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Engendering the Cantorate

Mark Slobin

This article is a close-up from a book-length panorama of the American cantorate I have just completed. The advantage of zooming in on one corner of a picture is that you uncover a wealth of detail; the disadvantage is that you lose the background. So while the present study fleshes out the brief coverage of gender in my survey of the cantorate, it will scant the comprehensive ethnomusicology of the profession and the chronicling of women's entry to the cantorate that the larger study contains and to which the reader is referred.[1] The present article draws only on the ethnographic data, in the form of quotations from oral histories developed for the History of the American Cantorate project (1984–87).

Nevertheless, some historical and sociological background is in order. Briefly, the cantor is one type of *sheliach tzibbur* ("messenger" or "emissary" of the congregation), a specialist who, by knowing the service extremely well and praying with great care, ensures that the congregation's message is correctly transmitted to its God. The developed notion of the cantor[2] as a specialized professional distinct from a lay member of the congregation who leads services is about one thousand years

old. At that time, gifted singer–hymn composers arose, so impressing worshipers that they accorded these aesthetically commanding men an extra measure of respect and recompense. Over the centuries in European Judaism,[3] the role waxed and waned in particular locales under a variety of historical circumstances. The obviously Latin-origin term *cantor* dates to the early nineteenth century, when a handful of talented singer-composers took the opportunity of increased civic rights for Jews in German lands to establish a new tradition of "high church" synagogue services with imposing choruses and elegantly crafted liturgical works. A bit later, among Polish and Russian empire Jews, the figure of the cantor took on heroic proportions as an emulation of the grandeur of the opera star, and in appreciation of the soul-stirring intensity the cantor evoked in a population enduring persecution and hardship. The advent of sound recordings meant that as early as 1903, this Eastern European notion of the star cantor could create international reputations via media exposure.

In America, where the first known cantor is documented in 1685, fluctuations in the role of sacred singer far outweigh any real stability in the institution. The cantorate developed as a result of successive waves of immigration (first German Jews, then Eastern Europeans); shifting Jewish ideologies, producing denominational divisions (the rise of Reform Judaism among Germans, the redefining of traditionalism among Easterners); the impact of Americanization (Protestantization of the synagogue, lack of government rule through Jewish communal bodies, relaxation of observance); and the exigencies of Jewish history (the Holocaust, creation of the State of Israel).

Throughout all this change, two factors key to our discussion remained stable: the maleness of the profession and the view of the cantor as servant of the congregation. It was not until 1976 that even one denomination (Reform) allowed ordination of female cantors; only in 1987 did a second (Conservative) permit it. Meanwhile, each congregation—despite denominational affiliation—has always been a world unto itself, defined

by the views of its membership and its lay leadership. Today, those views determine whether a synagogue wants a full-time professional cantor to be on the job, in the building, some forty to seventy hours a week, or whether it desires or can afford only a part-time cantor to run the weekly and holiday services. Every point exists on the hiring continuum, from just High Holiday "cantoring," with no professional at the weekly service, through year-round duties in four spheres: the musical (choir-building and leading, special events), the educational (working in the Sunday and after-school religious program, adult education, training boys and girls for the bar or bat mitzvah ceremony), the pastoral (hospital and condolence visits, officiating at weddings and funerals), and the administrative (serving on committees, writing for the bulletin, filling in for the rabbi).

Mentioning the rabbi brings up a crucial point about being a cantor. In traditional Eastern Europe, the rabbi was a legal authority consulted for opinions and rulings (on disputes, divorce, issues of Jewish law), and the cantor was the clergyman who appeared in the synagogue. In America, however, Protestantization meant that the rabbi's role paralleled the minister's, taking a dominant position in the congregational hierarchy. For the most Protestantized denomination, the Reform, an organist and choir leader replaced the cantor altogether for decades. Even today, Reform congregations that have *never* known the leadership of a cantor—perhaps for over a century—find themselves hiring a woman in her twenties to fill a brand-new professional role. Among the moderately right-wing groups that coalesced in the 1910s and 1920s to form the Conservative movement, congregations kept the cantor but curbed the virtuoso star role granted the sacred singer in Eastern Europe, allowing the charismatic rabbi-preacher to take charge internally and also to serve as the Jewish community's spokesman to Gentile America. So commanding did the rabbi's role become that the classic 1950s sociological studies of American Jewry do not even mention the cantor when surveying the synagogue as crucial ethnic

