

ARTICLE

Contested Narratives of the Alash Movement in Contemporary Kazakhstan

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Abstract

This article examines the discursive contestation of Alash movement narratives in post-1991 Kazakhstan by studying overlapping and diverse official and non-official narratives. By surveying textual content and conducting interviews with those who carry these narratives, including textbook authors, the article reveals that while both official and unofficial narratives converge on the subject of statehood for the Alash movement, the non-official narratives and textbook authors use its legacy to express dissatisfaction with post-1991 developments in Kazakhstan. This study sheds light on the differing perspectives and debates surrounding the Alash movement's legacy in shaping post-1991 Kazakhstani society and politics.

Keywords: official narratives; non-official narratives; Alash; textbook authors; Kazakhstan

Introduction

Eurasia's contemporary nations remember their respective early twentieth-century freedom movements in their occupied present states by employing the narratives of statehood and their continued independence in the pre-Soviet Union (Nourzhanov, 2005; Abashin, 2010; Ergun, 2022). This article examines how the collective remembrance of the Alash movement and Alashorda, along with its members referred to as Alashordashylar, has been a source of discursive contestation in the non-democratic context of Kazakhstan over the last thirty-four years. By way of background, the 1917 February Russian Revolution ended Tsarist rule over the current territory of Kazakhstan. Indigenous intellectuals consolidated within the Alash movement in an attempt to attain statehood. They had previously resisted the Bolsheviks by cooperating with anti-Soviet forces during the Russian Civil War (1918–1920). Following their victory in this war, the Soviets initially bolstered their legitimacy by using the Alash movement for Soviet modernization along with ethnic Kazakh communists but then excluded the former. Great Purges saw the deaths of both Kazakh communists and Alashordashylar. They were considered “counter-revolutionary and bourgeois-nationalists” until the limited rehabilitation of their fates in the mid-1980s (Qoigeldi, 1995).

This article situates itself on scholarship concerning the Soviet past's remembrance in Kazakhstan and on research covering the Alash movement. The former focused on the durability and change of the Soviet narratives (Carmack 2019; Kaşıkçı 2019; Rees 2020), overlooked remembrance of collective trauma (Cameron 2018), non-ethnic character of suffering (Kundakbayeva and Kassymova, 2016), the selective victimhood (Slade 2017), the political manipulation of the Soviet nostalgia (Dadabaev, 2021) and the contrasting everyday remembrances (Ercilasun, 2017). This article adds a component to the heterogeneous discursive contestations that attempt to challenge dominant

narratives in the post-1991 period. The history of the Alash movement written in English has been the scholarship's focus. Research has offered the history of the political development within the Alash movement (Caroe, 1968; Bennigsen and Wimbush, 1986) and has highlighted their attempt of attaining statehood through involvement in politics and in developing Kazakh history and language, as well as responding to the grievances of the local population against the Tsarist and Soviet institutions (Oraltay 1985; Kendirbaeva 1999; Uyama 2009; Rottier 2003; Sabol 2017; Koigeldiev 2007; Kesici-Ayoubi 2016; Kesici 2017). Contextualizing these researches, this article examines a nuanced portrayal of both the official and non-official narratives, highlighting their diversity, multifaceted nature, and blurred boundaries. The study focuses on how and when these heterogeneous narratives diverge and coalesce. This article does not aim to examine the history of the Alash movement, interpret it from the perspective of ethnic or civic nationalism, nor to decolonize the knowledge. Government officials under former President Nursultan Nazarbaev and current President Qasym-Jomart Toqaev represent their agencies. At the same time, conveyors of non-official narratives are also diverse, including nationalist opinion shapers, activist regime challengers, and public figures who use the narratives of the Alash movement in varied ways. Some of these figures joined the Toqaev administration to address Kazakhness-led initiatives, while others continued to challenge the regime using the Alash movement's narratives.

