

PIGS IN THE PROMISED LAND



Figure 1 Non-Kosher deli sign in both Hebrew and Cyrillic letters located in Haifa, Israel.

The Russian Great Aliyah and non-kosher meat as a secular symbol against Orthodox Rabbinical Hegemony in Israel.

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The windows of Iwo's deli were stained with vomit throughout the Sabbath days of September 2010. For four weeks on these holy Saturdays, the doors to the non-kosher deli were locked and the owner, Avi Ben-David, was within the comfort of his own home, observing the Jewish day of rest. During this time, two Haredi men, members of a sect of Orthodox Judaism instantly recognizable by their black suits and hats, beards and *payot*¹ descended on Iwo's Deli in Tel Aviv, a city traditionally seen as the epicenter of secular activity in Israel.² After ritual morning prayers and Shabbat services, these two Haredim left their synagogue and proceeded to smear their own spit and vomit all over the shop's windows. A few weeks later, they were finally caught in the act through a sting operation orchestrated by Ben-David and the police. The Haredi culprits were dragged away from the scene of the crime, screaming, "according to the Torah we have a right to do this!"³ For the Orthodox Jews who perpetrated this vandalism, their acts were a method of political protest, meant to represent the inward disgust felt when they see pigs feet and pork salamis hanging in the stores of the Jewish holy land. This became a quite frequent site in their city after the migration of a large number of Russian immigrants arrived in Israel.

Protests against non-kosher delis by Ultra-Orthodox Jews have been

¹ *Payot* (Hebrew): Sidelocks.

² Another deli owner interviewed viewed Tel Aviv as a safe haven within Israel where their shop is free from the persecution that non-kosher deli's face in other parts of Israel. Leon Danylnuk, owner of Leon's Deli in the *HaCarmel Shuk* in Tel Aviv, hasn't been the victim of any acts of vandalism since his deli opened in the city over thirty years ago.

³ Ronan Medzini, "Haredim caught defacing non-kosher deli," *אחרונות ידיעות* (*Yedioth Ahronoth*), September 4th 2010, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3949169,00.html>, last accessed March 17th, 2014.

occurring regularly in Israel since the dawn of the 1990s. While the attack on Ben-David's store was a particularly grotesque act of defiance, this incident captures the rising tensions between Russian immigrants and the Ultra-Orthodox that has been brewing ever since the mass migration of Russian Jews to Israel began. Israeli History refers to this large influx of Russians as the Great Aliyah.⁴ The Great Aliyah included the initial wave of approximately one million immigrants from Eastern Europe who migrated to Israel from 1989-1991 as the Soviet Union crumbled. Today, these Russian Jews make up around a fifth of Israel's Jewish population.⁵ In many ways, the absorption of the Great Aliyah's Former Soviet Union (FSU) immigrants was successful, with many of the leading doctors and software engineers currently in Israel coming from this group of Russian Jews. However, their migration caused social and cultural conflicts with the Orthodox *sabras*,⁶ who were appalled by the consumer demands for pork and other non-kosher products that skyrocketed after the Great Aliyah.⁷

The conflict over pork in the land of Israel is long-standing, dating back to well before the creation of the Jewish state. During the Roman Empire's occupation of Palestine, stoic philosopher Epictetus wrote that "the conflict between Jews and Syrians and Egyptians and Romans is not over the question whether holiness should be put before everything else and should be pursued in all circumstances, but

⁴ Aliyah literally means "ascension" and refers to the act of a Jew immigrating to Israel.

⁵ The Guttman Center, "A Portrait of Israeli Jews: Beliefs, Observance, and Values of Israeli Jews, 2009," *The Israel Democracy Institute*, 2009, http://en.idi.org.il/media/1351622/GuttmanAviChaiReport2012_EngFinal.pdf, last accessed on March 17 2014.

⁶ *Sabra* (Hebrew): A popular term for a native Israeli.

⁷ Larissa Remennick, *Russian Jews on Three Continents: Identity, Integration, and Conflict* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2007), 81.

whether the particular act of eating swine's flesh is holy or unholy."⁸ Since these Roman times, Jewish insistence on keeping kosher⁹ has been a trademark of the struggle to retain their own unique religious identity while living as a minority within another country. The mass migration of Russians to Israel, however, has completely reversed this traditional narrative of Jewish cultural resistance.

Russian Jews in Israel today defend their consumption of pork on cultural grounds. They want pork not only for the flavor, but also because it is a staple of traditional Slavic recipes such as *pelmeni*¹⁰ and *ruletiki*.¹¹ These dishes provide Russians in Israel with a taste of home, helping them preserve their ethnic heritage while living alongside Orthodox Jews, who view the consumption of pork as not only a physical, but also a spiritual violation to the holiness of their bodies.¹² The creation of a Jewish state has created the first society where *not* keeping kosher can be seen as a form of cultural resistance. Now, under pressure to assimilate to Jewish dietary laws, these immigrants view the freedom to consume non-kosher meat as a way to retain their unique secular identity while living as a minority group within Israel, a state where Jewish life is completely controlled by the Chief Rabbinate¹³ and

⁸ Jordan D. Rosenblum, "Why Do You Refuse to Eat Pork?" Jews, Food, and Identity in Roman Palestine," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Volume 100 (Winter 2010): 97-98.

⁹ It should be noted that when referring to keeping kosher, it's not only referring to the type of meat but also to the religious slaughter of the animal. While this paper uses non-kosher meat and pork interchangeably, it should be noted that while all pork is non-kosher, beef or chicken can only be considered kosher if slaughtered properly by a *Schochet*, or kosher butcher and the proper part of the animal is eaten.

¹⁰ *Pelmeni* (Russian): A Russian dumpling, usually filled with pork.

¹¹ *Ruletiki* (Russian): Pork stuffed with pickled vegetables.

¹² Samuel H. Dresner, *Keeping Kosher: A Diet For The Soul* (New York, Burning Bush Press, 2000), 5.

¹³ The Chief Rabbinate is recognized by Israeli Law as the supreme Talmudic Authority, and officiates over weddings, funerals, conversions, and daily Jewish functions in Israel, including the examination of kosher meat. The president of the Chief Rabbinate Council alternates between an Ashkenazi and Sephardi Chief Rabbi every year.

enforced by many Orthodox Jews.

The escalating of controversies surrounding non-kosher meat directly correlates with the arrival of the FSU immigrants during the Great Aliyah. Before the Great Aliyah, the non-kosher meat industry in Israel was small and for the most part invisible to the general kosher-keeping public. The Great Aliyah transformed this trade into a multibillion-shekel¹⁴ enterprise, with thousands of non-kosher delis popping up in cities all over Israel. The fastest growing grocery store chain of the 1990's, *Tiv Ta'am*,¹⁵ caters to Russian Immigrants and other secular Jews, specializing in the advertising and selling of pork. This new thrust of non-kosher meat into the public sphere has had widespread effects, reaching every aspect of Israeli society. The Russian demand for non-kosher meat led Orthodox Jews, who see the sale of pork as blight on the sanctity of their religious neighborhoods, into action. These local level protests are mirrored at the national level on the *Knesset*¹⁶ floor, as Russian special interests and religious political parties' debate furiously over the renewal of "Bacon Laws," or laws restricting the sale and manufacturing of pork. These fights over non-kosher meat are more than mere battles over diet or even dietary law. For Israelis, the question of pork is a struggle over the very nature of Jewish Identity, as secular life and a plurality of Jewish expressions clash against the hegemony of Orthodox Judaism and the authority over religious life held by the Chief Rabbinate. In this paper, all of these various aspects surrounding non-kosher meat will be woven together to present one cohesive image of the Russian

¹⁴ The New Israel Shekel (NIS) is the common currency used in Israel.

¹⁵ *Tiv Ta'am* (Hebrew): The Best Taste.

¹⁶ *Knesset* (Hebrew): Israeli parliament system.

immigrant experience and how their arrival changed the nature of the debate around non-kosher meat and secular identity in Israel.

