

Zeev Levin

The *Khujum* Campaign in Uzbekistan and the Jewish Women of Bukhara

Introduction

A women's liberation campaign was carried out in Uzbekistan by the Soviet administration during the second decade of its presence in the region – as was the case in the other republics of Central Asia. During its first years the government ignored various aspects of public life that did not fit its Communist dogmas because it needed to establish a solid administration. The initial focus was on issues such as the “Basmachi” uprising,¹ the creation of local administrative cadres via the *korenizatsiia* (nativization) program, the delimitation of new separate national administrative units, and land and water reforms.²

Once the major preparations had been made and the Soviet administrative system stood on solid ground, attention was turned to ideological deviations. Whereas during the first half of the 1920s the party's agitation against religion and the oppression of women was minor, it became both frequent and loud after 1926. The turning point was marked by the fourth convention of the *TsKKP(b)Uz* (Central Committee of the Uzbek Communist Party) in October 1926 that demanded action for *raskreposhchenye jenskih mass* – the emancipation of the female masses. Later, this was called the *khujum*, an Uzbek term for ‘assault’ coined as a popular slogan for the masses.³ The party demanded the application of a hard-line policy to

1 The “Basmachi” movement was active in Central Asia from 1916 till the late 30s. The movement was inspired by nationalist ideas and focused on resistance to Russian imperialist and later communist rule, cf. Glenda Fraser, *Basmachi*, in: *Central Asia Survey*, 6, 1 (1987), 1–73, and 2 (1987), 7–62.

2 On these issues see: Alexandre Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush, *Moslem National Consciousness in the Soviet Union*, Chicago 1979, 145–157; Terry Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, Cornell 2001, 133–187; Rakhima Aminova et al. eds., *Istoriia Uzbekskoi SSR* [The History of the Uzbek SSR], vol. 3, Tashkent 1967, 376–415.

3 Cf. Kh. Shukurova, *Kommunisticheskaia partiia Uzbekistana v bor'be za raskreposhchenie zhenshchin (1924–1929)* [The Communist Party of Uzbekistan in a Struggle for Women's Emancipation (1924–1929)], Tashkent 1961, 93. The term *raskreposhchenye*, literally meaning to be released from slavery, has a positive connotation. But when adopted, it was not presented as optional. Nor was the welfare of Uzbek women the goal of the campaign which was rather a means for increasing production and for transforming the traditional civic structure into a Soviet one. The term *khujum* has also a dual meaning: a proletarian attack for a better future and the destruction of local traditions and customs.

bring about real social change in religious and family values and would not accept mere lip service. The campaign targeted traditional regional values and practices that were classed as humiliating for women who were denied equal standards. In particular, assaults were made against the *paranja* (veil) and *kalym* (bride money), as well as against polygamy, child marriage, women's illiteracy, and the prevention of outdoor work. The most vivid symbol of the *khujum* became the unveiling and, in some cases, the public burning of *paranjas* which in Soviet eyes symbolized women's exclusion from productive society. The hostile response by traditionalists, including local Communist activists as well as religious people, caused the *Communist Party* to target these 'backwards' forces. During the campaign the party made a major effort to disarm religious authorities by creating alternative, civic institutions that were backed by a civil law code that was drawn up to replace traditional customs and rules. When they discovered problems in implementing these alternative institutions and found unexpected obstacles within the Soviet administration itself, the party reconsidered its policy. It turned to its nationalities cadres and demanded that they set a personal example prior to a general implementation.⁴

The campaign created a difficult situation that trapped women between a rock and a hard place. The party and the conservatives both applied violence and punished women and their families. The *Communist Party* pressured those who did not participate in the campaign and it had "pioneer gangs" harass veiled women. The clergy and the conservatives on their part portrayed unveiled women as challengers to traditional and religious values. They threatened to expel participants of the campaign from the community and to cast unveiled women out as prostitutes – which encouraged family members to react violently against the "shame" that a woman would cause by her "immoral" behavior. As a result, many women were harmed, raped, or killed during the *khujum*.⁵

4 On the History of the *khujum* cf. Shukurova, *Kommunisticheskaia*, see note 3, 88–128; and Gregory J. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat. Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919–1929*, Princeton 1974, 226–248, 322–359. Moderate critiques of the implementation of the *khujum* was already made by Soviet researchers in the early 1960s; cf. Shukurova, *Kommunisticheskaia*, see note 3, 121, it was elaborated by Massell, and is present in the recent research of Shoshana Keller, *To Moscow not to Mecca, 1917–1948*, London 2001, 115–118. In order to avoid confusion, except in book titles all non-English terms are, written according to Russian spelling rules even if they are not of Russian origin (as, for instance, *khujum* and not *hujum* or *kbudjum*).

5 There were even some cases in which Soviet officials and party members who held conservative views themselves treated unveiled women as prostitutes; cf. Massell, *Proletariat*, see note 4, 304 and Marianne Kamp, *Remembering the hujum: Uzbek Women's Words*, in: *Central Asia Monitor*, 1 (2001), 2.

The State of the Research

The *khujum* in Uzbekistan has been studied by a number of Soviet and western scholars. Despite addressing the issue from a range of different aspects and using a variety of sources, these studies have generally failed to stress the national and religious differences that existed within the multiethnic, heterogeneous society living in the territory of Uzbekistan.

