



HALACHIC MULTICULTURALISM IN THE IDF: RULINGS OF OFFICIAL RELIGIOUS AUTHORITIES IN ISRAEL CONCERNING “WOMEN’S SINGING”

In the summer of 2011, a number of soldiers walked out of an auditorium in which a musical performance was taking place. The men, cadets in an officer’s course, explained that they walked out of the performance because there were female vocalists, and the halacha prohibits men from listening to females sing.

As a result of this incident, representatives of the army chief rabbinate as well as the Matka’l, or Israeli General Staff, convened to discuss and ultimately publish new guidelines addressing the participation of religious soldiers in military ceremonies featuring female vocalists. These new guidelines were in turn criticized by a group of army chaplains united under the name “Keren Lahav—for the strengthening of Judaism in the IDF.” The group published a joint document in which they stated that the army’s decisions had undermined the trust of religious soldiers in the system. They claimed that the new guidelines—which were approved by the IDF’s Chief Rabbi Rafi Peretz—demonstrated Peretz’s ignorance of the inner workings of the army system. One criticism against Rabbi Peretz was that he had not risen to his position from within the military but rather was an outside candidate placed directly at the top of the pyramid.

Three board members of *Keren Lahav*—Rabbi Colonel Yosef Harel, Lieutenant Colonels Pini Izak, and Avshalom Katzir—sent a letter to the Chief Rabbis of Israel, the Israeli defense minister, and to the IDF Chief of Staff suggesting a new approach to the future selection of the next Chief Rabbi.¹ Since these rabbis based their claims on the precedent established by the first Chief Rabbi of the military rabbinate, Rabbi Shlomo Goren, a discussion ensued about the merit of his true legacy. Rabbi Major General Mordechai Piron, who succeeded Rabbi Goren in the position of Chief Rabbi, as well as Rabbi Menachem Hacohen, who served for many years as Rabbi Goren’s personal assistant, co-authored a letter sent to the chief of staff in which they claimed that Rabbi Goren had never objected to female singing in

the presence of male soldiers. According to Rabbis Piron and Haohen, Rabbi Goren had never seen this phenomenon as violating the army's adherence to halachic requirements.²

The events led to a discussion of the IDF Chief Rabbi's authority as a halachic decisor within the army. Rabbi Eliezer Melamed, Rosh Yeshiva in Har Brakha, caustically noted that the Chief Rabbi is not a halachic decisor but rather merely a "religious consultant to the Chief of Staff."³ This position was summarily rejected by Rabbi Yisrael Rozen, the head of the Tzomet institute for the solution of halachic problems related to technological advancements. Rabbi Rozen then accused Melamed of threatening the continued existence of the army as a unified hierarchical organization.⁴

Two competing evaluations of this affair can be raised in the context of what Yoran Peri has called the religionization of Israeli society, which he defines as the "process in which there is a strengthening of religious elements in society."⁵ Shlomo Fischer wrote that this event clearly demonstrates religionization,⁶ whereas Asher Cohen and Bernard Susser did not consider this event to be of such importance. They mentioned that out of ninety religious cadets present at the performance, only nine chose to leave, and some of those who left later expressed regret. This event, they say, is less momentous than it was made out to be in the press.⁷

In this article, I wish to discuss the event from a halachic perspective and to focus on two different halachic rulings issued by official religious authorities. The first ruling was issued by the Chief Rabbi of Israel at the time, Rabbi Yonah Metzger, and the other by Rabbi Eyal Krim, the head of the Halacha Department of the Army Rabbinate.⁸

It is a well-known fact that halacha is a multifaceted system, containing various options. The Decisor's assessment of reality and his general worldview play a significant role in shaping his halachic deliberations and therefore different Decisors reach different conclusions. In the case at hand, the different attitudes of the Decisors to the ceremonies featuring female vocalists brought about different modes of halachic analysis and discussion, and thus led each one to construct differing halachic conclusions.

An examination of the arguments and considerations that guided the Decisors (*poskim*) in their discussion of the issue will help trace the internal tensions between the two Decisors and, more importantly, within the halacha itself. I will describe the modes of interpretation and decision-making principles applied by the Decisors, and will then try to demonstrate their fundamentally different perceptions about Israeli culture. The discussion of these two views will serve as an opening to an understanding of the complexity of the practical integration of halacha in the military environment. At the end of this article, I

shall raise some questions that, in my opinion, should be the basis for a discourse on multiculturalism in the IDF in particular, as well as in Israeli society in general.