Other scholars have dealt with non-kosher meat and Russian immigration, but only as a specific detail in a broader point that they are illustrating, a mere chapter in a much larger book.¹⁷ These works have undermined the significance of the pork debate in Israeli society and how it has become a tool used by both secular and religious Israelis to vie for control over the State and the direction of Israeli culture. First, the historical circumstances and trajectory of the Great Aliyah will be examined to show the contrasting expectations of the Israeli Government and Russian Jews on the eve of the mass emigration. These dissonant visions precipitated the conflict over non-kosher meat. Then, a legal and political history of non-kosher meat in Israel will be provided, in order to show how the Great Aliyah changed the direction of and discourse about “Bacon Laws” in the Knesset. Finally, this paper is the first to use interviews, newly translated Russian language polls and newspapers to give an authentic look of life in Israel from the Russian perspective. Other Israeli newspapers, including religious newspapers, will also be analyzed to give a more rounded view on how all of Israeli society views non-kosher meat, and

¹⁷ There are three main books that deal with the subject of Russian Immigration and non-kosher meat, but all only offer a partial analysis. Daphne Eretz's *Outlawed Pigs: Law Religion and Culture in Israel* is a cohesive political and legislative history of pork, but is not centrally concerned with the economic side of the pork industry or the social issues around Russian immigration. On the other side of the spectrum, Larissa Remmenick's *Russian Jews on Three Continents: Identity, Integration, and Conflict*, focuses on Russian immigration that swept the globe after the collapse of the Soviet Union, but dismisses non-kosher meat as merely a temporary roadblock for the eventual assimilation of Russian immigrants into larger Israeli society, as subsequent generations will find themselves more detached from their Russian identity. Guy Ben-Porat's *Between State and Synagogue: The Secularization of Contemporary Israel*, provides a panoramic view of all the issues of secular challenges to the Rabbinate's control of ever day life, including civil marriage and businesses staying open on Shabbat, and only holds a single section on non-kosher meat.

in order to profile the dissident groups who use food politics to protest the Chief Rabbinate's authoritative control over the meat industry.

Dueling Expectations: The motives behind The Great Aliyah and the arrival of Russians Immigrants into Israel

After decades of strict control over emigration and travel, the relaxed immigration policies put in place by the Gorbachev regime through *Perestroika* created a mass exodus of millions of people from the Soviet Union. The dam finally broke and the flood of USSR citizens spread across the entire world, with the United States, Germany, and Israel absorbing the most immigrants. While the massive influx of Russians to Israel that began with the Great Aliyah, and continued throughout the nineties after the fall of the Soviet Union, may appear to be a spontaneous by-product of *Perestroika*, it was actually planned and manipulated by the Israeli government, who saw how these potential *olim*¹⁸ could firmly solidify a Jewish majority in the face of a rising Arabic population. However, the Jews Israel expected to receive and the Russians that arrived were very different, and nowhere is this disconnection between the two groups more evident than in the rise of non-kosher meat in the 1990s.

The Great Aliyah was not the first experience that Israel had with Russian immigration. From 1970 -1975, a smaller wave of around 15,000 Russian immigrants made Aliyah before tighter Soviet immigration policies clamped down

¹⁸ *Olim* (Hebrew): Plural for A Jew who makes Aliyah.

on migration to Israel.¹⁹ Russian Jews who immigrated to Israel at this time cited the main reason for their departure as anti-Semitism, considered themselves Jews who kept Kosher, and were committed Zionists. Their assimilation into mainstream Israeli society was practically seamless, and the Russians learned Hebrew quickly and resigned the use of their native language to the private sphere.²⁰ These model Jews set the standard of the type of religious, politically conscious Russian immigrants Israel expected from the Great Aliyah.

Israel goes to great lengths to secure new *olim* and keep a steady influx of immigrants into the state.²¹ These immigrants play a key role in the demographic balance between Jews and Arabs. The Israeli Government believes that a Jewish majority is vital to the legitimate control of a Jewish democratic state over the entire population.²² Shifting demographics were especially of concern during the time of the Great Aliyah, when what Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) chairman Yasser Arafat called a “Palestinian demographic time bomb” threatened to create an Arab-majority in Israel through rising birth rates in the Gaza Strip.²³ On this population explosion, Arafat said that “the womb of the Palestinian woman will

¹⁹ The Soviet Union cut down on migration to Israel in the 1970’s because they believed many Jews were using the way point in Vienna to actually go to the United States instead of their intended destination.

²⁰ Joseph A. Flaherty, “Demoralization in Soviet-Jewish immigrants to the United States and Israel,” *Comprehensive Psychiatry*, Volume 6 (1988): 588-597.

²¹ The most prevalent example of this is the Birthright program, a free trip for Jewish youth to build a stronger connection with Israel and encourage Aliyah, which is partially funded by Jewish taxpayers.

²² Sergio DellaPergola, “Jewish Demographic Policies: Population Trends and Options in Israel and in the Diaspora,” *Jewish People Policy Planning Institute*: 17

²³ Thomas L. Friedman, “A Forecast for Israel: More Arabs than Jews,” *The New York Times*, October 19, 1987, <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/10/19/world/a-forecast-for-israel-more-arabs-than-jews.html>, last accessed March 17, 2014.

defeat the Zionist.”²⁴ The threat to Israeli power posed by the rising number of Palestinians puts the urgency of the Israeli Government to secure a large chunk of the Russian immigrants leaving the Soviet Union into context.²⁵ As Yehuda Dominitz, the Director General of Immigrant Absorption put it, “to forfeit such an opportunity by letting tens of thousands of Jews opt for other countries of migration would be unforgivable.”²⁶

The *Sochnut*, a Zionist lobbying arm of the Israeli government, took great steps to funnel Russian Jews leaving the Soviet Union into Israel. In 1990, the transit center in Vienna, a waypoint for travel to the United States or Europe, was shut down through *Sochnut* who in turn set up direct flights to Tel Aviv in cities across the Soviet Union. The Israeli embassy also streamlined their immigration procedures, making it possible to complete paperwork and get a free ticket to Israel in only a few months, while the United States visa process was long, drawn out, and bureaucratic. Israel made immigration to Europe and the United States harder while simultaneously creating an easy, simple immigration process to Israel. Because of this, twice as many Jews made Aliyah rather than choosing to migrate to the West from 1989-1991.²⁷ In order to make room for these Jews, Ariel Sharon, the Minister for Housing at the time, launched an expansive plan to create thousands of new homes in the occupied Palestinian territories along with creating scores of mobile homes on the coast of Israel, declaring he will “confiscate all privately owned

²⁴ Matthew Wagner, “Just a Womb Away,” *The Jerusalem Post*, November 23, 2006, <http://www.jpost.com/Magazine/Features/Just-a-womb-away>, last Accessed March 17 2014.

²⁵ James W Moore, “Immigration and the Demographic Balance in Israel and the Occupied Territories,” *Middle East Policy*, Volume 1 (1992).

²⁶ Remennick, *Russian Jews*, 47.

²⁷ Remennick, *Russian Jews*, 44-46.

land required for the building of immigrant housing, wherever it's required."²⁸

Sharon's plans to build new houses in the occupied territories shows that he believed these Russians would be committed political Zionists, willing to settle in the less developed territories in order to promote Jewish expansion. However, a look at the demographics of Russian Jews who came to Israel during the Great Aliyah proves that this was not the case. While the Russian *olim* who came to Israel from 1970-1975 emigrated to escape anti-Semitism, the migrants of the Great Aliyah were fleeing the spiraling inflation and continued stagnation that characterized the economic turmoil during the collapse of the Soviet Union and the first years of the Russian Federation. Many of these Russians took advantage of Israel's broad definition of who is considered "Jewish" in order to escape their current situation and land in an area of better economic opportunity.²⁹ Their decision to move to Israel was pragmatic, not spiritual.

While the Russian Immigrants from 1970-1975 were predominantly religious Jews, the Jewish character of the FSU immigrants of the Great Aliyah is questionable. Two distinctions are used when defining Jewish populations: the terms core and periphery. Core Jews are those who were born from two Jewish parents and actively identify as Jewish,³⁰ while periphery Jews either have at least one Jewish grandparent or are the non-Jewish spouse of a Jew, and don't necessarily practice the religion. Of the 1.4 million Russians who travelled to Israel between

²⁸ Clive Jones, *Soviet Jewish Aliyah 1989-1992: Impact and implications for Israel and the Middle East*, (Portland, Oregon: Frank Cass Publishers, 1996), 77.

²⁹ Rebecca Raijman and Moshe Seyonov, "Best of Times, Worst of Times, and Occupational Mobility: The Case of Soviet Immigrants in Israel," *International Migration*, Issue 3 (1998).