The historical study of the *khujum* was begun by Soviet scholars in the early 1960s. As might be expected, they pointed out the tremendous progress brought to the East by the *Communist Party*, whose battle with and ultimate triumph over conservative forces was described at great length. In order to avoid dealing with differences within the complex society of Uzbekistan, they addressed the subject in collective terms such as “Uzbek women”⁶ and “women of native nationalities” (*korenyie*) or they spoke of them as “women of the East”.⁷ Western scholars took a different, more critical approach concerning the aims of the *khujum* campaign and its outcome, but did little to differentiate between groups when dealing with the subject. In his pioneering work, Gregory J. Massell criticized the premises and the outcome of Soviet policies but still discussed women as a homogeneous whole.⁸ The results of Massell’s study were essentially determined by his exclusive reliance on Soviet periodicals and publications that also treated Uzbek society uniformly.

Recent work, based on archival sources, represents a variety of research disciplines and perspectives. Dilarom Alimova stresses the delicate position of Moslem women in the transformation of society and the development of industry during the *khujum*.⁹ Shoshana Keller concludes that the “liberation policies” were in fact an assault against Islam and the Moslem tradition with Moslem women as its tool.¹⁰ Douglas Northrop addresses the subject from a different perspective by studying the delicate position of men in official party positions caught up in the campaign and these men’s reactions.¹¹ Marianne Kamp’s research is based on the personal recollections of *khujum* participants. As in earlier studies, these fail to differentiate between Uzbek and Moslem identities and treat the participants in the campaign

6 Shukurova, *Kommunisticheskaia*, see note 3, 24f.

7 Aminova, *Istoriia*, see note 2, 466–476.

8 Massell, *Proletariat*, see note 4, 93f; see also the Constance list there.

9 Dilarom Alimova, A Historian’s View of Khudjum, in: *Central Asian Survey*, 17, 1 (1998), 147–155.

10 Keller, Moscow, see note 4, 115 and her article: Trapped between State and Society: Women’s Liberation and Islam in Soviet Uzbekistan, 1926–1941, in: *Journal of Women’s History*, 1 (1998), 20–44.

11 Douglas Northrop, Languages of Loyalty: Gender, Politics, and Party Supervision in Uzbekistan, 1927–41, in: *Russian Review*, 59, 2 (2000), 179–201.

in a uniform manner.¹² A notable exception can be found in Northrop's recent work where he has raised the issue of ethnic and cultural differences in the Soviet East that had previously been ignored. These differences were not developed but presented within a general "national differences" debate.¹³ Most studies simply fail to differentiate between 'Uzbek' as a nationality or ethnicity and 'Uzbek' as citizenship and they do not consider that Moslems may belong to almost any one of the 189 different nationalities or ethnicities living in the territory of Uzbekistan according to a 1926 census, with ethnic Uzbeks forming merely half of the population. Instead, they treat "Uzbeks" as a united, homogeneous, and comprehensive body and tend to ignore the existence of cultural, religious, and national minorities as well as the different traditional societies which practiced a range of cults and were bound to a variety of religious structures in Uzbekistan and in Central Asia. In fact, each of these groups could have had a different response to the Soviet administration and its efforts to reconstruct the conservative, traditional communities, and each group's attitude towards the "women's emancipation campaign" could have been influenced by family descent and many other factors; or the members' efforts to maintain their personal affiliations could have conflicted with the improvement in their personal economic conditions and the opportunities for social mobility promised by the party.

The Aim of the Article

This article attempts to study the *khujum* era by concentrating on one unique minority group: Bukharan Jewish women. It not only contributes to a growing literature that examines Stalinism from a variety of local and regional perspectives, but also extends that literature by considering issues of gender, ethnicity, and religious-cultural identity. It draws on internal government reports and investigations at the state, regional, and local levels as well as on personal appeals and letters sent to the authorities, and it also includes the relevant published sources.¹⁴

12 As a partial exception Marianne Kamp does mention in one interview a case dealing with Tatar Moslem women who were not veiling but she does not develop this issue; cf. Kamp, *Hujum*, see note 5, 2.

13 Cf. Douglas Northrop, *Nationalizing Backwardness*, in: Grigor Suny ed., *A State of Nations*, Oxford 2001, 191–213.

14 The sources for this study are from: *The Central State Archive of the Republic of Uzbekistan* (TsGARUz) in Tashkent and the *Samarkand Regional State Archive* (SOGA). References to Uzbek archival material use the Russian terms of fond (collection), opis' (inventory number), delo/dela (file/files), and list (page) and are hereafter abbreviated as f., op., d./dd., and 1./ll., respectively with no specification of the archive unless from SOGA. The subsequent citations are from the collection No. R-86 of the TsIK Uz (Central Executive Committee of Uzbekistan) and the collection No. 277 of Uz KomZET (see note 24).

The main argument of the study is that, due to specific conditions within the Bukharan Jewish community and to the special consideration for Bukharan Jewish women taken by the authorities, the *khujum* campaign was not totally rejected by traditional Jewish authorities – as it was by traditional Moslem society and the majority of Moslem clergy. On the contrary, it was tolerated because it could be adjusted to fit basic Jewish religious and traditional values. The *khujum* campaign legalized Jewish women's work outside the house, gave the community a chance to improve its poor social conditions, and supplied it with the opportunity for some mobility via government structures or the women's organizations inside the party.