HALACHIC BACKGROUND

The beginning of the halachic discussion brings us back to the Bible. When the Jews left Egypt, and the Egyptian soldiers in pursuit of them drowned in the Red Sea, Israel sang a song of praise to God. According to the Torah, all the women of Israel, led by Moses' sister Miriam, danced and sang with the men.⁹ Similarly, after the victory of Barak Ben Avinoam over Sisera, Deborah the Prophetess sang a song of praise to God, in the presence of Barak—if not together with him.¹⁰

However, in the Babylonian Talmud, Shmuel, the great third century *Amora*, is reported to have said that a woman's singing voice is as immodest as her private parts. Various competing interpretations were offered during the middle ages to explain the exact intent and practical implications of this determination repeated several times in the Babylonian Talmud.¹¹

From the perspective of the contemporary Orthodox halachist, the accepted and authoritative view is that of Rabbi Yosef Karo in his *Shulhan Arukh*, where he clearly rules that a man may *not* listen to a woman's voice.¹² As such, in modern times, there is indeed a general halachic prohibition against hearing a woman singer. The questions that remain to be clarified are: what is the validity of this ban in modern time? Should the specific military context influence the halachic decision in any way?

OPPOSITE RULINGS BY THE TWO RABBIS

In his opening remarks, Rabbi Metzger explains that the background to his halachic ruling is the story of the soldiers retold above:

I was asked about an incident which happened recently in which a group of cadets were forced to take part in an event that took place in their unit and as part of it a female singer sang in front of them.

Rabbi Metzger speaks of an undefined "event" in which the soldiers were forced to participate; however, he does not disclose that the event was an official military memorial service for the IDF's fallen soldiers. Rabbi Krim's discussion, by contrast, seems to be a purely principled theoretical one. His discussion does not have any introduction and is seemingly unrelated to any particular situation or specific

context. However, it should be noted that Rabbi Krim's document is as of yet still an unofficial draft, and perhaps when it is published an introduction may be added.

After his opening remarks, Rabbi Metzger quotes the *Shulḥan Arukh's* ruling according to which a man must avoid hearing a woman sing (EH 21,1). Rabbi Metzger mentions several reasons for showing lenience to transgressors of the rule, but proceeds to reject each of these reasons. Rabbi Krim, as I will show, made the opposite decision.

CAN A DECISOR RELY ON A MINORITY OPINION?

The first argument raised in favor of a permissive ruling is that the halachic prohibition applies only to hearing a lone woman singer, whereas hearing a group of women singing together may not be prohibited. At this point, in his discussion, Rabbi Metzger has two options: first, he could argue that since the validity of this distinction is accepted only by a small minority of halachic authorities, it is therefore of no practical significance. Second, he could claim that since an important Decisor had expressed this position, one can rely on it in times of great need.¹³ Rabbi Metzger chose the first of these two paths. Moreover, Rabbi Metzger claimed that the lenient interpretation was only ever articulated as a purely academic possibility and was never put forth as a practical instruction allowing men to hear a group of women singing together. The result of this claim is the practical disqualification of a halachic position that could have been considered to be a legitimate option.

Rabbi Krim takes the opposite approach. He cites the position of Rabbi Aharon de Toledo, as expressed in his book *Divrei Hefetz* ("Words of Value") which was published in Salonika in the late eighteenth century. According to this rabbinic authority, the prohibition only pertains to instances in which the listener's express intent is to enjoy the sound of the woman's singing. Merely overhearing of her voice is not prohibited:

And it is not prohibited only by a voice [...] of lovely song and he intends to enjoy it as he hears her voice, however when she sings in her home to her son to lay him to rest there is no "nakedness" [...] for they surely did not say that her voice is like nakedness only when she hums and sings lewd songs and he means to hear and enjoy her voice. Here we certainly must penalize him, but when she sings to herself or to help her child sleep there is no nakedness here [...].¹⁴

On the one hand lewd songs are clearly prohibited, while on the other hand a woman's voice singing a lullaby to her child poses no problem.

It seems clear that the principle behind this distinction is that the woman's singing is only prohibited when it carries a sexual connotation. Based on this distinction, one could easily claim that there is no problem in hearing a woman sing when her performance is bereft of sexual connotation.

