

NEW ZEALAND'S BAN ON KOSHER SLAUGHTERING¹

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In May 2010 New Zealand's government, in the interest of animal welfare, required that all animals slaughtered for commercial purposes be stunned before being killed. This rule effectively banned the Jewish practice of slaughtering, which requires that a kosher animal (e.g., cloven hooves, chews the cud, is in good health, etc.), be killed by a trained butcher who slits its throat with one stroke of an extremely sharp knife. A stunned animal (i.e., one shocked electrically), if not already dead, is considered injured and unhealthy, and, therefore, not kosher for slaughter. The government's position was due to recommendations by New Zealand's National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee and studies by veterinary scientists. Members of the small Jewish community went to New Zealand's High Court alleging that the ban infringed on their constitutional rights. The issue of humane animal treatment versus civil liberties proved to be much more involved and also instructive as a local example of cultural politics. (Cultural politics, animal welfare, multiculturalism, New Zealand Jews)

This essay explores a controversy over a humane method of slaughtering animals for consumption and how it undermines New Zealand Jews' understanding that they are citizens with equal rights, free to practice their religion in a country with an international reputation for tolerance. The issue developed in a context involving animal welfare interests, meat exporting, and local Muslim *halal* (correct or proper) slaughter, itself the subject of similar proscriptions in Europe. Since Jews and Muslims are not the only groups facing cultural threats from animal rights advocates, the relevance of this case extends beyond New Zealand's small Jewish community.

New Zealand is reputed to be a model tolerant liberal society. Its recognition of Maori civil and customary rights has gone so far that one anthropologist claims the country to be in thrall to an excessively relativistic culturalism (Sandall 2001). Fox (2008) provides an interesting summary and evaluation of the issues at stake for anthropology in Sandall's (2001) critique, which contrasts democracy and totalitarianism, primitivism and modernity, open versus closed societies, universalism and relativism, the betrayal of modernity by the intellectuals who support tribalism, and the associated degeneration of anthropology into a pseudoscience advocating cultural relativism. Crowder (2008), commenting on Sandall, states that the choice between an "open" universalistic society and one that promotes "closed" sectarian interests is not always as stark as Sandall alleges:

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[M]embership of a flourishing culture is universally a component of individual well-being, and...consequently one's own culture ought to be accorded some level of public respect and support by a just political system. There will be limits to the kind and degree of respect and support that are justified in each case, limits set by reference to the other components of individual well-being as marked out by the standard liberal list of individual rights. Cultural practices will not be accommodated if they violate basic rights or undermine personal autonomy. (Crowder 2008:248)

Jews hardly figure into analogous discussions in New Zealand. The place of Maori, their concerns about land, water, language, education, income disparities, health, etc., completely dominate debates about multiculturalism in the country. This is reflected in the often-repeated claim that *Aotearoa* (Maori for New Zealand) is a bicultural Maori and *Pakeha* (non-indigenous New Zealander) nation.

The Jewish community is by no means unhappy to be overlooked. Its public culture has been characterized as quiet, with an ethos of keeping its head down and its concerns private. The Jewish cultural presence in New Zealand remains hardly visible, despite the fact that Jews there contribute much to the arts, business, and politics (Bell and Morrow 2012). Local knowledge about Jewish culture, values, and beliefs comes from American television sitcoms, Hollywood films, or news about Israel, more than through interaction between gentile and Jewish New Zealanders (Beaglehole and Levine 1995). That the New Zealand government should have any interest in *shechita* (prescribed ritual slaughtering) in 2010, let alone ban it, seemed anomalous, given the quiet, unobtrusive nature of local Jews. The Jewish community suddenly found itself confronted with some very uncomfortable questions and choices. For the first time in their history, the boards of the two New Zealand Orthodox congregations asked for funds to hire lawyers to sue the government.