institution. Thus, today's cantors of whatever affiliation find themselves in an uneasy relationship to another clergy figure, with implications for gender to be spelled out below.[4]

Finally, the rise of American professionalism after World War II has added a new element to the mix: cantorial training programs and organizations that define competence and issue credentials. This development has resulted in a deep split among sacred singers between duly accredited insiders and "unofficial" outsiders, often part-timers, who are cut off from the benefits of professionalization: prestige, placement service, model contracts specifying fringe benefits, pensions, professional meetings, and the like. On the other side of the hiring process, a congregation must decide whether to accept or to ignore its own denomination's placement guidelines, which stress considering only graduates of the official training programs.[5] However, individual congregants may not make this distinction, calling whoever is hired to lead services "cantor." Here again, the range of solutions is wide, as one professional in my study notes: "If. . . you are hired, in their eyes you are their cantor according to the role that they require, and every congregation is very different" (L.E.).[6]

It must be clear to the reader by now that isolating the factor of gender within such a complex system is far from straightforward.[7] Nevertheless, what I intend to do in the following analysis is just that: locate the issue of female gender within the interlocking and overlapping set of variables that make up the sociology of the cantorate since 1976.[8] Under several headings, I will look for insights gained from insiders' views of their careers to help orient us in a search for the significance of femaleness as a distinctive feature. My basic approach will be to use *intersections* of elements of women's experience in the cantorate with roles, social movements, and institutional structures available in mainstream American and Jewish-American society. The data base consists of interviews with twenty-eight full- and part-time female cantors, both accredited and nonaccredited.[9]

INTERSECTIONS WITH FEMINISM

It is not hard to find some handy overlaps between the experiences of female cantors and those of other American women in the 1950s through 1980s. As one Jewish feminist volume puts it: "The women's liberation movement has given Jewish women permission, and a vocabulary, to express our agony and revulsion and anger at women's second-class status in Judaism."[10] A quote from a female cantor, such as the following, is almost a textbook citation of a general pattern:

> Women didn't take decisions in those days. We did not know that we can be responsible for our own destiny, that we could make changes ourselves, not by just having things happening to us, which is really what had been happening to me my whole life. (L.E.)

The denial of a profession to a girl leaves a lasting impression, and can be couched in terms familiar to any feminist:

> I wanted to be a cantor when I was four years old. . . . I used to sit right in front of [the cantor] and my little legs were dangling off the chair. . . . he would sing and I knew I wanted to do it, and finally a few years after that I told somebody I wanted to do it, and they said, "no, you can't, there's no women doing that. . . . you have to be a mother." (L.C.)

Although space does not allow a full survey of feminism and the cantorate, I can point to several basic overlaps, such as the notion of parity: "I'm not a staunch feminist [but] I feel that if you're a secretary and a man's a secretary you should be paid equal. I believe if I'm a cantor and you're a cantor we should be paid equal" (L.B.).

As many case studies of feminism on the job have shown, the woman is also faced with "a continuous process of proving yourself" (K.J.). One also finds the appeal to internal quality control among women professionals as a way of changing minds. Here it is coupled with a dig at male and lay

notions of standards, to which women must conform and perhaps condescend:

> That [anti-female] attitude will never change if we have charlatans, because we have to prove ourselves. We have to say: yes, we have to do this job. . . at least as well as it is *thought* the male cantors do their job. (L.G.)

