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What is Northern European Russia?

- 1 Before I proceed directly to the topic of this paper, I would like to explain why I call this village, Prokopievo, the “honest village¹”. It is situated in the northern part of European Russia, in the south of the Arhangel’skaia oblast’ (region). This region is known to Russian scholars as “the Russian North” and it also includes Vologodskaja and Murmanskaja oblasts and the Republic of Karelia. The culture of these lands is syncretic, consisting of Russian peasant and agricultural culture as well as the reindeer herding culture of different Finno-ugric peoples, especially the Komi. The Russian use of the term “the Russian North” differs greatly from the Western one, which refers to all the circumpolar regions of Russia. Hereafter I use this term in its Russian sense.

- 2 The remoteness of this area plays a major role in the social life of its inhabitants. In the middle of the 20th century, it took approximately two days to reach the county centre (Rus. *centr raiona*), about 70 km from the village. From the county centre, it then took another two days to reach the regional centre (Rus. *oblastnoi centr*): the city of Arkhangelsk. One of the villagers, Irina, told me, “We live very close to each other. Everyone knows everything about everyone else. Everyone is accountable in the eyes of his or her neighbours. It is almost impossible to lie to your neighbours. We are very honest”. This quote reflects not only the image Prokopievo dwellers have of themselves, but also the view of other Russian citizens about them. The attribution of the traits of honesty, openness and the ability to keep promises to the inhabitants of the Russian North is widespread in other regions of Russia. There is a saying that “in the Vologda region not even traffic cops take bribes”, meaning that even the most unpleasant and corrupt people who “have to take bribes” are comparatively honest and pleasant. There exists another common saying, “Vologodskaia vohra”, which refers to the prison guards (Rus. *vohra*) of the Vologda region. “Vohra” is slang for the “armed guards” in prisons (Rus. *Vooruzhennaia Ohrana*, officially abbreviated as “VOHR”). Muscovites say that it is almost impossible to corrupt these guards, as they are highly devoted to the authorities.
- 3 In summary, the inhabitants of the Russian North are considered more honest than the average Russian, and everyone assumes that explicit lying practices are not very widespread there.

Etic and emic aspects of lying

- 4 I was working in the village of Prokopievo in July and August 2014 with four undergraduate students and one PhD student. It was the summer ethnographic practice for students of Lomonosov Moscow State University. Our main subject was everyday life in the Soviet collective farm, kolkhoz. This method of fieldwork is not really effective because the supervisor spends a lot of time working with the students rather than with the subjects. This initial weakness in my research actually turned out to be a strength, as the research topic slowly moved from the Soviet kolkhoz to lying practices. All five students who accompanied me approached different people and tried to interview them. Fifty percent of the time, they received a negative reaction in a very interesting form. The villagers would say that “they didn’t know anything”. In some cases, this statement was justified (that is, when a person was not really sure about the dates and the details related to historical events):

Student: Could you tell us about the Soviet times?
 Villager: Oh! I don’t know anything.
- 5 In other cases, however, it was evident that this answer did not reflect what the person actually knew:

Student: Could you tell us about your life in kolkhoz times?
 Villager: I don’t know. I was working all the time...
 Student: But we don’t need any official information. Just tell us your life story!
 Villager: I don’t know anything. Go to someone else. I was working all my life, I don’t know anything.
- 6 When we discussed this typical situation within our team, we assumed that interviewees gave us this answer because they saw us as a group of strangers “from the

city” and therefore people unfamiliar with village life. Our questions were understood as requests for official information about the village (such as official statistics, exact historical facts about collective farms and other similar things) and people believed that they were unable to provide us with such information. By saying that they had worked all their lives, people wanted to show that they were not good interlocutors and were not able to talk in an interesting manner about kolkhoz times. Having understood their intentions, all the students agreed that this type of answer was a kind of lie in that it was false from the point of view of formal logic (interviewees stated the opposite of the actual reality because they knew about their past life during the kolkhoz).