ANIMAL VS. CULTURAL RIGHTS IN GERMANY AND CANADA

Restrictions and prohibitions on *shechita* have historically been something of a litmus test of Jewish modernity. As it involves commerce with gentile meat processors and customers² more than any other aspect of Jewish culture, this practice tests the extent to which Jews are accepted and simultaneously recognized to the reasonable extent articulated by Crowder (2008). Well before the rise of the Nazi regime, whose ban on *shechita* was an early step towards the Holocaust, an important case arose between the 1870s and 1930s in Prussia, Bavaria, Hess, and Saxony (Judd 2003, 2007) that involved interactions between interest groups surprisingly similar to those happening now in New Zealand.

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Judd (2003) observes that, as Jews developed into citizens and their religious institutions became less compelling, demands by animal liberationists that they be required to follow the laws of the state became persuasive. Defenders of Jewish cultural rights insisted that the government's tradition of tolerance was being tested and that kosher slaughter should continue, despite its supposed brutality. Demands for religious privilege started to make leaders of the communities increasingly uncomfortable because they highlighted peculiarly Jewish practices. There is a noticeable shift in the literature defending shechita in the German states from a focus on religion in the 1870s and 1880s to later campaigns that characterized kosher slaughter as humane, hygienic, and in the public interest. The meat was said to remain fresh longer, be free of disease, and taste better. The requirement that the animals be bled out -- the main religious justification for shechita (blood contains the animal's life force and should not be consumed), -- was represented as a way of ridding the carcass of germs that cause syphilis and tuberculosis, rather than evidence of a peculiarly Jewish preoccupation with blood. It was the animal protectionists who were being irrational and deviant. Jews were respectable, moral, and progressive citizens.

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In addition to appealing to defend shechita, the Jews improved conditions in the slaughterhouses. Holding pens and shackling practices were made less traumatic to the animals, and stricter regulations were developed for slaughters. Scientifically-based claims that kosher slaughtering caused unnecessary pain and suffering were countered with competing scientific evidence that stunning is an additional source of distress to animals being slaughtered (Judd 2003:134). Catholics, who also faced a host of issues about their position as citizens in the German states, came out in support of the rights of Jews in regard to kosher processing. Defending Jewish cultural practices simultaneously advanced their own rights to religious freedom without having to bring any specific attention to their customs (Judd 2003).

Although anti-Semites joined the critics of kosher butchering, animal protectionists generally distanced themselves from anti-Jewish themes. The debates were important in helping to define the character of the German state, its power and limits, the nature of citizenry, the extent of religious freedom, and just how far it could intrude into what were formerly autonomous affairs (Judd 2003:19).

A situation far removed in time, space, and culture from the German example is that of Canada. In 1983 animal-rights groups succeeded in having Canada halt sealing, which some called "the world's most intensive commercial hunt for marine mammals" (Wenzel 1991:142). Those involved in this "spectacular victory" insisted that they were not opposed to people killing the animals, but only to the cruelty of the practice. However, it did not take

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long before “the moral focus of the movement on the rightness of sealing...moved to an examination of Inuit culture itself” (Wenzel 1991:160). The protesters insisted that the Inuit were participating in a rapacious commercial activity and not following authentic tradition.

These cases, and others involving whaling,³ show that such challenges segue into cultural attacks that destabilize the target group and undermine it socially and culturally. Forbidding commercial sealing meant that the Inuit could not remain both Arctic hunters and Canadian on their own terms. The aftermath of the victory of the animal rights and ecology groups was alienation, socioeconomic differentiation, and the proletarianizing of the Inuit population. Although the consequences for New Zealand Jews are far less fundamental—e.g., only 4.1 percent of the respondents to a recent survey indicated that they adhere to Jewish dietary laws (*kashrut*) (B’nai B’rith 2011:31)—they too have found their position in society suddenly destabilized.

THE ISSUE OF KOSHER SLAUGHTER IN NEW ZEALAND

As with the German case, animal rights have been invoked centrally in the various New Zealand forums concerned with the implications of banning shechita. Arguments about cruelty and compassion regarding animals, the scientific determination of pain and suffering, and the right balance between human rights, religious freedom, and animal rights also confront the New Zealand state regulation of kosher slaughter. There, however, the importance of neoliberal ideology and the legitimacy of the state to facilitate the demands of the market for New Zealand’s primary products emerge simultaneously as both a clear and hidden factor behind the ban.