Rabbi Krim is of the opinion that just as one must distinguish between different types of songs, and the woman's own intentions as she sings, so too must we apply a similar distinction in regard to the listener's internal motivation and situation. The simplest case is when the listener purposefully tries to deny himself any enjoyment from the singer's voice. A second category would be when he is listening without any special intention, and the third most severe case would be when the listener intends to enjoy the beauty of the female singer's voice. Rabbi Krim even notes the possibility of a further more nuanced distinction:

[...] there are two types of intention to enjoy. There is one who intends to enjoy the beauty of the song and the softness of its sounds, however this is not enjoyment from the "feminine" aspect of the voice, in other words, the song is appreciated for its content and form without any connection to the fact that it is being sung by a woman. There is also a second type of enjoyment from the "feminine" aspect of the voice and unique intonation and special sound of a female vocalist [...] and in this whole chapter we are discussing the possibility of permitting only for one who has no intention to enjoy the singing at all, and does not even intend to pay close attention and listen to her singing.

Rabbi Krim is aware of different aspects of enjoyment which one can derive from hearing a song, clearly differentiating between the aesthetic and sexual possibilities. Nonetheless, although one could understand from Rabbi Toledo's exposition that the prohibition only relates to one who is listening for sexual enjoyment, Rabbi Krim prohibits deriving any enjoyment from a woman's song. In other words, Rabbi Krim does not explore the full array of possibilities of granting a permissive ruling but rather limits his ruling to one who hears a woman's singing without intending to listen and derive aesthetic or any other type of enjoyment from her voice.

Rabbi Krim's reliance on Rabbi Toledo's position is interesting, seeing that Toledo's position was rejected by Rabbi Haim Hezekiah Medini, author of the great encyclopedic work *Sdeh Hemed* and chief rabbi of Hebron at the end of the nineteenth century until his death in 1904. Medini claims that while one should not relate to Toledo's opinion as utterly unreasonable, it should not be followed because it is a singular interpretation. Rabbi Krim explains that Medini meant to say that were he to find additional Decisors who agreed with Toledo,

then this position could be accepted. Therefore, Rabbi Krim made an effort to search for another Rabbi who held Medini's opinion, and indeed he found a little known text, *Kokhaba D'shavit*, by Rabbi Eliyahu Ventura. Rabbi Krim then turns to the writings of more commonly recognized Decisors and reviews their writings in view of the understandings of Rabbis de Toledo and Ventura. In his reinterpretation of their views, he ultimately presents a group of Decisors who are of the opinion that the prohibition depends on the male listener's intention to enjoy the song. Thus, he concludes that hearing a woman singing is not prohibited as long as the soldiers do not expressly come with the intention of deriving pleasure from the singing.

NARROW INTERPRETATION VERSUS WIDE INTERPRETATION

A similar disparity is found in the attitude of Rabbis Metzger and Krim with regards to the ruling of the twentieth-century Rabbi Yehiel Yaakov Weinberg, the renowned author of the books of responsa *Sridei Aish* ("Remains from the Fire"), published after the Holocaust. In one of his responsa, Rabbi Weinberg allowed boys and girls to sing together in their youth group:

In countries such as Germany and France women feel hurt and that their rights are denied if we prohibit them from participating in the *Oneg Shabbat* by singing the sacred songs. This is of course well understood by anyone who knows the nature of women in these countries.¹⁵ A prohibition could result in distancing such women from religious practice, God forbid.

Here we see another Decisor permitting males to be present when women sing.¹⁶ Rabbi Metzger rejects this view, claiming that Rabbi Weinberg addressed the singing of sacred Sabbath songs and that he would have considered secular songs prohibited.

Rabbi Metzger adopts a narrow interpretation of Rabbi Weinberg's view and here, too, Rabbi Krim takes a different approach:

In my humble opinion there is a fundamental distinction between a public evening dedicated to singing and gaiety, on the one hand, and a woman singing in the context of an event of gravity and seriousness, where is no levity at all. Although this distinction is not explicit in the words of the Decisors, and one simply cannot rely on this distinction alone, nonetheless I think this distinction is logical and reasonable.