- 7 After a week in the village, I discussed one of these answers with Tatiana, a woman in whose house we stayed. She smiled and said: “Maybe she [the person whose answer we were talking about] was very busy at that time, and maybe she wasn’t in the right mood to talk to you”. The answer “I don’t know” to a stranger was considered an effective way to prevent unfavourable, incomprehensible contact with strangers “from the city”. While this kind of behaviour was not exactly good or admirable, it was seen as acceptable in such cases. For Tatiana it was not lying, but just unwillingness to talk.
- 8 Once I was talking to Irina, one of the most “autochthonous” people of the village: all her ancestors had been born in Prokopievo. She worked for many years at the village school and knew everyone very well. We were talking about lying in the village and the possibility of not telling the truth to the neighbours. Irina told me once again that it was almost impossible to tell lies to them. However, she admitted that there was one family in the village who always told lies. She explained away the family’s violation of the prohibition on lying through their origins: “They are not from our village. They came from Kotlas [a big railway centre, some hundred kilometres away]”. She also mentioned that the adults in this family were called “those who shit” (Rus. *srali*, from *srat’*, to shit). The Russian word *srat’* resembles another word, *vrat’*, which means “to lie” or “to cheat”, and people who lie are called “*vrali*”. The nickname *srali* thus differs from the word *vrali* by only one letter and at the same time it adds a pejorative and invective dimension. These two words in Russian are very much like the English words “cheats” (*vrali*) and “shitters” (*srali*). She said that all the family members are liars, even the children. So they have a special diminutive nickname – *sraliki*.
- 9 I asked Irina to describe a situation when *srali* behave as liars. Irina said: “Once I was going by their house and came in to ask for some milk. Natalia (the wife of the household, one of “*Srali-family*”) told me that she would go to check in the fridge. Some moments later, she returned and said that she didn’t have any milk. But of course she knew how much milk she had”, Irina said, emotion rising in her voice. “Every good housewife knows very well how much milk she has. When she said, I’ll check it, what she meant was that she just didn’t want to give the milk to me. They live on their own, and they often go to the woods and collect berries. They never give them to the neighbours, they always sell them. They are not from our village”.
- 10 This situation seemed very interesting to me. Natalia didn’t pronounce the “magic words” (I don’t know) as did everyone in response to the questions posed by our team. She only said that she would check. At the same time the meaning of her behaviour was exactly the same as if she had said, “I don’t know”. Going to her fridge to check how much milk she had meant for her neighbours that she was not ready to share her agricultural products. In the Vologda region, this is an unacceptable way to deal with

neighbours. The correct behaviour in this case could be either giving the last drop of milk or saying that there was no milk left at all without checking first.

- 11 We thus have two different situations. In the first case, where people answered “I don’t know” about kolkhoz times when they knew perfectly well, there was a formal lie (from an etic point of view) but the situation was not considered as lying, while in the second case – Natalia from the “Srali-family” checking to see if there was some milk left – there was no formal lie but her answer was unanimously regarded as a lie.

Lying in the village through the lens of intimacy

- 12 Here we shift from field examples to anthropological theory. I would like to state three points that could be put together to make the situations mentioned above clearer.
- 13 1. The ideas of intimate vs public sphere have their centrepiece in the concept of a person as “a bounded, sovereign individual” (Strathern 1988, p. 57). A person is seen as a self-sufficient unit, an absolutely autonomous social organism. All the “things”, “topics” and relations that are directly in touch with the person are seen as “private”, those that are at some distance are seen as more official and public.
- 14 2. In post-Soviet studies, this idea was turned upside down. Different researchers coined different terms in order to show this change in the private and public spheres in Soviet culture. Alexei Iurchak explains in his Russian version of the book *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More*: “Among studies of ‘authoritarian’ systems of power, there is a widespread model according to which the participants of political speeches, acts and rituals in such systems should pretend in public as if they support political slogans and statements of authorities, while in reality they discard them” (Iurchak 2014, p. 58). Contrary to this model, he argues that the very “public” sphere (in the “Western” sense) that was occupied by the once and for all created form of Soviet official language and rituals – what Iurchak calls “ideological discourse” – provided possibilities for freedom and self-expression. The inflexibility in this discourse led to a “performative shift” which filled parts of the ideological discourse with new meaning. The public sphere became more intimate and open to the agency of people (*ibid.*, p. 76). Voting at the party meetings, for example, was obligatory. Everyone had to vote, and the vote always had to be in favour of the decision. If someone was against the decision of the party block or did not want to vote, it could be considered as a betrayal of party ideals and met with severe punishment. At the same time, voting for a decision did not mean that a person needed to agree with it or be willing to actualize it. Voting for something and not knowing for what s/he had just voted was considered quite normal (*ibid.*, p. 73). I can also add that those who were most active and quick in voting were often considered to be just as active in *not* actualizing this decision. Adopting all decisions without thinking about them was thus considered to be a way of neglecting them. Those who tried to take party ideology seriously were not so agreeable. As a result, the public sphere was controlled pro forma and gave possibilities for agency.
- 15 3. The private and intimate sphere, on the contrary, became more closed and *truly* controlled. Cynthia Hooper, a scholar studying Soviet history and culture, shows that, more often than not, the reason for administrative punishment and even arrest was the wo/man’s behaviour in the private sphere. Private family life thus became a crucial testing ground for political beliefs and a focus of new forms of community surveillance, although in party meetings and the media this surveillance was consistently portrayed

