

Sacred and Profane Space in the Modern Russian City: A Choice of Russian Jews

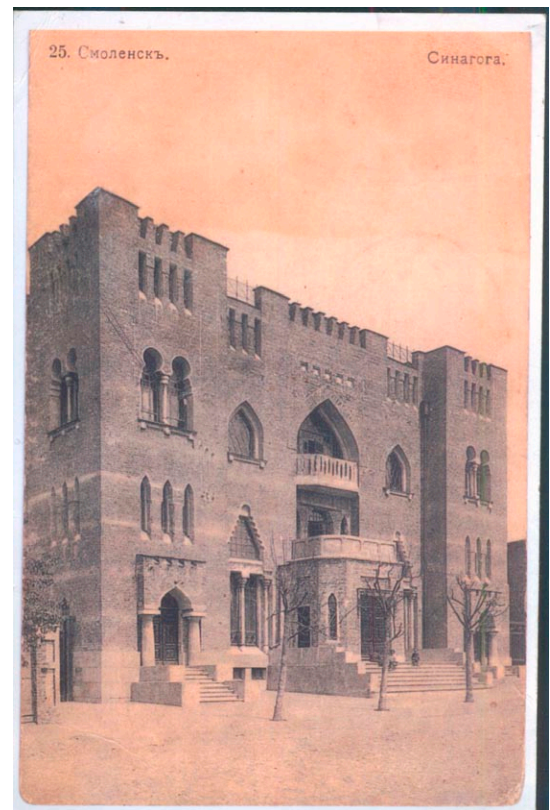
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Abstract

A profound transformation of the cultural memory in the former Soviet Union has resulted in deep changes in the cultural identities of all Soviet—and ex-Soviet—ethnic and religious groups. This transformation led to a change of perceptions about sacred and profane spaces and the connections of these spaces to the urban landscape. As a result of complex historical and cultural processes, contemporary Russian Jewry is a highly heterogeneous community and its perception of traditional Jewish sacred places—synagogues, cemeteries, saints' tombs—is that they have lost their function. During the Soviet era these places had often not been considered by Jews as sacred. Moreover, non-Jewish sacred places, like Christian churches, had, paradoxically, in some cases, become Jewish sacred places. The so-called Jewish renaissance in post-Soviet Russia has led to a revived interest in Judaism and Jewish traditions. Therefore, Jewish communal centers, philanthropic and youth organizations, centers for economic support, leisure time activities, and places for Jewish sentiments and memories function as Jewish sacred places. This inversion of sacred and profane spaces, typical of post-modern culture, is visible, especially in small urban centers, where there are no synagogues and where the role of secular or semi-secular Jewish organizations is growing. In this article I will try to demonstrate the specifics of Jewish sacred and profane spaces in modern Russian urban centers.

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This postcard of the early 20th century depicts the building of a former synagogue in Smolensk. At present the college for Communication Studies is located there

Introduction

Some scholars stress the decline of many traditional collective identities, and the emergence of new ones at the same time (Davidman 1991; Giddens 1992; Vermuelen and Govers 1994; Eriksen 1993; Anthias 2001). The deep crisis of some traditional religions and nations is one aspect of the phenomenon (Gans 1994; Smith 1995; Horowitz 2001; Calhoun 2004). The other is the “ethnicity explosion” and the “religious renaissance” in many parts of the world (Bentley 1987; Banks 1996; Brubaker 2004). In any case, a person

identifies him or herself more and more with his or her religion or culture, even though some ethnicities and religions are declining. Paradoxically, we can see that personal self-identification, free from many former collective ties, is very widespread (Cavalcanti and Chalfant 1994). These tendencies are also typical of Jewish identities in many countries.