In Rabbi Krim's opinion, even though Rabbi Weinberg introduced a division between secular songs and religious hymns, his real intention was to distinguish between singing in a serious atmosphere (which

permits listening to a chorus of women) and an occasion in an atmosphere of laxity in which the singing may lead to physical proximity between men and women—a prohibition of the halacha. Therefore, a woman's singing in the context of a serious ceremony should not be forbidden.

WHO IS THE “TARGET POPULATION” OF THE DECISOR AND
THE DEFINITION OF “SPIRITUALITY”?

In Rabbi Metzger's opinion, Rabbi Weinberg's purpose was a spiritual one: to protect young Jewish people from assimilation. But in the case of Israeli soldiers, there would be no spiritual gain from hearing a chorus of women. Rabbi Metzger claimed that permitting the soldiers to listen to a chorus of women would not produce any spiritual benefit compared to that discussed by Rabbi Weinberg.

Here too, Rabbi Krim disagrees. He notes that the prohibition of hearing women sing is interpreted, mistakenly, by the non-religious public as degrading and insulting. If so, he reasons, one has to consider the permissive position in order to increase the unity between the soldiers. We may conclude that while Rabbi Metzger examines the effects of hearing the singing on the soldiers' personal religious world, Rabbi Krim examines the wider implications of his ruling, factoring in the reaction of nominally secular society. Additionally, while Rabbi Metzger refers exclusively to spiritual and religious considerations, Rabbi Krim sees the unity amongst the soldiers of the IDF as a spiritual value influencing the halachic ruling.

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF SONGS IN CEREMONIES?

A third possible lenient argument, which Rabbi Metzger rejects as well, is that if one inadvertently derives enjoyment against his will, he does not transgress any prohibition against that enjoyment (*hana'ah haba'ah lo be'al korkho*). Rabbi Metzger adopts the view that limits this rule only to circumstances in which listening to a female sing is not the primary activity. For example, a person engaged in painting a house overhears a female singer from the next room. Since the primary act is painting, he is not transgressing the prohibition of listening to a female singer. However, according to Rabbi Metzger, this is not the case in a military ceremony. Here, according to Rabbi Metzger,

It seems that in the matter before us, the permissive principle of 'the inadvertent pleasure of a person against his will' is not applicable, since the soldiers are not doing something else and incidentally meet

with the banned pleasure, but they are invited and are even commanded to come to the scene and to participate in it. This is the only reason for which they came to the event. Therefore, although the purpose for which they come is not to benefit from the prohibition, but to uphold the spirit of army and to avoid contention, there is nonetheless no true analogy to ‘the inadvertent pleasure of a person against his will’.

While one could argue that the soldiers are coming to remember and honor the fallen, thus hearing the song in passing, Rabbi Metzger refers to the ceremony as a show, and therefore argues that by participating the soldiers are transgressing the halachic prohibition.

Rabbi Krim disagrees once again. In his opinion, the rule permitting “the pleasure of a person against his will” applies to anyone deriving pleasure from a situation in which his intention is to act in a permitted manner. Therefore, since the soldiers hear the singing as part of the permitted ceremony, and are not there to enjoy the singers’ feminine voice, they do not transgress the prohibition.

SOCIAL CHANGES AS A FACTOR IN HALACHIC DECISION-MAKING

An interesting argument found in Rabbi Krim’s discussion relates to the question of halachic changes arising from changes in women’s social status. Rabbi Krim cites several rulings from the twentieth century, including those of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef and Rabbi Eliezer Yehuda Waldenberg, permitting—as a result of these social changes—behaviors that were previously considered forbidden. Since women generally now have the same social visibility as men, the overall effect of their presence on men has lessened. Therefore, we can be lenient today regarding situations where previously we had to take the stringent viewpoint:

Regarding laws of modesty and the mode of worthy behavior in public space common to men and women, we find much has changed in accordance with the social reality that transformed the face of society. It cannot be denied, that now it is almost impossible to say for a normal man, that hearing a woman singer might make him sinful, even in the extreme, and therefore there is no denying that there is room for leniency.

According to Rabbi Krim, today, a chorus of women is not an expression of extreme immodesty, and therefore can be permitted.