³⁰ DellaPergola, "Jewish Demographic Policies," 21.

1989 and 2002, forty percent can be defined as on the periphery of Judaism. This does not mean that forty percent of Russian Jews did not define themselves as Jewish, but rather that, despite personal identification, these immigrants may not be considered Jewish depending on who defined the label.³¹

Even though only Jewish immigrants are granted automatic citizenship through Israel's Right to Return Law,³² both core and periphery Jews meet the law's requirements.³³ In contrast, Talmudic law³⁴ defines Jewish legitimacy through matrilineal bloodlines. This definition, which is observed by the Chief Rabbinate, only considers those within the core as actual Jews, while all on the periphery must undergo a conversion process before being legitimately seen as Jews. This distinction is taken seriously by the Orthodox community in Israel, who believe that a third of all Russian immigrants are not actually Jews. The fact that they eat pork is further proof to them that the Great Aliyah represents a Gentile invasion into their Jewish homeland, causing many of the local conflicts around non-kosher meat that erupted in the 1990s.³⁵

Not only did the Orthodox Jews not consider many of these new Russian immigrants Jewish, but the FSU immigrants themselves did not have a very strong

³¹ Remennick, *Russian Jews*, 14-15.

³² The fact that only Jews qualify for citizenship through the Right to Return law is controversial, as many Palestinians thrown into the Diaspora after the 1967 War have tried to return to Israel and been denied citizenship. Many believe that the right to return should apply both to the Palestinian and Jewish Diasporas.

³³ "Israel's Basic Laws: The Law of Return," *Sefer HaChukkim* (Book of Laws), (July 5, 1950) No. 51, p. 159.

³⁴ The Talmud is an intricate coding of Jewish Laws and criticisms followed by Orthodox Jews. Orthodox Jews consider the studying of the Talmud a lifelong, holy pursuit. While many iterations of the Talmud exist, when the Talmud is mentioned it is usually referring to the Babylonian Talmud written between the 3-5 centuries C.E.

³⁵ Ian Lustick, "Israel as a Non-Arab State: The Political Implications of Mass Immigration of Non-Jews," *Middle East Journal*, Volume 53 (Summer, 1999): 418-419, 432.

connection with their Judaism. This new wave of Russian Jews were thoroughly assimilated into broader Soviet Union society before their arrival in Israel and identified as observant Jews in low numbers. Practicing any sort of religion in the official Atheist state was incredibly difficult, especially for Jews, who attracted extra stigma due to their association with Trotskyites³⁶ as well as the centuries long tradition of anti-Semitism in Russian society. Even for Jewish schools in the Soviet Union, the Talmud was replaced with Marx and Jews had to rely on *shtetl*³⁷ folklore and sheer guess work to guide their Jewish education. Perhaps, then, only in Russia could such a thing as “kosher pork” develop, with local Jewish communities without access to the exact definitions of Talmudic Law believing that if a pig were slaughtered following kosher rituals, it would still be considered kosher.³⁸ Not all Russian Jews ate “kosher pork” or were thoroughly assimilated into Russian society, but unfortunately most of the traditional, devout Orthodox Jews in Eastern Europe perished in Poland during the Holocaust. The Jews that survived were predominantly the culturally pluralist Russian-Jews who lived in the urban areas of the Soviet Union. Because of their dual national/religious identity, these Jews saw no hypocrisy in defining themselves as Jewish and even moving to a Jewish state yet still retaining Russian customs such as fiercely devouring pork and opening up non-kosher stores within a Jewish Holy Land.

³⁶ Leon Trotsky was the Jewish Russian Revolutionary and leader of the Red Guard before being expelled from the Soviet Union by Josef Stalin in 1929. For many victims of the Great Purge of 1937, being Jewish was enough of a connection to Trotsky to be considered enemies of the state by the NKVD and sent into labor camps.

³⁷ *Shtetl* is a Yiddish word for a small town of Jews in the Pale of Settlement area of the Russian Empire where Jews were legally allowed to settle. This Pale of Settlement included parts of modern day Ukraine, Poland, and Lithuania.

³⁸ Anna Shternshis, *Soviet and Kosher: Jewish Popular Culture in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 1-3.

As religious Jews categorically refuse to eat pork, the selling of this non-kosher meat is reserved entirely to the secular realm of Israeli society. The secular rate of Russian Jews is much higher than the rest of the population, which explains why Russian Jews are much less likely to keep kosher than other Jews in Israel. At the end of the Great Aliyah, 75 percent of the immigrants who arrived from the Former Soviet Union defined themselves as secular, compared to 44 percent for the general population. These Secular Jews might identify as Jewish, but do not consider themselves overtly religious and usually do not keep kosher. The higher rate of secularism among the Russian Jewish immigrants compared to the rest of the population is reflected in their higher demand for pork products. The pork industry in Israel has had to grow at tremendous rates in order to keep pace with the Russian consumer. Before the Great Aliyah in 1980, there were 50,000 pigs in Israel, which was more than enough to satisfy the low demand for non-kosher meat. By 1990 that number doubled, and by the turn of the millennium the number of pigs in Israel increased yet again to 150,000.³⁹ As the pig market was only quasi-legal and pork a taboo of the highest order for many Jews, most Israeli's abstained from getting involved with trading or selling pork. Russian businessmen and butchers were responsible for creating the market to meet their own demand.

Leon Danilyuk, owner of Leon's Deli in *the HaCarmel Shuk* in Tel Aviv⁴⁰ is an example of a Russian butcher in Israel who has helped fill the need for non-kosher meat created by his fellow Russians. Leon came to Israel as a child with his parents

³⁹ Guy Ben-Porat, *Between State and Synagogue: The Secularization of Contemporary Israel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 130-141.

⁴⁰ *Shuk* (Hebrew): An Israeli open market place, where vendors, mostly selling food, gather to display their wares.

as a part of the earlier wave of Russian immigration. His parents were fleeing from the anti-Semitic threats in Russia and felt at home in Israel. Leon Danilyuk considers himself to be a practicing Jew and closes his store on the Sabbath, but he also eats non-kosher meat and loves Russian cuisine. Danilyuk opened his shop in 1987, right before the Great Aliyah, and while he said that his shop serves all kinds of people, the signs in his store are in Russian and he has a poster of a Russian babushka on the wall. When asked if he felt conflicted about owning a non-kosher meat store in a Jewish state, he said “Why should I? We might be (in Israel) but we like to eat all kinds of foods, just like everyone else.”⁴¹

When the Israel Government courted the FSU immigrants during the Great Aliyah, they did not foresee that Leon Danilyuk and thousands of others like him would have to open up non-kosher delis in order to satisfy the new immigrant craving for pork. Ariel Sharon and members of the Israeli government committed to the continued occupation of the Palestinian territories viewed the Great Aliyah as the tool to defuse the “Palestinian time bomb.” They hoped that large numbers of Russian Jews who were committed to the political Zionist cause would be willing to establish religious communities at the front lines of the conflict, inside the Palestinian territories. However, although some Russians did move into the settlements and Russian public opinion in Israel is overwhelmingly favorable of Israeli expansion into the territories, Russians preferred to settle in established Israeli urban environments along the coast, within the established Israeli borders.

⁴¹ Leon Danilyuk, “Personal interview in his store, Leon’s Deli,” Interviewed by author, January 8th 2014. This interview was conducted in Russian and the quote provided was translated into English by the author.

The growth of the non-kosher meat industry reflects the immigrant communities' larger commitment to retain their Russian identity over adopting a purely Jewish one, despite now living in Israel. While the earlier wave of Russian immigrants quickly learned Hebrew, towns that became host to large amounts of these new FSU Jews were described as being "drowned in Cyrillic," in reference to the swarms of Russian store signs that popped up on every street corner.⁴² Russian newspapers began to circulate in the 1990's, such as the *kurier*⁴³ and *interesnie novosti*⁴⁴ and Russian television was programmed into Israeli TV schedules. Russians believe that the Russian culture they bought along with their suitcases served to benefit not only their immigrant communities, but all of Israel. Russian newspaper *Interesnie Novosti* published that "The Russian Aliyah of the 90's completely transformed the Jewish state, making it more modern, more lively, and more European. The credit for this belongs to Russian-speaking doctors, engineers, scientists, and specialists in arts and culture who made up the million Russian *olim*."⁴⁵ While it remains to be seen how second and third generation Russians will assimilate into Israeli society, it is clear that the new immigrants are deeply connected to their Russian roots and believe that Israeli society should change for them, not the other way around.