How easy is it to impress a suspicious congregation? Among Reform Jews, who arrive at the synagogue with less cultural baggage about the impossibility of women's ritual leadership than Conservatives, in at least some cases women can do very well winning over suspicious congregants: "They're starving for it. They love it. I parade around with the Torah for the *hakofa* [circumambulation of the synagogue on the holiday of Simchat Torah] and they come and they kiss the Torah and then they kiss me" (L.C.). Apparently, even the more right-wing can be charmed:

> At a bar mitzvah you get a whole new crowd. . . that you've never seen before that belong to the family of the boy or girl and they walk in, and the ones that wear *yarmulkes* [skullcaps] or *tallit* [prayer shawls] they are suspicious, and very cool. . . . And as the service gets going, you can just read the expressions on their face. They change from just cool and cautious to a friend. (L.E.)

What these women are saying, in essence, is that given the chance, they can easily equal men on their own grounds: the pulpit. However, the notion of parity is complex when it comes to the relationship between cantor and rabbi on the staff, as opposed to the question of male versus female cantors. Take the issue of whether the woman should wear a robe at services if the male rabbi does:

> I don't wear a robe; I wear a *tallit* [prayer shawl] and *kipa* [skullcap]. . . . My *rabbi* wears a robe. . . . it's my personal preference. Not that a robe automatically

> masculinizes you; on a holiday I wear a robe; perhaps in future jobs. (K.F.)

Since each small decision about role display is important to one's ego and to the signal being sent to the congregation by the liturgical actors on the pulpit, it is no surprise that feminism must be nuanced. In this case, the prominence of the cantor at High Holiday time (which for most congregations is the only time they hire a cantor) outweighs the woman's willingness to defer to the rabbi—for whatever reasons (and they might be multiple)—on a weekly basis. "Perhaps in future jobs" implies a considerable degree of flexibility, combined with a pragmatic approach to the volatile work situation. For the women interviewed, feminism seems strategic, not doctrinaire. Angry when deprived of equality at any level, they nevertheless appreciate the problems stemming from overstating the case for female participation, as becomes clear in this discussion of a congregation in which the possibility of majority female control of synagogue life has arisen:

> We have an [female] assistant rabbi. . . . the president of our congregation is also a woman.[11] So therefore it's three women and one man on the *bima* [pulpit]. . . . Because of the imbalance, I do believe that when we hire our next assistant [rabbi], he will be a man; I'm certain of that. (D.H.)

Another cantor's analysis of the situation makes clear why the woman just quoted wants to exert control over her congregation's gender direction: "The Reform don't want women; they really want men, because most of their rabbis are turning into women too—they don't want two women" (K.I.).

One of the problems of applying feminist criteria to the cantorate is that the woman on the pulpit is only one of many women in synagogue life, from ordinary dues-paying members to those who rise to prominence within the lay leadership hierarchy, like the synagogue president just mentioned. Here we have the case of a unique professional in the midst

of a large population of women, who may or may not identify with the cantor. On the one hand we have reports of strong feminine support for the woman cantor, but on the other there are distrust and opposition, summarized in the judgment that "the people who oppose women being cantors are often women" (L.F.). Female cantors may even be driven to psychoanalyze their fellow women to find answers, as in this analysis of the issue of *kol isha*, the traditional bar to female sacred singers, based on the notion that the sensuality of a woman's voice would "seduce" male worshipers from concentrating on their obligation to pray:[12]

> The very reason that women can't do it [is] because of *kol isha*, because women are supposed to be arousing to men, that's what women want in their spiritual leader. They want to be aroused themselves [by a male cantor]. (I.G.)

Attitudes like this may lead to a feminist notion that women can and should do it differently from men, even in the face of stereotypes like *kol isha*. One cantor asked, "What's wrong with a little sensuality if it creates a bond between me and God?" (L.A.).