THE CONCLUSIONS OF THE DECISORS

At the end of his discussion, Rabbi Metzger concluded that the military should only appoint male singers, but if a woman had arrived to

sing, they should then release any soldier who asks to be released, regardless of the category of the event. Rabbi Krim's conclusion is most interesting. While in the discussion he takes a liberal position, his conclusion is more reserved. In his opinion, the army should bring male singers, and if the army does bring a female singer, male soldiers should be exempted from participation in the ceremony. However, a soldier who is present when a woman begins to sing should not leave in the middle, but should distract himself from her singing. Thus, he will be considered to have avoided the prohibition of listening to a woman's singing.

Why does Rabbi Krim not present a stronger permissive ruling? Perhaps, he thought it unwise to force this permissive view on soldiers who he knows follow the instructions of other more prohibitive rabbis. Therefore, although he personally has a consistent viewpoint, he prefers a conclusion that would back religious soldiers who follow the stricter opinions as well. A third possibility is that Rabbi Krim presented a view he believes to be a legitimate halachic position, yet nevertheless thinks that on the practical level it is better not to follow this view. Thus, in his discussion, he proves his theoretical position, but in his conclusion he expresses his reservations regarding its practical applications.¹⁷

THE INSTRUCTIONS OF THE IDF RABBINATE AS A REFLECTION OF THE ROOTS OF THE CONTROVERSY

How should we understand the overall differences in the tendencies of the two rabbis? An examination of the provisions issued by the IDF Chief Rabbi, Rabbi Rafi Peretz (Rabbi Krim's superior) provides some insight. In a document dated January 22, 2011, Rabbi Peretz states that one cannot compare women's singing in a military context with women's singing in a civil context:

The position that I presented the Chief of Staff, based on a number of halakhic principles, is as follows: The nation's honor, honor of IDF, and honor of the Torah must be taken into account. You can not refer to this issue without the perspective that sees the value of the power, the cohesion and the honor of the IDF as a religious value, all belonging to the important value of respect for Torah.

Military cohesion and dignity are presented as important goals from a halachic perspective; this probably stems from the view that since the IDF is an official body representing the people of Israel, it is inherently holy.

Along with concern for the families of the fallen, Rabbi Peretz points out that conflicts and distinctions between religious soldiers

and non-observant soldiers might harm military cohesion, and thus harm the war effort. For Rabbis Peretz and Krim, it seems that military cohesion is a legitimate halachic consideration that would allow the participation of the soldiers at official ceremonies even if the singing is seen as problematic.

In the conclusions presented to the Chief of Staff, Benny Ganz, Rabbi Peretz distinguished between three categories of events. The first category is “official ceremonies,” which includes memorial services and state ceremonies. The second is “other ceremonies,” such as graduation ceremonies and military unit ceremonies. The third category includes socialization and morale-oriented activities. In official ceremonies in which women sing, there is a definite permission to participate, and all soldiers may participate. In “other ceremonies,” the commander should release the soldiers who do not wish to attend, but if he does not, they should attend and should not leave without permission. For unit social activities, there is an obligation to release the soldiers who do not wish to attend.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The two Decisors are fully aware that one can legitimately back different halachic positions, either permitting or prohibiting hearing the singing of women in the context under discussion. Rabbi Metzger raises more lenient claims and for various reasons rejects them, whereas Rabbi Krim raises similar considerations and collates halachic evidence to prove their halachic validity. In their rulings, the two rabbis come to different conclusions and, therefore, their judgments constitute different halachic positions.

This is the halachic summary of their views. I now want to fill out, to deconstruct more fully, the context in which these views were formulated by looking at the sociological and cultural influences that were at play in shaping these rulings.¹⁸ In their discussions, we see the influence of the differences between their assessments of reality, and a disagreement as to whether ceremony has cultural or social implications. Rabbi Metzger does not differentiate between a memorial ceremony and any other musical event. He sees singing as a cultural phenomenon. For Rabbi Krim, there is a basic distinction between a memorial ceremony and other events. He views a memorial ceremony not merely as cultural, in the broad sense, but also as a social-bonding event. It, therefore, has special significance.

Moreover, the evaluation of the social situation shapes the decision. Rabbi Krim is more concerned with uniformity among the

military units, and that has a direct bearing on his decision. His desire to maintain unity within the army motivated his search for legitimate halachic positions allowing all soldiers to attend the ceremonies. To further this goal, he uncovers obscure sources and provides new interpretations to some of the well-known positions of other Decisors. In addition, he states that although this position remains a minority one, it may be relied upon, at least with regard to the special circumstances that obtain in the military.

