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'Ours' and 'Theirs' in the Modern Russian City: Jewish Sacral Geography[1]

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As a result of the crisis of Jewish identity of which so much has been written and said by researchers, journalists and Jewish activists the world over ([Meyer 1990; Arnow 1994; Webber 1994; Sobkin, Gracheva 1998; Hart 2001; Militarev 2002; Chervyakov et al. 2003; Ierushalmi 2004; Nosenko 2004; Rimon 2006; Satanovsky 2006; Cohen, Werheimer 2006; Gitelman 2009; Nosenko-Shtein 2013] and others) many traditional Jewish values are losing their significance in the modern world. This is perfectly true of modern Russia, where, as almost everywhere in the post-Soviet area, this crisis, as a result of various historical circumstances, is particularly profound (for more detail see: [Nosenko-Shtein 2013]). Many researchers have shown that since Soviet times the main criterion for Jewish identity in Russia has remained the ethnic principle, i.e. belief in a common origin or the existence of Jewish ancestors [Gitelman 1994; 1998; 2009; Shapiro et al. 2006; Nosenko-Shtein 2010b]. According to a survey which I carried out in 2007–2010 (on which see below), 45 % of respondents consider that to regard oneself as a Jew, one has to have Jewish parents, while 36 % think that

[1] The original title depends on an opposition between *svoe*, literally 'one's own', and *chuzhoe*, 'someone else's'. The translation of these terms, which has a flavour of 'us and them', but is less aggressive, is notoriously difficult. In this article, the terms are not translated consistently, but in ways that reflect the most meaningful English usage in a given context. [Eds.]

one Jewish parent is enough [Nosenko-Shtein 2013: 72]. A no less important sign of belonging to the Jewish identity in modern Russia (and in some cases more important) is self-identification: for almost 89 % of respondents the main thing is 'feeling Jewish' [Nosenko-Shtein 2013: 76]. One of the consequences of the crisis of Jewish identity is a significant deformation of the perception of traditional cityscapes and urban space. Over recent years the perception of the cityscape has become an extremely popular topic for specialists with a particular interest in the anthropology of the town. And problems of 'urban geography', including sacral geography, have acquired a greater significance and become the subject of numerous discussions [Lefebvre 1991; Lewicka 2008; Bandarin 2011]. This is connected both with the growth in the urban population, partly as a result of migration and the growth of multiculturalism, and with the change in function of various parts of the cityscape and of the role of particular places in the urban space, etc.

My intention in this article is to take a brief look at how the perception of *our* and *their* sacred and profane spaces — the synagogue, the church, the community centre and other centres — has changed in recent times among the Jewish population of several Russian towns.[1] It must be borne in mind that although Judaism does not regard the synagogue as a sacred place (it is not the Temple, not the place where God is present nor the dwelling-place of the Deity), that is precisely the status it has in the awareness of the masses (particularly gentiles, or, in a broad sense, the Russian masses).

Sources and methods

I have, as in my previous work, used a multiple approach in writing this article, combining qualitative research (texts of in-depth interviews and participant observation) with quantitative research (survey data). I have written more than once about the advantages of such an approach (in greatest detail in my book [Nosenko 2004: 45–50]), so on this occasion I shall be brief. It is my opinion that qualitative research should precede quantitative research in every case, because the former allows the general tendencies of the phenomena and processes under examination to be deduced from a relatively small amount of material and basic working hypotheses to be drawn up. Quantitative methods, by virtue of their 'mass' nature, allow the results obtained during various kinds of interviews and participant observation to be verified and refined. However, conducting supplementary

[1] I have already dealt with this topic [Nosenko 2008; Nosenko-Shtein 2011], studying the problem on the basis of mixed marriages and using primarily qualitative methods. Here I would like to take a more comprehensive approach to the problem, and also to stress that it is sacral geography (and not just topography) that is under discussion, since I am examining sacred and profane *spaces* which have particular functions, and not just points on the map of the city.

interviews and analysing them will thereafter again provide the deeper perspective which even good sociological surveys generally lack. In other words, the use of a variety of methods, particularly when studying such complex problems as cultural identity, cultural memory, questions of behaviour etc., makes it possible to study them as fully and comprehensively as possible.