The Bukharan Jewish Community before the Revolution

The earliest documentation of a Jewish community in the city of Bukhara dates back to the 10th century.¹⁵ It isn't clear where its members came from originally, but some sources think from Iran. In any case its thousand-year presence in the region allowed the Jewish community to integrate into its environment and to assimilate culturally, but it maintained some segregation due to the religious differences that separated them from their Moslem environment.¹⁶ Jews adopted much of the regional folklore and customs, as well as clothing, food, and language, so Jewish women rarely went out of their courtyards, married at a young age, and wore the *paranja* (veil) when in public, while Jewish men practiced polygamy and paid the *kalym* (bride price). They spoke the native dialect based on the Tajik language but lived in separate *mahala* (neighborhoods). They were deprived of some rights and considered to have a lower status than Moslems, but they were able to conduct an autonomous community life by providing their own services. They lived mainly in the central cities of the region so they concentrated on the crafts and trade, which became their traditional occupations.¹⁷

The term 'Bukharan Jews' comes from the legislative terminology created by Tsarist rule to describe native resident Jews (*tuzemnye*) who were originally from the Khanate of Bukhara which was located along the southern border of Russian

15 On the origins of the Bukharan Jewish community cf. Michael Zand, Bukharan Jews, in: *Encyclopedia Iranica*, 4, 183–192.

16 On '*chala*' and Jewish-Moslem relations cf. I. Babahanov, K voprosu o proishozhdenii gruppy evreev-musulman v Bukhare [On the Question of Origin of a Group of Jewish Moslems in Bukhara], in: *Sovetskaya Etnografia*, 3 (1951), 161f.

17 Bukharan Jews were craftsmen in copper and silver, wool, and silk painting. On the occupation of Jews in pre-revolutionary Uzbekistan cf. Roman Rabich, *Predprinematel'naia deiatel'nost bukharskikh evreev v dorevoliutsionnom Turkestane* [The Business Enterprises of Bukharan Jews in Pre-Revolutionary Turkestan], in: Iliya Dvorkin ed., *Evrei v Srednei Azii proshloe i nastoiashchee* [Jews in Central Asia Past and Present], St. Petersburg 1995, 92–110.

Turkestan. After the Communist Revolution of 1917, most of its area was included into the Uzbek Soviet Republic formed in 1924. The native Jewish population under direct Tsarist rule was emancipated, while those under Bukhara Khanate rule were left in their previous condition. The changes following the Russian conquest of Central Asia from in the 1860s provided part of the community with occupational opportunities that had never existed before, such as land and real-estate ownership.¹⁸ They also opened up the world to the Jewish community: Wealthy Jewish entrepreneurs and businessmen developed business ties with many cities in Russia and Europe, sent their children to study in schools there, and met with Ashkenazi Jews who had started to settle in Central Asia in association with the Russian administration. The two communities of Bukharan and Ashkenazi Jews remained separate; they prayed in separate Synagogues where available, lived in different quarters, and spoke different languages.¹⁹

The Influence of the Revolution on the Bukharan Jewish Community

The Soviet Revolution ‘emancipated the workers of the East’ and brought equal rights to the citizens in Central Asia, with the exception of those who were considered to be ‘exploiters of other people’s work’. The latter were denied rights and labeled *lishbentsy* (the deprived) by the Soviet legislators, they were left with no citizenship rights, and their property was confiscated. With no assets or any means to provide for their families, they were driven to a state of bankruptcy.

The mutual aid system of the Jewish community came to assist those in need and the N.E.P. (New Economic Policy) of the early 1920s provided some with an opportunity to restore their small businesses.²⁰ Nevertheless, the general condition of the community was very poor.

This situation drew the attention of government authorities. Uzbek Prime Minister Faizulla Khodjaev made a speech stressing the urgent need to aid and to develop the Bukharan Jewish community. Khodjaev’s speech was a starting point for a variety of actions aimed at improving the situation.²¹

18 Albert Kaganovich, Jews and Autonomy in Kokand, 1917–1918, in: *Jews in Eastern Europe*, 1–2 (1999), 74–87.

19 Roman Rabich, Rosiiskie evrei v dorevoliutsionnom Turkestane [Russian Jews in Pre-Revolutionary Turkestan], in: Dvorkin, Azii, see note 17, 133–150.

20 In Samarkand alone this system took responsibility for more than 300 orphans and hundreds of poor or crippled individuals; cf. f.86 op.1 d.4503 ll.73-74.

21 Khodjaev’s address was highlighted in: *Pravda Vostoka*, June 21, 1926.

- The status of Bukharan Jews as a native nationality (*korenoie*) was underlined and as such given priority within the *korenizatsiia* nativization apparatus.²²
- Bukharan Jews became a “special attention” minority group: The community was constantly inspected and evaluated by *National Minorities Commissions* which operated within the Uzbek government.²³
- The issue of Jewish mass unemployment was addressed by *Komzet*, and *Ozet* branches that were established in Uzbekistan in 1926. They aimed to help Jews become agricultural and industrial laborers.²⁴

Since these general measures were oriented towards the whole of the Bukharan Jewish community, women benefited from them as part of the collective but not individually. In order to improve their condition additional steps were required that followed only after the *khujum* campaign had been set in motion.