It is important to note that while Rabbi Metzger focuses on the inner spiritual world of the religious soldiers, Rabbi Krim is mainly concerned with the broader implications a prohibitive ruling may have on the relationship of the non-observant public toward the Jewish religion.¹⁹ However, both rabbis believe that in certain situations, there remains an obligation to absolve religious soldiers from participating in certain army activities, thus they envision the army as a multicultural environment.

I think it is clear that the argument between these two rabbis does not stem from differences of opinion regarding the question of the general role of women in society, and neither rabbi is motivated by an attempt to exclude women from the public realm. Rabbi Krim's argument about changing society and the halachic implications of this change, shows, in my opinion, that the discussion does not revolve around the question of the exclusion of women—even though it certainly has its implications²⁰—but rather around the question of the effects of social change in halacha.²¹

Another important issue in the debate between the Chief Rabbi and the Army Chaplain is the question of the relationship between cultural uniformity vis-à-vis a multicultural army. The two rabbis agree that women should preferably not sing in the army's ceremonies, their disagreement is about the importance of this preference.

The disagreement between these two authorities touches upon the question of the risks, and the possible gain, that may ensue from requiring religious soldiers to leave military ceremonies the moment a female vocalist begins to perform, and the severity of the halachic prohibition involved in hearing such singing. Rabbi Krim believes that requiring soldiers to absent themselves from these types of situations, this may harm the unity of the army ranks, and thereby harm the IDF's overall stability. Since he sees the halachic prohibition as a relatively minor one, Rabbi Krim is willing to defer the prohibition in the face of the army's need to maintain internal unity. Rabbi Metzger, on the other hand, evaluates the situation differently. He does not believe that the soldiers' behavior truly poses any significant threat to the IDF's internal unity, and therefore sees no reason to permit their participation in prohibited performances.

According to this formulation, Rabbi Krim believes that the army *cannot* contain behavioral differences between the various sub-groups of which it is comprised, whereas Rabbi Metzger believes that the army is capable of being multicultural. Thus, the controversy is based upon differing perceptions of reality in two respects: first, what is the degree of damage to army unity that is likely to occur if religious soldiers are not present in army ceremonies when women sing, and second, whether the army can—or should—sustain such injury.²²

It is important to note that both rabbinic Decisors maintain that in certain events, the army must release the religious soldiers from attendance, and this approach is even honored in the standing military guidelines with the approval of the army Chief of Staff. Thus, the army is multicultural in this regard: it recognizes *de facto* the different needs of different groups of soldiers, and has replaced the “melting pot” narrative with a multicultural narrative, allowing each group to live by its own convictions.²³ Therefore, we may determine that one basic difference between the rabbis is their assessment of the IDF’s multiculturalism.

Another aspect of multiculturalism relevant to this discussion relates to the existence of a separate religious society that functions according to its own internal norms and rules. The official position of the military rabbinate determines the behavior within the army; nonetheless, the military rabbinate does not ignore the various rabbinic voices in the general public, and does not wish to force soldiers to defy their civilian Rabbis’ rulings. Therefore, it is possible that for certain situations, instructions will be given that will permit different behaviors among religious soldiers. In this sense, as the army comprises many diverse religious groups, there will be a multiplicity of halachic guidelines.

But increasing the participation of ultra-Orthodox soldiers in the army—something that Israeli society is debating intensely at the present—will inevitably lead to religious requirements of ultra-Orthodox recruits. Will the trend of multiculturalism in the army accommodate the ultra-Orthodox group? The world of halacha, as presented in this article, has learned to contain the various groups, and the question at hand is whether liberalism will succeed in being just as accommodating? Will the army of a Democratic state, which holds liberal values, be able to contain units of soldiers with regulation and orders that reflect their distinctive conservative values?

Granted, full freedom of religion for ultra-Orthodox soldiers would come at the expense of women’s status and visibility. In order to prevent a possible rift within the army ranks, Rabbi Krim was ready to advance renewed interpretations of the traditional halacha and

offered halachic rulings which matched the demands of the chief of staff. Is liberal society—democratic Israel—ready on its own part to give new interpretations to the concept of democratic equality in order to reduce the friction between religious and secular societies? Will the various subcultures in Israel succeed in bridging the gaping rifts that still exist between them?

