07.2003. Vas Zubovo. Inf.: PEA, r. 1926. Ank.: A. Kuškova.
- EY-Belozer.-03. FR. 1.12. 17.07.2003. Vas Zubovo. Inf.: VAD, r. 1932. Ank.: A. Kuškova. S. Žavoronok.
- EY-Belozer.-03. FR. 1.14. 16.07.2003. Vas Zubovo. Inf.: RV, r. 1937. Ank.: A. Kuškova.
- EY-Belozer.-03. FR. 1.15. 18.07.2003. Vas Esino. Inf.: BLP, r. 1927. Ank.: A. Kuškova.
- EY-Belozer.-03. FR. 3.9. 15.07.2003. Vas Sosnovij Bor. Inf.: IZA, r. 1938. Ank.: S. Žavoronok, N. Slavgorodskaja, Yu. Knjazkina.
- EY-Belozer.-03. FR. 3.9. 15.07.2003. Inf.: BLA, r. 1918. Ank.: S. Žavoronok, N. Slavgorodskaja, Yu. Knjazkina.

---

# VILLAGE GOSSIP BETWEEN FEAR AND PLEASURE

## Some notes on the economy of emotions in the social interaction of a local tradition

---

Anna N. Kushkova

---

157

### Introduction

As is suggested by the title, this paper will address the role of emotions, particularly fear and pleasure, in the social interaction of a specific kind – village gossip. The concept of *emotions* does not imply that we will focus on a single individual, or even a number of single individuals and the way they shape their communicative behavior under the influence of such factors as potential threat or gratification. Rather, we will try to look at the community as a whole, as an aggregate body, where personal feelings and incentives are largely determined by the conditions of social interaction and make one adopt certain strategies of communal behavior. As opposed to R. Paine's assertion, that "*It is the individual and not the community that gossips*" (Paine 1967: 280–281), emotions will be discussed here "*in their relations within a social system*" (Gluckman 1968: 22)<sup>1</sup>.

First – a few words on the methods of this research. Obviously, gossip is not a type of interaction that may be called "*observable-and-reportable, i.e. available... as situated practices of looking-and-telling*" (Garfinkel 1994: 1). As a rule, whenever anthropologists have the luck to "catch" the process of gossiping *in situ* (which in itself happens very rarely), the nature of communication radically changes, turning into a "regular" conversation (on differences between "gossip" and simple "everyday talk" see below). We can ground our analysis primarily on the following types of field data: 1) answers to direct questions about what gossip is and how it is performed in the village, 2) informants' narratives which include stories about village gossiping, and 3) observations on the very process of information exchange between informants and anthropologists. The range within which the first strategy may be applied is rather limited: among other things, it requires reflection on the part of informants (ability that should not be taken for granted) and is tied up with reservations about speaking about "private" affairs with strangers<sup>2</sup>. The second way of getting information on gossip is more "natural", because informants

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper contains a thorough discussion on the definition of *psychological* in social anthropology.

<sup>2</sup> On possible ways of shaping interviews about village quarrels see: Kushkova 2001: 14–36, esp. pp. 19–25.

proceed to this topic according to the internal logic of their narrative, without, so to speak, being forced. The rationale for the third strategy may be recapitulated by Max Gluckman's famous citation, when he justly compares the process of collecting field data with gathering gossip: "*Anthropology is a very tightly knit profession... We maintain our tight bonds of friendship by a vast store of scandal and gossip as well as by legends... It is worth noting here that the Greek Lexicon defines "an anthropologist" ... as "a scandalmonger": /.../ "He is no scandalmonger (anthropologos): he will not talk either about himself or another person"*" (Gluckman 1963: 314). This is especially true because of the differences in the communicative competence of anthropologists and representatives of a local community: because the genre of interviews is not, as a rule, a part of the local "narrative repertoire", interaction, in order to be successful, should adapt to the "native" forms of oral performance (see more about this in: Briggs 1986: x–26). It seems that the easiest way of adaptation is turning from the format of interview proper to that of "everyday conversation", or "talk". These private talks, usually held in the "private" atmosphere of informants' houses, especially when they focus on internal village conflicts, may properly be called "gossiping", and their participants – a temporary "*gossip cell*" (Gluckman 1963: 308).

Our analysis will rely both on recorded texts and on our personal impressions acquired in the process of their recording; in other words, we will reflect upon two major situations where gossiping takes place: "informants among themselves" and "informants and anthropologists".

The main assumption that we are going to test in this paper is the following: fear and pleasure may be seen as two mutually constraining forces that determine one's decision to take part in gossiping and to do this in a particular way (i.e. whether to put certain information into circulation, whom to "initiate" in the gossip and how, how to avoid damaging one's reputation in the process etc.). In other words, we shall try to show that anxiety over potential threats and anticipation of emotional gratification are two factors determining the specific "economy" of village gossip. In doing this, we will discuss only those aspects of *fear* and *pleasure* that we discovered during our field-work, thus leaving the list potentially open.

### **Some notes on local traditions in relation to gossip**

Most of the materials cited in this paper were recorded in the area called Shola (Vologda region, Belozersky district, North-West of Russia), where a team from European University in St. Petersburg conducted field research for several successive years (1997–2003). Shola consists of seven villages grouped along the banks of a river and is about 100 km from the nearest local town.

Like many other rural areas in Russia, Shola is almost exclusively an "all-female world", and more precisely, an "all-old-female world": most of our informants were elderly women between 65 and 90, whose husbands either fell in the Second World War or died after the war. Men of younger generations, roughly those under 50, moved to larger places such as district towns and big cities, and they come to the village only to visit their mothers and to bring their own children for

the summer holidays. The younger men who stayed are mostly socially inept (invalids, alcoholics), or – much more rarely – managed to find some kind of employment in the area.