All these processes, including ethnicization and de-secularization, have led to a change—real and perceptive—of urban space. The Soviet homogeneity has been substituted by diversification—ethnic and religious elements of the urban landscape are more evident now in Russian urban centers. “Patterns of popular taste [I would also add, patterns of mass culture, *E. N-S*] 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). Temples of various religions (churches, mosques and synagogues), as well as centers for ethnic activities (communal and Diaspora centers, all kinds of clubs for studying ethnic traditions, music etc.), play a more significant role in the lifestyle of modern Russian citizens and in the urban landscape than formerly. These changes, in their turn, result in deformations, sometimes strange ones, in the identities of ex-Soviet people.

This article is dedicated to the choice of sacred and/or profane spaces by modern Russian Jews. These spaces refer to synagogues, Christian churches, and/or other places, mainly spaces of leisure activities and centers of economic support for their members. I will try to demonstrate the perception of these places in the context of Jewish or non-

Jewish identities of the Jewish population in Russia today.

Modern Russia is a deeply divided society. We can see many splits in the social and cultural spheres of this country so it is impossible to speak about a common sacred myth or a grand narrative in Russia. Russia’s Jewry, being a part of this “society in transition,” is also a very heterogeneous community (Kochan 1972; Gitelman 1988). As a result, there is no common Jewish identity (Nosenko 2004: 52-53) and no common sacred spaces for Jews in Russia today.

Sources and Methods

In conducting my research I chose to use qualitative methods, such as oral and life history, since they are more useful than quantitative ones in anthropological studies. This article is based mainly on the results of my field research which I carried out from 1999 to 2009 in several Russian cities and towns (Moscow, St Petersburg, Penza, Krasnodar, Smolensk, Veliky Novgorod, and some other urban centers in the European part of Russia). I conducted a total of 250 in-depth interviews. Interviews were informal and indirect, that is, informal conversations where the interviewer tried to minimize her role and give the lead to the narrator. Yet I had a special interview guide that included several areas of topics that I wanted to cover. Interviews lasted from thirty minutes to six hours, depending on the willingness and time of the informant. There is no single representative sampling in qualitative research; I relied on what is known as “theoretical saturation”, where the researcher gets enough evidence for his/her theory and new interviews might add details but do not affect

the main concepts (see Bertaux 1981; Hummersley 1989). As a result, the main source of this study is texts of interviews with the attendants of different Jewish organizations, as well as with people of Jewish origin who have never visited them. Among the informants 137 were women; their age ranged from seventeen to eighty-eight years old. Out of all the informants 221 had undergone higher education or were students in universities and colleges at the time of the interview. I found the informants as a consequence of my contacts with Jewish organizations and the use of the snowball principle.

In addition, during my research trip, I carried out a survey in order to verify the results of the qualitative research. The general sampling included 300 respondents whom I found mainly in the Jewish organizations. Most respondents were aged between 16 and 30, or older than 60. These age cohorts represent the age structure of attendants and members of Jewish organizations. The data of this survey is, therefore, an additional and important source. In some cases I used the data of sociological surveys conducted by other scholars (Gitelman *et al* 2000; Chervyakov *et al* 2003; Ryvkina 2005; Shapiro *et al* 2006; Osovtsov and Yakovenko 2011).

An additional and very important source was participant observation. It was especially helpful in the Russian periphery because, although my field trips were not very long, they were intense: I stayed in private homes, spent whole days with my informants, listened to their stories and gossip, and learned their routines. All of this added considerably to my understanding of Jewish life in these towns.

Diversity in Singularity

For many centuries to be a Jew meant “to perform ceremonial laws of Judaism.” A synagogue was a Jewish sacred place and an opposition to the sacred places of *Others* (churches, monasteries, mosques) or Jewish/non-Jewish profane spaces, including public places— markets, various offices, etc. The situation had started to change in the 19th and much more so in the 20th century, when a secular Jewish identity had emerged and spread out (Klier 1995; Nathans 2002; Zipperstein 1999; Frankel 1981). In the former USSR Jewishness has been almost totally cut off from Judaism and the Soviet variant of Jewish secular identity was based mainly on the principle of ethnic origins and state anti-Semitism (Shneer 1994; Shternshis 2006; Nosenko-Stein 2009). In modern Russia the crisis of Jewish identity has its unique characteristics. The Jewish population in Russia is culturally diverse and it is impossible to speak about a single Jewish self-identification. There is a set of cultural self-identifications based on different symbols and values (Nosenko 2004). Therefore, it is also impossible to speak about a common Jewish sacred or profane space because its perception depends on the self-identification of many people of Jewish origin.