As the majority and minority groups within a given society come into contact with one another, the majority group has two possible ways of containing the minority groups while minimizing the friction between them. The first is to allocate separate, autonomous, living space for the minority, whereas the second is for both of the groups to reformulate their value systems so that they will be more in tune with those of the second group. Rabbi Metzger's solution encourages the physical separation of the two groups, whereas Rabbi Krim is willing to reexamine his position and reformulate a new approach more in tune with the values of Israeli society as it presently exists.

The General Chief of Staff, for his part, was willing to accept that the soldiers would leave women's performances at entertainment events, even though his liberal worldview perceived such an action as an affront to women's status within society. Which of these two models will find expression as the army incorporates a growing number of Hareidi soldiers? Will the army express liberal values and attempt to force these values upon the religious soldiers thereby creating a great deal of friction? Will the army define different sets of guidelines for Hareidi units and for the general ones, thereby declaring that two separate groups, with different law systems, coexist within it? This second option could lead to a situation in which the two cultures live side by side, not together with one another, and thus widen the disparities between the two groups. Perhaps, the army will reformulate its general guidelines so that they could be appropriate for all types of soldiers—Hareidi, religious and secular, thereby creating the possibility for the development of a sense of closeness and camaraderie among all the soldiers, which could serve as a base for building bridges between all the components of Israeli society. Thankfully, the future is open and we will have to see how these issues are played out within the IDF and Israeli society more generally.

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NOTES

1. The documents circulated by these rabbis were made public in various forums and reached me.

2. Yishai Friedman, "Former Senior Members in the Military Rabbinate: Rabbi Goren Did Not Prohibit Women's Singing," *Makor Rishon*, February 12, 2012, p. 4 (Hebrew).

3. Rabbi Eliezer Melamed, "A Command Against the Halakha," *Yeshivat Har Brakha* website, January 12, 2012 (Hebrew). <http://revivim.yhb.org.il/2012/01/12/%D7%A4%D7%A7%D7%95%D7%93%D7%94%D7%A0%D7%92%D7%93-%D7%94%D7%94%D7%9C%D7%9B%D7%94/>

4. Rabbi Yisrael Rozen, "Rabbi Melamed Wishes To Create Rabbinic 'Militias'," *Srugim* website, February 1, 2012 (Hebrew). <http://www.srugim.co.il/28268-%D7%94%D7%A8%D7%91-%D7%A8%D7%95%D7%96%D7%9F-%D7%94%D7%A8%D7%91-%D7%9E%D7%9C%D7%9E%D7%93-%D7%A8%D7%95%D7%A6%D7%94-%D7%9C%D7%94%D7%A7%D7%99%D7%9D>

5. Yoram Peri, "The 'Religionization' of Israeli Society: Introduction," *Israel Studies Review*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (2012), p. 1.

6. Shlomo Fischer, "Yes, Israel is becoming more religious," *Israel Studies Review*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (2012), p. 13.

7. Asher Cohen and Bernard Susser, "Religious Pressure Will Increase in the Future," *Israel Studies Review*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (2012), p. 19.

8. Rabbi Metzger published his response on the internet, while Rabbi Krim's response is as yet unpublished and was given to me personally. I would like to acknowledge my appreciation for the trust he has shown me by granting me access to this unpublished draft. I would add that although this article focuses on the responses of rabbis holding leading official positions, additional responses were published by others. For example, see: Rabbi Moshe Lichtenstein, "Women's Singing Without Emotional Attachment," *Tehumin*, Vol. 32 (2012), pp. 291-99 (Hebrew). A perusal of the editor's remarks on this article and the author's replies will provide an interesting parallel to the disagreement between rabbis Metzger and Krim.

9. Exodus 15, 20-21.

10. Judges 8, 1.

11. Babylonian Talmud, *Berakhot* 24a; Babylonian Talmud *Kiddushin* 70a; Talmud Yerushalmi, *Halak* 2, 1. Various interpretations have been offered; some suggested that we have to distinguish between a woman's normal speaking voice and her singing voice; others limited the prohibition of hearing the woman's voice only to the time of prayer, etc. For the full discussion, see the sources in *Otzar Haposkim*, E.H. part 9 siman 21, 1, 20 b (p. 49).