As opposed to this deeply ethnic side to cantorial feminism, one of the more mainstream ways in which the cantorate intersects with the women's movement is in the notion of career choice. Whereas older women come to the profession from "women's professions" such as teaching or housewifing, younger female cantors have switched from such fields as banking; their choice is between moving up in the corporate hierarchy or out into the world of aesthetically satisfying work: "I was thinking, I want to advance in my job; I really need an MBA. . . . and then the idea of doing music as a serious career came back to me. . . . I would work by day and sing by night" (K.F.).

While I have shown a strong overlap with basic feminism in some areas of the cantorate, albeit in a nuanced and flexible

way, at other times there are disjunctures. In the area of religious observance, most American feminists tend to think of piety as incurring female subservience. Yet in the case of a Jewish-American girl destined to become a cantor, a decision to move rightward religiously meant liberation from what she perceived as the degrading status of being a cheerleader:

> In my junior year of high school I was on the kickline, and we used to perform at football games. And I remember saying, I'm quitting, next year I won't have to do this, I won't have to be out there and kick on *shabbes*, and I was very happy about that. (K.F.)

The combination of religious observance and feminism can lead to ideological stands that combine the two. Whereas women feel that the Conservative training program must certify women cantors (as they did in 1987) as a matter of simple parity, some women insist on this happening not just as a matter of course, but as a matter of law, in this case Jewish legal practice (*halakha*): "We're there [in the program] because we're Conservative Jews. . . . We believe in adherence to Judaism. . . . We'd like to see it resolved according to halakhic process" (K.F.).

This position puts such women at odds with the standard works on modern Jewish feminism of the last decade, which, like earlier male analyses of Jewish-American society, either ignore the position of the cantor or downplay the importance of working within the system. Susannah Heschel's *On Being A Jewish Feminist* puts it this way:

> Feminists may be misdirecting their efforts by attempting to remain within the frameworks of the denominations. . . . the changes made by these denominations in response to particular feminist demands were made not by applying the central principles of each movement. . . . Feminists cannot turn to one or more of the denominations in hope of developing a positive, constructive reconciliation with Judaism.[13]

Heschel—who nowhere in her book mentions women in the cantorate—contends that feminism must operate on principle, not on pragmatism, a stance rarely seen among working women cantors. Indeed, women are often ambivalent about the methods used to push their cause by the denominations but satisfied with the results, as when the Reform training program began forcing congregations to consider female candidates for job openings in 1974:

> I didn't feel good about it, but I felt this was the only way we were going to make any inroads because if these people saw. . . that women were capable of interpreting the prayers that eventually a woman would get one of these positions, which is what happened. (J.C.)

INTERSECTIONS WITH ESTABLISHED MALE ROLES

I have already touched upon this topic by citing the question of wearing a robe. As with every area of inquiry, one finds a full range of responses, ranging from those who anticipated and have found no problems as a female in a formerly all-male profession to those who suffered severe problems in remolding a gender-specific model. One woman graphically describes the stress of "invading" a male domain:

> If I were coming into another congregation where there's been a revered rabbi and a revered male cantor for fifty years. . . I would stand up there straight and I would give them 100% and they wouldn't know that inside the sweat is pouring down my arm and that I'm shaking, and that I'm wetting myself from fright. (L.B.)

Surprisingly, even a younger woman preparing herself for the cantorate can wonder whether she has the self-confidence to break into the profession:

> Even though I know it's something that's in me to be, and that. . . God gave me the gift, the talent, the ability, the interest to love, and the caring, and the religious

> feeling and everything that goes with it, I have such a difficult time getting past that to say I'm gonna take a job and be that role. (I.G.)

Sometimes the price of joining the club is more subtle. Whereas male cantors report some discomfort with the gold-fish-bowl life of the clergy, it seems more telling when women comment on it:

> It's hard to walk into a supermarket and run into a congregant who's curious about what you eat and what you're buying and what you're wearing in a supermarket; or in a restaurant who you're with, can you afford to eat in that restaurant. . . . (K.G.)