Over the last three decades combinations of different methods, including qualitative and quantitative, have been widely employed in this country and abroad. Examples are infinite, but I shall make particular mention of Paul R. Spickard's brilliant work on interethnic, interracial and interconfessional marriages and unions in the USA [Spickard 1989], Larissa Remennick's book [Remennick 2007], among her many studies of Russian-speaking emigrés on three continents, and the very recent work by Zeev Khanin, Dina Pisarevskaya, and Alek Epshtein on Jewish youth in the post-Soviet area [Khanin et al. 2013]. These examples are selected arbitrarily, but they do show that the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods in anthropological research has long been a widespread practice.

I conducted the research in Moscow, Smolensk, Velikii Novgorod, Penza and Krasnodar in 2007–2010. Apart from Moscow, these towns have very small Jewish communities, which nevertheless have a long history, stretching back to the eighteenth century. Historical events are reflected, in one way or another, in the geography of the town: the presence of (former) synagogues and houses of prayer, community centres, libraries, etc. In the post-Soviet period, in connexion with the 'Jewish renaissance' that began in the 1990s, new 'Jewish objects' appeared in all these towns: the premises of charitable organisations (*chesedim*), and cultural centres, which now fulfil different functions from those which they fulfilled formerly. Moreover, nowadays Orthodox Christian churches, whose role and functions have also changed radically in comparison with the pre-revolutionary period, are also 'incorporated' into the system of 'Jewish geography'.

The overall sample consisted of 320 persons aged from sixteen to ninety-six, 62 % of them women. A significant proportion of the respondents participated in Jewish life to one degree or another: they were clients of the chesedim, i.e. people over sixty, or took part in events organised by 'Hillel' (the Jewish youth organisation) or the programmes of the 'Sochnut' (the Jewish Agency for Russia) — young people under thirty. I thus started with a mixed sample reflecting the age and sex of the people who visited Jewish organisations. I then tried to even out the sample by surveying middle-aged people and those who did not visit those organisations (who form the majority among those of middle age). Moreover, the 'oral history' method which I preferred, as I had in my previous research, permits a deeper understanding of the motivation behind actions and

of the perceptions of my informants (whom I basically found on the 'snowball' principle), and thereby to adjust the results of the survey.

In a number of cases I also used results obtained by other researchers who had indirectly touched upon some of the questions that interested me.

On the crisis of identity and memory in the post-Soviet area

The phenomena of crisis which I mentioned earlier, and likewise the various profound changes and transformations within the post-Soviet area (by which, of course, not only the Jews were affected) have led to the formation of a 'cultural vacuum', which is inevitably accompanied by ethnic 'renewals', religious 'renaissances', the spread of 'new' religious cults and the 'fundamentalisation' of old ones. All these phenomena (including 'ethnicisation' and 'desecularisation') have led to changes, real or imagined, in the perception of urban geography. Various spaces within the city may become objects of the construction of 'places of memory' associated with different meanings. Such interpretations of different places depend in turn on the socio-cultural discourse they belong to, that is, they are correlated with the subjective experience and attitudes of the interested groups, the groups that use these places and the groups that participate in the various discourses attached to these places [Skriebeleit 2005: 219; cited in: Vitti 2011].

The homogeneous Soviet perception of the urban space has been replaced by an extremely highly differentiated picture of the cityscape, including its ethnic and religious 'components'. 'Patterns of popular taste [I would add — mass culture. — *E. N.-Sh.*] reflect, among other things, attitudes to the city, the state, the nation, the family, money, foreigners, minorities, the arts, and the "system"' [Stites 2000: 2]. Different religions' places of worship (including churches, mosques and synagogues), and centres (community, cultural, émigré, etc.) of ethnic activity play a significant role in the formation of the lifestyle of modern Russian townsfolk and of the cityscape. These changes in turn lead to deformations of the cultural identity of Russian citizens, sometimes exceedingly curious ones.

The sacral: is it 'ours'?

First a few figures. Just over a quarter of people asked said that they were definitely believers (table 1).