The First Steps of Khujum among the Bukharan Jewish Women

The economic crisis drove Jews²⁵ to seek alternative ways to provide for their households. This eventually led to adaptations and changes in their traditional lifestyle and the family structure demanded by the new economic reality led to self-education and the reorganization of their traditional crafts into communal and productive work. While the *Communist Party* was trying to provide the traditional society with a new ideology, it concentrated its efforts on dress, religious values, and the traditional establishment. On the other hand, government officials tried to

22 Even though Bukharan Jews were considered part of the *korenizatsiia* campaign since 1923, its implementation was problematic and selective. Officials seldom asked for clarifications on this subject, confusing different Jewish groups with Bukharan Jews both before the Khodjaev address and after; cf. inquiries made in 1925: f.86 op.1 d.2597 ll.67- 69, 90, 118, and in 1929: f.86 op.1 d.5266 l.205.

23 Such as *Kommissia Nats Men pri TsIKUz* (Committee of National Minorities within the Uzbek Executive Committee), other committees were functioning within the ministry of education and the party apparatus. After a report in early 1927 “On the Conditions of Jews in Samarkand”, the government decided to dig three additional wells in their neighborhood, to open a medical office, to set up a police post with local Jews as policemen, and to open a court with native language jurisdiction; cf. f.86 op.1 d.3659 l.63.

24 *Komzet* is an acronym of *Komitet po zemel'nomu ustroiistvu trudiascikhsia evreev pri Prezidiume Soveta Natsional'nostei TSIKa SSSR* (Committee for the Land Settlement of Productive Jews within the Presidium of the Nationalities Board as part of the Executive Committee of the Soviet Union). It was established in Uzbekistan in 1926 and dissolved in 1938. *Ozet* is an acronym of *Obshchestvo po zem'nomu ustroiistvu trudiascikhsia evreev v SSSR* (Society for the Land Settlement of Productive Jews in the Soviet Union). It was established in Uzbekistan in 1926 and dissolved in 1938.

25 Hereafter ‘Jews’ stands for Bukharan Jews. Ashkenazi Jews will be noted separately.

improve the Jewish economy by recruiting Jews into office jobs and by organizing workers in cooperatives and agricultural settlements.

The *Communist Party* saw Bukharan Jewish women simply as part of the traditional society of Uzbekistan. It failed to differentiate them as a unique group and did not devote any special consideration to them in the early stages of the *kbujum*. The *Jenotdel*²⁶ (Women's Affairs Branches) concentrated their work on the majority group of Moslem women. More than that, the regional branches of the *Jenotdel* were, as was reported by a special investigation, deliberately neglecting their work among Jewish women, justifying that behavior with the argument that Jewish women were all wives of *lishentsy* and formerly wealthy *burjua*.²⁷ The same report provided an account of the unique behavior of Jewish women claiming that "they veil themselves when someone traditionally dressed is approaching, even if he is Russian, but do not veil when a man dressed in a western style comes by, even if he is Uzbek."²⁸

Following this report, mass meetings of Jewish women were organized all over Uzbekistan that resulted in the claim that the unveiling of Jewish women did not present a real problem for them because it was only a local custom and did not violate any religious rules. But they also concluded that the real problem was the lack of involvement of the government in abolishing illiteracy among Jewish women and in supplying them with jobs in a difficult economic situation.²⁹ The report stated that many Jewish women worked, but their work was performed individually, indoors, and without any organization, guidance, or assistance.³⁰ Because unveiling did not meet with hostility in the Bukharan Jewish community, party agitators did

26 "Women's Affairs Branches" of the *Communist Party* aimed at conducting party work among women; they were abolished in 1930 in the USSR but preserved in the eastern republics; cf. Wendy Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, Cambridge 2002, 56.

27 A special investigation was conducted in August 1927 on "The State of Jewish Women in Uzbekistan"; cf. f.86 op.1 d.4503 l.72.

28 This behavior manifests the complex reality in which women were trapped. The dress code was associated with traditional versus 'modern' and not national or religious values; cf. f.86 op.1 d.4503 l.72.

29 The religious literacy of the participants and the specific demands raised at the gatherings could suggest that these complaints were put in their mouths and were not original sentiments, nevertheless, on January 1, 1928 a meeting of "Toiling Jewish Women of Bukhara" was held; cf. f.86 op.1 d.5274 ll.58-60, and on February 5, 1928 another meeting of Jewish women toilers of Katakurgan took place, cf. f.86 op.1 d.5274 l.63, all raised the same points. Northrop argues that Ashkenazi Jewish women influenced the unveiling of Jewish women and that the Party did not invest much effort in this campaign; cf. Northrop, *Languages*, see note 11, 212. This conclusion is problematic since there were a lot of Ashkenazi Jewish women within *Jenotdel* and there was a suspicious attitude towards 'non-religious Jews'.

30 The author of the report was a Comrade Kalontarov, who had been a permanent member of the Uzbek government since 1925; he was a Bukharan Jew by descent and dealt a lot with Bukharan Jewish community issues. The document was written as a voice of a neglected minority group pointing out its discrimination; cf. f.86 op.1 d.4503 ll.72-73.

not raise issues of 'form' or challenge traditional power structures within the community.