The situation described contains two major implications for our research. First, studying gossip in this tradition we will inevitably explore “*the ways conflict talk is bound up with gendered voices*” (Kulick 1993: 512) – more precisely, with “female voices”. Although we do not proceed from the popular premises that gossiping is an exclusively women’s occupation, in our context it is such by necessity. Secondly, the stereotype of “women’s world” being “*more obscure... because so much of it centers on the “inside”*” (Dubisch 1986: 26) will not hold in the tradition under discussion: in Shola elderly women occupy both “private” and “public” spheres of life<sup>3</sup>. Yet, although there are no constraints to share in the public life of the village, this participation is pretty equal, so there are no real possibilities for any noticeable “public performance”<sup>4</sup>.

Apart from gender and age, other “*sociometric*” factors (Gluckman 1963: 314) determining the nature of gossiping in this tradition are: an equally low standard of living (everybody lives on state allowances or a pension, everybody heavily depends on gardening, only a few receive additional means from their children), the tight texture of kin relations (extending to other villages beyond Shola), the presence of “traditional” meeting places (e.g. benches at the houses, where neighbors like to sit, or local stores where people regularly meet). One should also mention the telephone, which, however, is not to be found in every house and thus presents an “alternative” channel of communication only to a certain number of villagers. One more thing to take into consideration is the firm belief in witchcraft, on the basis of which all people are divided into those who “know” and all the rest. In each of the seven villages of Shola, there are at least several people who are believed to possess “magical skills”, including those who can “do bad”, i.e. inflict harm through magic.

In as much as a social setting determines the phenomenology and pragmatics of communicative genres existing in it, all these factors taken together make this area into a very fertile ground for gossip. Shola may be even described as a “*chronically high anxious*” community (Anthony 1973: 92), where gossip is one of the very few – if not the only – means of asserting one’s status in the social hierarchy.

<sup>3</sup> Exceptions are the head of the local administration, the policeman, and the priest. The local church was destroyed, as in many other rural areas of Russia, during the Soviet era, and the new one is still under construction. The priest comes to Shola 2–3 times a year; because of the lack of priests, he serves in many other churches of the region. Whenever this happens, he reads mass in a small chapel that was opened here about 5 years ago. During the rest of the time, three elderly women take care of the chapel, perform readings on holy days and virtually supervise the construction of the new church.

<sup>4</sup> Again, with the only exception of the local choir that was very popular in the past and is now gradually “dying”. In the past, women also used to be very active in the local “comrades’ courts” (Russ. *tovarishcheskie sudy*), an example of “grass-root” Soviet justice, but these courts were abandoned a long time ago. We heard that there are organizations such as a “Women’s council” and a “Council of veterans” in the village, but never came across any evidence of their activities.

## Village gossip: between fear and pleasure

### Gossip and fear

Fear – and/or any of its “companions” such as anxiety, hesitation, nervousness, suspicion, and the like – are, so to speak, more “tangible” and “real” than pleasure. One of the reasons for this is that the fear (of getting “involved”, spoiling one’s reputation, being accused of being a scandalmonger etc.) comes before one even starts gossiping – in fact, it exists as a certain cultural disposition whereby participation in any “secret” activity contains a potential threat.

160

The most common expression of fear connected with the process of gossiping is the prohibition, whether explicit or implicit, “to tell anyone”. This prohibition concerns several interrelated aspects of gossiping: a) the content of what is said, b) the very fact that certain information is being circulated, and c) the “source” of information (the names of those who originated it). A number of times in the course of our work this prohibition was verbalized by our informants and was addressed to us: Inf.: *Here in the village... only, please, girls, don't let it out anywhere...* [this warning was followed by several stories: about children who didn’t take proper care of their elderly mother, and as a result one of them got into a motorcycle accident; about a village witch who “stole milk” from cows (i.e. deprived them of the ability to give milk), and about “enchanted” wives who could not leave their husbands] (EU–Belozher.–03. FR.3. KNA)<sup>5</sup>. In another interview with the same woman, after a warning that “*this is a conversation among us*”, she reported how a neighbor’s wife had betrayed him during all of their married life (EU–Belozher.–03. FR.6. KNA).

Similar prohibitions are a constitutive part of “internal village gossiping” as well, and as such presuppose a certain degree of trust between the interlocutors, based on the belief that one’s words will not be “*stolen and publicly dramatized*” (Abrahams 1970: 292). This trust reflects the network of social alliances existing in the community, be they permanent or temporal<sup>6</sup>. On the other hand, one is not so naive as to think that this prohibition will not be immediately broken (at least as far as the content of the message is concerned) – ultimately, it is the mechanism of

<sup>5</sup> In the citations of field materials within the main text we use the following abbreviations: ‘Inf.’ – ‘Informant’, ‘Coll.’ – ‘Collector’, EU – archives of the European University in St. Petersburg, Belozher. – Belozersky district (Vologda oblast), Batets. – Batetsky district (Novgorod oblast), Khvojn. – Khvojninsky district (Novgorod oblast), Gdov. – Gdovsky district (Pskov oblast), year of the recording (last two figures), FR – Field Record (followed by its number), initials of the informant. In the full citation of field materials (in the Sources section) we also added the place and date of recording, the year of informant’s birth and the names of the collectors. We also tried, wherever possible, to preserve the syntax of informants’ speech.

<sup>6</sup> In connection with the notion of *trust*, it is interesting to note that the modern English word *gossip* derives from the Old English *godsib*(*be*) meaning ‘godparent’ (from *god*, God + *sibb*, related), which was also used to denote ‘a friend, esp. a woman’ (Webster 1996: 825) (cf. also *gossiped*, ‘spiritual closeness, friendship’ (Archaic) (Galperin 1987. Vol. I. P. 697). This etymology suggests a direct connection between the process of gossiping and the structure of the social group where it takes place – first of all, family, but also a larger community, interconnected by mutual ties. In other words, the expression “*Ó is Y’s gossip*” implies that the possibility of a communicative exchange between them is determined by close kinship and/or friendly relations.

constant passing on that constitutes gossip as such. This prohibition has thus either a purely formal character, or takes the form of “Don’t tell anybody that you heard it *from me*”.