Among those who definitely believe (25 %), most are in the youngest age-group of 16 to 19; there are also many young people of 16 to 34 amongst those who called themselves definite unbelievers. But people aged 55 to 69, and also those aged 70 and over, more often answered that they are 'believers, but not religious', or believe in fate, destiny, a world consciousness, etc.

Table 1

Can you call yourself a believer? (%)

Yes	27.5
No	27.5
There is some higher power	20.3
I am a believer, but not religious	10.1
I am an agnostic	5.8
I believe in fate or destiny	2.9
I believe in a world consciousness	2.9
I find it hard to answer	1.5
No answer	1.5
Total	100.0

Between 13 % and 20 % of Russians with Jewish origins profess Judaism (different investigations have produced different results). The figure of 13 % comes from the data collected in a survey conducted amongst Russian citizens (including Jews) in 2012 by the Sreda sociological service (<http://sreda.org/arena>). The data collected by Vladimir Shapiro and his colleagues, who conducted a survey in 2005 in St Petersburg, indicate, on the other hand, that the proportion of those 'sympathetic' to Judaism make up about a quarter of the people surveyed in the various age-groups [Shapiro et al. 2006: 109].

My research initially produced results similar to those of Shapiro and his co-authors. To the question 'If you consider yourself a believer, which religion do you belong to?' 22 % of the respondents answered 'Judaism'. However, further research, both qualitative and quantitative, showed that in fact doctrinal and ritual practices (going to synagogue, practising circumcision, observing kosher dietary laws, etc.) are observed by far fewer of them, from 1 % to 8 % [Nosenko-Shtein 2013: 91–5]. Shapiro and his colleagues also indicate that ritual practices are consistently observed by 1 % to 4 % of respondents [Shapiro et al. 2006: 109].

As for the synagogue, according to my data fewer than 6 % of respondents regularly attend (see table 2).

As we can see, over half the people surveyed never go to synagogue; among those who do so regularly, there are slightly more men than women. Those who consider synagogue attendance obligatory are mostly people aged 25–34 or 55–69, but there are not many in either group; in almost all age-groups there are many more who consider it optional or who are not inclined to go at all: table 3.

Table 2

How often do you go to synagogue?

	Sex		Proportion of sample
	Male	Female	
Regularly	4.5	6.4	5.8
Sometimes	45.5	29.8	34.8
Never	50.0	55.3	53.6
No answer	0	8.5	5.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 3

Do you consider it necessary to attend synagogue to consider yourself a Jew? (%)

Age	Is synagogue attendance necessary?					
	Obligatory	Desirable	Does not matter	Hard to say	No answer	Total
16–19	0	50	25	25	0	100.0
20–24	0	0	83.3	16.7	0	100.0
25–34	11.1	44.4	33.3	0	11.1	100.0
35–54	7.7	15.4	69.2	7.7	0	100.0
55–69	11.1	22.2	44.4	16.7	5.6	100.0
70 and over	0	31.6	36.8	21.1	10.5	100.0
Proportion of sample	5.8	26.1	47.8	14.5	5.8	100.0

According to the survey carried out by Alexander Osovtsov and Igor Yakovenko, 11.7 % of Jews attend synagogue regularly [Osovtsov, Yakovenko 2011: 75]. In other words, only a minority of Russian Jews see the synagogue as 'their' sacred space. It is curious that the synagogue is, on the other hand, sometimes perceived as such even by people who do not regard themselves as followers of the Jewish religion (or as believers in the wider sense).

Here is a typical fragment of an interview. Yakov B., 73 years old (Velikii Novgorod, 2007) describes his attitude to the synagogue:

What sort of Jews do you expect us to be? We grew up in the Soviet period, didn't we? Of course I was an unbeliever, I am a Communist, I never resigned from the party... But now I come here [to the synagogue,

or more precisely to the hall where prayer meetings take place. — *E. N.-Sh.*], *and I like it. You understand, I don't come to listen to the rabbi, it's just that here I feel a bit Jewish. I'm sorry now that I didn't ask my parents much, they must have known it all.*

This fragment shows that the synagogue may function as a place of memory (*lieu de mémoire*), of which Pierre Nora wrote in his famous research [Nora et al. 1999; Nora 2005], or, to be quite precise, 'instead of a place of memory' — in this case, Jewish memory, as this is often lost or seriously distorted. Furthermore, amongst people of Jewish descent memory, like self-identification, is 'plural', i.e. it reflects the experience of different socio-cultural groups (for more detail see: [Nosenko-Shtein 2013]).