⁴² Jeffery Yoskowitz, "Israel's pork problem" *Slate*, August 8th, 2012, http://www.slate.com/articles/life/faithbased/2012/08/israel_s_pork_problem_and_what_it_means_for_the_country_s_christian_arabs_.html, last accessed March 17th 2014.

⁴³ *Kurier* (Russian): The Courier

⁴⁴ *Interesnie Novosti* (Russian): Interesting News

⁴⁵ "Первая страница на русском языке на сайте кнессета (First page of Russian Language on the Knesset Website)," *Интересные новости (Interesting News)*, February 8th, 2008, <http://www.lenta.co.il/page/20070208114252>, last accessed March 17, 2014. Translation provided by author.

The Politics of Pork: How the legislative and political framework used to regulate non-kosher meat transformed after the Great Aliyah.

The conflict over the sale and consumption of non-kosher meat did not suddenly appear alongside the Great Aliyah. Rather Israelis have debated how to regulate non-kosher meat through politics since the creation of the state. The religious right and the progressive left wing parties in the Knesset argued over the balance between Jewish sensibilities and freedom of religious expression when it came to dietary habits, finally reaching a compromise in 1962 that lasted throughout the 70's and 80's. After the Great Aliyah, the debate resumed and the addition of Russian political parties into the Knesset changed the flavor of the rhetoric surrounding pork politics used by both sides.

Legislation restricting pork consumption is one of a few rare cases of religious laws in a mostly secular Israeli legal system.⁴⁶ These laws serve one of two functions. First, some laws restricting pork consumption are intended to make observing Jewish law within Israel practical and convenient for the more traditional Jewish citizens. This type of law includes the Kosher Foods for Soldiers Ordinance of 1948, which mandated that the Israeli Rabbinate must certify all kitchens used to prepare meals for Israeli Defense Force (IDF) soldiers as Kosher. This is a practical mandate, meant only to make it feasible for soldiers to observe Jewish law while on active duty. However, other kosher laws were not in service of practicality. Rather, these laws are intended to enforce a common cultural value of abhorrence towards pork fostered within the Jewish community after centuries of persecution. After living in other countries where at times Jews were isolated, vilified and forced to eat pork as a way of attacking their religious way of life, laws tightly regulating

⁴⁶ While Religious freedoms were granted in the *Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel*, there is no set Israeli constitution, and the freedom of religion is maintained through the Basic Laws and the Israeli Supreme Court. However, there are instances where Israeli Law is influenced by Jewish practices, including laws around meat, divorce, marriage, and Jewish conversion.

the pork industry creates a country where keeping kosher is the norm and those who don't keep kosher are the ones isolated from mainstream society.⁴⁷

A pairing of laws are used to enforce the Jewish value of keeping kosher in Israel. These two central laws lay the foundation of pork restriction within the State. The first law passed was the Local Authorities (Special Enablement) Law of 1956. This law states, "A local authority shall be competent to make a bylaw limiting or prohibiting the raising and keeping of pigs and the sale of pork and pork products destined for food."⁴⁸ The Local Authorities Law did not ban pork consumption, but rather allowed religious communities to pass laws restricting the trade of pork within their neighborhoods. This law was seen as a compromise between members of *Agudat Yisrael*, the first political party representing Israel's Haredi population, and members of leftist parties who felt a Pig Raising Prohibition law was essentially religious coercion.

The implementation of the Special Enablement Law proved difficult, however, as the law specifically states that new by-laws restricting pork will not apply to pig breeders who were given special permits by the Food Control Ordinance before the Local Authorities law came into effect. Thus, after another Knesset election in 1961, the debates surrounding the prohibition pig herding in Israel resurfaced. After presenting the bill that would become the Pig-Raising Prohibition Law of 1962, National Religious Party member Moshe Unna stated that "This law in some ways conveys the uniqueness of the State of Israel as the preserver of this nation's special tradition, upholding the need for continuing ways of life endorsed by the Jewish people throughout its history."⁴⁹ Again, a law prohibiting the raising of pigs was

⁴⁷ Daphne Barak-Erez, *Outlawed Pigs: Law Religion, and Culture in Israel*, (Michigan: University of Michigan, 2007), 5-6.

⁴⁸ "Local Authorities (Special Enablement) Law," *Sefer HaChukkim (Book of Law)*, (26 November 1956,): No. 11, LSI 16.

⁴⁹ Barak-Erez, *Outlawed Pigs*, 53-55.

seen by traditional Jews with right wing views on civil liberties as proving that Israel's official values were in line with Jewish traditions.

The Pig-Raising Prohibition Law was intended to end the debate around pork and clearly mark the limits of where pigs were allowed in Israel. The first clause of the Pig-Raising Prohibition Law of 1962 simply states, "A person shall not raise, keep or slaughter pigs."⁵⁰ However in Schedule (section 2 (1)) of the law, a list of five municipalities, including Nazareth and Rama, were deemed to be exceptions that could administer pork production locally.⁵¹ These are all cities in Northern Israel that have a majority Christian population. Restricting the raising of pigs to areas that were predominately Christian proves that this law was specifically tailored to enforce a standard that keeping kosher was an expected commitment among the Jews who live in Israel.

Neither of these laws banned pork production or consumption in Israel. Rather, they worked in tandem to keep non-kosher meat out of the sight of those religious Jews who kept kosher. The Local Authorities' Law banned the pork trade in the most religious communities in Israel while the Pig Raising Prohibition Law kept all of the pig farms hidden away up in Northern Israel. This does not mean that there was no market for pork, but rather that if people wanted to consume pork they would have to know where to go and deliberately seek it out. On certain restaurant menus, a commonly known code name for pork, "white steak," would be listed, while even delis in areas where it was legal to sell pork would keep it in the back, out of sight from the shop windows. These laws kept Orthodox Jews appeased throughout the 1970's and 1980s, which is why no pork legislation was introduced during this time.

⁵⁰ Pig-Raising Prohibition Law, *Sefer HaChukkim (Book of Law)*, (23 July 1962,): Number 16 LSI 93.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

In the 1990's debates over legislation restricting pork returned to the Knesset with a renewed ferocity. The Great Aliyah upset the balance between the two existing laws restricting the pork industry and the existing sale of pork. While before the Great Aliyah the demand for pork was small enough for the market to exist in the shadows of Israeli society, the introduction of one million Russian immigrants to Israel caused the non-kosher meat industry to balloon to the point where orthodox Jews could no longer ignore it.⁵²

Because of the influx of Jews from the Soviet Union, the rhetoric of debates around the "Bacon Laws", took a much different approach than the earlier debates in the Knesset. While earlier proponents of the Pig Raising Prohibition Law of 1962 cited a historical refusal to eat pork as a unifying aspect of Jewish cultural heritage, the proponents of Bacon Laws in the 1990's used a thinly veiled xenophobic narrative, linking pork to a manifestation of foreign evils attempting to corrupt Jewish society within Israel. The Meat and Meat Products Law of 1994 is an example of this, implementing a ban solely on the import of non-kosher meat, and while controversial, the Supreme Court upheld its constitutionality.⁵³

The Meat and Meat Products Law elucidates how the narrative used by religious right-wing Orthodox Jews to further restrict the sale of non-kosher meat changed due to the impact the Great Aliyah had on Israeli Society. Rather than addressing the problems of pork within Israel, the Meat and Meat Products law of 1994 restricts the influx of meat into Israel from abroad, shifting it to a foreign rather than a domestically bred issue. The party responsible for the shift of this rhetoric was *Shas*, a religious-conservative Orthodox party spearheaded by spiritual leader Rabbi Ovadia Yosef.⁵⁴ The *Shas* party thought that if the

⁵²Guy Ben Porat, *Between State and Synagogue*, 140-141.

⁵³ Suzi Navot, *Constitutional Law of Israel* (Frederick MD: Kluwer Law international, 2007), 294.