The analysis of texts enables me to suggest a classification of cultural self-identifications of persons of Jewish origin in Russia and their relationship with their religious choice. It is very important to take into account that most of my informants, like most Russian Jews today, are people of partly Jewish origin (i.e., they were brought up in mixed families).

1. East European Jewish (East Ashkenazi). Self-identification is often based on the Yiddish language and traditional Ashkenazi culture. The informants were aged 75+. However, this self-identification is actually quasi-traditional, because it is detached from Judaism and represents a Soviet variant of Jewish traditional culture. The main Jewish symbols for these people are events of World War II and the Holocaust.

2. Russian (or non-Jewish) self-identification. Informants with this type of self-identification were usually born through intermarriage, and usually declare that they are Russians and have never regarded themselves as Jews. They prefer Russian values and often declare that they are Christians (Russian Orthodox).

3. The negative type. These informants perceive their Jewishness as part of quite a negative personal experience and have a negative form of Jewish self-identification that very often has been formed through anti-Semitism, often *par excellence*. They declare themselves as non-believers or in relation to Christianity.

4. Dual self-identification (a kind of hybrid identity). Persons of this large group often say that, in some situations, they are Russians and, in others, Jews. They were brought up in a Russian milieu, but during recent years they have often become interested in Jewish culture and tradition. Some of them converted to Christianity but at the same time they are interested in Judaism.

5. The “new Jewish” self-identification differs from the traditional Jewish self-identification that existed in Russia until the first two decades of the 20th century, as well as from the Jewish self-identification

in the USA, Western Europe and Israel. These informants, like the previous group, had had no traditional Jewish education either. Nevertheless, they knew something about Jewish tradition and values from elder relatives. During recent years they have often tried to “find their Jewish roots” by studying Jewish culture, history, etc., and by taking part in Jewish life. They try to observe some Jewish ceremonial laws; and sometimes convert to Judaism.

Their Sacred Space?

I will begin with Judaism and the synagogue as a Jewish sacred place. According to my survey, 4 to 10 per cent of Jews (in different age cohorts) in Russia today fulfill Jewish ceremonial laws; a higher percentage (13.7) consider Judaism as “the most attractive religion” (Gitelman *et al* 2000, 72). Ryvkina even found that 35 per cent of the respondents believed so (Ryvkina, 2005, 120). Osovtsov and Yakovenko are more realistic—11.7 per cent of their respondents regularly visit a synagogue (Osovtsov and Yakovenko 2011, 75).

The informants with East Ashkenazi self-identification do not regularly go to the synagogue but they occasionally do, as part of a traditional way of life, and, in these cases, they say that they want to be with Jews, or commemorate their parents:

Of course I am a non-believer, all of us are Soviet Jews, you know. If anybody tells you that he believes in God, don't believe him. ... I was a communist and I didn't abandon my party. ... However, I come here [to the synagogue]. I do this in memory of my parents, and they were religious.

I have great regrets that I didn't ask my parents about all these customs, I am sure they knew all of them (Yakov B., 82, a pensioner, Veliky Novgorod, 2007).

In this case the synagogue functions as a *lieu de memoire*, a place of memory (Nora 1984) or, more accurately speaking, *au lieu de memoire*, instead of a place of memory, because the real memory is often lost. Some informants also have a free meal there, and this is very important for most of them, as pensioners, especially in the Russian periphery, are extremely poor. In this case, synagogues once again play the role of a soup kitchen, a role that almost totally disappeared during the Soviet era. I would say that informants usually perceive the synagogue as a Jewish sacred space, even when they are non-believers, and therefore they state that former synagogues should be returned to Jewish communities.