Sometimes elderly people get free lunches or other material assistance at the synagogue, in which case the synagogue is fulfilling its traditional function of supplying economic support to the needy, which had almost completely disappeared during the Soviet period.[1] True, some people begin to see the synagogue *par excellence* as a place where material goods are distributed, as *our* profane space, and this is not always regarded in a positive light by the rest.

For example, Polina B., 51 years old (Smolensk, 2009), spoke about this sort of assistance very emotionally:

Hardly anybody goes to our synagogue [meaning the prayer hall. — *E. N.-Sh.*]. *There are hardly any Jews left. We see a lot of people when they're giving parcels out, but afterwards you won't see hide nor hair of them. ... And who are they* [the *hasidim*] *building that centre for, with its hotel, and its synagogue, and its tourist centre — for themselves, for their own people, for businessmen from America? What good is it to us?*

The elderly informants whom I call *preservers* — those who preserve the remaining elements of Eastern Ashkenazi culture (for more detail see: [Nosenko-Shtein 2013: 64–9]), even when they position themselves as unbelievers, usually regard the synagogue as *their own* sacred space.

Natalia S., 82 years old (Moscow, 2010):

I believe that there is one God and that it doesn't matter where you pray to him. But since I'm Jewish, of course I'd go to the synagogue...
— And do you go to the synagogue?
— I have been, but not often.

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[1] Philanthropic activity by religious groups was in fact prohibited by Soviet law, particularly the 20 January 1918 Decree on the Separation of Church and State and the Decree on Religious Associations of 8 April 1929. [Eds.].

Vera B., 81 years old, pensioner (St Petersburg, 2005):

I used not to go to synagogue, or to church either. We grew up in Soviet times, after all <...> But in recent years I've become very interested in religious questions, I read the Torah. <...> I don't like everything, but a lot of it is close to me. And I've started to go to the synagogue sometimes, on some holidays, on Yom Kippur. <...> If I'm Jewish, it's at the synagogue that I must ground my faith, not at the church, obviously.

The case is completely otherwise with those informants whose self-identification is non-Jewish and who declare themselves Russian, and likewise with those who 'feel' Jewish almost entirely 'thanks to' antisemitism. (These last have a negative form of Jewish self-identification, on which see in more detail [Nosenko-Shtein 2013: 66–7]). They do not usually attend the synagogue, seeing it as 'their' (other people's) sacred space.

This is what Tatyana P., 68 years old (St Petersburg, 2000) said about this:

I sometimes go to church. In my youth I used to go out of curiosity. And my husband's family are very religious, they have church funerals, and as his wife I go. But I don't attend church services. At the moment I would very much like to buy some candles and request a service for the repose of the dead. My daughters are baptised themselves, and they have had their children baptised, and my eldest daughter is very religious. But I haven't been to the synagogue, though I have sometimes gone and bought matzos. But I'm a bit afraid to go in — women aren't allowed to. (My informant shares the belief, quite widespread in Russian mass consciousness, that women are not allowed in the synagogue.)

Informants with a hybrid self-identification (i.e. those who feel Russian in some circumstances and Jewish in others) do not often go to synagogue. Their dual self-identification usually results in an ambivalent perception of the synagogue: sometimes as *their own* sacred space, sometimes as *another*, but not as *someone else's.*

Valentina G., 38 years old, with a Jewish mother (Moscow, 2008), answered the question about going to church thus:

Oh, that's really complicated... I was christened as a baby, but of course I didn't go to church — only I would look in with my friends sometimes out of curiosity. <...> But ten years ago, you know, everybody started going, and talking about it. People around me were talking about nothing else. And I started to go to church too — sometimes.
— Have you never been to synagogue?
— Not till recently, I never had occasion to. But then I was persuaded to go, and I found it all very strange and unusual. <...> My impression was positive on the whole, you know. I still can't make my mind up.