⁵⁴ *Shas* is an example of the complexity in defining Israeli political parties. The right-left spectrum of Israeli politics can be defined as operating on three main axes: Civil Liberties (including right to

Russian immigrants of the Great Aliyah who ate pork came from abroad, then the threat non-kosher meat posed to the traditional Jewish way of life stemmed from foreign influences as well. These foreign influences were not only Russian, but also demonic and purely evil in character. *Shas* believed that a third of all FSU immigrants were not actually Jewish, but rather Russians pretending to be Jews in order to live in Israel.⁵⁵ They believed that this large gentile influx into Israel was tantamount to a plague that posed an existential threat capable of destroying the very nature of Judaism within their home land. In 1999, *Shas* led rallies in Beth Shamesh, advocating for the implementation of a by-law prohibiting the sale of non-kosher meat within the municipality. These rallies were condemned on the Knesset floor as being xenophobic and explicitly anti-Russian in character.⁵⁶ Before the 2009 elections, Ovadia Yosef was interviewed comparing consuming pork with acts of Satanism, illustrating the demonic aspect *Shas* associated with non-kosher meat.⁵⁷ Before the Great Aliyah, laws restricting the sale of non-kosher meat were simply used as a method to ensure that Jews would keep kosher. After the Great Aliyah, Bacon Laws were a weapon used against the distinctly non-Jewish threat bought into Israel by the Russian immigrants.

Just as the dialogue used to advocate the promotion of Bacon Laws adjusted in the 1990s due to the Great Aliyah, the parties that defended the sale of non-kosher meat drastically changed in character during this time as well. Part of this change was due to a new legal argument created in the 1990's that could be made for the sale of non-kosher

practice secular activity in Israel.) Arab-Israeli Relations, and Economics. While *Shas* is extremely right wing on Civil Liberties, they support the Israeli Welfare state and are also particularly liberal in relations with Palestine. This is because *Shas* primarily represents *Mizrachi*, or Arab speaking Jews. Throughout the paper, I try to use a modifier along the word "conservative" in order to delineate which axes I am discussing.

⁵⁵ "Высшая сила в тарелки не заглядывает (The Unseen Power of the Dish)," *израильские новости (Israeland News)* February 4th, 2005, <http://www.isra.com/news/?item=47671>, last accessed March 17th 2014. Translated by Author.

⁵⁶ Barak-Erez, *Outlawed Pigs*, 94.

⁵⁷ Alastair Macdonald, "Satanic pork-eaters vs draft dodgers- Israel's election gets down and dirty", *Reuters*, February 9th, 2009, <http://blogs.reuters.com/axismundi/2009/02/09/satanic-pork-eaters-vs-draft-dodgers-israels-election-gets-down-and-dirty/>, last accessed on March 17th, 2014,.

meat. In 1994, the Basic Law: Freedom of Occupation was passed by the Knesset. While prior Basic Laws only pertained to the function of bureaucratic institutions, this was the first of a pair of Basic Laws outlining any sort of human rights for Israeli citizens.⁵⁸ Section 2 of the Freedom of Occupation law states “the purpose of this Basic Law is to protect freedom of occupation, in order to establish in a Basic Law the values of the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state.”⁵⁹ This set a new legal precedent challenging the legitimacy of any laws restricting the sale of pork. Could bans on the non-kosher meat market now be considered an unconstitutional restriction to a butcher’s right to pursue their occupation? The *Shinnui*, a neoliberal economic party in Israel promoting free trade and deregulation of the economy, defended non-kosher meat in the Knesset for this very reason, citing economic, not religious, freedom as being under attack. After the Freedom of Occupation Law, the support of non-kosher meat came from pro-business free market Capitalist parties rather than socialist liberal parties such as The Labor party, who traditionally were responsible for defending issues concerning secularism.

In the 1990s, the pro-business narrative used to defend non-kosher meat was utilized by the new Russian special interest political parties forming in the Knesset, who saw the renewed Bacon Laws as an attack not only on free trade but also on all of Russian culture. In 1996, politician Natan Sharansky formed *Yisrael B’aliyah*, a centrist political collective with a goal to provide a united voice for the entire Russian immigrant community. *Yisrael B’aliyah* defended pork on the local level in immigrant communities, and after twenty two Russian-Immigrant storeowners in Ashkelon were fined for selling pork in their city, Yisrael B’Aliyah Knesset member Marina Solodkin bought their appeal to the Supreme

⁵⁸ The other law outlining human rights was the Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty act. This law established property rights, freedom of movement, and freedom of speech.

⁵⁹ Basic Law: Freedom of Occupation Law, *Sefer Ha-Chukkim (Book of Laws)* (March 10th, 1994): Number 1454.

Court. The *Solodkin Decision* that followed upheld the right of the Asheklon storeowners to sell non-kosher meat and changed the rules of bylaws restricting the sale of non-kosher meat to apply not to entire municipalities, but rather only to smaller religious neighborhoods.⁶⁰ *Shas* MK Eli Yishai was appalled by how the authority to regulate the non-kosher meat trade was diminished and called the *Solodkin Decision* “a jewel in a swine’s snout.”⁶¹

By the 2000s, a new, more politically conservative Russian special interest party formed, which blended the defense of non-kosher meat with militant Political Zionism.⁶² In the 2003 election, *Yisrael B’Aliyah’s* failure to attain a significant number of Knesset seats caused the party to merge with the dominant conservative political party, *Likkud*. After the dissolution of *Yisrael B’Aliyah*, *Yisrael Beiteinu*⁶³ became the largest Russian political party in Israel, led by the current Minister of Foreign Affairs Avigdor Lieberman.⁶⁴ The *Yisrael Beiteinu* party platform advocates a liberalization of the economic sphere on a macro-level, criticizing the government regulation through the Local Authorities act as stifling the Israeli economic vision.⁶⁵ *Yisrael Beiteinu* is also a party in favor of the expanding the Israeli state and captures the Anti-Arab sentiment attributed to Russian immigrants. The *Yisrael Beiteinu* “no loyalty-no citizenship” law has been criticized as being anti-Arab and detrimental to peace with the Palestinians. This law requires every Israeli Citizen to take a

⁶⁰ Solodkin vs. City of Beth Shamesh, Israeli Supreme Court, Section 32, HCJ 953/01 (1997).

⁶¹ Daphne Barak-Erez, *Outlawed Pigs: Law Religion, and Culture in Israel*, (University of Michigan, Michigan) 2007, 103.

⁶² Political Zionism is a loose term used here to define the belief that not only does the Jewish State have a right to exist in Israel, but also the state of Israel must expand its force of control over the Palestinian territories.

⁶³ In terms of the three previously mentioned axes of Israeli political orientation, *Yisrael Beiteinu* is the exact opposite of *Shas*. *Yisrael Beiteinu* is liberal when it comes to civil liberties, but very aggressive with Arab-Israeli relations and advocate for the further deregulation of the economy.

⁶⁴ Currently, *Yisrael Beiteinu* holds 11 Knesset seats, the second largest party behind Netanyahu’s *Likkud*. The alliance between *Yisrael Beiteinu* and *Likkud* controls 31 of the 120 Knesset seats.

⁶⁵ *Yisrael Beiteinu, Yisrael Beiteinu Party Platform on Social and Economic Security*, 2009, <http://www.beytenu.org/social-and-economic-security/>, last accessed March 17th, 2014.

loyalty oath pledging fealty to one Jewish, Zionist state, lending legal authority to a very controversial, extreme political stance in Israel.⁶⁶

The sharp contrast between the progressive parties who defended non-kosher meat in the 1950's and the current party prominently defending pork, *Yisrael Beiteinu*, shows how drastically the advocates protecting the legality of non-kosher meat has changed. In the 1950's, Liberals believed the attack on non-kosher meat was religious coercion negatively associated with political Zionist extremism. Today, the very party protecting non-kosher meat is one of the most radical political Zionist parties in the Knesset. This is directly due to the Great Aliyah, as Russian immigration special interest groups were the first to blend secularism with conservatism, demanding an expansion of the Jewish state while still being able to eat pork within it.

There goes the neighborhood: The debates surrounding non-kosher meat at the local and personal level.

The struggle between the religious right and Russian interests over the legality of non-Kosher meat cannot be fully explained through the political discourse. Rather, it is played out in the cities where these two communities intersect, and points to larger, existential problems of the nature of Judaism in Israeli society and the role Orthodoxy plays within the state. Through the meat industry, many Jews have found a way to vent their frustration with the control the Chief Rabbinate possesses over daily life. Non-Kosher delis operate in a sphere outside of Rabbinical control and kosher stores that reject the oversight of the Chief Rabbinate have publically refused to renew their kosher certification as a method of political protest.