In Germany, science was simultaneously an ally and an opponent of shechita (Judd 2003). Then, as now, scientific opinion regarding the most humane way of killing animals was mixed. In New Zealand, the National Advisory Committee on Animal Welfare (NAWAC) counsels the government on such matters through reports to the Ministry of Agriculture. The humane treatment of animals is particularly important in a country whose economy is dependent on the export of primary products. New Zealand exports about 370,000 tons of sheep meat (<http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/meat-and-wool/4/1>) and slaughters 2.2 million cattle per year (<http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/beef-farming/7>). D. J. Mellor, a long-term head of NAWAC, is a professor of veterinary science at Massey University in Palmerston North. In 2009, a graduate student at that university published a series of papers on experiments done to ascertain whether cattle felt pain upon having their throats cut. The results of these highly technical papers provided proof of the correctness of

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NAWAC's recommendation to stun all animals commercially slaughtered in New Zealand (Mellor, et.al. 2009:75). The committee's advice to the Minister of Agriculture included a statement that the Jewish community should be allowed to continue shechita as long as it was limited to the small domestic market and that there be no export of kosher meat.

The Minister rejected this dispensation recommendation and declared, "We may have upset a relatively small religious minority, and I do appreciate their strong feelings for this issue but frankly I don't think any animal should suffer in the slaughter process." (Carter 2010). NAWAC essentially said that shechita is cruel but excusable in the interest of civil rights, while the Minister countered that cruelty to animals could not be excused on such a basis. Both positions upset observant Jews who, along with their fellows elsewhere, insist that Judaism stresses "the utmost compassion of human beings...extended towards the creatures with which we share this earth" (Hodkin 2005:129). To them, shechita is divinely mandated, a rightful use of animals, and the most humane method of slaughter.

The Massey University study and related points made by various animal welfare groups, NAWAC, and the Minister of Agriculture challenged the entire Jewish community, both observant and unobservant, in terms of their understanding about their place in multicultural New Zealand. Kosher slaughter, legal there since its founding as a British colony, was prohibited because it was deemed cruel. Reactions toward the ban ranged from general opposition, to questioning the validity of the research done at Massey University, to accusations of anti-Semitism against members of the committee and the Minister. The legal case taken by the two Orthodox congregations stressed civil rights, but not everyone was convinced that this was the best strategy.

DEFENDING KOSHER SLAUGHTER IN NEW ZEALAND

Two men who have been involved in accessing kosher meat for the New Zealand Jewish community for many years,⁴ and who come from long resident families, described being nonplussed by the situation.

First Man: I have been a loyal citizen all my life. I lost my brother fighting for New Zealand in the Second World War. I never would believe that the country that I love would ride roughshod over my rights in such a fundamental way. I can only assume that the Minister did not understand the catastrophic implications of his decision for our community...I am not just upset, I'm angry. I am shocked. I am deeply hurt. Never did I think I would live to see the day

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when the Jewish community would be forced to sue the New Zealand government in order to be able to freely practice our religion. I ask myself, 'How can this happen in New Zealand?'

Second Man: In 82 years my Jewish identity has never before been challenged. I have always considered myself to be a New Zealander of Jewish persuasion. It has never before been an issue of the two not being compatible...The impact of the ban on shechita is twofold. It diminishes my lifestyle, and is a disincentive for our children and their families to visit...New Zealand may now be seen to be an anti-Semitic country and, as a New Zealander, I deeply resent this implication. I have always accepted the institutions of government. Never would I have expected to be part of a legal action against the New Zealand government in order to practice my religion.

The most striking point in these statements is that these men suddenly experienced a dissonance between being an ordinary New Zealander and being a Jew. The distinction never arose before, and they could not have imagined a situation in which it would. This surprise does not come from unfamiliarity with the intricacies of providing the community's kosher meat. Both men had dealt with the NAWAC for years and said that they respect Mellor. He has communicated with them on numerous occasions and recommended the Jewish dispensation. Why the Minister did not accept his recommendation is a mystery to them. Whatever his reasons, the decision has profoundly upset their image of the place of Jews in New Zealand society and is symptomatic of the Jewish community's ad hoc reaction to these events.