not in opposition to socialist family values and “cultured” interpersonal relations, but as an essential means of their preservation (Hooper 2006, p. 65). Hooper dates this situation back to the 1930s and argues that a tremendous fear of friendship and intimacy was imposed by the state in the years of the Great Terror (*ibid.*, p. 71).

- 16 However, I believe that this situation is not specific to the 1930s. A Russian researcher from Perm, Anna Kimerling, has examined letters to the authorities during the late Stalin period (1947-1953; see Kimerling 2014). She finds that the desire to reveal someone’s family problems to the authorities was often initiated from below (Iurchak 2014, p. 326). In Russian ethnographic literature, there are many cases in which the behaviour of a young woman or a man was discussed at communal meetings. Marina Gromyko in her book gives many examples from 19th century Russia about intimate relations of young unmarried women. If a young unmarried woman was believed to have had sexual relations with someone, her co-villagers would put a tar slur on the gates of her house. As a result, the inner, intimate life of this woman would become public. After this incident, she could ask the community to hold a meeting to determine her innocence. This procedure would start with an open accusation: the woman would come to the meeting and asked all the villagers to accuse her. If no one stood up, she was considered innocent and guiltless. All the people at the communal meeting would then apologize to her. If someone accused her, however, the elder woman would inspect the young woman and if she was innocent, the same procedure of apology would follow. If she was not innocent, it would bring shame and dishonour to the whole family (Gromyko 1986, pp. 97-98).
- 17 Making inner life and interpersonal relations public was widespread in prerevolutionary Russia. Intimate life (sexual relations or drinking vodka at home) was discussed openly by villagers. This information was very important for the formation of society. This way of examining private life was embraced by the Soviet state in the 1930s but it was not invented or created by Soviet officials.
- 18 Returning to our situation – answering “I don’t know” or not telling the neighbour about the milk – we can see almost the same logic at work. The “public” situation, where one side of the conversation consists of outsiders (students from the city), gives the speaker more freedom and opportunity. A villager can tell an outsider almost anything he wants (to some extent); he can tell partially true stories or close the door and simply declare that “he doesn’t know anything”. All these possible behaviours would be judged by the other villagers as permissible, acceptable and honest. There would be nothing to discuss. On the contrary, the situation between villagers is much more intimate but gives fewer opportunities for choice: a person should be intimate and honest. If something strange were to occur in that kind of situation, it would be discussed in detail by the villagers.
- 19 This kind of reversal of the private and public spheres still exists in Russian villages, especially in the northern part of European Russia. I believe one should not attribute this reversal solely to years of the Great Terror, but treat it also as a feature of a communal identity or Russian peasant culture, as examples from the 19th and 21st centuries demonstrate. It is still important to note that in the times of Great Terror, this reversal played a very important role and became a centrepiece of state control over Soviet citizens.
- 20 I wish to refer here to the meaning of the word honest (Rus. *chestnyi*). The root *chest’* (Eng. “honour”) is used in the word “honourable” (Rus. *pochetnyi*). The similarity

between these words shows us that being honest is attributed to some extent with being worthy of respect by one’s neighbours. It is difficult in close, intimate relations but rather simple in less intimate and more official ones. However, in order to give the reader a more complete picture of the relations of honesty and intimacy, more examples are provided below.