⁶⁶ Jonathan Lis, "Knesset passes law to strip terrorists of Israeli citizenship," *Haaretz*, March 28th, 2011, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/knesset-passes-law-to-strip-terrorists-of-israeli-citizenship-1.352412>, last accessed March 17th, 2014.

The Chief Rabbinate is the central organ given supreme authority over Jewish traditions by the Israeli Government. All Jewish marriages, conversions, and access to holy sites are overseen by the Rabbinate. They also determine which shops receive kosher certificates and dole out fines to any store that stays open on the Sabbath. The Chief Rabbinate homogenizes what it means to be Jewish in Israel, determining who is Jewish, how to worship in public places, and how to observe Jewish law. This complete control over Judaism has been heavily criticized by other Jewish sects who want to practice their religion in a way that is meaningful to them, not in the way which is prescribed by the Rabbinate and followed by Orthodox Jews.^{67 68}

The Jewish status of the FSU immigrants is seen as questionable to the Chief Rabbinate. As mentioned earlier, many of the Russian immigrants who came to Israel did not have a Jewish mother. Because of this, they are not considered Jewish, which means they cannot legally marry or be buried in Jewish cemeteries. While some Russian Jews have undergone the conversion process and now follow traditional Jewish laws, by and large the Russian community has not converted into Orthodox Judaism and have not incorporated the customs and regulations of the Chief Rabbinate into their daily life. Rather, the Russian immigrants have preferred to maintain a cultural plurality that puts them at odds with the Chief Rabbinate and the Orthodox Jews.

The percentage of Russian immigrants who eat non-kosher meat and, most interestingly, the reasons why they continue to eat non-kosher meat in Israel proves this point. *Israland*, a Russian language newspaper, conducted a poll among Russian speaking

⁶⁷Rachael Gelfman Schultz, "Liberal Judaism in Israel," *My Jewish Learning*, http://www.myjewishlearning.com/israel/Contemporary_Life/Society_and_Religious_Issues/Freedom_of_Religion/liberal-israel.shtml?p=3, last accessed March 17th, 2014.

⁶⁸Yair Ettinger, "Without the rabbinate, I'll have a Jewish burial," *Haaretz*, November 18th, 2011, <http://www.haaretz.com/jewish-world/without-the-rabbinate-i-ll-have-a-jewish-burial-1.396309>, last accessed March 17th, 2014.

Jews, asking “Do you keep Kosher?” Only 6 percent of those polled said “Yes, for religious reasons,” while another 6 percent claimed they kept kosher because it is convenient or healthier. A resounding 84 percent answered that they do not keep kosher. The most popular explanation for this was “Because I do not think that God cares about what I eat.” This means that a majority of Russian immigrants self-identify as Jewish, but do not believe in the same strict observance of Jewish law enforced by the Rabbinat. In fact, only eight percent polled answered “I don’t care, because I’m not a Jew.”⁶⁹

Rather than assimilate into the Judaism of the dominate Orthodoxy, immigrants have created alternate structures which have allowed them to continue their Russian cultural life within Israel. Russian child care and private schools, book and culture stores, and non-kosher delis have helped Russian immigrants retain their language, values, and cuisine in order to fight against assimilation into the homogeny of Jewish Orthodoxy in Israel.

In a separate poll, which asked “What is the most important type of Russian shop in Israel?” a clear majority answered non-kosher delis over Russian bookstores or Russian schools, proving that non-kosher meat, and Russian food in general, is the most essential cultural aspect of Israeli-Russian life. While many Russians also answered that they believe other types of shops with wither away in Israeli society as subsequent generations become more assimilated, they don’t see these non-kosher delis disappearing.⁷⁰ Because of this,

⁶⁹ “Соблюдаете ли вы кашрут? (Do you keep kashrut?)” *израильские новости (Israland)*, March 25th, 2005, <http://www.isra.com/poll/>, last accessed March 17th, 2014. Provided quote translated by the author.

⁷⁰ “Если бы вы сегодня открывали «русский» бизнес в Израиле, какой бы вы предпочли? (If you could open up any Russian business in Israel, what would it be?)” *израильские новости (Israland)*, March 25, 2005, <http://www.isra.com/poll/>, last accessed March 17, 2014. Translation of results provided by author.

Israland stated that “even when the “Russian” in Israel forgets how to read the language of Pushkin and Tolstoy, they will remain forever faithful to pork and red cavier.”⁷¹

While pork is the most important aspect of cultural retention for Russian immigrants, it is also the most offensive part of their heritage to many Orthodox Jews. For these Jews, keeping kosher is more than just a diet. Kosher laws are a way to sanctify the relationship with God at every meal, and necessary to keep the body clean and holy.⁷² In the Torah, God commands that animals with split hooves that don’t chew their own curd must not be consumed by humans, so when Jews eat pork they are breaking this holy commandment.⁷³ Not only do traditional kashrut-observing Jews object to non-kosher meat on theological grounds, but pork also represents something so physically vile and disgusting that Rabbi Shlomo Vilka, a vocal critic of pigs being raised in Israel, says that he couldn’t even imagine touching a pig, let alone eating one. Vilka believes that pork, more than any other animal considered non-kosher, has become the symbol of everything Jews find “unpure, filthy, and dirty.”⁷⁴

Delis that sell non-kosher meat represent an invasive threat to the insular Haredi communities that have grown rapidly in Israel alongside the Russian immigrants in the 1990s. Hassidic Judaism developed as a conservative resistance to the modernization of Western Jewery in the 19th century, and the Israeli Haredi community is seen as perhaps the most traditional Jewish community in the world. They value the pursuit of Torah for men and the domesticity of women beyond all else, and they see secularism in Israel as a direct

⁷¹ “Еда – дело верное (Food- a sure thing,)” *израильские новости (Israland)*, March 28th 2005, <http://www.isra.com/news/?item=50792>, last accessed March 17th 2014. Quotation provided translated by author.

⁷² Samuel H. Dresner, *Keeping Kosher*, 15.

⁷³ Deuteronomy, Chapter 14:8-10.

⁷⁴ Heather Sharp, “Israel pig-farming Kibbutz draws religious ire,” *BBC*, June 30th, 2010, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8708541.stm>, last accessed March 17th 2014.

threat to their way of life.⁷⁵ These delis are the most conspicuous symbol of an outsider presence encroaching in on their tight knit communities. For some Ultra-Orthodox, Russian immigrants represent a distinct danger to their very safety and wellbeing. Orthodox communities who organize to keep non-kosher stores out of their neighborhood believe that the allure of pork will bring an outside presence into their communities that carry a legitimate threat to their physical security. Eli Ro'ash, a committee chairmen in the local government of Haifa and a leader in the neighborhood trying to ban non-kosher meat, claims that because of non-kosher delis, "Our children will be afraid to leave the house at night because of the unsavory characters who will come and because of the violence they will bring to the neighborhood."⁷⁶ To these communities, non-kosher meat, a symbol of growing secularism across Israel, is seen as a violent, grotesque threat to their very way of life.

Orthodox Jews have mobilized in cities across Israel to protest the opening of non-kosher delis and to pressure their local governments to pass by-laws banning the sale of non-kosher meat. These protests usually follow the opening of *Tiv Ta'am* branches, the largest non-kosher grocery store in Israel. *Tiv Ta'am* poses a double threat to Orthodox communities, because not only does it sell non-kosher meat but it also remains open during the Sabbath. *Tiv Ta'am* stores that stay open and violate the Sabbath receive a 660 shekel fine every week, but the chain is strong enough and accumulates enough profits from the extra business day to absorb the fines and stay open.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Yaol Finkelman, "Ultra-Orthodox/Haredi Education," *International Handbooks of Religion and Education* 5 (January 1st, 2011): 1063-1080.

⁷⁶ A. Ariel, "Demonstration Against Sale of Non-Kosher Meat in Haifa," *Dei'ah ve Dibur (Truth and Insight)*, July 20th 2005, <http://www.chareidi.org/archives5765/PNC65ahaifa.htm>, last accessed March 17th, 2014.

⁷⁷ Ben Hartman, "Tel Aviv faces pressure for policy on Shabbat businesses," *The Jerusalem Post*, August 19th, 2013, last accessed March 14th 2014, <http://www.jpost.com/National-News/Tel-Aviv-faces-pressure-for-policy-on-Shabbat-businesses-323617>.