For fear of acquiring the reputation of being a “scandalmonger”, gossip may be represented in a slightly “reduced” form – as a warning against having any business with certain members of the community: “...*I warn you, too... when you leave the house, lock it properly and take the key with you*”, “...*I tell you... put everything away as far as you can and... watch out*” (EU–Belozër.–03. FR.3. KNA). Usually, such warnings were followed by explanations why certain people should not be trusted, taking the form of stories about their bad deeds (in the case cited above it was the “criminal biography” of a village thief). Warnings of this kind are not necessarily presented as an explicit piece of advice, but may be expressed in a more general way, as if addressed to any potential listener:

Inf.: “*That’s her, one should be afraid of her... she takes soil from the cemetery, does something [with it]... and throws it under one’s feet /.../ and sends people to the other world*”.

Coll.: *Is it somebody who lives here?*

Inf.: [in whisper] “*She is from here. It’s V.*” (EU–Belozër.–02. KZV).

It is obvious enough, that it is informants’ own fears that are voiced in such a way.

There is one interesting peculiarity concerning magical knowledge in relation to gossiping. It is believed that if a person really “knows”, she or he should not profess this openly, not even to those whom she or he “trusts”: “*The one who “knows” will never acknowledge it*” (EU–Belozër.–03. FR.1.11. VAD); “*those who “know” do not admit [it] /.../ there is no such habit of admitting that one “knows” something*” (EU–Belozër.–03. FR.1.12. VAD), “*I came to I. K., but she didn’t at first acknowledge that she could help*” (EU–Belozër.–03. FR.1.9. KSV). The assumption behind this is that magical knowledge may lose some of its power if it is spoken about by its “owner”; any public declaration of having such knowledge is a sure sign that the person is lying (this, for example, was said about one woman who boasts her abilities at every corner, and who, according to one of our informants, “*does not know anything*”, for “*those who know, don’t tell*” (EU–Belozër.–03. FR.1.12. VAD). To our question how people then learn about X or Y being a witch, we were told that people “*pass it on*” (Ibid.). Taking into consideration the content of such information, as well as the way of its dissemination, this is nothing but gossip.

A paradoxical situation follows. On the one hand, if X is a witch, one should take measures of precaution not to get into confrontation with him or her (which naturally includes not spreading gossip about this person). On the other hand, if the fact of her “special knowledge” is to be known in the village, and if it is to be reliable, it has to be gossiped about. This is the only way such information may be spread, and at the same time only this way guarantees its veracity<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Although, if a person already has the reputation of being a witch, especially if she performs “black” magic, it won’t be so easy to refute the gossip, even if she were to start speaking openly about her skills. Every reputation is accompanied by a certain degree of “inertia”.

162 This connection between the content and the mode of its delivery may to a large extent explain why people are so much afraid to get the reputation of being a witch through villagers' gossip. Whether a person performs magic or not, it becomes a "fact" precisely because it is gossiped about, and the person's attempts to deny it may even strengthen the community's conviction that "(s)he really knows". One of our informants had a "prayer" (most probably, a text of a popular "charm") that her father, supposedly a "knowledgeable" person, had given to her when he was dying. Somehow neighbors learned about the existence of this "prayer" and started to besiege the woman with demands for "help": Inf.: "...*they shouted my name from the rooftops... And then people would arrive – from Murmansk, from Belozersk, from all kinds of places. And I read and read [i.e. the text of the prayer], silly me! I have pity on people... but there are good people, and there are enemies. You see, you were hooked by it too ... now – that's it. As of last year – nothing! I say "no" to everybody*" (EU-Belozer.-02. KZV). Yet although the woman staunchly denies having any special skills, everybody is dead sure that she is a hereditary "witch".

In another case, when a woman was trying to help her neighbor by applying vodka compresses to her wounded foot, even her small son warned her: "*Mother, people will call you a witch*" (EU-Khvojn.-97. FR.43. ENE) – but it was already too late.

The fear of getting the reputation of being a witch seems to be tainted by "Soviet" tones, from the times when the secret spreading of any information was suspicious to begin with, and acknowledgment of the fact that "witches" existed in a village was tantamount to defamation of the "new Soviet way of life", and thus also dangerous.

Inf.: *In the past – women who "knew" were not recognized – they were punished... It was prohibited for them to perform [their skill]. In the past... not a word about it... one had to hold one's tongue /.../ everything was covert, one couldn't utter a single word... It's now that they revive everything... show it on TV, and in the radio they say – old women who "know" are in demand* (EU-Belozer.-03. FR.3.9. IZA).

Another woman said that her mother-in-law, although she "knew", never helped anybody outside of the family, because her son was a party member (EU-Belozer.-03. FR.3.9. BLA). Even traditional "listening at the windows" (a Christmastide custom: youths listen to the first sounds from their neighbors' windows in order to learn about the future) would not always "work" in Soviet times: "*My hubby was not a talkative fellow. When Christmastide would come, I would always say: "Do not come to us to "listen" – we are just sitting here, just holding our tongues*" (EU-Khvojn.-97. FR.43. ENE).

Presently, as is mentioned in one of the interviews cited, the pressure "from above" is not as hard as it used to be, and sometimes village "witches" become so extremely "popular" that even people from towns and cities come to see them. The internal village "censorship" is still in place, but it is being transformed. Firstly,



because of a certain shift in the notions of what is “normative”, or “proper” behavior: what used to be ethically inadmissible and “sinful” in the past (divorce, extramarital affairs, women drinking and swearing etc.) is becoming more and more common, and it is performed more and more openly, thus “loosing” some of its “value” as a theme for gossiping.

Inf.: [in the past, women] *thought that it is shameful to leave* [their husbands]. *Whether they lived a bad life or a good life – they never spoke about it...they concealed it from people /.../ And now everything’s in the open* (EU–Belozër.–01. FR.8. EAK).