Other possibilities of not telling the truth

- 21 Two weeks before we left the village of Prokopievo, a group of students interviewed an elderly man, Ivan Danilovich, about life in Soviet times and on collective farms. Ivan Danilovich was living in a settlement for lumberjacks some dozen kilometres from Prokopievo. After the interview, we went to a shop and ordered coffee. While we were drinking, Alexei, a man from the settlement, came over and asked us who we were. I briefly told him about the topic of lying. He was very interested and told us about a few taboos that were common among fishermen. He said that no fisherman would ever tell anyone about the exact place of fishing or the exact amount of the fish s/he had caught. He then mentioned that Ivan Danilovich was an expert on this topic. At that moment, Ivan Danilovich came into the shop.
- 22 Alexei walked towards him and said:
Danilych, tell us how you fish?
– Oh, I don’t really know much about it...
– Okay, then tell us where you fished last time.
- 23 Suddenly the face of Ivan Danilovich became sly and he said:
I don’t know. I can’t remember.
– But how can you not know if it was just two days ago?
– I don’t know how, but I don’t know! (laughing)
– And you don’t know what have you caught?
– Of course, I don’t know!
- 24 At that moment, all the people in the shop started smiling and laughing. The seller cut off Alexei in a loud voice: “Stop troubling Danilych! He said he doesn’t know anything!” Alexei turned to us and said: “He will never tell you anything about fishing”. Ivan Danilovich smiled to us and repeated, “I don’t know”. This was a comedic performance, and no one showed a negative attitude to the explicit lying of Ivan Danilovich.
- 25 That same evening, we discussed that situation with Tat’iana and Irina. They also laughed and said that this type of conversation was very common. Suddenly Irina said: “Sometimes when I go for mushrooms and don’t collect enough of them, I put some grass into the basket and lay the mushrooms I have on top of it. So I go through the village with a full basket. That way, it looks like I did a good job in collecting mushrooms”. She smiled. Tatiana also smiled: “Yes, those things happen. I sometimes do the same thing. And no one tells about the places where you can find mushrooms. In this case, you may lie freely”.
- 26 These situations were common lying practices inside the community. Saying “I don’t know” and lying to neighbours was not only possible, but also seen as amusing. The reversal of public and private spheres cannot explain this. The rationale behind this type of behaviour and reaction could be explained by applying Russian ethnographic theory to these situations.

Intimate topics and internal othering

- 27 To understand why these situations are possible and in which cases a person can lie freely and in which cases he should be very attentive, we have to take into consideration one aspect of Russian rural/peasant culture that is well known to folklore researchers.
- 28 Dmitrii Zelenin, a Russian ethnographer of the first part of the 20th century, wrote in the book *East-Slavic Ethnography*: “Word-taboos are very widespread among Russian fishermen. In the seas and big lakes it is forbidden to pronounce words such as ‘bear’, ‘hare’, ‘priest’ or ‘fox’” (Zelenin 1991, p. 108). There were also beliefs about mermaids and mermen, or their children (Rus. *shilikuny*) who could come from the river or lake to the house of the fisherman (Zelenin 1991, p. 416, 418). To protect themselves, the fishermen would draw crosses with charcoal on the doors and near the windows. Zelenin argued that these actions were holdovers of pagan practices.
- 29 Contemporary researcher Irina Nazarova argues that these superstitions were a way to bring luck. One way for a person to become more successful in fishing would be to demonstrate that he was not interested in the haul. Nazarova gives an example: “The best behavioural strategy for a fisherman is to show complete indifference to what is happening, reporting by non-verbal means her/his unwillingness to catch the fish. [...] The more people know about your intention to go fishing, the less fish you will catch” (Nazarova 2009, p. 27).
- 30 We can conclude that the domain of fishing, or rather discourse about fishing, is subject to numerous superstitions, rituals and other folklore forms. My field data cannot explain the origins of all these forms of speech behaviour, but I would like to stress their contemporary meaning.
- 31 Was Ivan Danilovich’s pretense of ignorance about fishing just a superstition or can we also talk about lying here? I believe this situation include both superstition and lying. Saying “I don’t know” several times Danilovich was trying to avoid saying something about fishing. His unwillingness to talk is of course a manifestation of the superstition not to talk about the number of fishes, places of fishing, etc. But after the words of Alexei – “But how can you not know if it was just two days ago?” – Danilovich switched to explicit lying. Declaring openly that he doesn’t know what he should know makes him not only a person who wants to retain “luck” but a person who can lie, do it explicitly and not be punished by society. This switch to lying was marked by moving from serious talking to smiling and joking. Right at that time the seller and all the visitors of the shop started to react to Alexei’s and Danilovich’s words.
- 32 I would like to stress that a person can avoid the situation of saying prohibited things about fishing without switching to lying. I can give another example from my fieldwork in a remote village of the Russian North. I asked a local fisherman about the best places to fish and fishing technique. He hesitated for a few moments and then said: “How can I tell you anything? If I do so, I won’t have luck fishing anymore”. He refused to tell me anything else and we moved on to another topic. Here we see how the superstition can work without implying a lie of any sort...
- 33 We should also take into account another argument with regard to the claim of ignorance, that of “internal othering”. I agree with the anthropologist Rupert Stasch when he emphasizes that creating others and otherness inside a small group plays a