It is probably safe to assume that "what you're wearing" and "who you're with" are less important when judging men than women in American middle-class society. The problem of finding a mate seems much more aggravated among women:

> I find a lot of men are intimidated, not by me but by my title. . . . it just would never occur to them to get involved with a person such as a cantor. . . . they imagine a cantor to be holier than most, and they don't want a wife that's holy, I suppose. I don't know if female cantors have a harder time meeting men than male cantors have meeting women; my guess is that women have a harder time. (K.G.)

One woman states it more succinctly: "It has to be a somewhat perverse male who will put up with a female cantor in the family" (K.I.).

If a female cantor does have a spouse, it is important that he be supportive, and several women have testified to the importance of such support at critical junctures;[14] men much less often point to their wives as key figures, perhaps because they take wifely reinforcement of career goals for granted. At least I have not recorded any anecdotes such as the following where the helper was the wife:

> There was an ad, "Cantor needed for High Holidays." I saw a New Jersey number and said—and I was desperate, really almost suicidal, it was that depressing—and my voice was shot. I said to my husband, "If it wasn't New Jersey I'd give these people a call." He said, "What does New Jersey have to do with it?" . . . I got the job. The money was a joke. I had to travel an hour to get there. I adored it. (L.E.)

In addition to the husband's tolerance of his wife's lengthy commute, implicit in this account is the fact of the husband's income as a basic family support, freeing the woman to take a "joke" salary to relieve her psychic distress. In short, to adopt a man's role, some women need a man's backing, both financial and moral. This tends to be more common among the older generation, of course, among whom woman are turning to the cantorate after years as a housewife or in other "female" employment. As one older woman puts it:

> Sometimes if you have a man who—"dinner's not ready," or "do you have to do this?" I don't have that, and that's been a very contributing factor. . . . he's just been a good spouse and a good husband, and that needs to be acknowledged. (L.B.)

Still, if children come, the resulting disturbance in a family's equilibrium seems to be part of the price women pay for shouldering a male role. Some women speak of the difficulties of being unable to celebrate holidays the way they'd like to as mothers, since they have to be up there on the pulpit celebrating them for others. The problem can come up on a weekly basis, since among observant Jews, the arrival of the Sabbath on Friday night has traditionally been a central moment for women's domestic ritual and social sovereignty, as opposed to the male domination of the sacred space of the synagogue. It is significant that a women's magazine, alert to the problems of the new working woman, carried the follow-

ing remarks by a female cantor on the problems she faces leaving her children to go off to work. That the magazine was *Vogue*—hardly a feminist or religious publication—shows the extent to which the cantorate can be seen as just another profession:

> I try to be honest with my children. I tell them that I love what I'm doing on my job but I miss them very much. I can't always be home at the dinner and bedtime hours . . . but I always telephone and tell the children what time I'll be home.[15]

Another problem in taking over from men is a strictly musical one: the voice. For older congregants, the cantor is the voice of the synagogue, and that voice belongs to a powerful male, a preference reinforced by the classic recordings of the star cantors. Thus aesthetic, rather than legal, issues can keep a woman off the pulpit: "The man [that replaced her] had an operatic background; he had what they were looking for. . . . they had had a [male] tenor and they had me, and I think they wanted a lower voice" (L.F.).

A more common issue having to do with voice quality is the lack of liturgical music written for the woman's voice. To date, women have mostly modified music written for men, transposing vocal parts from bass and tenor to soprano. One self-confident professional imagines change will be forthcoming due to simple supply and demand: "There are some synagogue composers who are intrigued by the possibility of writing for a female voice and are doing so. . . . If they want to sell their music, they should write for women cantors as well" (D.H.).

The issue of voice is just one component of a larger matrix in which female cantors operate: the typology of male cantors that characterized the all-male generations. We have seen that one congregation wanted "a voice," that is, prized their sacred singer's ability to move them above all other qualities. Other synagogues might choose teaching abilities,

or personal affability, or any combination of other traits; the point is that to some extent both synagogues and cantors could be sorted out by this sort of capsule description. One knowledgeable woman has told me that indeed, such sorting has begun among full-time, ordained female cantors, who merely fill in the slot expectations that were originally designed for men. The dozen years in which women have been in the profession is far too short a time to tell whether a change of gender will produce a new typology, though it seems inevitable.