Tiv Ta'am was founded by businessman Kobi Tribitch in 1990, after he saw the market for non-kosher meat exploding during the Great Aliyah. Today, there are 32 *Tiv Ta'am* grocery stores in Israel and the company is worth over 300 million dollars.⁷⁸ *Tiv Ta'am* represents everything unethical and dirty that Orthodox Jews criticize about non-kosher meat. The fact that *Tiv Ta'am* stays open during the Sabbath is seen as a dirty business move, as it edges out smaller delis and grocery stores that can't afford to pay the fines from staying open. Also in 2007, *Tiv Ta'am* had to spend 500,000 dollars in a media campaign to repair their public image after a video leaked of stray cats roaming through a *Tiv Ta'am* store room, helping themselves to meats being prepped for the sales floor, proving to many Jews that the non-kosher *Tiv Ta'am* is completely unsanitary.⁷⁹

Despite the negative image with the kosher public, the sale of pork is the driving success factor of *Tiv Ta'am*. In 2009, Israeli billionaire businessman Arcady Gaydamak began to negotiate a deal to buy out the *Tiv Ta'am* chain for 100 million dollars. In an interview on the upcoming merger, Gaydamak said "In my view, as a Jew and as a public figure in Jewish society, the promotion, distribution and sale of pork products in Israel offends the Jewish tradition. Therefore, my first order of business will be to ban the distribution and sale of pork products."⁸⁰ Gaydamak planned to convert all of the Mizra pork distribution centers to kosher chicken distributors and take pork off the menu of the biggest non-kosher grocery store chain in Israel. However, the deal fell through after he realized it was impossible to turn *Tiv Ta'am* kosher. The contract the Mizra factory distribution center had with *Tiv Ta'am* prevented Gaydamak from forcing them to sell chicken, and an analysis

⁷⁸"Tiv Ta'am Holdings 1 LTD," *Google Finance Stock Portfolios*, <http://www.google.com/finance?q=TLV:TTAM>, last accessed March 17th, 2014.

⁷⁹ Yael Walzer, "Tiv Ta'am pours \$500,000 into spicing up its image," *אחרונות ידיעות* (*Yedioth Ahronoth*), October 10th, 2007, <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/business/tiv-taam-pours-500-000-into-spicing-up-its-image-1.230775>, last accessed March 17th, 2014.

⁸⁰ Ofer Petersburg, "Gaydamak acquires non-kosher supermarket chain," *אחרונות ידיעות* (*Yedioth Ahronoth*), June 10th, 2007, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3410650,00.html>, last accessed March 17th, 2014.

of *Tiv Ta'am* customers showed that the primary reason they shopped there was to buy non-kosher meat.⁸¹ After the deal fell through, one *Tiv Ta'am* grocery store celebrated by having a German Oktoberfest themed festival called *A Taste of Paradise*, dressing up in lederhosen and giving out pork sausages to all of their customers.⁸²

Orthodox Jews have organized protests to shut down *Tiv Ta'am* grocery stores in many Israeli cities, including Beth Hamesh and Haifa. However the most intense protests against non-kosher meat occurred in Netanya in 2007. On July 15th, 2007, opening of the newest *Tiv Ta'am* branch in their area, Haredi Jews organized a protest against the store. They chained themselves to the supermarket's doors and prohibited entry to the supermarket for an entire day.⁸³ The demonstration against non-kosher meat escalated quickly and 1,500 religious protesters spread across the city, and that night the non-kosher Aviv Delicatessen located in Downtown Netanya was set on fire.⁸⁴ Two days later on July 17th, the Netanya City Council voted 12-3 to ban the sale of pork within the residential and tourist areas of the city, forcing all pork to the outskirts of town. This law was set to cause the closing of 70 non-kosher stores in the center of the city, and harm the income of the 2,000 families those stores support.⁸⁵ Meir Sheetrit, the Interior Minister at the time, harshly criticized the resolution as illegal and harmful to Israel, despite the fact that he himself keeps Kosher. The blanket ban on pork was overturned by the Interior Ministry on

⁸¹ Tani Goldstein, "Gaydamak, Tiv Ta'am deal falls through," *אחרון ידיעות* (*Yedioth Ahronoth*), June 18th, 2007, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3414562,00.html>, last accessed March 17th 2014.

⁸² "Новый кошерный Тив Таам" предлагает обнаженный 'Вкус Рая' (The new kosher Tiv Taam offers 'Taste of Paradise'), *sem40.ru*, June 14th, 2007, <http://www.sem40.ru/index.php?newsid=161146>, last accessed March 17th 2014.

⁸³ Raanan Ben-Zur, "Netanya Forbids Sale of Pork," *אחרון ידיעות* (*Yedioth Ahronoth*), June 17th, 2007, 2014, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3426559,00.html>, last accessed March 17th.

⁸⁴ Yigal Hai, "Netanya pork deli reopens for business to customers' delight," *Haaretz*, August 7th 2007, <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/netanya-pork-deli-reopens-for-business-to-customers-delight-1.226995>, last accessed March 17th 2014.

⁸⁵ Hillel Fendel, "Netanya: No Pork and Ham Sold in Residential Areas," *Arutz Sheva*, July 18th, 2007, <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/123119#.UyNdyPmzErU>, last accessed March 14th 2014.

the first week of August.⁸⁶ Today, there are only small district bans in the most religious areas of Netanya but for the most part it is business as usual for family owned non-kosher delis and *Tiv Ta'am*. The particular conflict ended in a definitive victory for secularism and the Russian immigrant community against the pressures of Orthodox Judaism.

There are multiple other cases in Israel where protests against non-kosher meat have turned violent. Two teenagers were arrested in Kiryat Gat for setting fire to a *Tiv Ta'am* in their neighborhood, citing the fact that the supermarket was non-kosher as the motivator behind their arson.⁸⁷ Another dramatic case of violence against *Tiv Ta'am* was on March 13th 2013, when police were called in to a *Tiv Ta'am* in downtown Tel Aviv in order to neutralize a bomb found on the premise.⁸⁸ The police arrested a former IDF soldier and a few others in relation to the attempted bombing, but were unable to attach any official “nationalist” motives to the crime. The supposed reasons for the bombing still remain unclear, but it would make sense given the stream of violence against stores selling non-kosher meat that this act would be a part of that narrative.⁸⁹

The growing success of *Tiv Ta'am* grocery stores despite the protests and the acts of vandalism is a strong indicator that Israel's secular population wants more consumer options reflecting their relaxed religious beliefs. These secular Israelis are willing to eat non-kosher meat and do their grocery shopping on the Sabbath, despite the insistence of

⁸⁶ “Interior Minister slams ban on sale of pork” *The Pig Site*, July 26th, 2007, <http://www.thepigsite.com/swinenews/15070/interior-minister-slams-ban-on-sale-of-pork>, last accessed March 17th 2014.

⁸⁷ Aher Zeiger, “Two teens arrested for setting fire to ‘nonkosher’ shops,” *The Times of Israel*, March 29th, 2012, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/two-teens-arrested-for-setting-fire-to-kiryat-gat-shops/>, last accessed March 17th 2014.

⁸⁸ Asher Zeiger, “Police neutralize bomb at Tel Aviv supermarket,” *The Times of Israel*, March 24, 2013, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/police-neutralize-bomb-at-tel-aviv-supermarket/>, last accessed March 17th, 2014.

⁸⁹ Ben Hartmen, “3 arrested for suspected involvement in attempt to bomb Tel Aviv branch of Tiv Taam market,” *Jerusalem Post*, July 15th 2013, <http://www.jpost.com/National-News/3-arrested-for-suspected-involvement-in-attempt-to-bomb-Tel-Aviv-branch-of-Tiv-Taam-market-319856>, last accessed March 17th 2014.

the Chief Rabbinate that all Jews must keep kosher and observe the Jewish weekly Jewish day of rest. Tiv Ta'am and smaller non-kosher delis are widening the areas in Israeli society outside of Rabbinical Control, giving secular Jews a consumer choice outside the parameters of Orthodox rules.

