

## **“Unmasking Enemies” Again and Again? The Memoirs of Mordekhay Bachayev and the Revenge of the Soviet Past**

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### **Summary**

The memoirs of Mordekhay Bachayev (1911–2007), a Bukharan Jewish intellectual and poet, are an important document for understanding the history, culture, and everyday life of Bukharan Jews in the first two decades of Soviet rule in Central Asia. Nevertheless, thus far they have been widely excluded from the post-Soviet efforts of the Bukharan Jewish communities in Israel and the United States to create a unifying “nationalist historiography.” This paper argues that this omission relates to Bachayev’s openness about interpersonal antagonisms and denunciations within the Bukharan Jewish intellectual circles of 1930s Soviet Uzbekistan. The publications of the memoirs in 1988/89 caused a fierce debate among Bukharan Jews about the role and personal guilt of Bukharan Jewish intellectuals during the time of the Great Terror, and transported the internal group tensions and interpersonal differences of the Soviet past into the present.

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### **Introduction**

“Tear off the masks!” was *the* slogan used to encourage the social practice of denunciation in the Soviet Union of the 1930s, especially during the Great Terror of 1937–1938, “as citizens were exhorted to watch out for spies and saboteurs and unmask hidden ‘enemies of the people’” (Fitzpatrick 2005: 207). While Fitzpatrick deals with “written communication to the authorities,” whose “damaging” (Fitzpatrick 2005: 209) potential unfolded right there and then on the spot, I instead intend to present and discuss here a case of denunciation in the Bukharan Jewish intellectual circles of Tashkent that not only affected people at the time but that was to also live on even many decades later, appearing as circumstances hardly less noxious than the original events in the 1930s. The case became public when Mordekhay ben Hiyo Bachayev, a writer, journalist, and émigré, published in Israel his memoirs