The informants with the Russian and negative self-identification usually do not visit the synagogue and perceive it as a sacred place of *Others*:

Now I would like to believe in something. I believe in destiny, in fate. But I didn't believe in all that before. In recent years I wanted to observe rituals—both Russian Christian and Jewish. But I realized that it is impossible to worship two Gods. You just cannot do that. ... Sometimes I go to church. My husband's relatives [Russians] are Russian Orthodox, and they are very religious and I have to fall into line with them. ... Sometimes I'd like to buy and light candles, order a memorial service. Both my daughters are Christian and they baptized their children. (...) I have never visited a

synagogue, I am afraid to go there. Besides, I know that women are not allowed to go there (Tatyana P., 68, a pensioner, whose mother was Jewish, St Petersburg, 1999).

The informants with the dual self-identification also usually do not visit the synagogue. Their hybrid self-identification often develops an ambivalent perception about synagogues, i.e., they regard them as a Jewish sacred space but not *Their Own*. Nevertheless they often visit the communal centers.

"New Jews" visit the synagogue even if they only observe a few ceremonial laws of Judaism. They usually do so in their own way, separately from the elderly people. For example, they begin the Sabbath when it is convenient for them, after the lectures or working day. That is, they consider the synagogue as a kind of youth club, a space for leisure activities, and therefore as *Their Own* profane space.

At the same time, those who have converted to Judaism visit the synagogue very ardently and perceive it as *Theirs*, as a Jewish sacred space:

I can't say I didn't believe in God. I just didn't think about it. I had no need for faith. But over the recent years I thought about these things a lot. I went to church, then to the synagogue. I spoke to the rabbi and liked him very much. He is very intelligent, he helped me a lot. I began reading the Tanakh, and then some Midrashim. Now I observe everything. ... When I was in Israel I went to see her [the informant's daughter's] wedding and liked to be in a Jewish Orthodox milieu. I liked to wear a long skirt and a hat. I think if you want to be Jewish, you have to

perform Jewish ceremonial laws. ... There is no synagogue here now, you know. But I often come to this room where I can see our rabbi and feel so comfortable here. I hope there will be a real synagogue in Smolensk (Olga F., 45, a businessperson, whose mother is Jewish, Smolensk, 2007).

Isn't Alien Sacred Space No Longer Alien? Profane Becoming Sacred

All the same, the results of my research, as well as studies conducted by some other scholars, show that Christianity is more popular or, at least, more attractive for persons of Jewish origin in Russia, especially among offspring of intermarriages (Ryvkina 2005, 120; Gitelman *et al* 2000, 72). My survey shows that 14 per cent of the respondents in a general sampling considered themselves as Christians (mostly Russian Orthodox). Young people more often preferred a church than a synagogue—25 per cent (according to Ryvkina) and 10 per cent (Gitelman *et al*).

The reasons for their conversion to Christianity were very diverse. Some intellectuals became Christians in the late Soviet era because they considered it as a kind of opposition to the Soviet regime, or tried to fill the spiritual vacuum in the anti-religious state, but were in a situation of lack of information about Judaism (see, e.g., Deutch Kornblatt 2003):

I converted to Christianity because I needed it, I mean, to have a religious experience. But it is just accidental, I mean, that I am a Russian Orthodox. We did not know anything about other religions then [in the 1970s-1980s]. I am not sure, but had I known a good rabbi then, I would have converted to Judaism (Mikhail D., 58, a psychologist

whose grandfather was Jewish, Moscow 2007).