Based on textual analysis of 42 data sources and conducting 17 interviews, I argue that despite the common substance of the Alash movement in the early 1990s, particular official narratives emphasized its members as cultural icons. In contrast, non-official ones highlighted them as political figures to challenge the official narratives. Although the official narratives consistently built a linear connection between the Alashordashylar and the first generation of Kazakh communists, they diverged in emphasizing or downplaying the former following Nazarbaev's emergence as the chief articulator of nation-building. Similarly, although non-official narratives consistently interpreted the Alash movement's aspiration for democracy to criticize post-1991 government achievements, they diverged in whether to separate or unite the Alash movement with Kazakh communists. However, official and non-official narratives coalesced when interpreting the Alash movement's aspiration for statehood. In response, although textbook authors have followed the statehood narratives, they have expressed dissatisfaction with the domination of post-1991 history over the history of the Alash movement in the examined textbooks. The following description of memory politics aims to demonstrate how heterogeneous official and non-official narratives struggled for symbolic control of the past. The following subsections describe the material and methods used, provide an overview of the Alash movement, and discuss the diversities and struggles of the official and non-official accounts, followed by perspectives from history textbooks.

Description of memory politics

Memory politics focuses on the employment of certain narratives to remember the past in a specific way which is especially relevant for the turning points in any collective memory. "The selection of certain events as turning points highlights the ideological principles... [and the] liminal position [of them in the official narratives] allows more significant ambiguity in the interpretation (Zerubavel 1995, 9). The notion of commemorative density developed by Zerubavel (1995) stipulates the significance of paying tribute to distinct past periods. The commemorative narrative extends from the detailed celebration of events that are central to the group's identity to an illustration of ones that stay unnoticed in a master narrative (6–12).

However, Wedeen (2015, 159–160) argues that although a regime attempts to control the meaning of the past, discursively they can never achieve complete dominance: "The fact that changes do take place, but almost always concerning the language and symbols of the past, suggests the power of symbolic mechanisms of control. That a regime cannot wholly control the significance or meanings of its symbols suggests the inherently intangible and contestable dimensions of any symbolic project ... language and symbols are politically fundamental even without belief or loyalty"

Counter-memory or non-official narratives challenge the control of official narratives and weaken their ability to present all-encompassing tropes (Martin, 1995). Non-official narratives are patchy and fragmentary and develop in connection with the official narratives. Remembrance becomes a contested territory, wherein the master commemorative narratives raise competing perspectives to gain political control (Zerubavel, 1995). A challenge from counter-memory could provoke the master commemorative narrative to increase salience by investing in memory events, as occurred using the Alash movement in the Toqaev period. By studying how single events are remembered in different performances, we can grasp the tensions and learn how remembrances are mediated by divergent past interpretations (Zerubavel, 1995).

The scope of this article defines official narratives as “command authority both through its [their] mechanisms of production and through the use of official ‘objective’ language.” (Goldberg, Porat, and Schwarz, 2006, 320). Official speeches, addresses, legislation, state-sponsored monuments, and commemorations are part of the official narratives. Non-official narratives or counter-memories not only challenge but can support official narratives by suggesting a divergent interpretation and by accentuating subversive and opposing meanings. The non-official narratives develop and circle “around the official narratives through critical or antagonistic reference either to the official institutions (state organs, policies, and actions, officials, symbols, etc.) or to the official history itself (textbooks, declarations)” (Goldberg, Porat, and Schwarz, 2006, 323).

Methods and materials

This article presents findings from a thematic content analysis of 42 pieces of data, and 17 semi-structured interviews with individuals conveying official and non-official narratives. The content analysis, on official and non-official narratives, includes speeches, addresses, books, articles, and interviews as well as publications by historians and ten history textbooks for secondary schools published in Kazakh and Russian from 1991 to 2023 through tracing National Library catalogue in Almaty. The Alash movement theme was covered in senior classes, including the ninth, tenth, and eleventh grades. The curriculum was prepared by historians and educators and approved by the Ministry of Education. Based on this curriculum, publishers write textbooks. To do that, publishers select authors who prepare the textbooks closely, working with the editors at the publisher before ministerial approval of the textbooks.