Change in ethical concepts, primarily in that of “shame”, diminishes the fear of being gossiped about in connection to what used to be seen as morally reprehensible and was discussed only behind the offender’s back. Now, people are often openly lectured about their behavior, but this does not necessarily cause any excitement. The constant lamentations of elderly people about the “decline of morals” are pretty understandable.

What is more – and this is another element of such complaints – if, in the past, people lived “*in a tightly knit community*” (EU–Belozër.–03. FR.1.15. BLP), now they all live “separate” lives. The weakening of social cohesion in the village, for whatever reasons, is certainly related to the village gossip: if others “couldn’t care less” about what I do, I “couldn’t care less” about what they may say of me.

Certainly, changes both in village ethics and sociality are not absolute and should rather be regarded as tendencies – otherwise gossip would have ceased to exist. Nevertheless, it is obviously vital to take these tendencies into consideration and this partially explains our preference to work with elderly people, because they socialized in a different environment and are able to compare the past and present.

Gossip being a “common cause” and the obligation of any community, one cannot choose to completely “abstain” from it, if one wants to be a full member of the community. However, one can – to a certain extent – decide upon the degree, or measure of participation. This “measure”, however, is also subject to normative regulation on the part of the community, and this is another aspect of the connection between gossip and fear – one may be afraid to breach this measure, i.e. to gossip “too much” or “too little”:

a) Inf.: *L. – she is sly... when she talks with you, she draws everything out of you /.../ and judging other people – God save!* [meaning, she judges a lot – A. K.] (EU–Belozër.–03. FR.3. KNA).

“Too much” gossiping, or “judging” other people (these terms are used almost interchangeably) may provoke as much social reproof as “not enough” gossiping:

b) *...I had five kids, and even our shepherd... he told me: “Everybody is passing judgment on you that you don’t go anywhere, not even to visit women to chat, you don’t visit anybody”. I say: “You know how it is with me – during the*

*day I work, and when I come home in the evening, I don't know where to start first...*" (EU-Belozer.-01. FR.24. TNI).

The woman's poor ability to establish social alliances and to engage in networking persists in the present; we witnessed how one day (it was major Christian holiday) her neighbors spent a long time persuading her to come to tea. Her case most probably exemplifies the idea that one's "*reticence may be held against one*" (Abrahams 1970: 296), although in the case described, the woman is not completely "ostracized" in the local community, even her closest "friends" at times "forget" about her existence.

164 Apart from the fear not to observe the due "measure" of gossiping and thus either earn the reputation of a "scandalmonger" or be totally "excluded" from everyday communication, there is the additional fear that gossip – any gossip, whether "big" or "small" – may provoke open confrontation, potentially divisive for the community.

The universal mechanism of circulating gossip assumes the exclusion of the person gossiped about from the "information exchange". This "partial exclusion" is particularly interesting, because a member of the community is being "alienated", even though only for a certain time. The fear of becoming such an "outcast" allows gossip to be a powerful tool of normative regulation within the community:

Coll.: *Were there a lot of "evil tongues", a lot of gossip in the past?*

Inf.: *Both then and now /.../*

Coll.: *Were people afraid of this?*

Inf.: *Of course they were. They were afraid... One does not know what they say and do* (EU-Batets.-99. FR.32. SVI).

This "partial exclusion" may be terminated in several ways; the one that is of interest to for is when somebody secretly discloses to such a person a) the very fact that he/she is being gossiped about, and b) the content of what is being said about him/her. The moment this happens, the gossip ceases to be what it should be – information shared and discussed "behind somebody's back" and may turn into an open confrontation, in which the person gossiped about "settles the accounts" with the "perpetrators". The threat of such disclosure is the topmost factor which constitutes the "fear of gossiping" – both to those gossiped about (because he/she may be in scandalized publicly), and for the gossipers (in case the victim attempts to find the "culprits").

Coll.: *Were there any cases when somebody would intentionally provoke a quarrel?*

Inf.: [laughing] [one girl] *...was going out with a guy, but he married another girl, and she – how could she take revenge? She came and made him impotent<sup>8</sup>. /.../ yes, and then they started to say a lot of dirty things, that he had a girl friend in his own village, and then got married to another one... /.../ they will say all this*

<sup>8</sup> Popular culture provides a variety of magical recipes for making a man "incapable" – impotent.

*on purpose, so as to create a scandal in the family. This happens only too often* (EU–Khvoïn.–99. FR.24. IEI).

Later, we will return to the situation of “friendly reporting” to the gossip’s subject, for it may also be connected with strong feeling of pleasure and gratification.

As far as “tracing” back gossip and “identifying” each of those who participated in its circulation, people usually advise “not to do it”, mostly for the simple reason that in the absence of positive evidence, it will not avail much. Yet in our field work we came across a number of situations when this was done, and sometimes achieved the desired effect: the gossip “*boomeranged back on the gossiper*” (Gluckman 1963: 313):

a) Coll.: *Have you ever had a situation when somebody launched gossip about you?* 165

Inf.: *It happens that they accuse you wrongly – and you won’t find the ends<sup>9</sup>. Last year I went to F... and said: “Whaaat? Who told you that?” Well, I don’t remember whom she pointed out... who said that... but I made an inquiry. But they denied everything, saying that “we didn’t say anything, she invented it all” /.../ They blamed F. for everything, they lumped all the blame on her. And she is indeed capable of making things up.*

Coll.: *How so?*

Inf.: *She is prone to outright lies* (EU–Belozër.–01. FR.3. KNA).

b) [somebody said that the informant fell in love with a married man and was going to divorce her husband; this hot news started to spread in the village and one woman was caught “red-handed”]

Inf.: *...I say: “It is necessary to verify”* [who first said this. – A. K.]. *“Let her tell precisely whom she heard this from”* [being pressed, the girl disclosed the name of Z. who worked in the kindergarten]. *So I came [to the kindergarten] and [said]: “I will fuck your guts out right now, and you will kick the bloody bucket right here!”* [this, and much more, she said in the presence of kids, and in the end she had to face the local court for using obscene words – but she couldn’t care less, because she has taken revenge on her offender, who was half dead for fear and shame] (EU–Belozër.–03. FR.1.12. VAD).