Many “half Jews,” (i.e., people who have one Jewish parent) were baptized in infancy by their non-Jewish relatives, who were often non-believers, but performed this ritual as part of the Russian tradition. The baptism was not the informants' choice but sometimes determined their preference and affiliation later, because they were usually raised in a Russian cultural environment. Even during the Soviet era they could observe some elements of Christian culture—books, icons, painted eggs and other dishes of festive meals, etc., moreover, as I have already mentioned, in the late Soviet era some Jews converted to Christianity (see Deutsch Kornblatt 2003; Nosenko-Stein 2010). So, in the 1990s, many of them made their implicit Christianity more explicit after *perestroika*, in the era of the “Russian Orthodox boom” in Russia. Most, however, converted to Christianity in the 1990s, the period of the above-mentioned religious boom (Nosenko-Stein 2010).

The informants with the East Ashkenazi type of self-identification very seldom declared themselves as Christians. But, at the same time, some of them went to church, explaining that the church was nearer, or that the atmosphere there was friendlier than in the synagogue. Some informants, who live in towns where there is no synagogue, consider their visits to the local church as a kind of substitute for the Jewish sacred place:

There is no synagogue here. There is no rabbi here. Rabbis don't come here. They prefer to earn money in your Moscow and don't want to come here.



Yom Kippur eve in a private apartment in Gelenjic, 2007

Sometimes I go to a church because it is possible to pray in any place. But I feel more comfortable here [in a small Jewish center located in a private apartment] because some people like me come here (Pyotr G., 73, Gelenjic, a resort in the South of Russia).

However, some researchers show that most elderly Jews in Russia do not visit either a church or a synagogue (Shternshis 2007, 280-282), although more often, they prefer churches. Therefore, churches function not only as a substitution for the Jewish *Sacred*, but rather as a place where a person can find his or her very vague and uncertain sacred place.

The informants with Russian self-identification, who declare their affinity to Christianity, perceive a church as *Their*

natural sacred space:

I am Russian because I am Russian Orthodox. All of us are Russian Orthodox, all my family. We observe only Russian Orthodox holy days, not Jewish ones. ... My father often goes with my mother and me to church (Natalia A., 19 years old, a student, whose father is Jewish, Moscow, 2000).

The informants with the negative type of self-identification usually affirm they are non-believers, but in some cases they were baptized, mostly at the time of the religious boom in post-Soviet Russia, and perceive the church as non-Jewish and *Their* sacred space, sometimes even as an opposition to the synagogue:

There was a very difficult period in my life, a time of depression. Sometimes I went to church and felt good there. ... Once a friend of mine told me: you should know where you feel better. Besides, I didn't feel Jewish [her mother is Jewish, her father was born in a Jewish-Armenian family]. So I got baptized and go to church now. And after that [baptism] all Jews—of course I don't consider them to be enemies—but I feel more comfortable in a Christian milieu, among Russians, Russian Orthodox (Lina B., 49, a secretary in a small company, Moscow, 2000).

The emotional factor has great importance in such cases—the friendly atmosphere of the church and the beauty of the Russian Orthodox liturgy often attract people—especially women—in difficult periods of their lives.

The informants with dual self-identification were sometimes baptized in the late Soviet era but, during the last 10 to 15 years, they have become interested in Judaism and believe that it is impossible to be a Jew and a Christian at the same time. Sometimes they try to keep their Christian faith a secret.

Yelena K., 20, a teacher of music, began visiting the local Hillel club, a Jewish youth organization, and, as a result, became deeply interested in her Jewish roots. She tried to explain:

I was baptized when I was nine years old; I often go to church and pray there and feel at home. I observe Russian Orthodox holy days and fasts. I have friends who are Russian Orthodox. Regarding the synagogue, I can't go there. I think it is improper to attend a church and a synagogue at the same

time. But I don't want anybody here [in the Hillel club] to know about my Russian Orthodox faith (Yelena K., 20, St Petersburg, 1999).

The unstable self-identification often leads to an uncertain perception of what is *Their Own* and what is *Others'* sacred and profane space. A synagogue is often considered as an *Alien* sacred place, albeit highly esteemed and sometimes even attractive. The emotional distance to the church is shorter, even if the respondents were non-believers or agnostics and did not perceive the church as a sacred space.