Official narrative articulators include Nazarbaev, Toqaev, and senior politicians such as Berik Abdigaliuly, Serikbolsyn Abdildin, Jabaihan Abdildin, Ermuhamet Ertysbaev, Qazybek Isa, Erlan Qarin, Muhtar Qul-Muhammed, Mahmut Qasymbekov, Azat Peruashev, Imangali Tasmagambetov, and Salyq Zimanov. These politicians were selected because they held positions related to history and culture and because they referenced the Alash movement. Publications by Nazarbaev and Toqaev were traced through yearly chronicles published by the Presidential Administration. Non-official narrative articulators include Baqytjan Darimbet, Jasaral Quanyshalin, Mikhail Isinaliev from the Azat movement, Aron Atabek from the Alash movement (not to be confused with the 1917-1920 Alash movement), representatives of the Alash Joly organization, Janbolat Mamai from the unregistered Democratic party, Beibit Qoishybai from the Adilet historical society, historian and opinion shaper Sultan-Han Jusip, and nationalists Aidos Sarym (now a parliamentarian), Amirjan Qosanov, Dos Koshim, Muhtar Tajjan, and political activists Anar Aqkozy, Eldos Dosanov, and Aigerim Qusainqyzy.

In a non-democratic context, interviews are tools for understanding the private domain of symbolic contestation on deliberations, resistances, and mobilizations on specific topics (Schatz 2009, 304). I conducted 17 semi-structured interviews, including one with a senior politician from the presidential administration, 5 articulators of non-official narratives, 4 senior historians with ties to the presidential administration, and 7 textbook authors to gain insight into the discursive contestation surrounding the employment of Alash narratives. Interviews were conducted between August and October 2019 in Astana and Almaty in both Kazakh and Russian, lasting about an hour,

except for Zoom interviews with an Alash movement historian that took place in April 2021 due to COVID-19. Most interlocutors wished to remain anonymous. Interviews with historians reveal the intricate nature of remembrance, as they interacted with senior politicians and officials from the presidential administration. Historians specializing in the Alash movement may align with parts of both official and non-official narratives or express sympathy towards one over the other. Interview questions focused on the core narratives of the Alash movement and the extent of discursive control over these narratives. Texts and interviews were coded based on themes incorporated into both official and non-official narratives.

Alash movement from revolutions to perestroika

The Alash movement defined the meaning of the Kazakh ethnic group, continuing the work of earlier generations of Kazakh thinkers from the mid- and late nineteenth century.¹ The myth of Alash has been a standard marker in the evolution of Kazakh genealogy since ancient periods (Kesici–Ayoubi 2016, 63–64). Alash movement used education as a unity of action against Tsarist Russia's seizing land to relocate non-Kazakh peasants. Additionally, the newspaper titled *Kazakh* spread the ideas of self-determination, and history (Nurpeisov 1995; Sabol 2017). After the fall of Tsarist power in February 1917, indigenous intellectuals in the *Kazakh* newspaper unsuccessfully worked with the Provisional Government to achieve self-governance. In November 1917, the program of the Alash party was announced in Kazakh newspapers which contained chapters on the governance structure, local freedom, fundamental rights, religious affairs, authority and justice, national defense, taxation, workers, science and education, and the land issue (Tilshov and Qamzabekuly 2014, 49). In December 1917, these intellectuals held the II All-Kazakh Congress to adopt *Ham Ult Kenesi* (all National Council), which was interpreted as creating an Alash autonomy (Tilshov and Qamzabekuly 2014, 164–66).