It should be stressed that VAD, a huge lady who worked as a blacksmith from the age of fifteen (!) is famous in the village for her exceptional skill at swearing and for not fearing anything or anybody – a fact those who gossiped about her must have known. That, in spite of her reputation, they put into circulation discrediting information about her, is an example of miscalculation or failure to correctly estimate the “muscle” of the gossip’s “victim” and, consequently, of insufficient fear of possible consequences.

---

<sup>9</sup> The unfeasibility of “unraveling” gossip is supported by a long chain of metaphors about *gossip* in the Russian language which create an image of something interwoven, interlaced, intertwined, etc. This image is also reflected in many dream interpretations: to dream of nets, or a women’s plaits, a woven fence, etc. in reality signifies gossip.

The fear of spreading gossip may originate not only in the face of a potential threat from its “victim”, but also from cases where one’s own reputation was “tarnished” – such people may shun away from any “scandal mongering” lest their public image should be further undermined. One of our informants, known in the village for her dissolute behavior (she actually became “the talk of the town” when she “stole” a married man from his wife and two small children),<sup>10</sup> deliberately avoided talking about “dangerous” topics dealing with other people’s peccadilloes – just in case her own deeds be “brought up” at a certain point. At least she tried to produce an impression of total “disinterest” in such village affairs, among other things, this was aimed at justifying her own behavior in the past.

166 Inf.: *...I can't... I don't judge people... the way they live... it is said... what a person likes, let him do it... we are all given only one life... (EU-Belozer.-01. FR.8. EAK).*

She explained her unwillingness to judge other people or to listen to what happens around the village in a very skillful way: because life is getting worse and worse, as compared to the time of her youth, she prefers not to disturb her peace of mind and does not visit her fellow-villagers:

Coll.: *Do you often visit other people?*

Inf.: *Well... now I don't go anywhere. First, I don't have fell any inclination to do so, second, for some reason... people have become so... /.../ whoever you meet – there is drinking, tears... and your mood drops ... so one doesn't want to get frustrated. At home you don't hear anything, and somehow you have... more peace in you soul /.../ I only wish that children do not suffer ... (Ibid.).*

Speaking about the role of gossip in the process of group unification, M. Gluckman observed that it “creates a past history for the members” (of a group) (Gluckman 1963: 313). It should also be added that gossip is capable of “reviving” the memory of old scandals, which some community members would rather forget.

<sup>10</sup> In a very exemplary case, a woman was “awarded” the nickname “teacher” (Russ. *Učitelnitsa*). Not knowing the context, one might think that it does not contain anything derogatory, and on the contrary, may testify to the professional merits of someone who worked in a local boarding school for several decades. However, one day we learned that this nickname was given to her because as a young widow after the war she was notorious in the village for “teaching all young guys how to do IT” (EU-Belozer.-01. FR. 13. BLP). This explains why the nickname was always pronounced behind her back, and why we had to give “our word of honor” that we would not “tell anybody”.

The obvious analogies in the communicative pragmatics of gossip and derogatory nicknames, as well as their relation to the sphere of conflict, may suggest an interesting path for further research (one may, for example, look at gossiping as the potentially limitless “expansion” of the conflict that led to the gossip which it originated, and derogatory nicknames – as gossip’s “maximal reduction”, potentially “unfolding” into a new confrontation – the same way as gossip may turn into an open quarrel).

It should also be observed that very often the true nature of a nickname (e.g. whether it is derogatory or not) can be determined from the context that led to it. The fact that derogatory nicknames (*urnoms péjoratifs*) do not necessarily contain any offensive components and usually consist of neutral elements (*des noms neutres qui n'ont rien d'injurieux*) so that their “derogatory” nature may be perceived only from the intonation used when they are pronounced (*par le ton moqueur avec lequel on les emploie*), see: Fonseca 1984: 2227.

An old conflict may be “reproduced” in the form of a new one, and the fear of this possibility is an important factor in the economy of gossip.

The motif of “children” mentioned in the last interview deserves our attention. The tight connectedness of people living in a small community, especially if it involves family relations, creates a situation where shame inflicted upon one family member “spreads” to the other members. The fact that somebody’s father was a thief, or somebody’s mother an alcoholic and “a bad mouth” definitely influences one’s public image. Consequently, another possible source of the fear connected with gossiping has to do with the desire “not to inflict harm upon children”. In the past, when people had more children than they do now, and everybody lived “in a closely knit community”, this must have been a powerful restraining force in all kinds of village scandals:

167

Inf.: *In the past... it was better in the past – people didn’t gossip, didn’t gossip that much. Because they all had kids ...at every home– three girls, five girls... So every mother kept silent – she knew that she had the same... Forbidden to speak.*

Coll.: *That is to say, today you gossip about somebody, and tomorrow – somebody gossips about you?*

Inf.: *Yes. And tomorrow somebody gossips about you. Our mother used to say: “In our village there are two people who can pass judgment – ... K. and O.V. – they didn’t have children. They, she said, can pass judgment, for they don’t have anybody. And all of us, she said, should keep silent. /.../ Why would I pass judgment if I have the same? ... people were afraid (EU–Khvoïn.–99. FR.24. IEI).*

The last aspect we would like to discuss has to do with gender differences. Although, as we mentioned in the beginning, “male voices” are, so to speak, “subdued” in the present-day Russian village, we also recorded several interviews with men, in which they commented upon village gossip.