One area that will push such a development is that of rabbi-cantor relationships. A woman obviously makes a very different partner and competitor for a male rabbi than traditional typologies allow. The following analysis gives just a brief glimpse into a rather complex pattern of interlocking roles and psychologies:

> Women work well with me. After all, think about the way we're brought up. In most roles in families the woman learned to take a little bit of a submissive role. Two men together, it's difficult, so I think that a rabbi likes working, many times, more with a woman. . . . She's better able, psychologically, to know how to handle a man's ego. (H.I.)

The same woman would much prefer working with a male to working with a female rabbi:

> It's difficult to work with the same sex, you know; it's the same as when you put two animals [of the same sex] together and they start biting each other. . . . Men are better at handling a woman; will take more time and patience than they will with another man.

The fact that the female cantor is disadvantaged by occupying the weaker role in this dyad perhaps explains some of the rhetoric of the argument above: presumably a female rabbi and a male cantor would play out a different dynamic.

In either case, ordinary, mainstream American roles are being acted out in this ethnic, clergy job situation.

INTERSECTIONS WITH OTHER FEMALE ROLES

To what extent the role of female cantor overlaps with that of wife, mother, sister, daughter, or granddaughter is not easy to gauge without extensive interviewing of congregants. Still, the stray remarks of women professionals show a strong awareness of intersections with recognized female roles such as the on-stage woman singer with guitar, an American icon since the coffeehouse days of the 1950s. Reporting on what someone said about another female cantor, one woman commented:

> [They said] "I was at a synagogue in Jersey, something Shalom, and they had a little curly-haired cantor, and she played this guitar, and she was so good," and I wonder if they realize all the effort that went into [her] cantorial training, and what they remember is the fact she played the guitar, and it blows my mind. (L.B.)

The barely disguised bitterness of these remarks may be due to the woman's own experience during a hiring interview:

> The rabbi said, "you'd be great, you're exactly what we would love," he says, "but we really need someone who can play the guitar," and I figured, holy cow, at this stage in my life I've done so much. . . . I'm in my early forties; I really don't want to play the guitar; I do enough. (L.B.)

On the positive side, the same woman expresses delight that she has avoided less prestigious female roles by joining the ranks of the clergy, a more respected profession:

> I love to see people's faces when they say "What do you do?" Maybe they expect to hear cosmetologist, or fashion consultant. . . and I come up with I'm a cantor, and if you're not familiar with what that is, it's the

> musical link on the pulpit between the Jewish people and their God. And their faces drop—it is a trip! (L.B.)

INTERSECTIONS WITH PROFESSIONALISM

Among the cantors interviewed, issues of professionalism raised stronger feelings than any other topic. Remember that two types of women serve congregations: those certified by the training programs and professional organizations and those who go it alone. The male denominational leadership has been vehement in its insistence on placement only for cantors who are accredited and in its denunciation of those who are not. This stance is strongly echoed by the ordained women in the profession. One cantor's response to the question of whether she has any contact with the "unofficial" Women Cantors Network even heaps scorn on the need for professional women to have a gender-specific support group:

> Not on your life, not at all. First of all, I don't personally feel the need for a woman's group so that we can get our feelings out and all that crap. Second of all, many of the women who are part of this alliance are free-lancers. . . and in my humble opinion they're not qualified to call themselves cantors. I resent that some of these women study cantorial music and buy a couple of books, they can read Hebrew and they're cantors. (D.H.)