Alashordashylar cooperated with anti-Soviet forces (the White Army and Admiral Kolchak's Siberian Army) during the Civil War (1918–1920) against the Bolsheviks. Other local groups and Kazakh communists supported the Bolsheviks. As the anti-Soviet forces lost, Alashordashylar sought amnesty and recognized Soviet power. The Soviets initially used Alashordashylar work on history and language to bolster their legitimacy. As Soviet control strengthened, the influence of Alashordashylar within Soviet institutions waned. The Bolsheviks favored Kazakh communists who had supported them during the Civil War and removed Alashordashylar from political positions in the 1920s. Some Communist-turned-former Alashordashylar continued to work in Soviet educational and cultural institutions. Kazakh communists sympathetic to Alashordashylar were removed from their positions as well. Given this and political disagreements, the relationship between Alashordashylar and the Kazakh communists became strained. During territorial limits of the national Soviet republic in the 1920s, some Kazakh communists advocated for creating the Central Asian Federation of States, and others advocated for a Turkic Communist state in the Turkestan region. Both Alashordashylar and early Kazakh communists faced executions during the Great Terror (Tilshov and Qamzabekuly 2014, 439–507).

In the 1920s–1930s, the mainstream Soviet canon explained that Alashordashylar was composed of counter-revolutionary–bourgeois–nationalists who supported anti-Marxist and anti-Leninist views (Bochagov 1927; Martinenko 1929. Brainin and Shafiro, 1935). In the late 1950s and 1960s, post-Stalin changes rehabilitated the memory of those Kazakh communists executed during the Great Terror. Alashordashylar was not part of this rehabilitation because they fought against the Soviet power in the Civil War (Qoishybaev 2019, 78–79). During the 1960s–1980s, that position remained unchanged despite a request to rehabilitate Alashordashylar (Musagalieva 2006, 15–16).

Perestroika (restructuring) in the late 1980s enabled limited rehabilitation of some Alashordashylar as cultural figures. The Soviet canon of this period was that although Alashordashylar were wrong when they went against the Soviet regime, they positively contributed to the development of Kazakh literature and left their mark on history.² Unwritten criteria for this rehabilitation included

the degree of Alashordashylar Soviet resistance.³ They accentuated their cultural legacies and friendship with Russian public figures to hide political activities so that decision-makers in Moscow would accept their reports (Mutanov, 2022 154-163; Jurtbai 2011, 13).

Official Narratives

Post-1991 official narratives continued *perestroika*'s canon of portraying Alashordashylar as cultural icons rather than politicians in the early independence years. Some deputies of the Supreme Soviet of Kazakhstan were elected from public organizations representing national intelligentsia. The rethinking of history, including the Alash movement, was expected to be part of their discourse. However, the Alashorda rehabilitation commission's chairperson, Jabaihan Abdildin, was elected as a deputy of Kazakhstan's Supreme Soviet and left the employment of the Alash narratives to the supporters of the non-official narratives (Mutanov 2022, 189). The chairperson of the Supreme Soviet, Serikbolsyn Abdildin (1993, 26), emphasized that the origins of Kazakh statehood started in the fifteenth century and developed further during the Tsarist Russia and Soviet Union periods without highlighting the Alash movement.

Since 1995, when his presidential power increased, Nazarbaev has become a key articulator in setting the agenda for using history in nation-building. The emerging intra-elite contestation within the Nazarbaev government was concerned with challenging economic policies rather than focusing on issues of history and identity. His speeches did not distinguish the first generation of Kazakh communists from Alashordashylar, who had not joined the Bolsheviks or joined after the Civil War. These speeches treated both *Alashordashylar* and the first generation of Kazakh communists as martyrs who were murdered by the Soviet totalitarian regime (2010a, 358; 2010b, 600; 2010c, 457). The Alash movement's first resistance to the Bolsheviks, then merging with the Soviet Union, and finally becoming martyrs during the Great Purges hardly fits into a linear continuation. A significant part of Nazarbaev's career growth is a successful example of a Soviet-created biography and symbolic capital. The writer Al-Khalel Karpyk's (1995, 6) book on the legacy of intellectual thought in Kazakhstan, endorsed by the President's press service, builds a lineage of "stars of Kazakhstan," such as Qunanbaiuly, Bokeihan, and Nazarbaev.