Even religious Jews have turned to non-kosher meat in order to escape the oppressive eyes of the Rabbinate, even if only by giving up the "kosher" title. In 1983, the Prohibition of Fraud in Kosher Food Act made advertising the sale of kosher meat without an official kosher meat certificate from the Chief Rabbinate illegal. This has given the Rabbinate considerable power to pose restrictions on kosher business owners. In response to this, starting in the 1990's many shop owners have decided to drop their kosher certification despite continuing to sell meat that is ostensibly kosher, just so they could sever all business ties with the Chief Rabbinate.⁹⁰

The Chief Rabbinate's control over kosher food is rife with greed, profiteering, and fraud. Restaurants have to pay hundreds of Shekels every month for a Rabbinate approved *Mashgiach*⁹¹ to come inspect their establishment and receive their kosher certificate. However, many shop owners have complained that *Mashgiah* visits are actually few and far between, and when the *Masgiah* actually arrives their visits are brief and appear to be merely a formality. If a shop owner is unhappy with the work of the Rabbinate's *Mashgiah* they can hire another, but only in addition to the Rabbinate's, not as a replacement. In

⁹⁰ Winfried Brugger, *Religion in the Public Sphere: A Comparative Analysis of German, Israeli, American, and International Law* (Springer Berlin, Heidelberg, 2007), 327.

⁹¹ *Mashgiach* (Hebrew): A supervisor hired to ensure that stores selling Kosher food and plants manufacturing kosher meat are properly abiding by Kashrut laws.

essence, the Chief Rabbinate is levying a type of tax on all stores that claim to be Kosher, forcing them to pay hundreds of shekels a month just for the privilege of keeping that title.⁹²

The Chief Rabbinate maintains a domineering control over which shops can be considered Kosher, and any restaurant or deli that refuses to cooperate with the Rabbinate is liable to be fined thousands of shekels. One such shop, the Italian dairy restaurant Topolino, removed its kosher certificate specifically because restaurant owner Shai Gini no longer wanted to do business with the Rabbinate. Topolino stopped advertising as kosher, but continued to serve kosher food and observe kosher law. Shai Gini felt that the certificate was not worth the hassle or the cost of dealing with the Rabbinate. However, after removing the certificate, Shai Gini was still fined 2,000 shekels by the Rabbinate, who claims that Gini violated the law by advertising his store as being kosher on the Internet. Gini says that "This is harassment and revenge of the rabbinate against us without any reason or legal basis,"⁹³ and is working with five other restaurants in a lawsuit that directly challenges the Chief Rabbinate's control over the word "kosher."

Despite protests, the Chief Rabbinate is refusing to back down from their position of authority, and a new bill with considerable support in the Knesset is aiming to set up a "Kashrut Police." This force will be armed and equipped with a uniform and a badge and have only one goal: to find any store that claims to be kosher without an approved kosher certificate and bring those wrong doers to justice.⁹⁴ Deputy Religious Services Minister Rabbi Eli Ben-Dahan cites the purpose of the bill as being to "provide inspectors with tools

⁹² "Kosher Competition, *The Jerusalem Post*, May 11th, 2012, <http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Editorials/Kosher-competition>, last accessed March 17th 2014.

⁹³ Jessica Steinberg, "The battle over kosher Jerusalem, *The Times of Israel*, November 28th, 2012, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/the-battle-over-kosher-jerusalem/>, last accessed March 17th 2014.

⁹⁴ *ibid*

for fighting kashrut fraud and kashrut criminals effectively."⁹⁵ The very language used by the Rabbi captures the disdain and vehemence felt by some Orthodox Jews against those who directly challenge the Chief Rabbinate's power. Ben-Dahan does not view shop owners such as Shai Gini as Jews with differing opinions on how to enforce Kosher Laws than the Rabbinate, but rather thinks of these shop owners as criminals deliberately trying to poison Jews with their fake kosher food.

The fate of these kosher shop owners battling for greater freedom from the Chief Rabbinate and the Russian non-kosher deli owners are inextricably linked. Both present a direct challenge to Chief Rabbinical control over Israeli society. Non-Kosher delis provide Russian immigrants and other secular Jews with a structure of food consumption that cannot be regulated by the Chief Rabbinate. Kosher delis that refuse to pay for the kosher certificates of the Chief Rabbinate are fighting for the legitimacy of Jewish diversity in Israel. These storeowners are trying to create a kosher system that runs on a mutual understanding between the store and consumer rather than a system of rabbinical coercion. Both types of resistance are facing push back from Ultra-Orthodox Judaism and the Chief Rabbinate. Ultra-Orthodox Jews attempt to use public pressure and acts of vandalism to ban non-kosher meat in their communities and drive out stores that sell pork. The Chief Rabbinate uses fines and strict enforcement to maintain authority over all stores that choose to sell kosher meat. This issue has yet to be resolved and is still an ongoing debate being played out in the courtrooms, Knesset floors, and the consumer habits in Israel.

⁹⁵ Kobi Nachshoni "Israel set to get 'kashrut police,'" *אחרון ידיעות* (*Yedioth Ahronoth*, December 30th, 2013, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4471193,00.html>, last accessed March 17th, 2014.

Conclusion

Today, despite the literally putrid acts of vandalism, Avi Ben-David's Iwo's Deli remains open, as do thousands of other shops that sell non-kosher meat in Israel. The campaign to defend the increasing market for non-kosher meat has been incredibly successful, especially when compared to other major campaigns to increase secularism in Israel, including civil marriage and open business days on the Sabbath. Despite the reintroduction of Bacon Laws into the Knesset and mass protests of Orthodox Jews against the sale of pork, the availability of non-kosher meat has been increasing rapidly since the Great Aliyah and political parties advocating for the rights of non-kosher shop owners have won significant victories in Israeli law, including the Solodkin Decision. *Tiv Ta'am* grocery stores continue to expand and sell pig products while campaigns in local cities such as Netanya to ban non-kosher meat have ended in failure. The reason for the successful maintenance of non-kosher meat in Israel is the strong Russian immigrant lobbying power through special interest political parties. This gives the defense of non-kosher meat a different dimension than other secular campaigns. Rather than being only a cause for secularist progressive and liberal parties, non-kosher meat is a cause that has support from the traditional secular base, advocates for the expansion of the free market in Israel, and ethnic Russians represented by political parties such as *Yisrael Beiteinu*.

Campaigns to defend non-kosher meat and broaden the definition of what can be considered "kosher" offer a pragmatic political framework of how to advance and defend secularism against Chief Rabbinical control over in Israel. On the other hand, the increased availability of pork is seen as a threat to the very Jewish character of the state by Orthodox Jews. Non-kosher meat is an existential threat that may seem minor but actually could change the very nature of how Judaism is perceived Israel. Non-kosher meat is at the center

of the tension between secular and religious life that holds the very future of Jewish society in a precarious balance.

However, despite the advances of non-kosher meat in the 1990's and 2000's, the hopes secular Jews hold for a more secular Israel are looking quite grim. The Ultra-Orthodox are the fastest growing religious sect in Israel with a birth rate of 7.1 percent. This is staggeringly high compared to the 1.4 percent birth rate for the rest of the Jewish population.⁹⁶ In contrast, the Israeli secular population has been shrinking in recent years. In 2004, secular Jews made up 44 percent of the population, in 2009 it was only 42.⁹⁷ These demographic shifts are likely to continue to make any push for increased secularism in Israel a long and hard struggle in the coming decades.

The Great Aliyah has undoubtedly changed the very nature of the Israeli state. The FSU immigrants brought a whole new unique character, language, culture, and palate into the state of Israel. However the lasting effects this wave of immigration will have on Israeli Society is questionable. As the years go on and subsequent generations become more and more detached from their homeland, assimilation is inevitable. Eventually the Russian book stores will close, the Russian schools will lose their students and Russian special interest politics will merge into the general political spectrum. However, this does not mean that Jews of Russian descent in Israel will stop eating pork and other non-kosher meats. Food is a way for many to connect to family and cultures that in other ways might be long forgotten. Even as Israel moves farther and farther away from the Great Aliyah, these Jews will still have a taste for Russia.

⁹⁶ Yonit Farago, "Israel Passes Law Drafting Ultra-Orthodox Into the Army, *Time*, March 12,th 2014, <http://time.com/21237/israel-ultra-orthodox-knesset-draft/>, last accessed March 17th, 2014.

⁹⁷ Asaf Shtull-Trauring, "Poll shows ranks of secular Jewish minority in Israel continued to drop in 2009, *Haaretz* .May 17th, 2010, <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/poll-shows-ranks-of-secular-jewish-minority-in-israel-continued-to-drop-in-2009-1.290749>, last accessed March 17th 2014.

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