Judging from the data collected, the notion that gossiping is a characteristic feature of “female gender display” is fully shared by both the male and female members of the community:

Inf. [female]: *People know everything... They pass it from one person to another... they know everything...*

Coll.: *Is this women or men who are doing this?*

Inf.: *No, men don’t do like this, but women will collect all data [laughs]. And some will add more [laughs] All kinds of lies... (EU–Belozër.–03. FR.3. KNA).*

Inf. [female]: *Well... there were 14 houses in our village, so naturally, one thing led to another ... something happened in one house, this person would go and tell someone, and this way it would reach all the neighbors...*

Coll.: *Was it women or men who did this?*

Inf.: *No, men didn't do this, they are more serious...* (EU–Belozер.–03. FR.1.6. RTA).

Inf. [female]: *It is not decent for a man to gossip, but forgivable for a woman* (EU–Belozер.–03. FR.1.12. PEA).

Some other interviews also suggest that male and female communicative practices do not fully overlap:

Coll.: *And what about women? What do they talk about?*

Inf. [male]: *Women... I don't know what they talk about...the moment they start prattling...[one doesn't understand a thing]* (EU–Gdov.–00. FR.7. MNP).

168

Women, on the other hand, may say that they are not aware of what men talk about: “[Men] *are not gossipers...perhaps they do gossip among themselves at times, but only among themselves. They will never gossip with a woman. They will [talk] among themselves... about troubles, maybe... but gossiping about somebody or something... they won't*” (EU–Belozер.–03. FR.1.6. RTA); “*men had their own rules... but I didn't join their company*” (EU–Belozер.–03. FR.1.10. VAN).

Men themselves stressed that their “male talk” does not have anything to do with gossiping: “*...here is a bench – at times we sit here, smoke, and talk... a man with a man – what do they talk about?... How to find something to drink... one says, “I was lubricated yesterday, got a headache”. And me, for instance, I'd say, – “me, too, I was drunk”. Nothing in the pockets, and nobody will give anything for free. The store doesn't sell on credit...*” (EU–Gdov.–00. FR.7. MNP).

The examples given above suggest that “*solidarity and group membership*” (Pilkington 1998: 254) in the male part of the community are sustained by specific means, in particular by drinking practices (it is a fully “male” occupation to get drunk), whereas gossiping, a typically female business, afflicts men’s “performance of masculinity”. Hence the fear that one’s behavior will be seen as “female”: “*If a man is gossiping, people will say: “He is like a woman!”*” (EU–Belozер.–03. FR.1.12. PEA).

Unwillingness to gossip “like women” and the inability to do it (because there are no conditions for the “social adaptation” of male gossip) make men fear village gossipers, so that they will often refuse to even mention their names:

Inf. [male] *There are such people... No, I won't speak about them... If you want the whole village to know – tell [them] a word or two... the next day everybody will now. There are such people. But only not to... no, I don't want to... Don't want to...* (EU–Khvoin.–00. FR.15. IVE).

In other words, village gossip is regarded as a conscious strategy of the female part of the community, and it has an intimidating effect on the village’s men who lack this powerful weapon: “*Women’s talk about social relationships gives rise to fear because it poses a threat to the male social order. Female speech can be fatal...*” (Romaine 1999: 152).

## Gossip and pleasure

Starting our discussion on gossip and fear, we observed that fear is more “tangible” and more easily “observable” in interviews than pleasure, because in the actual interaction fear, so to speak, comes first, even before a person actually gets involved in gossiping, whereas the pleasure is “delayed” and is not “guaranteed”. Another reason why there are much fewer observations on pleasure in the context of gossiping is the point of view.

Let’s look how people choose to speak about gossiping in their village.

The first type of texts are generic descriptions of the process, where the source of gossip and/or its participants are presented as undefined, multiple and depersonalized (e.g. “one hears from people”, “a rumor spreads around”, X was “on everybody’s lips”, “people say that...” etc.).

169

In the texts of the second type, informants speak about their own participation in gossiping. The expressions used here are either absolutely neutral or signify the speaker’s deplorable situation which makes her turn to others: informants are engaged in “speaking”, “having conversations”, “sharing”, or “confiding” their troubles to good neighbors, or else “imparting” something in order to find emotional comfort. There was not a single example where someone said “I gossip”<sup>11</sup>.

The third and largest group is “dedicated” to the way others spread gossips around. The arsenal of words and expressions here is strikingly rich: villagers “pass judgment”, make others “notorious”, “lie”, “fabricate”, “mince the truth”, “exaggerate” and “calumniate”, “turn” things “upside down” and “over the head”, “blab”, talk in an “idle” way and “indecently”, “pass their inventions for reality”, tell “all kinds of dirt” etc.

This short review of narrative strategies allows us to draw several important conclusions: a) informants try, as much as they can, to take the responsibility for participating in gossip off themselves (that is why very neutral, non-judgmental expressions are used in the first group as well – the speaker, as a member of the community, may be a part of its gossiping); b) the amount and diversity within the third group reveals not only disapproval of other villagers’ behavior, but also – and very strongly! – a hidden fear of becoming their “victim”. Both of these factors together suggest an ego-oriented position of the informants when they speak of village gossip, as well as their inclination to look at it from a specific perspective.

This perspective may be described in the following way: the “fear” of gossip is first and foremost “my fear” (or, at least, “ours”, all decent people’s in the community and I’m one of them), and the “pleasure” is always “theirs”, that of the “evil tongues” who make the life of us, decent people, so unbearable.

<sup>11</sup> In one case, our informant specifically stressed that what she was telling us (about a person held to be a witch) was not gossip: “And you surely won’t tell her... OK? I am just making a side remark – you know, I don’t do it for the sake of gossiping...” (EU–Belozer.–01. FR.13. BLP).

What we called the “pleasure of gossiping” is thus, in the stories of our informants, almost exclusively “other people’s pleasure in gossiping”, and because this “pleasure” is enjoyed “at my expense” it is rather “malicious joy”, subject to moral reprehension. This reprehension is the dominating tune in the narratives about the “pleasure of gossiping” – for if one were to speak about the “pure” pleasure of gossiping, even somebody else’s, this would immediately implicate him or her hidden liking it. Even when our informants hint at positive emotions on the part of gossipers, they immediately shift the story towards the harmful effects produced by their words.