Nazarbaev set the tone of putting Alashordashylar and Kazakh communists against each other for their different views as anti-historical (2010a, 359). In the following excerpt, the *mitingovshchina* (a pejorative Russian word that describes excessive or disorderly demonstrations) implicitly referred to the bearers of non-official narratives who criticized his attempts to increase presidential power (359): "[Because of the] socio-economic and political conditions and the heterogeneity of Kazakh society in those days, Kazakh intelligentsia's works (from both groups) did not hint at mitingovshchina, biting slogans, quarrelsome, and even more... national arrogance, old-fashioned ideas. Moreover, this is a lesson for all of us, not very hard-working students of the most incredible people."

Nazarbaev's narratives built a seamless continuation from the first generation of Kazakh communists and Alashordashylar to Kazakhstan's independence, highlighting their expected contribution to Kazakh culture and education. Nazarbaev (2010a, 359) highlighted the unity of the Alash movement representatives, such as Jumabaev, and Kazakh communists such as Rysqulov, in spreading education:

We must turn to the international experience and strive for only one thing – achieving strict scientific truth and establishing the fundamental role of outstanding people in our country's history, regardless of their political leanings. Finally, there are the highest moral imperatives – service to the people, activity in education, and high humanism. It is impossible not to recognize their outstanding role in spreading literacy and introducing culture to the vast masses – the same T. Rysqulov was the first to raise the people's voice against the collectivization of the Kazakh village. A.S. Khojanov risked publishing the poems of the disgraced M. Jumabaev. This must be remembered by those who today artificially draw historical arrows and fit life into primitive schemes.

Nazarbaev's book *Halyq Tarih Tolqynynda* (People in the Stream of History) became a landmark for historians. Compared to the national programs and concepts, this book offers an explicit way of interpreting the history of Kazakhstan. The anthologies of political thought started from the Turkic period of philosophers and ended with this book (Ertysbaev 2002). As per *Halyq Tarih Tolqynynda*, the Alash movement's role was the unity of Kazakhs and patriotism, not nationalism (Nazarbaev 1999 152, 169).

In an interview a senior historian of the Alash movement told me that although there was no explicit censorship, the implicit language formed the dominant narrative of the movement: "Since then [after 1995], to this day, there have been implicit restrictions on research and propaganda of the idea of Alash [movement]. Literally, unspoken [rules]. They continued during the meeting between Nazarbaev and historians of the Alash movement in the late 2000s, the former gave "appropriate instructions to not mainly promote the topic of Alash" [movement]. This historian emphasized greater references to the political legacy of the Alash movement and expanded discussion on the resistance against the Soviet power leading to rupture rather than continuation from the communist legacy.⁴

The Alash movement was peripheral in Nazarbaev's addresses, which only spouted it when supporting a consolidated state narrative trope. Nazarbaev used the Alashordashylar contributions to a centralized capital in a few places in the speech when referring to the building of the new capital in Astana. His speech was dedicated to the declaration of Astana as the capital of Kazakhstan in 1997 and referenced that Alash leaders were the first to create statehood with a single capital: "The Alash party raised the question of creating a national statehood with a single capital... Its center was supposed to be in Semipalatinsk [now called Semei] (2010f, 599). However, the political repressions unleashed by the Bolsheviks against the liberal–democratic intelligentsia buried this idea" (2010e, 531).