Members of the two congregations quickly formed committees to oppose the ban, but in a way that appeared ill-considered and ineffectual to some Jewish informants. A few individuals, more knowledgeable and experienced in the areas of concern than the committee members, felt left out and marginalized, or disagreed with the strategy to focus on religious rights rather than the humane practice of kosher slaughtering. Considering what prevailed in the German states, a focus on religious rights connotes accepting Judaism as a religion that some New Zealanders follow. This is the stance taken by the two men quoted above, which reflects the ethos of New Zealand's Jews (Beaglehole and Levine 1995). But shifting the focus to the process itself can turn the argument to an emic definition of shechita and what that means to Jewish people. One informant ("Michael") was uniquely placed to articulate such an argument, as he was a civil servant familiar with the relevant authorities for over 40 years. He had a deep knowledge of Jewish religious practice and kosher regulation in New Zealand and elsewhere. Rather than promoting a Jewish perspective on humane slaughter, however, he framed his interpretation of events in terms of export trade, expediency, and accommodation.

I had come to the conclusion, after many years working [with the New Zealand authorities], that the "machine," as I call it, is basically corrupt, and that domestic slaughter could be

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protected provided one did not venture into the realm of creating an export market to Israel...It is that export thing which triggered the whole bloody business this time around.

NAWAC's position on shechita consistently made reference to trade issues as well as animal welfare. Shechita only became problematic as an afterthought to the start of New Zealand's export of large volumes of meat to Muslim countries. At first, live sheep were shipped to the Middle East, but the high death rate resulted in vociferous public protest. The solution to the problem of how to export meat to this market sustainably was to institute local halal slaughter of animals. The Muslim practice resembles shechita, in that halal animals are killed by a throat cut, but the New Zealand government negotiated a dispensation with some Muslim authorities for a mild pre-stun. This was not universally accepted, and there are Muslims who object, saying that the animals are injured or perhaps dead from the stunning. Malaysians seem particularly concerned. Michael declared:

The fear was that if they gave a dispensation for the Jews there would be a move for one for the Moslems and that would affect all of the slaughtering for New Zealand and that would be an animal welfare issue. That was a big fear for NAWAC [and it was] agreed with the Moslem authorities that if shechita was only carried out for the Jewish community and not for export, they wouldn't object. And that's why you cannot export kosher meat.

There are people within and outside of the Jewish community who envision good business opportunities in kosher meat export. Others disagree because the New Zealand Jewish community lacks the infrastructure necessary to support such a venture. One informant, "Alan," stated:

In New Zealand there used to be two ministers. One rabbi minister, who often conducted the service and would preach, was sort of the figurehead who would do the bar mitzvahs, and the weddings, and the funerals...And there used to be a second minister who was also a ritual slaughterer. Now, two things went wrong. The supply of ministers dried up...the supply from Eastern Europe was wiped out, and there was a marked reluctance to come out to the far flung communities of the [British] Empire. Also the [Jewish] community, in Wellington, Auckland, and Christchurch, shrank. And they simply couldn't afford to support a rabbi and his assistant, so they concentrated on employing a rabbi. They could then get meat from Australia.

A handful of people objected to that decision, and I was one. I said, 'A time may come where, if something were to go wrong in Australia, if you give up shechita yourselves, shechita will give you up, and you will never be able to reinstate it.'...And, of course, there are other reasons. It was increasingly difficult to slaughter steers. Even if you were able to find an abattoir willing to interrupt the chain to kill a few sheep, it is far more difficult to restrain steers. And to interrupt the chain flow, virtually no abattoir would allow you to do that.

Alan recounted how, when he oversaw the procurement of kosher meat, it was exceedingly difficult for him to get the necessary clearance from official agencies and the co-operation of the abattoirs to actually run a killing session.