12. *Shulhan Arukh, Even Ha'ezer* 21, 1: "A person must be very careful to stay away from women [. . .] and he is not allowed to hear her voice or see her hair." In the Laws of Prayer (*Orah Haim* 78, 3), it would seem that this prohibition applies only to hearing a woman's singing while one is in the middle of prayer, and yet the above quote teaches us that the prohibition is much more encompassing.

13. Regarding the possibility of relying on minority opinions in "hard cases," see *Talmudic Encyclopedia*, volume 9, column 268 ("Halacha"), and

volume 10, column 36 (“Hefsed Merubeh”). For further elaboration, see Avraham Veinrot, “The Minority Opinion In The Judicial Decision in Jewish Law,” *Sinai*, Vol. 110 (1992), pp. 216–32 (Hebrew); Rabbi Zalman Druk, “Deciding Halakha According to the Majority Opinion,” *Tehumin*, Vol. 18 (1998), pp. 71–74 (Hebrew).

14. Rabbi Aharon De Toledo, *Divrei Hefetz* (Salonika, 1798), p. 113.

15. For a man who was raised in the East of Europe, the custom of women and men singing together was unnatural, see Marc B. Shapiro, *Between the Yeshiva World and Modern Orthodoxy: The Life and Works of Rabbi Jehiel Jacob Weinberg, 1884-1966* (Oxford, 2002), p. 52, n. 1.

16. Rabbi Weinberg’s responsa should be understood in the light of his attitude to education of youth in general, and of women’s education in particular, see: Judith Bleich, “Between East and West: Modernity and Traditionalism in the Writings of Rabbi Yehi’el Ya’akov Weinberg,” in *Engaging Modernity: Rabbinic Leaders and the Challenge of the Twentieth Century*, edited by Moshe Z. Sokol (Northvale, NJ, 1997), pp. 199–217.

17. The notion that not every legitimate halachic opinion should be practically played out is well known in the rabbinic literature and is expressed in terms such as: *Naval B’rshut Hatorah*, *Mihyot Tov Al Tikrei Ra*, as well as others.

18. The importance of understanding the sociology of halacha was pointed out by Chaim I. Waxman, “Toward a Sociology of *Psak*,” *Tradition*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (1991), pp. 12–25.

19. It seems that the question of the “target population” is the source for a lot of halachic disagreements. For good example, see the discussion about the opinions of Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Kook and Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya Karelitz (Hazon Ish) regarding the halachic way to keep the Sabbatical Year laws, see Arye Edrei, “from Orthodoxy to Religious Zionism: Rabbi Kook and the Sabbatical Year Polemic,” *Diné Israel*, Vols. 26–27 (2009–2010), pp. 45–145 (pp. 99–110 in particular).

20. Sylvia Barack Fishman, “Women’s Transformations of Public Judaism: Religiosity, Egalitarianism, and the Symbolic Power of Changing Gender Roles,” *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, Vol. 17 (2001), pp. 132–55.

21. This is one of the causes of the rifts between Ultra-Orthodox and Modern-Orthodox Jews. Susan Sered claims that since the argument is about changes in the sacred field, we cannot expect changes to occur in the same way as if they were perceived as secular changes, see “Women and Religious Change in Israel: Rebellion or Revolution,” *Sociology of Religion*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (1997), pp. 1–24. Another view on religious feminism, focusing the suspicions of the Rabbis and the theological responses to this fashion, can be found in Adam S. Ferziger, “Feminism and Heresy: The Construction of a Jewish Metanarrative,” *American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 77, No. 3 (2009), pp. 494–546.

22. This disagreement is known also in other military forces. On the one hand, multinational armies can be the proof for a multicultural army, as claimed by: Efrat Elron, Boas Shamir and Eyal Ben-Ari, “Why don’t

they Fight each other? Cultural Diversity and Operational Unity in Multinational Forces,” *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (1999), pp. 73–97. However, continued research has discovered that in the Dutch armed forces, the employees prefer the “assimilation strategy,” at least when it is about the public context, see Femke Bosman, Rudy Richardson and Joseph Soeters, “Multicultural Tensions in the Military? Evidence from the Netherlands Armed Forces,” *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (2007), pp. 339–61.

²³ For important clarifications of the use of “melting pot” in the Zionist context, see Yosef Gorni, “The ‘Melting Pot’ in Zionist Thought,” *Israel Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (2001), pp. 54–70.