The so-called 'new Jews', those whose Jewish self-identification was constructed very recently (they are, for the most part, young people) go to synagogue, but not always regularly. Sometimes they even perceive it as 'our own' profane space, a sort of Jewish youth club.

Olesya K., 21 years old (Penza, 2007), described her visits to the synagogue like this:

I come because I like to hang out here. I used to hang out somewhere else, now I hang out here. It's interesting, with all these Shabbats, I've never seen this sort of thing before, and the boys and girls are very nice, too.

As a rule this sort of perception of the synagogue is characteristic of those young people who profess 'secular Judaism' — an arbitrarily selected set of values and practices both religious and secular, but very highly valued within the particular community; amongst young Jews in Russia they include observing the Sabbath, attempts to keep kosher, some Jewish holidays (celebrated in Jewish community or youth centres), a sympathetic attitude towards the Israeli state, a desire to marry someone Jewish, and a few others (for more detail see [Nosenko-Shtein 2010a; 2013]). Only those 'new Jews' who are really devoted to Judaism and go to synagogue regularly (about 2 % of the 16–34 age-group) perceive it as *their own* sacred space.

'Ours' or 'theirs'?

If we proceed to analyse the perception of what for Russian Jews is (or rather, for Jews everywhere has been for centuries) *their* sacred space (i.e. the space of 'others'), the church, we must remember that many investigations indicate a roughly equal number of adherents of Judaism and Christianity among Russian (ethnic) Jews. According to the survey mentioned before carried out by the Sreda sociological service, 13 % of Russian Jews called themselves Orthodox Christians, and another 4 % Christians (but 'do not consider themselves Orthodox, or Catholic, or Protestant'); the same survey, it will be remembered, found that 13 % profess Judaism <http://sreda.org/arena>. According to the data of Shapiro and his colleagues, there is a steady growth in the number of Russian Jews sympathetic to Christianity, and in the youngest group of respondents (16–19 years old), the number of those sympathetic to Judaism and Christianity is more or less the same: 27.3 % and 26 % respectively [Shapiro et al. 2006: 109].

My data are somewhat different: 10 % of respondents said that they professed Orthodox Christianity, and the same number chose Christianity (which is analogous to the Sreda survey). Anna Shternshis, who did her research in Moscow in the 2000s, showed that at that time a larger number of elderly Jews went to church than to synagogue, and that some of them would go both to Orthodox churches and to synagogues [Shternshis 2007: 275]. At the same

time, she stressed that the number of Jews who went to neither was much greater than of any of the other groups [Shternshis 2007: 280–2]. One can add that young people (a large proportion of whom are of mixed, i.e. Jewish and non-Jewish, origins) go to church more often than to synagogue. Overall, almost 25 % of those surveyed were churchgoers, though, as we can see from table 4, this proportion is correlated with their origin.

Table 4

Are you a parishioner of any church? (%)

Are you a parishioner of any church?	What can you say about your Jewish roots?					
	I am completely Jewish	I am three-quarters Jewish	I am half Jewish on my mother's side	I am half Jewish on my father's side	I am a quarter Jewish on both parents' sides	I am a quarter Jewish on one parent's side
Yes	3.2	22.3	16.7	15.4	61.1	66.7
No	96.8	87.7	83.3	84.6	38.9	33.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Sometimes even *preservers* go to church, saying that God is one and it does not matter where he is worshipped, or that the atmosphere in church is friendlier than in the synagogue (A. Shternshis has written about similar remarks, see [Shternshis 2007: 274; Nosenko 2009]), or that it is a long way to the synagogue, but the church is nearby. Finally, in some towns with a very small Jewish population there is no synagogue at all.

Petr G., aged 73 (Gelendzhik, 2007), was dissatisfied with this situation:

There is no synagogue here and no rabbi, and no rabbi ever visits us. They get their salaries over in Moscow and they don't come here. <…> Sometimes I go to the church, because you can pray to God everywhere. But it's better for me here (a little Jewish community centre in a private flat), people like me come here, we keep the Shabbat; I'd very much like to learn Hebrew, only there aren't any textbooks.

As a rule, in such cases the informants see the church as at best a replacement for 'our' sacred space: while not exactly 'theirs not ours', it is still *other*.