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This was not made easier by a rabbi who (able to slaughter lambs and poultry) decided to go ahead regardless of official intricacies. He said the present crisis was precipitated by someone who came to that rabbi with a proposal to export kosher meat to Israel. The rabbi approached the Minister for Arts, Culture, and Heritage, who often attends Jewish events, to see if this was possible. The Minister would have passed on the request to the Minister of Agriculture. In the meantime, the Prime Minister made a visit to the Jewish community's Holocaust Education Centre, accompanied by the rabbi and the Arts, Culture, and Heritage Minister. An informant told me that, as they were walking toward the Centre, the PM turned to the rabbi and said, "Rabbi, you have nothing to worry about for shechita, provided it is for domestic consumption only." The rabbi hoped for more, but the Minister of Agriculture was concerned that the Malaysian acceptance of pre-stunned halal meat would be jeopardized by the export of kosher meat and insisted that all commercially slaughtered animals be stunned.

ANIMAL RIGHTS GROUPS

In addition to the factors discussed above—the Minister of Agriculture's position on animal welfare and its association with trade to Muslim consumers, the experiments done at Massey University that appear to support stunning as a humane method of killing animals, and the Jewish case that religious rights cannot be so easily set aside in New Zealand—a number of animal rights organizations have commented in support of the shechita ban. These groups, which form world-wide coalitions, vary in their philosophies and tactics. Some emphasize welfare, aiming to minimize the pain and discomfort of animals. Abolitionists seek to overturn the distinction between animals and people, advocating personhood for all or specific species (Kim 2011). PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) has staged exhibitions and taken cases to court that make dramatic comparisons between captive animals and oppressed people. Kim (2011:321) notes that PETA uses these tactics as part of an attempt to "persuade the public that animals have intrinsic moral rights just as humans do...[T]he everyday use of animals therefore rises to the level of a moral atrocity."

SAFE (Save Animals from Exploitation, an organization "defending animals against cruelty and abuse") and the Royal New Zealand Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals have been the most vocal animal-rights opponents of shechita in New Zealand. Neither has gone to the lengths of PETA, but both would not compromise on the stunning issue. Affiliated with PETA, SAFE says it:

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[C]ampaigns against the abuse and exploitation of all animals and therefore believes a welfare code for slaughter is a misnomer as slaughter can never be humane. There are clearly inconsistencies when we look at the standards of how we kill animals...[and] ask the public to support the ban on slaughtering without stunning. (www.safe.org.nz)

Michael may have had a valid point. If shechita is no worse for animal welfare than stunning, the Jewish community would be able to make a case based on both religious rights and animal ethics. When I asked if he thought that kosher slaughter was in fact humane, as some insist (see, e.g., Zivotofsky and Strous 2012; Hodkin 2005), he said:

No, I don't believe any killing is humane. I am reasonably confident it would end up in a hung jury, basically. Because I don't think you can prove it one way or the other. And I think you could produce, from the pro-shechita lobby point of view, significant evidence or statements of expert evidence by Temple Grandin and others, and remember the qualification is "properly performed," that it is the most humane form of killing because death is instantaneous and all the rest of it. And I don't think the anti-shechita lobby can actually establish that it is a crueler method of killing.

His mention of Temple Grandin is significant. She is well known for studies on humane slaughtering methods⁵ and provides a current example of pro-kosher science countering anti-kosher science, very like the situation discussed by Judd in relation to the German states. In an article on improving religious slaughter, Grandin (2006) notes that there are unacceptable practices that go on in kosher slaughterhouses, particularly the shackle and hoist of a conscious animal. (There is no religious reason for using shackle and hoist.) She believes that this can be improved using methods that she has designed. Most relevant are her comments that cattle essentially do not feel the throat cut if it is properly done.⁶ Grandin emphasizes the importance of the long knife used by the *shochet* (ritual slaughterer) and the other rules associated with shechita. There is no delay in the cut, the knife has no nicks, it is drawn with little exertion, and it produces no tearing. It is important that the animals are kept calm. In a more recent publication (Grandin 2010), she specifically commented on the Massey experiments and noted that the knife used in them was "much shorter" than a *kalef* (ritual knife) and that the skilled use of the proper knife produces "little or no behavioral reaction."

Zivotofsky and Strous (2012) reversed the usual procedure of inferring how cruel slaughter is for animals by imagining what a human would experience when stunned. There are extensive reports on people who have undergone electroconvulsive shock therapy. The procedure is exceedingly unpleasant, and we can expect that animals will find it similarly unpleasant. Indeed, unmodified by anaesthesia, it is considered "a form of torture" (Zivotofsky and Strous 2012:960). They advocate that considerations of animal welfare should lead to the prohibition of stunning.