Bukharan Jews were recognized as *korenoie* (that is of native nationality), but implementation of this in the *korenizatsiia* effort was not immediate. The Soviet administration often showed little interest in Jewish participation and had a hard time in distinguishing between 'native' and 'non-native' Jews who should or should not be involved in *korenizatsiia* – even after the clarifications of the Khodjaev speech. This treatment was the subject of many appeals made by Bukharan Jews to higher authorities complaining about discrimination against them when applying for government-assigned jobs.³¹ But as Bukharan Jews comprised only half a per cent of the population of Uzbekistan they could not be involved in the *korenizatsiia* campaign on a large scale and their unemployment problems could not be solved.³²

Nevertheless, three Bukharan Jewish women were elected to *Gor-sovet* (the city council) in Samarkand as early as 1926.³³ At the time, Bukharan Jewish women's involvement in the *Komsomol* (Communist Union of the Youth) was relatively high: 60 out of 250 *Komsomol* members in Samarkand's *mabala shark* (the Jewish quarter), were women (25 per cent). Samarkand's Jewish women were also active in local theatres, choirs, and literature clubs.³⁴ In Tashkent two Jewish women were elected to *Gor-sovet* and to *ispolkom* (the executive committee) in February 1927.³⁵ Participation in the *khujum* often demanded personal sacrifices but provided neither the promised personal liberation nor prosperity. One such example is that of Davydova Tursun, who was an active party member and took part in the *khujum* effort but was left without employment and with no means to provide for her children when her husband left her.³⁶

31 See a note on this issue from the Secretary of the *National Minorities Committee of Tashkent Region*, who in June 1929 complains of much confusion in employment offices which did not place 'native' Jews in government positions; cf. f.86 op.1 d.5266 l.205. The same situation was monitored in the "Kalontarov Report" on the situation of the Jewish community in Samarkand; cf. f.86 op.1 d.3659 l.226.

32 In 1928, official statistics show that the Bukharan Jewish community in Uzbekistan numbered 27,000, representing only ½ % of the country's total population of 4.7 million. Nevertheless, due to their urban concentration in the major cities of Samarkand (10,000) and Bukhara (8,000), their numbers climbed up to 10 % of the city population, turning them into the second minority group after the Tajiks; cf. f.86 op.1 d.5267 l.130. Soviet officials seldom manipulated numbers if they did not serve their goals or interests. Other sources even speak of 50,000 Jews in Uzbekistan and of 15,000 in Samarkand. Even though I use numerical citations, I advise that they should be treated with a certain amount of suspicion.

33 Cf. f.86 op.1 d.2110 l.3.

34 All this was prior to the *khujum* campaign; cf. f.86 op.1 d.3659 l.226.

35 Cf. f.86 op.1 d.4508 l.42.

36 See the complaint letter written by Davydova in May 1928 to *KomNatsMen* stating that she and her children were left hungry with no one to aid them; cf. f.86 op.1 d.5270 l.75. It is not clear from her letter what had brought her to this condition.

Changes in the Bukharan Jewish Community due to the *Khujum* Campaign

Marital Status Issues

Native language courts were established to bring national minority groups into the Soviet courts and bind them to the Soviet law code and jurisdiction system. The first nationalities court for Bukharan Jews was opened in Samarkand on November 11, 1926.³⁷ Two further Bukharan Jewish courts were opened after budgetary and ideological obstacles were removed. So by the end of 1928 there were three Soviet courts organized for Bukharan Jews that ran in their native language.³⁸

Another element in introducing the civil code and implementing Soviet law for the native population was the adoption and enforcement of a civil marriage registration system for the Jewish community. This was accomplished through the implementation of a list of legislative measures that accorded women equality in marital, labor, and social issues. Special Soviet civil registry offices, the *Z. A. G. S. (Otdel Zapisi Actov Grazhdanskogo Sostoianiiia)*,³⁹ were established for the Jewish community to register and control cases of marriage and divorce as well as of birth and death.

Z. A. G. S. offices were meant to replace the Jewish community's traditional religious registry,⁴⁰ but Bukharan Jewish women weren't able to benefit from them because the community didn't recognize this civil institution. When a woman divorced or married in one of the *Z. A. G. S.* offices, the change in her civil status wasn't recognized by her community and such women were forced to leave their families, communities, and congregations.⁴¹ More than that, the *Z. A. G. S.* office in the Jewish quarter of Samarkand was financed by Bukharan community funds and not by the government. This not only gave the local Jewish community authorities an important tool of civic control over marital issues it also officially legitimized

37 It is puzzling that Bukharan Jews were chosen to be the first group to attend these courts; cf. f.86 op.1 d.2597 l.111; and f.86 op.1 d.4508 l.39.

38 In late 1928, there were five courts for Tajiks, three for Kazakhs, and one for Kirgizs. The Bukharan Jewish courts were established in Samarkand, Bukhara, and Kokand. Executives in *NarkomYust* (People's Committee of Justice) thought that there was no need for these courts since Bukharan Jews never used Soviet courts anyway; cf. f.86 op.1 d.5266 l.285.

39 *Z. A. G. S.* operated within the *Jewish Public Committee* in Samarkand at least since the beginning of 1926; cf. f.86 op.1 d.3659 l.224. A formal application by the Jewish community of Bukhara was made in December 1927 and was granted immediately by *KomNatsMen*; cf. f.86 op.1 d.4504 l.6.