As to Jewish communal centers, they often substitute for different hobby clubs and free places for leisure activities which were widespread and popular in the Soviet era. These places of cultural consumption are not only places for leisure “time, money and energy but also for the super-cultural effects adopted by consumers—the songs they sing together for certain functions, the clothes they wear, styles of behavior, emulative postures (e.g., movie stars), dances, and even speech patterns ... and narrative styles” (Stites 2000:3).

For the “new Jews” a synagogue is the only Jewish sacred place, however, if they had already had another religious experience, they do not consider the synagogue as the only Jewish sacred place. Sometimes they also perceive a local Jewish communal center as a Jewish *Sacred Place*. Tatyana P., 34, a teacher of foreign languages, whose mother is Jewish, was Russian Orthodox, and who now fulfills some Jewish ceremonial laws said:

When I was a Christian I never considered Christianity as the only true faith. Even now I think there are different ways and different faiths, but they all say the same thing. But I suppose that if I am Jewish, I shouldn't hesitate. ... I think Judaism is more rational than Christianity. I go to the synagogue but not very often. The atmosphere is too formal, too cold there. ... And at our Jewish center the Jewish life is very hectic and so interesting! (Tatyana P. 34, St Petersburg, 2000).

One of the specific characteristics of all of the above-mentioned types of self-identification is the loss of great importance, even of most Jewish symbols and values, including Judaism itself. In this context the *Others'* sacred space is not perceived as Alien. Thus, the church can be often considered as *Their* sacred space, especially by so called "ordinary Soviet people", who were raised in the Soviet era and were cut off from Judaism, but had some knowledge about Christianity. This perception is especially popular among non-Halakhic Jews (i.e., patrilineal Jews), who do not feel comfortable in an orthodox synagogue. As an example, here is what a student, whose mother is non-Jewish, told me:

When I came to the synagogue for the first time, they paid attention to me because I was new there. And I was young—you know that most people there are very old. ... But then they asked me about my mother. And after hearing my reply they just turned away from me and didn't notice me anymore. I was shocked. I will never go there anymore! I don't attend church but, if I wish, I can go there and nobody will ask me about my mother (Stas K., 21, Penza, 2007).

No wonder that in search of a sacred place many people of Jewish origin in Russia convert to Christianity and find a sacred space in a church or in the Jewish communal center.

At the same time, we can observe a very slight tendency to return to Judaism. This tendency is most prevalent among "new Jews" —young people involved in Jewish life. They try to find *Their* sacred space in the synagogue. A young businessperson, whose parents are Jewish, visits the synagogue regularly:

I was brought up as a non-believer, but I have always felt there was something; maybe I knew there was God. But all my family was atheistic. Nevertheless, several years ago I met a very good rabbi. He explained many things to me. And I understood that a Jew must perform the ceremonial laws of Judaism (Denis O., 32, Krasnodar, 2007).

In these rare cases (2 to 3 per cent of the respondents said they belong to orthodox Judaism, both Hassidic and non-Hassidic; less than 1 per cent prefer the reformist Judaism) they perceive both the synagogue and the Jewish communal centers as Jewish and *Their* sacred places.

In addition, we can see some attempts to construct a kind of "civil Judaism", mainly by people with "new Jewish" self-identification. They try to observe some commandments of Judaism which they consider as important:

My religious principles largely coincide with Judaism, but I am not an observant Jew, just partly observant.

-What do you observe?



Dancing modern Israeli dances in the yard of the Jewish community center in Veliky Novgorod, 2007

Mostly the Sabbath, sometimes holidays and kashrut—to a certain extent. I try not to eat pork or mix milk and meat. ... Sometimes my father and I [his mother is Russian] go to the synagogue (Matvey R., 21, a student of sociology, St Petersburg, 1999).

Moreover, some young respondents even perceive the synagogue as a Jewish profane space:

I come here [to the synagogue] because I like it. It is so interesting: this is a real club. Before that I went to another club, but I like this club better. I have never seen all these Sabbath and festivities, this is so interesting! And people are so friendly (Olesia K., 21, Penza, 2007).