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Animal welfare is fully compatible with agribusiness. Indeed, a member of Parliament, Sue Kedgley, said on the floor of the House that animal welfare has good economic justifications, noting that the desired export markets contain intelligent, discerning consumers “clamoring for meat from animals that have been well treated” (N.Z. Parliament 2010:15221). When the shechita case was to be heard, she made a plea that failed to gain traction, calling for the rapid cessation of practices such as sow crating, factory farming of poultry, and other breaches of the animal welfare act. The dissonance between allowing the practices Kedgley deplored to continue (and we may include hunting and home-kill here as well) while prohibiting shechita was noted by members of the Jewish community and individuals who discussed the issue in the New Zealand media.

A CONFLICT OF INTEREST?

Another informant, from the Auckland Jewish community, who has been looking into NAWAC and MAF (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry) policy on shechita for ten years, maintains that “the animal welfare legislative process involving...MAF, animal welfare and market access officials, NAWAC, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade [MFAT] is corrupt...[C]ertain officials benefit personally from their involvement in the animal welfare/halal industry.” He insists that these people are involved in regulatory capture, advancing special commercial and personal interests, while supposedly serving the public. Additionally, the local halal processors produce meat that is *haram* (illegal or forbidden), according to almost all Islamic scholars recently surveyed,⁷ and make a lot of money from representing it as pure to Muslim consumers overseas. The processing fees that support the exported meat’s undeserved humane and properly halal image get funneled back to the regulators and friends of MAF in the form of consultancy and research grants, as well as supporting a burgeoning bureaucracy generated by the profits this representation of New Zealand products supports. Furthermore, NAWAC’s and MAF’s engagement with Jewish representatives during the “consultative process,” NZ Food Safety and MFAT’s involvement behind the scenes, the Prime Minister’s assurances to the Wellington rabbi, and the contacts between some of the scientists and members of the Jewish community were duplicitous.

Although his position seems a minority viewpoint (he was essentially ignored by his fellow congregants who consequently appeared nonplussed by the ban), this man uncovered a large corpus of data under the Official Information Act to back up his claims. He sent evidence to an Auckland newspaper that the Minister had acted improperly, and this succeeded in undermining the government’s position to such an extent that they dropped

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the case before hearings were to commence in the High Court. An interim settlement with the Jewish community currently allows a modified form of shechita to continue.

Documents obtained by the Herald on Sunday appear to show Carter broke the rules governing his portfolio by considering trade implications when making the original decision...Emails obtained by the Herald on Sunday show Carter met in March with Silver Fern Farms Ltd chairman Eoin Garden and chief executive Keith Cooper, who said meat exports would suffer if shechita wasn't banned. The MPs Register of Pecuniary Interests shows Carter owns shares in Silver Fern Farms Ltd and another major meat exporter to Muslim countries, Alliance Group Ltd. Ministerial private secretary Natalie Nesbitt emailed senior Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries officials: "Silverfern (sic) Farms CEO and chairman raised their opposition to an exemption being provided for shechita (kosher) slaughter...with the minister this afternoon, among other matters." She said concerns from Garden and Cooper included "trade risks (particularly to halal markets)" if a Jewish religious form of slaughter was allowed to continue in New Zealand. (Fisher 2010)

CONCLUSION

Whether New Zealand's shechita ban was humane, discriminatory, or mercenary is the theme raised by informants, the courts, and the media. Apparently, a mix of motives stimulated various parties (a neoliberal administration, meat exporters, animal rights groups, veterinary scientists, Jewish congregations, lawyers) to take their stances and jockey to protect their interests in regard to animals, meat export, culture, and religious rights. At the end of 2010 the exercise of legal power trumped all previous actions. When the court case was about to be heard, the Crown's own lawyers suggested that the Minister of Agriculture had overstepped the boundaries of his position, and the government partially reversed the ban. The situation, at present unresolved, is likely to be raised again.