170 All this explains our difficulties in eliciting contexts on “gossip and pleasure”, as well as their comparably small number. In the remaining part of the paper we will try to delineate these contexts, paying attention not only to those cases where the motif of “pleasure” was directly expressed by our informants, but also to instances where it was more or less obvious for us.

In a number of cases, when talking about village gossiping, people would laugh, even though the gossip in their stories was connected with “unpleasant feelings” and “scandal”:

[conversation about wives who left their husbands]

Coll.: *Did people like to... discuss such things, to gossip about them?*

Inf.: *All... liked it. But so that they [i.e. the wife and the husband] wouldn't find out [laughs]*

Coll.: *Is it generally... pleasant to gossip?*

Inf.: *And then they will report it, and you have troubles – such things happened <...> all kinds of dirt – they will say all this on purpose, so as to cause a scandal in the family <...>*

Coll.: *Would people immediately believe it?*

Inf.: *What else? [laughs] (EU–Khvoïn.–99. FR.24. IEI).*

or:

Inf.: *No, men don't do like this, but women will collect all data [laughs]. And some will add more [laughs] All kinds of lies... (EU–Belozër.–03. FR.3. KNA).*

Informants definitely experience positive emotions when they speak about gossip, even though it brings about negative effects. There seem to be several reasons. First, there is a sense of distance: the negative effects are inflicted upon other people, not upon themselves, and/or such things are a matter of a remote past. Secondly, there might be an element of irony about the anthropologist who takes the trouble to ask about things everybody knows (also from one’s personal experience!), that is hardly interesting. Yet there seems to be a third and probably most important reason. Gossiping is here presented as a kind of game, a game with a “secret” that is not really a secret to anybody and its disclosure is predictable, as well as the effects it will produce – it is not going to be fatal, not even for its direct participants. This particular case will be forgotten – to make place for a new one.



In other words, gossip may be looked at as some kind of entertainment<sup>12</sup>. Through participation in gossip, people seem to at least partially compensate for the general scarcity of public entertainment in the present-day village.

The pervasive interest in the erotic aspects of younger people's lives constitutes a special type of entertainment to some elderly women (e.g. EU-Belozer.-01. FR.12. I.; EU-Belozer.-01. FR.13. BLP; EU-Belozer.-03. FR.1.7. GAP etc.). Interestingly enough, some of these elderly women are known for being particularly inclined to using obscene language and singing obscene songs. One might suggest that a psychological mechanism of compensation is at work here, whereby a communicative breaking of "sexual taboos" remains the only accessible means of asserting one's "sexuality" and "femininity". In this case *"prejudices against... old women and their chatter"*, and especially accusations of *"bitchiness"* (Romaine 1999: 152) are not totally groundless.

171

In his work on gossip, R. Abrahams mentions another aspect of "compensation" that may be achieved through participation in gossiping: *"there are many individuals who, if their activities have not been public enough, will utilize the gossip network to talk about their own business and thus to feel more fully members of the network and of the community"* (Abrahams 1970: 293). This would not provoke any objections, if only this strategy would be implemented by a certain number of people; if, however, the majority would try to promote themselves in such a way, it would definitely raise the general level of "competitiveness" in the community, but probably won't increase the chances of any "gossiping individual" to become a "fuller member" of it. Gossiping is a "leveling" procedure not only because virtually every individual may sooner or later become its target, but also because community members may be equally willing to participate in it and have an equal, or comparable, communicative capability of sustaining it.

Yet it seems that in the mechanism of gossip functioning there is one specific role, which allows the one who plays it to distinguish himself/herself from all other gossipers. We are again returning to the figure of the "informer" who "steals the words" entrusted to her and reports them to the person gossiped about. It seems that by becoming the "source" of information (and this is an example of *"prestige... result[ing] from having one's name used (and therefore known)"* (Ibid., 292)), as well as by giving the impetus for an open conflict, such a person has good chances of making up for the scarce possibilities for public performance.

No doubt, it is a dangerous game, and is usually seen as indecent in itself (hence, the fear to play it) – yet the more danger there is in it, the more potential

<sup>12</sup> Our research on everyday village conflicts of the XIX c. shows that, contrary to what might be expected, such conflicts did contain elements of pleasure: e.g. public village quarrels are often described as "the most favorite performance" for peasants, "shaming punishments" of village thieves and adulterers often grew into public holidays with singing, dancing and drinking, etc. The sense of distance is, of course, crucial here – it is the "audience" who takes pleasure in the process, giving vent to their frustrations.

gratification it may bring<sup>13</sup>. In this connection, it is worth paying attention to the fact that the very moment of “informing” may be described in terms of aesthetic pleasure experienced by the “informer”: KIY, a woman over 90, came to her closest friend and neighbor AAM and “sang out” to her that the reason AAM’s 17-year old granddaughter frequently visited the nearby town was not her studies in the town college, but “men” who are waiting for her there (EU–Belozer.–01.Fr.12. I.). AAM believed the neighbor, which caused a lot of trouble for her granddaughter who was as much surprised to hear this, as her grandmother was outraged<sup>14</sup>.

172 It is worth noticing that in the last example it was the closest friend who performed the “noble” role of “revealing the bitter truth”. The motives for such a step may, however, be different – one may, for instance, count on a favorable disposition of the informed person in exchange for such a valuable favor, and thus strengthen one’s not particularly close relationship with him/her. In connection with this, one may surmise that because anthropologists are seen as a certain “symbolic capital” in the village (being young, educated, coming from a big city, etc.), an internal competition for this “capital” may prompt some villagers towards winning our special favor by informing us about the most intimate details of the village life (such as gossip, for example)<sup>15</sup>. Apart from this, the possibility to exhibit, and thus to confirm one’s “cultural competence” in local affairs constitutes a pleasure in its own – especially because there might be no other eager listeners apart from outsiders, or because one is marginalized in the community for some or other reason.