very important role in community formation. He writes that his book is a “study of relations of otherness in Korowai life, showing how otherness is not antithetical to social connection and social closeness but an integral aspect of social involvement”. He quotes Viveiros de Castro, who argues that “difference encompasses identity” and states that “the Amazonian hierarchal synthesis is disjunctive, not conjunctive” (Stasch 2009, pp. 13-14). For example, a woman from a remote village who marries a man acquires a new social status, a new family-in-law, and has to observe different kinds of new practices. At the same time she preserves her relations with her tribe and, in many circumstances, her children can benefit from these relationships. When a woman has problems or conflicts in her husband’s village, she can retreat for a period of time to her native village. This “dispersal field” helps solve a lot of problems between relatives. As a result, differences such as coming from another tribe helps to keep peace and even promote closer relations (Stasch 2009, pp. 108-118). Translating Stasch’s statement to a language more common to Russian ethnographers, difference and otherness allow for the maintenance of the communal order and the stability of the village.

- 34 Returning to the subject of the Russian North, it is obvious that intimate relations between village dwellers are much more prescribed and regulated than relations with outsiders. This is the opposite of what is considered as intimate relations in “Western” culture. Such high-level regulation of relations creates a possibility for conflict. Research into socialism has shown that the reversal of private and public spheres leads to increased hostility and suspiciousness in Soviet society.
- 35 The regular topics of conversation that give village dwellers the possibility to cheat, lie or simply state “I don’t know” to neighbours without being punished were vital for them in order to recreate the high level of intimacy in other domains of conversation. It was very important in the middle of the 20th century and it is still important today in the early 21st century, because there are very few outsiders in the remote villages of the Russian North. The situation where a village dweller can talk to an outsider and say “I don’t know” to him happens very rarely. It is important to stress that the existence of special topics that require intimacy or that to the contrary allows otherness or alienness in relationships are not the same as private topics in “Western” culture. Intimate topics in the West, including love, friendship etc., are spoken about with certain people (close friends, relatives), often in special places (at home, in a cosy pub or during long walks in isolated areas). We could argue therefore that various interpersonal and environmental conditions create intimacy (Berlant 1998, p. 282). In the case of the Russian North, another way of creating intimacy is the attribution of conversational topics to the private or public sphere. Some topics require demonstration of intimacy and honesty (though it can only be a show as in the case of Natalia) and others require (or allow) alienation or social distance. These topics can be discussed in different places and with different people.
- 36 In contrast to topics like mushrooming and fishing that allow for “lying” even between very close relatives or good friends, the topic of the “importance of agriculture” in contemporary Russia creates a kind of intimacy between speakers. Just as fishing and mushrooming are subject to many superstitions, another commonplace theory in Russian ethnography is that all important rituals in peasant culture are related to agriculture and agricultural products. The prominent Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp showed that bread, the main product of agriculture, was used as the synonym for food

in general and played a role in all important rituals (Propp 2000, pp. 23-40). Baked bread was a metaphor of the family: the bride should sit on the grains or on the sheaf of rye after coming to the groom's house; cutting bread meant dividing family (and was done, for example, when the eldest son would start to build his own household); peasants welcomed important guests by giving them bread and salt to demonstrate a willingness to befriend and include them in society (Zelenin 1991, pp. 142, 152, 332, 382). All these examples show the importance of agriculture in ritual life; however, economically speaking, during the same chronological period (from the end of the 19th to the beginning of the 20th century) 40 % of income was derived from agriculture in the Central and Northern parts of (Chaianov 1993, pp. 69-97; Radchenko 1930, p. 19). We can then conclude that even in the Russian Empire of the 19th century, “the importance of agriculture” was more important as a cultural value than as an economic one. Agriculture was also an important part of social class identity.