In constructing the new capital in Astana, officials renamed old streets and erected new monuments. The authorities allocated the names of pre–Soviet figures to streets in the newly built parts of Astana where the government buildings were to be located. Streets named after Alashordashylar were situated in Astana's old part and outskirts (Ensebai 2017). Initially, Alash leader Bokeihan received a street name in the old part of Astana. The Onomastic Commission suggested combining central streets to give the name of Bokeihan Avenue, coinciding with commemorating his hundred and fiftieth anniversary international UNESCO in 2016 (Nurtai, 2016). However, it was then reported that this change would not occur without a specific explanation, and the name of Bokeihan Street remained in the old part of the city (Ult, 2021).

The Alash movement's unitary power vision was another narrative trope used by Nazarbaev. He connected the fulfillment of this vision with the independence of Kazakhstan by underscoring the need to understand Alash's political organization in national history. According to Nazarbaev (1999 170), Alash's vision aimed at the gradual transformation of Kazakh society and its adaptation to modern realities remains relevant. The Alash movement endeavored to unite all ethnicities residing on the steppes. In another example, Nazarbaev stated that with Islam coming to Kazakhstan from the outside, propagators of the Alash movement proposed the creation of the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Kazakhstan to manage the spread of Islam in Kazakhstan (1999, 169–171).

At the same time, the positions of senior officials within the ruling elite had yet to become coherent in the post-1995 period. A senior historian shared that some officials supported the usage of the Alash movement by allocating funds to its research. Others considered that placing the Alash movement to the forefront would lessen the role of Nazarbaev in cementing independence of Kazakhstan.⁵ In the 2000s, Muhtar Qul–Muhammed (1998), whose doctoral thesis was about the evolution of the political views of Alashordashylar, became a Senate Deputy and later reached minister-level positions. He was a director of the Atamura publishing house in which *Halyq Tairh Tolqynynda* was prepared for publication. Qul–Muhammed (2000, 11) writes in his book, "Indeed, the leaders of the Alash movement, both during the Tsarist autocracy and the Provisional Government, openly supported the protection of the national interests of the Kazakh people, the revival of its culture and language."

Two senior government officials advocated for commemorating the ninetieth anniversary of the Alash movement to the Presidential Administration. However, a senior official in the Administration, whom they met, still had “the Soviet interpretation on Alash [movement] (a bourgeois–nationalist organization).” According to this official, there was an understanding in the official narratives that “the dissemination of Alash [movement] popularized nationalism.”⁶ However, following lobbying by public figures, the government issued an order to commemorate the ninetieth anniversary of the Alashorda in 2008 and allocated the equivalent of USD 280,000 in national currency to the commemoration (AdiletZan 2008). This order was late by one year, as it was already 91 years since the foundation of the Alash party and Alash’s autonomy, which was established in 1917.

Identically, the commemoration of the Alash movement’s centenary anniversary was raised in 2017. Imangali Tasmagambetov, the–then–deputy Prime Minister, organized a meeting to discuss preparations for commemorating the one–hundredth anniversary since the foundation of the Alash party in 2017. During that meeting, Tasmagambetov highlighted that this commemoration needed to relate to independence and with the approval of Nazarbaev to the commemoration plan (Tengrinews 2017). Abruptly, Tasmagambetov was appointed an ambassador to Russia in February of that year. No nationwide commemoration occurred for the one–hundred jubilee of the Alashorda.

Nevertheless, conferences at research institutions and universities have since occurred due to the Alash movement’s sympathizers, historians, and public figures writing letters to the Presidential Administration (Nurtai, 2017). Nazarbaev repeated the same consolidated and unitary tropes narratives at these conferences. At one of the conferences in Semei, where this movement was founded, Hasen Oraltai, writer and former director of the Kazakh service for Radio Free Europe, remarked that Bokeihan was considered the first president of Kazakhstan by Kazakhs living abroad. Following his speech, the conference was abruptly stopped, and the participants were sent for a tour of Semei.⁷