40 On the formation of the Soviet policy on this issue see Massell, *Proletariat*, see note 4, 200ff.

41 In this regard men and women were considered equal before the religious law. For complaints of Bukharan Jewish women on this issue see Kalontarov's report from February 1928; f.86 op.1 d.5274 ll.70-80.

them.⁴² The government originally intended to introduce a civil code based on the equality of men and women in marital issues but ended by ‘shaking hands’ with the traditional religious establishment. The women were left in the same situation as before because the Z. A. G. S.’ registry procedures were in fact submitted to the traditional authorities and not taken away from them. The result was that long after the introduction of Z. A. G. S Jewish women married and divorced through the religious-traditional institutions in spite of Soviet legislation.⁴³

As for polygamy, this issue was seldom discussed or acted against by Soviet authorities, while Soviet courts in practice generally ignored it.⁴⁴ In March 1931, during a *chistka* (a cleansing campaign) carried out in the Jewish *kolkhoz* (a collective household farm) “*Plody Okteb’ria*” (“Fruits of October”) one of the female members wrote a report on comrade Menahem Haimov in which she claimed that he practiced Judaism and was the son of a Rabbi. She also alleged that he had two wives, one of whom was living in the city and the other kept in the *kolkhoz*. Following this complaint and the subsequent investigation, Haimov was expelled from the *kolkhoz*, but the motivation for his expulsion was not made clear.⁴⁵

Literacy and Nationality Education Issues

Education or literacy level was believed to be one of the most effective tools for increasing social mobility. It is probably because of this notion as well as the high value Jews traditionally put on education as such that the participation of Bukharan Jews in schools became a leading one amongst minorities. In August 1926, 1,726 students were recorded in 21 primary-level, Bukharan Jewish schools. Proportionally, this figure considerably exceeds those of other national minorities – with 1,665 Tajiks in 43 schools, 1,065 Kazakhs in 24 schools, and only 89 Uigurs

42 The Samarkand community paid 50 Ruble per month for this; cf. f.86 op.1 d.3659 l.224. It is clear that the Moslem population was not treated with this kind of consideration; cf. Keller, Moscow, see note 4, 135f.

43 It could be speculated that this unique form was adopted after the “Quba brides” affair, which took place in Azerbaijan in May 1926; cf. Larin’s article in *Pravda* from May 20, 1926 cited in: Yakov Agrunov, *Bol’shaia Sud’ba Malen’kogo Naroda* [The Great Destiny of a Small Nation], Moscow 1995, 89–93, where this affair is described. This situation was changed only after the abolition of Jewish organizations in the mid-30s. Meanwhile Jews had developed a double marriage system, one traditional/religious and the other state/official. This was convenient since the religious authorities were part of the Z. A. G. S. offices and could probably ‘look the other way’ when cases which contradicted Soviet legislation but not a religious rule were presented before them.

44 In this respect the Jewish Community was not an exception. In many cases party officials found it troublesome and unmoral to deal with it; cf. Massell, *Proletariat*, see note 4, 309.

45 The complaint was made not by one of the wives but by a third woman; cf. f.227 op.1 d.149 l.58.

in one school during the same year.⁴⁶ The vast majority of Bukharan Jews studied in their native language whereas other minorities did not.⁴⁷ Participation of adults in *likbez* (abolition of illiteracy) schools was also very high. In 1926 there were 2,768 Bukharan Jewish adult students who made up 7.5 per cent of the total number of Uzbekistan's *likbez* students that year. In the same year Tajiks formed 8.7 per cent and Uzbeks 74 per cent of *likbez* students. This number meant that more than 20 per cent of the total Bukharan Jewish adult population were attending or had at least registered in *likbez* schools.⁴⁸

In 1928, there were two *likbez* schools in Bukhara for Jewish women and they were attended by 78 students. This figure stands out in comparison to Tajik women, who had only one school with 31 students; there was also a school for Farsi women with 38 students attending.⁴⁹ In September 1927, a Bukharan Jewish women's club with 150 members opened in the old city of Bukhara. From September 1927 to March 1928 (that is within the first half year of operation), the club reported 24 lectures, each attended by 100 to 250 women who met at the club's medical office (equipped with a doctor and several nurses).⁵⁰ This participation rate could be estimated as 15 per cent of all adult Jewish women of Bukhara.⁵¹ Bukharan Jewish women also found their way to the *interpros* (international enlightenment) school in Tashkent, where students were taught to become teachers and members of the nationalities cadres of the Soviet administration. In June 1927, there were already three Bukharan Jewish women out of 18 students on the finalists' list.⁵²

46 The per centage of Bukharan Jews in the total population of Uzbekistan was very small (0.5 %), almost the same as the Uiiigur minority group, whereas Tajiks were the biggest minority group with more than 20 % of the total population; cf. f.86 op.1 d.5267 ll.270-273.

47 In 1928, of a total of 2,950 Bukharan Jewish students 2,766 studied in their native language whereas only 69 out of 651 Uiiigurs and 6,623 out of 9,715 Tajiks did so. This could explain why Jews preferred to live in the central cities which could provide national education, a service which was not available in rural areas; cf. f.86 op.1 d.5266 ll.57-59.

48 Cf. f.86 op.1 d.5266 ll.286-290.

49 Cf. f.86 op.1 d.5268 ll.77-88.

50 Cf. f.86 op.1 d.5268 ll.77-88.

51 Assuming that the women were half the community which amounted to 8,000 and that the average family had at least four children. See records of statistical survey: cf. f.86 op.1 d.5267 l.130.

52 The studies were conducted in closed boarding schools which were difficult to attend for both the women and their families who had grown up and still lived in a traditional society; cf. f.86 op.1 d.4508 l.92.