On the other hand, the woman who founded the WCN in 1982, Deborah Katchko-Zimmerman, holds down a full-time position in a Conservative synagogue, comes from a distinguished line of cantors, and feels that a support group is essential. She speaks of creating "a loving atmosphere in which friendship is fostered between women who share two interests: music and the Jewish tradition."[16] Another reason she felt a need for an organization is because she herself could not join the Cantors Assembly, the all-male Conservative professional society: "When I was appointed, I felt very isolated, since there were no cantors in the area I could meet

with formally. . . . Our organization is very special because it is open; you don't have to take a test to join."

The real issue is whether credentials or sexism is involved in excluding women. At the time of this writing (January 1990), the Conservative training program had already agreed to accredit woman graduates, but the Cantors Assembly had yet to accept them for membership. This continues to be a bone of contention among free-lance women:

> I feel it has nothing to do with their spirituality; it has to do with their politics. . . . I feel I'm called more than lots of those guys, and they're having a men's club. . . . Are we [the WCN] having a women's club? We're willing to let men in . . . as long as they don't tell us what to do. (L.C.)

Some of the complaints women voice are simply the lot of the part-timer: "I have no office, I have no phone; I'm a gypsy there. . . . I get a good hourly wage, but no benefits [as assistant cantor]" (L.C.). However, another women expresses "no problems being an assistant. . . . I don't want the seven-day-a-week life" (L.B.).

Each aspect of professional life, then, is two-edged, depending on the matchup between congregational expectations and the woman's own attitude. The issue of motherhood is a good example. At one congregation, a woman feels comfortable with pregnancy because some of the professional women in her congregation helped pass the state's maternity leave legislation, whereas the women at another synagogue are queasy at the thought:

> There are problems with being a mother, with being a pregnant cantor. There was a position in a Conservative synagogue that was considering women. . . . I was talking to a woman there, who said, "We'd love you to do a [trial] service, but we're just not sure about a pregnant cantor . . ." I said, "I'll wear a robe." (K.F.)

Beyond the practical needs for professional accreditation and affiliation, women hope to make a distinctive spiritual contribution to the cantorate. Clearly, the availability of a pool of dedicated women activists in leadership positions has helped revitalize the Reform movement in recent decades, and doubtless the injection of this new energy will have an impact on the Conservative movement; as one woman said, "if they're smart, they'll take us with open arms. . . since Conservative Judaism is grinding [to a halt]" (L.C.). Mainstream American Judaism continues to feel itself on the defensive from the growing militancy of the Orthodox, so it probably needs to enlist women in the creation of a middle-ground consensus among Jewish-Americans. In the double sense of the word, then, the cantorate has been newly engendered as a force in American Jewish life.

It is hard to draw definitive conclusions from a first-round study of a newly emerging socio-religio-musical phenomenon such as the engendering of the cantorate. Though in my larger study I referred to works on women in the professions, at times the authors told me that the cantorate appeared to present a unique case for feminist analysis. Given ethnomusicology's very recent interest in the issue of gender, I can only hope that such complex situations as that of women in the cantorate will serve as building blocks for future theory.

NOTES

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1. Mark Slobin, *Chosen Voices: The Story of the American Cantorate* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

2. In my longer study, I insisted on the term *hazzan* for the professional role involved, partly due to the predominance of data

for members of the still all-male Cantors Assembly, which deliberately uses the term. The present study is by definition centered on women excluded from the CA, and since none of the informants involved used *hazzan*, it seems reasonable to adopt their usage, so I use *cantor* throughout.

3. Over 90 percent of American Jews are of European origin, most of them from Eastern Europe, having arrived in the great wave of immigration that lasted from the 1880s to the early 1920s; thus space permits only an exploration of this population, though a significant and growing percentage of American Jews comes from Mediterranean and Middle Eastern lands as well.

4. In some cases, however, a durable cantor can outlast a number of transient rabbis and become the pillar of the congregation, illustrating once again the difficulty of generalizing about the American synagogue.