Some other ruling elites have propagated Nazarbaev’s role at the core of remembrance rather than spotlighting the legacy of the Alash movement, specifically its leader, Bokeihan. The head of the President’s Office, Mahmut Kasymbekov (2000, 7), whose doctoral thesis was about the institute of the presidency, emphasized Nazarbaev as a guarantor of political stability and balance among the political movements and political parties. He highlighted the *Kazakhstani Way of Development*, such as the independent state, construction of the new capital Astana, and stability, which were all linked with the name of Nazarbaev. Kasymbekov (2010, 89) titled it the *Nursultannin Nurly Joly* (Radiant Path of Nursultan), *Nur* is Ray and Radiant in the Kazakh language, which meant the centuries-long restoration of state independence: “The nature of human memory is such that it retains only the brightest and most significant, often reducing entire historical epochs to one short and capacious name. Moreover, who knows, maybe our time – the revival of independent statehood at the turn of the centuries and millennia – will someday bring our people under such a common denominator as the Radiant Path of Nursultan.”

However, members of the government-loyal party *Aq Jol* (Bright Path) presented themselves as successors of the Alash movement. During its establishment in 2002, the leaders of *Aq Jol* emphasized that they were “not a radical opposition [party and] will be a constructive political force that can agree with the authorities” (Mamasuly, 2021). In 2005, *Aq Jol* was divided into two, with the splinter group keeping a similar name, *Nagyz Aq Jol* (True *Aq Jol*), which was refused registration. Since the late 2000s, *Aq Jol* began to brand itself as a successor of the Alash movement. Following Qazybek Isa, editor of *Jas Qazaq Uni* (Voice of the Young Kazakh) newspaper, became a deputy of the party in 2012, it referenced the Alash movement more actively (Tugelbaev, 2014). A member of the dominant political party *Nur-Otan*, Azat Peruashev became chair of *Aq Jol* in 2011. He had familial ties to the Alash movement. His grandfather, Peruash Karimuly, was a member of Alash and was executed during the Great Purges (Tugelbaev, 2014).

The Aq Jol program highlights the following of the Alash movement's democratic stance (Sultanov, 2012). Peruashev signaled the peripheral role of the Alash legacy in the official narratives by mentioning its insufficient use on multiple occasions (Isa 2017, 93–99). Like official narratives, Peruashev uses unification narratives focusing on the Alash movement's role in reviving the Kazakh language and culture. The party sent open letters commemorating the one-hundredth anniversary of the foundation of the Alash autonomy in 2017. Aq Jol organized *as беру* (a customary tradition of remembrance) to honor the movement's leaders. Peruashev endorsed the shift from Cyrillic to Latin script within the Kazakh language because Alash leaders used the Arab and Latin scripts in their writings. Historians, writers, and opinion shapers grouped around the Aq Jol party, using the unnoticed legacy of the Alash movement. For Peruashev, the Alashordashylar were not only politicians but professionals in their fields, most notably the intelligentsia, who sought economic development, given that the Aq Jol party had been defending the business lobby of Kazakhstan (Sharip, 2019).

Non-official narrative representatives criticized the Aq Jol party for appropriating Alash's legacy without implementing it – such as by failing to switch to a parliamentary republic, improving the economy for the poor, and genuinely opposing the government despite being labeled an oppositional party (Musin, 2019). Historian of the Alash movement Sultan–Han Jusip, who claimed that Bokeihan, not Nazarbaev, should be considered the first president of Kazakhstan, was a candidate for the deputy of the Parliament from the Aq Jol Party but was not selected to the party list (Kazinform, 2020). Aq Jol's reference to the Alash movement was particularly damaged after its member and parliamentarian, Azamat Abildaev, endorsed Russian President Vladimir Putin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine; he was subsequently expelled from the party, and his deputy mandate was revoked (Qappas, 2023).