It is natural for those informants who declare themselves Christians to perceive the church as 'our' sacred space. This is from an interview with Lina B., aged 49, three-quarters Jewish, who worked at a computer firm at the time of the interview (Moscow, 2000):

Strange as it is, before, when I moved in all that [primarily dissident. — *E. N.-Sh.*] *atmosphere, there were a lot of Jews about, and I felt how much I belonged to that culture. Not entirely, because my relationship to it was not a profound one. Because I am myself something of a dilettante. Besides, I was bringing up my daughter by myself, I always had two jobs, I simply didn't feel like going into it all in any depth. I didn't get carried away reading Jewish books from cover to cover. I don't want to be hypocritical, it means, there was some kind of predisposition, something Russian getting the upper hand in me. You understand, it was a difficult time, a period of depression, and I went into a church, and I felt good there, but somehow... One of my friends said to me, 'See where you feel better.' But besides that, I didn't feel Jewish any more. And one fine day I just went and got baptised. And ever since, I wouldn't say that the Jews are my enemies, but I feel more at ease, more comfortable, amongst Orthodox Russians.*

The mixing of 'our own' and 'their' concepts of the sacral is particularly clearly visible amongst informants with a hybrid self-identification.

Andrei P., 22 years old (Moscow, 2001):

I can't call myself an Orthodox Christian. I do sometimes go to church, but it's quite complicated to be a believer. Roughly speaking I do believe in Jesus Christ. <...> But when I have to go to synagogue, I put on my yarmulka, and off I go.

Even 'new Jews', who are usually heavily involved in the activities of Jewish organisations and centres, do not always have an unambiguous perception of *their own* and *other people's* sacred space.

For example, Stas K., 21 years old (Penza, 2007), described his visit to an Orthodox synagogue thus:

You know, I once went to the synagogue at Samara. I went in, there weren't many people there, and at first they came up to me at once and were very attentive. Then they asked who my mother was. When I said that she was Russian, they simply turned their backs on me. I shall never go to the synagogue again. I do sometimes go to church, and they never asked me about anything there.

The situation that this informant found himself in is quite usual for so-called non-halakhic Jews, i.e. Jews on their father's side only. (The Halakhah, the normative Judaic law, acknowledges as a Jew a person who has a Jewish mother or who professes Judaism.) But even so-called halakhic Jews (i.e. Jews on their mother's side) sometimes perceive the church as *their own* sacred space (or a replacement for it). Olga G., 40 years old, a librarian, with a Jewish mother, who actively takes part in various Jewish events, said (Moscow, 2010):

I was baptised as a child. <...> I have always believed, but I never used to go either to church or synagogue. But now sometimes I go to church.
— Why not to the synagogue?

— There isn't a synagogue where we live, it's a long way off and hard to get to. The church is near. <...> Judaism and Christianity have the same roots, the same origins. <...> Yes, I understand that it isn't right, strictly speaking, but that's how it's turned out: I'm Jewish, and I sometimes go to synagogue, but I go to church too, and even more often.

Only those people who adhere consistently to Judaism perceive the church as *other people's* sacred space.

Sacred or profane?

Turning to the perception of 'our own' profane spaces, which various public places always have been and which various Jewish organisations are nowadays, it should be noted that they often fulfil the functions of clubs catering for particular interests, leisure centres, support groups, etc., which were popular in Soviet times. They offer free or cheap services (food or clothing parcels, medical aid, various seminars, circles, excursions, ex-servicemen's meetings), songs that people enjoy singing (choral classes, singing at meetings and festivals), festivals that people enjoy participating in (Sabbaths, some Jewish holidays, and also a number of others such as Israeli Independence Day), and so on. These places for cultural activity and various services are not only entertainment centres. Richard Stites's remark that 'Cultural consumption must be observed not only as particular ways to deploy leisure time, money and energy but also for the subcultural affects adopted by consumers — songs they sing together for certain functions, clothes they wear, styles of behaviour, gestures, emulative postures (e.g. of cinema stars), dances, and even speech patterns, jokes and narrative styles' [Stites 2000: 3] is extremely appropriate here. The definition which Stites attached to Russian urban culture is to a certain extent also applicable to Jewish organisations and the lifestyle constructed in them.