- 37 After the October Revolution, ritual life was suppressed but the value of the importance of agriculture persisted. This idea preceded its life in the juxtaposition of village and city. In official discourse, authorities spoke about contemporary factories, increase in production, goals of the five-year plan, and so on. The peasants were seen as “petty-bourgeois” owners or even *kulaki* and *podkulachniki* (rich peasants and those who supported them). The end of the Second World War saw the beginning of the era of cosmonautics and nuclear power as well as the decline of agriculture as a cultural value. Speaking about the importance of agriculture was seen as either a sign of stupidity, from the point of view of urban inhabitants, or as a way to find someone who shared common ideas and values, from the point of view of former villagers in cities and towns, who used this topic to find like-minded people. This situation is similar to the topic of secret rock concerts in the flats (Rus. *kvarirniki*, from Rus. *kvarira*, “a flat”) among hippies or of *tamizdat* (Rus. *tam*, “there” and *izdat*, “press”: “books published abroad”) among dissidents. The very act of discussing these topics created a kind of intimacy between speakers.
- 38 I was recently involved in a discussion about agriculture which required the demonstration of intimacy and participation. In 2007, I was conducting fieldwork in a small town, Petrovsk, in the eastern part of the Vologodskaja oblast. I asked the local government for a car in order to visit the remote villages of the Petrovsk district. One of the officials asked me about the topic of my research. At that time, I was studying the history of collective farms and the transformation of agricultural practices in Soviet times. The official told me that agriculture was very important for the Vologodskaja oblast and he said to me: “We are doing the same work”. This statement meant that he and I knew how important agriculture was for village inhabitants. Touching upon the subject of rural history and agricultural practices in Petrovsk was seen as a creation of intimacy (as in the case of asking about milk), so I was eventually given the car.

Conclusion

- 39 Lying in the honest villages of the Russian North is not only possible but also required in certain cases. Public lying about specific topics reduces the level of conflict in the village. From the point of view of the village inhabitants, formal lying is perceived more as joking than as lying. Based on my field materials, I believe that the topics readily available for lying, cheating and joking are related to activities outside the

village (collecting mushrooms, catching fish). Topics related to agriculture and the inner life of the village require demonstration of intimacy, honesty and participation. This inner life, the communal one, is considered to be more important from an economic and social point of view for rural people than relations with outsiders, strangers and life outside the village.

- 40 The idea that people from the Russian North do not lie at all stems from observations of their inner life behaviour, which was influenced by behavioural ethics in pre-revolutionary communities and Soviet work collectives. It means that lying is neither a permanent feature of a person nor an aspect of special relations (for example, with outsiders), but a required way to behave in special situations. In the case of Prokopievo, these special situations are discussions about fishing and mushrooming. This is why Vologda traffic cops do not take bribes and why “Vologdskaia vohra” are loyal to the state. At the same time, the exact same people can willfully give their neighbours false information about their success in fishing and mushrooming.

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NOTES

1. The names of the persons and villages have been changed.

ABSTRACTS

This study is an exploration of the role that lying plays in the everyday life and identity construction of the dwellers of the Russian North. I conducted fieldwork in the village of Prokopievo, Ustiany district in Arhangel'skaia Oblast' in summer 2014. Intimacy constitutes the crucial concept around which the article is built. The deepest contradiction of intimacy is that the intimate relationships are seen as “lasting over years” and “having therapeutic function” but, at the same time, they make possible “the unavoidable troubles and disruptions”. Lying in the Russian North is seen as a negative practice, not common for the local people who favour a “culture of honesty”. By contrast, the stranger, coming from the city, and village migrants are predominantly perceived as liars. As a consequence, “not saying the truth” to those kinds of liars (*otnekivanie*) is acceptable. As Viveiros de Castro and Rupert Stasch have both shown, this sort of small breaches in the communicative order can be used as a means to maintain and consolidate long-lasting close relations in small communities. In the article, I also stress the fact that there are special topics where lying is not just possible but even condoned.

Cet article constitue une exploration du rôle joué par le mensonge dans la vie quotidienne et dans la construction identitaire en Russie européenne septentrionale. J'ai réalisé mon travail de terrain dans le village de Prokopiévo, dans le district d'Ustiany dans l'Oblast d'Arkhangelsk durant l'été 2014. L'intimité est le concept crucial sur lequel s'appuie cet article. La contradiction contenue dans ce concept est celle-ci : les relations d'intimité sont souvent perçues comme éternelles ou comme ayant des effets thérapeutiques. Mais, dans le même temps, elles suscitent des problèmes et des perturbations. Le mensonge est une pratique conspuée dans la Russie septentrionale. Les locaux favorisent une « culture de l'honnêteté ». A contrario, les étrangers, venus de la ville ou les migrants ruraux sont généralement perçus comme des menteurs. Ne pas dire la vérité à ce genre de menteurs (*otnekivanie*) est une pratique acceptable. Viveiros de Castro et Rupert Stasch ont récemment montré que ce style de fissures dans l'ordre communicatif est utilisé pour maintenir et consolider les relations de long court dans les petites communautés. Dans cet article, je souligne également le fait qu'il y a des pratiques au sein desquelles il est autorisé de mentir.

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