The Question of Women's Work

The unemployment issue was also a concern of government authorities, but it was mainly the members of the Jewish community itself who sought new opportunities and solutions for their grim economic situation. In a special meeting held in *NarkomTrud* (People's Committee of Toil) in October 1926, unemployment among Bukharan Jews was discussed, and it was proposed that, due to the critical situation in the community, special quotas for Jewish women and adolescents would be created in production centers. The proposal met with opposition because it was considered to be a form of exclusive affirmative action for Bukharan Jews, who were thereby being differentiated from other native minorities of Uzbekistan.⁵³ It is not clear whether or not the proposal was rejected, but the concern with this issue and with the far-reaching proposals made in order to solve the problem reflects the degree of motivation that existed within the government at that time.

As early as January 1927, the Uzbek Statistical Survey stated that there were 268 Bukharan Jewish members who were working in *artels* (worker owned cooperatives) that formed 20 per cent of Uzbekistan's minority *artels* – and were second only to Tajik *artels*, which had almost the same number of members.⁵⁴ After about two years, the number reported was almost the same in October 1928; 266 members, but the number of Tajik members had decreased to 199.⁵⁵ During these two years many *artels* disintegrated because of the organizational and economic difficulties they were facing.⁵⁶ The number of Jewish *artel* members was maintained in part by the entry of Jewish women into the work force. The first official women's *artel* in Uzbekistan was the Bukharan Jewish *artel* called "March the 8th." It was established towards the end of 1927 and registered on March 7, 1928. It had 14 women at its founding, but it grew rapidly, reaching 52 members in October 1930 and 84 in 1931. The *artel* dealt with cotton production from raw materials produced in Uzbekistan.⁵⁷ Another organization, established almost at the same time and called "Khujum", was a factory that produced silk thread.⁵⁸ It was established

53 On affirmative action politics for minorities and on unemployment in Uzbekistan cf. Martin, Action, see note 2, 187–197. On the committee cf. f.86 op.1 d.3659 l.100.

54 The number of Tajik *artel* members was 917, but if the Tajikistan Autonomous Regions were excluded, their numbers went down to 332 members; cf. f.86 op.1 d.4508 l.5.

55 Cf. f.86 op.1 d.5266 ll.170-172.

56 Cf. below and note 65.

57 Cf. f.86 op.1 d.5266 l.172 and: SOGA f. 288. op.1.d.33 l.9 (fond 288 is totally dedicated to the *artel*). Within a year, the number of its members rose to 84 but the *artel* had shortages of raw materials which were not supplied by the government, cf. f.277 op.1 d.156 l.98.

58 The production of silk threads from cocoons had been a traditional women's craft for centuries. It is amazing that the Soviet government saw some kind of *raskrepostshchenye* (saved from slavery) in the establishment of this plant. Alimova claims that the success in the organization

in Samarkand's Jewish quarter and by the end of 1927 it employed 130 women – which made it the biggest factory in Samarkand and soon the biggest of its kind in Uzbekistan.⁵⁹ It grew rapidly and by April 1929 it employed 988 workers, 129 of whom were Bukharan Jewish Women.⁶⁰

Early in 1928, five men and two women established a tailors' *artel* in Bukhara, and after two months its membership rose to 25 men and ten women.⁶¹ In Tashkent that year, Bukharan Jews had seven out of 26 national *artels*, and the only female *artel* on record was Jewish. In Bukhara and Khojent the only minority *artels* registered were Jewish.⁶² A report sent to Moscow in September 1928 spoke of eight Jewish women's *artels* in Uzbekistan in which 300 women were working.⁶³ Most of the Jewish *artels* and all of the women's *artels* were highly productive and concentrated on the production or dyeing of cotton, silk, or wool fabric. Other minority *artels* concentrated on the service sphere: such as barbers, bakers, tea house workers, and kerosene distributors.⁶⁴ The Jewish *artels* reported a rapid growth in membership, production, and profits. As a result, they were in constant need of new and additional machinery.⁶⁵ The government was eager to help them, but sometimes this help was only verbal and the Soviet administration failed to supply the *artels* on a regular basis with raw materials and sometimes would not purchase or distribute their products.⁶⁶

The rapid changes in women's work routines in the major cities did not spread with the same speed to rural areas. The government of Uzbekistan began to settle Bukharan Jews on newly irrigated lands in the middle of 1926 through the *Komzet Committee*. Only men worked there in the first years because of the harsh living

of women's *artels* was due to the fact that, because only women worked there so the custom of segregating the sexes wasn't violated; cf. Alimova, *Historian's*, see note 9, 150ff.

59 See: Svetlana Levina, *Khujum eto nastuplenie*, in: Mark Fazilov ed., *Gody Liudi, Fakty ... [Years, People, Facts ...]*, vol. 1, Samarkand 1993, 18–22. Levina claims that the plant was established at the end of 1926 but she does not provide sources to support her data. Following archive sources it was not established before the end of 1927; cf. SOGA f.494 op.1 d.175 l.11.

60 Cf. f.494 op.1 d.175 l.13, which mentions large numbers of Ashkenazi Jewish women working in this factory, but their monitoring was mixed with other 'Russian nationalities'.

61 Cf. f.86 op.1 d.5268 ll.77–88.

62 Cf. f.86 op.1 d.5266 ll.167–173.

63 The report mentions a great lack in machines for production, a fact that drove *artels* to work in double shifts, and that the *artel* had asked for 200 sewing machines; cf. f.86 op.1 d.4605 l.90.