Furthermore, these organisations are now that *place of memory* which has replaced the synagogue and the family, which to a significant extent have lost their function of transmitting Jewish cultural experience from one generation to the next [Nosenko-Shtein 2010b; 2013]. For this reason informants sometimes start to perceive such organisations as *their own* sacred space.

For example, Rimma S., aged 58 (Krasnodar, 2007), an active participant in Jewish events and programmes, said:

This [the building of the Learned Society, where the reform community meets. — *E. N.-Sh.*] *is a real Jewish house. I say nothing against the synagogue, they celebrate the holidays well there, you've seen it, there were lots of people at New Year. <...> But there's a warmer atmosphere at the Learned Society, everyone talks to each other, and there are various circles for the young people.*

Tatyana P., aged 33 (St Petersburg, 2000):

I often go to the Israeli Cultural Centre, they have the 'Open University of Israel', where I am a student, they have a course called 'Introduction to the oral Torah'. I have got involved in this life — not religious life, you understand, these are separate things... Our life is very active, there are events unconnected with the synagogue at the Israeli Centre every holiday, it's very well developed, I go everywhere, I like it very much, and my children take part in it all too.

In other words, originally profane places acquire the significance of sacred spaces or their replacements. On the one hand, most people of Jewish ancestry in Russia position themselves as non-religious Jews, and consequently the synagogue has lost its sacral functions for the majority. And on the other hand, many of the traditional functions of the synagogue — the study of the sacred texts, the transmission of knowledge to young people, economic support for the needy, and social life (a place where you can 'feel Jewish') — are now being fulfilled by the various charitable, cultural, youth and other Jewish organisations.

* * *

In conclusion, I should like to share a few observations. If we speak of the sacred and profane geography traditional for Russian Jews, we sometimes discover a somewhat peculiar picture in the modern Russian town. Certain curious episodes fit very neatly into the post-modern context. Thus, during my visits to Smolensk I happened to see how after the Sabbath meeting at the local chesed, people went on to the nearby Orthodox Christian cathedral to light a candle and say their prayers. This, it goes without saying, is not confined to Smolensk, and I have written about it on more than one previous occasion ([Nosenko-Shtein 2012], for example); similar phenomena have also been described in detail by Anna Shternshis in her indicatively entitled article 'The Kaddish in Church' [Shternshis 2007]. (The kaddish is the Jewish prayer for the dead.) An informant in Novgorod, who maintained that she had a very negative attitude to Jews who were baptised, herself sang in the local church choir, etc.

Much of what has been said above is the result simply of the loss of traditional Jewish religion, consequences of which may be an attachment to Christianity, or the spread of various quasi-religious systems such as 'civil/secular Judaism', 'personal religion', and so on (for more detail see [Nosenko 2009; Nosenko-Shtein 2010a]). This is also the consequence of the crisis of Jewish identity and Jewish cultural memory, though what that means (even in an ideal sense) contemporary scholarship cannot agree, as Ierushalmi has rightly pointed out [Ierushalmi 1982]. As I have written more than once, this crisis is particularly profound in Russia, the break in transmission

of *our own* cultural experience is very prolonged and as a result both identity and memory have to be constructed again (not always successfully, see [Nosenko-Shtein 2010b]). One result of all these phenomena has been a significant 'displacement' of Jewish sacred and profane urban geography.

At the same time it seems to me that it has recently become possible to speak of attempts to overcome this crisis and create a new Jewish self-identification in Russia. Among other things this means an urge to escape the confines of traditional religion (the affirmation of Jewish secular values and even the formation of a paradoxical self-identification as both Jewish and Orthodox Christian). Therefore one may quite often observe the inversion of Jewish and gentile sacred places, and also of sacred and profane spaces. We have a motley picture before us: *our own* is confounded with *their own*, they may replace one another, their functions may cross over, and so on. That is, the previous homogeneous perception — of the synagogue as *our* sacred space, and the church as *theirs*, etc. — has been replaced by a real post-modern smörgäsbord, from which everyone takes what they find most appealing.

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