This phenomenon—an inversion of the Jewish sacred and profane places—is rather typical of many informants who go to Jewish centers. Most of them even prefer the local communal organization to the synagogues. Thus, the profane space plays the role of the sacred one. Some visit all three institutions, a Hassidic synagogue, a reformist center and a secular Jewish organization.

A pensioner who came to a Hassidic center and a synagogue and a reformist center for the Jewish holy days said:

This house [a building of the academy where the reformist center is located] is a real Jewish place. I don't mean anything bad by speaking about our synagogue. It is good and the Jewish holy days are interesting there.

You were with us at the New Year ceremony and you saw that a lot of people come. But here people can come at any time and see each other. There are different courses for our young people. ... It is so good of you to come here. Do you like this Jewish house?

Yes, I do.

You are really Jewish! (Rimma S., 58, Krasnodar, 2007).

During the Soviet era, “the entertainment possessed certain universal features and mechanisms dictated by the desire of the producers to have their products consumed on some kind of market, however controlled” (Stites 2000, 4). Nowadays, other “producers” create new places and opportunities for entertainment, which are sometimes perceived as new sacred places.

Conclusion

Thus, in many cases, Jewish and non-Jewish sacred places substitute for each other, and we can see the inversion of *Ours* and *Theirs* or, more accurately, the mixture of *Our* and the *Others'* sacred spaces. This interchange is particularly pronounced in small Russian urban centers, where churches can substitute for synagogues, and communal centers substitute for them both. At the same time, we can also observe such a replacement in large cities, where the distance to the nearest synagogue is too far, especially for the elderly. Besides, some people, whose self-identification is cut off from Judaism, perceive a church as a friendlier place, open to everyone irrespective of ethnic origin or gender. In some cases, churches and synagogues are

not just sacred spaces, they are centers of economic support for poor people (free meals, free second-hand clothes, free food etc.) and, sometimes, places for the commemoration of relatives. Therefore, they are important for elderly people with different types of cultural self-identification, irrespective of their perception of the place—either as *Ours* or *Theirs*.

Moreover, sometimes Jewish sacred and profane spaces change their function or supplement each other. Thus, many Jewish organizations are considered as all sorts of clubs—World War II veteran, youth, hobby, and so on. These clubs are often free or very cheap. In addition, Jewish organizations offer some free or cheap services, like medical services, financial support, education, leisure etc., as well as lectures about Jewish tradition, history and culture, celebrations of Jewish holy days and memorial dates. All these events are expected to strengthen Jewish identity and many people, especially non-religious or agnostics, sometimes perceive Jewish profane places as sacred ones. Their role is of great significance in constructing a “new Jewish” identity and reinforcing the Jewish component of a hybrid identity.

Generally speaking, we can see a highly diversified picture in which Jewish and non-Jewish sacred and profane urban spaces replace each other, coincide, and lose their original functions. This phenomenon can be seen in the context of so-called implicit religion (Bailey 1983, 1990). It is defined by scholars as a very vague core of beliefs and practices taken personally from different religious and secular systems, including the UFO, diets, meditations etc. This is a kind of

personal religion that is more convenient for a person who does not want to be restricted by any prescriptions or dogmas of a traditional religion (see also Cavalcanti and Chalfant 1994).

In spite of so-called the religious revival supported by the state, many people in contemporary Russia continue their search for the *sacred* in different religious and secular systems and places. So, on the one hand, we can see a specific return of some young people to Judaism and to the synagogue as a Jewish sacred place but, more often, they turn to a kind of civil Judaism, which they construct on their own. On the other hand, some people of Jewish origin prefer Christianity and try to find the sacred space in the church. However, most people of Jewish origin in Russia follow an implicit religion with its inversions or mixtures of all sacred and profane places. This quasi-religion and the mixture of sacred and profane spaces, are typical of the post-modern culture.

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