64 Cf. f.86 op.1 d.5266 ll.167–173.

65 Cf. the report of women who more than doubled their income from 40 to 100 Rubles and who asked for additional sewing machines; f.277 op.1 d.164 l.3, or the report of the Samarkand *artel* which asked for a loan of 2000 Rubles to buy machinery; f.86 op.1 d.5266 ll.167–173 and f.86 op.1 d.4605 l.90.

66 Cf. the detailed report on problems with the operation of a toiling *artel* in Samarkand f.86 op.1 d.4504 ll.140–142; and in Tashkent f.86 op.1 d.4503 ll.122–125.

conditions in the new settlements.⁶⁷ Women and children were left behind in the cities, joining the men only during the work season. It took several years before buildings were erected and families settled there. The fact that there were many women left in the cities while the men had gone to distant places could well be one of the major factors in the growth of women's independence in their working and behavioral habits. This speculation may be supported by the fact that Jewish women were distinct from other minority groups in this respect.

In March 1927, the *narkomzem* (People's Committee of Agriculture) decreed that that in every *kolkhoz* all women over 16 should be given full membership: that they should have equal duties and rights on the collective farm instead of being kept at home or having their work not counted even when they were working in the fields.⁶⁸ Despite these instructions, there were still only 23 women with full membership on the 15 Jewish *kolkhozes* with a total population of 3,181 people and 666 permanent members in July 1930.⁶⁹ The same situation was reported again in 1932 when an investigation of the *Zelenski kolkhoz*, the largest Jewish *kolkhoz* in Uzbekistan, found only 21 out of 160 members were women (13 per cent). In this *kolkhoz* and apparently in others too, the women's work hours were not counted separately even though they contributed substantially to the community's productivity. Instead, their productive work was seen as part of their household chores.⁷⁰ Women's substantial involvement in the *kolkhozes* began only in the mid-30s, long after the *khujum* campaign had been declared to have 'reached its goals'.

Conclusion

Even though the Bukharan Jewish population was less than half of one per cent of the total population of Uzbekistan, their participation in the *khujum* assault initiatives was outstandingly high, especially compared to the participation of other native minority groups. A unique set of conditions such as lack of or only minor contradictions with their religious and traditional dogmas, a critical economic situation, vast governmental support, and active participation in adult education programs drew Bukharan Jewish women to play a substantial role in the

67 Some settlers were robbed and even killed by gangs in the Samarkand Region in May 1928; cf. f.227 op.2 d.5 l.1. On medical conditions cf. f.227 op.2 d.16 l.54, which reports on cases of epidemics with medical help only available after 1932.

68 Cf. f.227 op.1 d.93 l.103.

69 There were 516 families and 150 singles with membership, which suggests that there were at least 516 women members if considering that all the singles were male; cf. f.227 op.1 d.256 l.1.

70 Cf. f.227 op.1 d.255 l.3.

“assault for a better future”, and this triggered a major socialization process that transformed the entire Bukharan Jewish community. Surprisingly, party agitation had little influence on the active part Jewish women played in the campaign since the party’s organizations did little if any work among Bukharan Jewish women and focused instead on the organization of public conferences and *paranja* burnings.⁷¹

The introduction of government aid and ‘trust-building’ steps, combined with a high degree of tolerance towards the traditional institutions of the community, aligned the Soviet administration with the community and assisted in the establishment of reforming ideas and programs. Ironically, it was the same administration that had brutally removed the means of support from Jewish community members only a few years earlier and, in that sense, had created the ‘problem’, and which now was eager to rehabilitate the former ‘wealthy’ and to transform them into a socialist working class.

The small Bukharan Jewish community experienced many novelties during the short period of the *khujum*, novelties that substantially impacted women’s lives. The fact that some women were driven to work outside the home did not solve the fundamental unemployment problems within the Jewish community however. In March 1932, a group of 52 unemployed seasonal workers arrived from Samarkand to work on the *kolkhoz* “*Zelenski*”. Six of the 52 (12 per cent) stated that their wives were the only provider in their household, and all of the others declared that nobody in their families was employed.⁷² Those who found employment and ‘stepped out of the shadows’ could not claim that they were really *raskreposhchenye* (saved from slavery), but they did experience a change in their occupational status and work place: Zilpo Arabova was ‘lucky’ to start working in the Samarkand silk factory “*Khujum*” after its opening in 1927. She was then 13 years old and she kept working there for fifty years, during which she was engaged and married to a “*Khujum*” worker, and her children went to work there too ...⁷³

71 The participation of Jewish women in these public events can only be speculated upon. I saw no documentation on this question but Jewish women probably took part in those demonstrations. As mentioned before, the party used collective terms in these accounts. See for instance a photo of a Jewish women’s *artel* titled “The Women’s *artel* of 1926” in: K. Zufarov et al. eds., *Uzbekskaja SSR*, Tashkent 1981, 110.

72 Considering that a husband’s inability to provide for his family was regarded as shameful, the real number of breadwinner women could be much higher; cf. f.227 op.1 d.274 l.5. Continued unemployment problems could have been the source of the fact that the Jewish agricultural settlements were developed constantly throughout the 30s, with many families being forced to leave town in order to provide subsistence for their members.

73 Levina, *Khujum*, see note 59, 21.

Most of the changes in the Bukharan Jewish women's lives at that time were formal in nature, that is to say they influenced the 'form' but not the 'substance'. Their social status and traditional roles within the family could not have changed dramatically within such short time limits. The *khujum* campaign was a landmark, the first step on the long and hard road towards the liberation of women.