Returning to internal village relationships: upon being “informed” that people are gossiping about him or her, the person may attempt to “unwind” the chain of gossip back to where it originated. As we already observed, is it a very precarious enterprise indeed; does it have any relation to pleasure?

It seems that those who try to get to the bottom of the gossip are propelled by two related desires: to punish the guilty (“the slanderers”) and to prove their own innocence.

In one such case, a woman was informed that according to what people were saying, she invited, men and women to her home in the absence of her husband, where they “drank” and did “*God knows what*”. She was also given the advice not to trace the gossip back. But she wouldn’t listen and started going from one woman to another, attempting to find the “source” of the information. In doing this she

<sup>13</sup> It is not at all impossible that certain positive emotions may be associated with the sense of danger of one’s own performance, whereby fear itself turns into a source of specific pleasure. One may suggest that a similar mechanism is at work in the case of (elderly) women breaking sexual speech taboos.

<sup>14</sup> It is obvious enough that not all gossip is based on “reality”, and even if it is, its content get more and more distorted as it is passed on: “*making up additions or even supplanting facts*” (Gluckman 1963: 307). It seems that by adding new details and “motifs to a piece of information one may feel him/herself in the position of an “author” and thus experience the joy and pleasure of creativity.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. a comment about the “*number of visits of ethnologists*” as one of the factors creating “*inequality*” in a village community (those who are deprived of the ethnologists’ attention become jealous, the rest experience satisfaction) – and this inequality in turn provokes new gossip— (Fonseca 1984: 2231).

would repeat over and over again, that she did not go out except to the store, that she had a small son who went to bed early, that she drank very moderately etc. At one point of her investigation she “reached” a certain L., known in the village for her dissolute behavior, and said: “*Listen here, madam, if men come to your place and you organize orgies, don’t put my name in this affair*” (EU–Batets.–99. FR.29. VNA). But L. appeared not to be “the last instance” and directed the woman to another address. Finally she discovered that the gossip was “authored” by her own sister with whom she had rather strained relations at the time. The sister admitted to the fact, a huge quarrel broke out, and the sisters severed relations for many years.

However, our informant did succeed in proving both her innocence and her sister’s guilt – which, no doubt, brought her, if not “pleasure”, at least inner gratification. What is also important in this example is the comment she made concerning her sister’s motive to defame her:

Inf.: ...*she is too dissolute... one never finds her at home, she spends all her time at her friends /.../ she should be taught a lesson...* (Ibid.).

To put this in other words, the “evil” sister’s imputation mirrored what she herself was held to be guilty of – extra-marital affairs (compare the accusation our informant brought against L.).

The broader assumption behind this argument is that everybody has something that may turn her/him into a target of gossip (cf. “*the reason they gossip is because they are not without blame themselves*” (EU–Belozet.–03. FR.1.7. GAP). By picking out somebody else and redirecting “behind-the-back” rumors about the other person, one not only removes a potential threat from oneself (however temporary this might be), but also gains the symbolic power of manipulating with the name of the chosen person. It is well known that power is inseparably connected with pleasure, and if one chooses the “target” not randomly, but on purpose (e.g. an old enemy with whom a “account” may be settled), the additional “pleasure of revenge” comes into the picture.

Due to the fact that one is gossiped about by a number of people. who all have something they would prefer to keep to themselves, this person is subjected to a kind of “*scapegoating*”, a practice of a “*world-wide*” character (Gluckman 1968: 24), wherein *many people* indulge and get indulged through the temporary license for accusing *one person*.

## Conclusion

In this paper we discussed certain aspects of *fear* and *pleasure* in the various forms they may assume within the context of village gossip. We intentionally chose not to focus on a single case, however extended it may be, but to address as many pertinent facets of the problem as our field material allow. Apart from analyzing the mechanisms of conflict communication among members of a given community, we also tried to look at the context of interaction between informants and

anthropologists – to show how the presence of outsiders may influence the “internal” practices of village gossip.

To avoid repeating what has already been said, we shall conclude that fear and pleasure may be looked at as two types of socially-conditioned emotions which determine the economy of village gossip, making one look for the “golden middle course” between incurring sanctions and gaining benefits.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY see page 155.

---

### BESEDA O AVTORICI

Ana N. Kuškova, dr., Evropska univerza v St. Petersburgu, Oddelek za etnologijo. Diplomirala je leta 1992 na Oddelku za tuje jezike Herzenove pedagoške univerze. Magistrski naslov iz angleščine je pridobila leta 1997 na Univerzi severne Iowe. Magistrski naslov iz etnologije je pridobila leta 1998 na Evropski univerzi v St. Petersburgu. Doktorirala je leta 2003 iz zgodovine na Evropski univerzi v St. Petersburgu; naslov doktorske disertacije: “*Prepiri v ljudski kulturi: strukturna in tipološka analiza*”. Opravila je pet terenskih raziskav na severozahodu Rusije. Objavila je sedemnajst publikacij v ruščini ali angleščini. Področja raziskovanja: antropologija vsakdanjega življenja, pravna antropologija, ljudska verska kultura.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anna N. Kushkova, Ph.D., European University in St. Petersburg, Dept. of Ethnology.

BA (1992, Herzen Pedagogical University, Foreign Languages)

MA (1997, University of Northern Iowa, English)

MA (1998, European University in St. Petersburg, Ethnology)

PhD (History) (2003, European University in St. Petersburg, Kunstammer; dissertation: “*Quarrel in Folk Culture: Structural and Typological Analysis*”).

5 field expeditions to the North-West of Russia.

Author of 17 publications, in Russian or English.

Areas of research interest: anthropology of everyday life; legal anthropology, folk religious culture.