Less anticipated by my informants, but more consequential in the long run for them and many other New Zealanders, is the ban's demonstration of the contingent nature of cultural rights for non-indigenous minorities such as Jews in this multicultural country. Regulating shechita and halal, sealing in Canada, and whaling provide contexts for the participants and observers to scrutinize fundamental questions about culture and citizenship that seemed resolved in Western democracies long ago. Until 2010, New Zealand Jews did not imagine that the country's increasingly neoliberal policy of adjusting domestic law and foreign affairs to meet market demands would immerse them in a predicament analogous to that of their European ancestors or indigenous hunters of marine mammals. The long history of Jewish participation in New Zealand's civic life and the community's ethos of maintaining a low profile seemed adequate to secure their position as a small group of ordinary Kiwis who unobtrusively follow a minority religion. Shocked by the Minister's

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action and constrained by the semiotic codes concerning kosher slaughter, they defended shechita at considerable cost, despite the fact that few individuals actually follow the kosher laws.⁸ During the course of their efforts, they, like their historical fellows in the soon-to-be amalgamated German states, found themselves facing demands that they behave like everyone else, treat animals “more humanely,” accept scientific evidence, co-operate more with the meat industry, and consider the interests of trade and another religion.

Efforts to ban shechita in Europe, Holland, the United Kingdom, and France seem to be outgrowths of attempts to outlaw the halal practices of growing Muslim populations (Havinga 2010; Ganley 2012). As my whistleblowing informant alleges, many Muslims do not accept pre-stunning as legitimate (see Harvey 2010). In Europe they confront the same political and animal rights issues as Jews, and, like the Catholics in pre-war Germany, frequently side with them on these matters. The New Zealand state is different in that shechita was attacked as a domestic practice by meat exporters and bureaucrats, at least partially to defend external trade interests.

Although they generally came to accept that the Minister of Agriculture did not have anti-Semitic motivations, the shechita ban unsettled the Jewish community. Despite the fact that few people “keep kosher,” a point made by Isidor Gruenfeld (quoted in Hodkin 2005:139)—that attacks on shechita are attacks on Jewishness per se because they characterize “the Jews as a cruel people”—certainly explains a good deal of the personal chagrin expressed by informants. Unsure of what to do next, they wonder if the government will attempt to regulate other Jewish practices in New Zealand (e.g., circumcision) and how they can more effectively organize to maintain their customs and religion.

NOTES

1. I am grateful to Len Plotnicov for his comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this paper.
2. Non-kosher parts of animals (e.g., hind quarters) and injured animals that do not meet final pre-slaughter kosher requirements are typically sold to gentiles.
3. Examples include Japanese whaling and that of the Makah natives of the Northwest Pacific coast. The New Zealand government made accommodations with Maori groups over their exploitation of marine mammals.
4. It is difficult to arrange a kosher kill. Finding a slaughterhouse that will interrupt its chain to accommodate shechita for the small kosher market is especially problematic. Recruiting the slaughterer, transporting him to the site, notifying the proper authorities, signing the forms, etc., makes this “a horrible experience,” according to one informant. Her father and the other man (referred to as Second Man on page 5), voluntarily made these arrangements for decades and even designed a holding pen to rotate cattle.
5. Grandin has autism and was a major subject of Oliver Sacks’s (1995) book that looked at the lives of people with major neurological problems.

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6. Grandin notes that the best “shochets” get over 90 percent of animals to collapse within 10 seconds and suggests they be scored on this basis (cited in Hodkin 2005:140). A plant employing such butchers would meet current American humane best practice standards.
7. UK Scholar Halal Survey, August 28, 2009. (http://www.halaltayyibmeat.com/pdf_and_others/HMC%20Ulamah%20Report_FINAL_lr.pdf).
8. They owe thousands of dollars in legal fees. In an article entitled Cultural Power and Social Movements, Swidler (1995) points out that “semiotic codes and political context can make ideas and symbols culturally constraining, irrespective of whether people believe them. Institutions can have similar effects by another route...individuals develop common scripts in response to the features of the institutions they confront...and the institutional challenges they face” (Swidler 1995:37–38). Culture, even if not practiced, is a force not so easily set aside by Jews or authorities—constraining even those who want to be “ordinary Kiwis.”

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