5. These are all located in New York, housed at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (Reform), the Jewish Theological Seminary (Conservative), and Yeshiva University (Orthodox), and are the by-product of American Jewry's cultural isolation following the Holocaust. Prior to World War II, a steady influx of European immigrant master cantors, who both served congregations and taught American-born students, meant that there was no urgency to develop native training programs.

6. The initials that follow quotations from cantors represent my random assignment of names to each of the more than 125 people interviewed for the History of the American Cantorate project.

7. Among the complexities avoided here is a complete account of the role of gender in Judaism, a topic too large and manifold to fit into a simple summary and one that is today being reexamined historically in some detail (e.g., when *did* the idea of separate seating in synagogues arise?). Suffice it to say that the female sacred sphere was traditionally more domestic than public, women being considered free of the obligation men faced of a wide variety of time-based (daily ritual, liturgical calendar), text-related performative acts. This remains the position in Orthodox Judaism.

8. Of course, the question of the maleness of the cantorate is also well worth considering separately. The earliest sources that outline qualifications for serving as *sheliach tzibbur* are nearly two thousand years old, and define ideal male types. Some strictures were consistently applied, such as a requirement that cantors be married. The dissolution of age-old regulations in recent decades is part of a redefinition of maleness that is worth looking into; the

issue of gay cantors, for example, is particularly intriguing as a wedge into studying the gendered nature of the cantorate.

9. Full-time, accredited cantors were necessarily members of the American Conference of Cantors, the Reform organization, as the Conservatives began ordaining women in 1987 only at the close of the Project period (January 1984 to June 1987). The nonaccredited women are all members of the Women Cantors Network, an organization of both accredited and nonaccredited women founded in 1982. I am grateful to Jeffrey Summit for some of the ACC interviews and to Shayna Mueller for all of the WCN interviews. Some of the women work in Conservative synagogues, but most are in Reform congregations. As the Orthodox wing of American Judaism, in all its subdenominational variety, rejects the notion of allowing women to officiate at services, it is not in our picture.

10. Susan Weidman Schneider, *Jewish and Female: Choices and Changes in Our Lives Today* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984), p. 21.

11. Several stages of access to the handling of Scriptures, the conferring of a congregational honor, and the achievement of administrative authority mark the advance of women to authority within American Judaism in the 1960s and 1970s; again, Reform congregations moved more quickly than Conservative. Thus, it is possible that having a woman president might come later than having a woman cantor in some synagogues, earlier in others. Reform Judaism began admitting women to the rabbinate in 1975, Conservatives in 1985.

12. The other, more central, legalistic argument used by the Orthodox against female cantors is that while men are obligated to pray, women are not; hence the cantor's ritual function of "covering" for men who perform prayers incompletely or imperfectly cannot be accomplished by a woman, who *by nature* is not responsible for the task. This issue also figured in the Conservative decision to allow ordination of women as rabbis who, like cantors, serve as *shaliach tzibbur* ("messenger of the congregation") these days as prayer leaders, unlike the older European context, in which rabbis served as authorities on Jewish law only.

13. Susannah Heschel, *On Being a Jewish Feminist* (New York: Schocken, 1983), pp. xxx–xxxi.

14. Male mentors figured frequently in accounts of careers, ranging from childhood role models and supportive fathers to teachers to colleagues who helped women in job situations.

15. Vicki Axe, untitled quotation in *Vogue*, May 1986, p. 108. Axe's predicament is one experienced by many Jewish career women, according to a recent study that shows that whereas such women are remarkably successful at juggling marriage, career, and children, they find little support from the Jewish community. The sociologist involved, Rela Geffen Monson, says, "Jewish women are committed to the Jewish community, but the Jewish community is not committed to them ("Jewish Women, Careers and Religion," *The New York Times*, Jan. 14, 1988, p. C5).

16. Linda Polonsky, "Women Cantors Meet to Talk of Successes, Setbacks," *The Jewish Week*, Jan. 9, 1987, pp. 35–36. Recent correspondence from Women Cantors Network leaders suggests the group aims at going beyond being a female support group to acting as a multigender professional organization.