Following the transfer of the presidency from Nazarbaev to Toqaeв, Alash movement narratives received a long-awaited revival. However, unity and consolidated narrative tropes were predominant, especially after the nationwide protests in January 2022 and amidst the war in Ukraine. As Toqaeв's government tried to distance itself from Russia amidst the war in Ukraine, Russian officials continued to make territorial claims on Kazakhstan (Dzen, 2024). Toqaeв opened the monument to Alash leaders Bokeihan, Baitursynuly, and Dulatuly in 2021 in Astana, emphasizing the Alash movement's aspiration for sovereignty and independence (Akorda, 2021). The Toqaeв administration co-opted some non-official narrative representatives and attempted to dialogue with others. State adviser Erlan Qarin, who authored the idea for the first complete television series about the Alash movement *Tar Zaman* (Difficult Times), which is closely aligned with non-official narratives, and Berik Abdigaliuly (2017), a historian of the Alash movement and mayor of the Ulytau region, attempted to engage with cultural figures, including non-official narrative representatives, to articulate for unity narratives.

Forums like the *Ulltyq Kenes* (National Advisory Council) and *Qurylytai* (Congress) aim to close the gap between the regime and the people to address public grievances. Qarin served as secretary and deputy to Toqaeв in these organizations, shaping the direction of their work. In 2019, the Toqaeв administration established the *Ulltyq Kenes*, a consultative and advisory body comprising well-known political figures, which ended its work in 2022. Some opposition representatives criticized it, and others left the *Ulltyq Kenes* due to its fictitious nature. At this time of criticisms, Qarin (2019) highlighted the unity – not division – of the Alash movement and Kazakh communists for the significant cause of *memleketshildik* (statehoodness), which emphasized the priority of state interests over any other interests when both continued the struggle for sovereignty within Soviet Kazakh institutions.

Public figures criticized *memleketshildik*, highlighting the etatist meaning, which led Qarin (2019) to write a response. Toqaeв incorporated the *memleketshildik* narrative into his speeches (Ak Orda, 2021). Similarly, Toqaeв connected the significance of *Qurylytai*, which occurred at important times in the country's history since the nomadic period, including the establishment of the Alash party, which was created at the first Kazakh *Qurylytai* in Orynbor in 1917 (Akorda, 2022).

Like Nazarbaev, Toqaev emphasized that comparing and contrasting the Alash leaders with Soviet Kazakh communists was divisive, calling for unity in his speech at Qurlyltai in 2024 (Akorda, 2024).

Although the state commission worked on restoring historical justice regarding the political repressions of the 1920s–1950s, which would have highlighted the Alash movement's role in the struggle for independence, no changes have been made to the existing law, although the commission is completing its work (Adilet Zan, 2024). Nevertheless, books published under this commission highlight the internal discontent within this movement regarding unitary state structures, disagreements between the Alash and Kazakh communists, and the slow formation of its military structures. However, they remained loyal to the narratives of suffering endured by both of these groups during the purges for independent statehood (Kasimov 2022, 4–7).

January 2022 broke out because the regime could not align with its neo-liberal prosperity rhetoric (Kudaibergenova and Laruelle, 2022). Initially, officials declared that protesters had ties with foreign terrorist and criminal organizations (Karibaeva and Lemon, 2023). According to Toqaev, the 2022 protests aimed to disrupt unity and sow discord among Kazakhstanis (Zakirjanqyzy, 2024). *Tagzym* (Reverence) memorial dedicated to the death of 238 people including 19 law enforcement officials in January 2022 represent wise sayings of renowned Kazakh poets and writers about the unity for the sake of statehood inscribed on black and white stones. The Bokeihan's "the only path to freedom is national unity" was inscribed in stones (Azattyq Ruhy, 2022).

The public perception in Kazakhstanis reflects the dominance of official narratives. A survey by the Strategy (2019) sociological agency conducted on behalf of Institute of World Politics and Economics revealed that Alash leaders remain less recognized than pre-Soviet statespersons and intellectuals. Over 90 percent of respondents amongst Soviet-era figures recognized Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin, Nikita Khrushchev, Leonid Brezhnev, Kazakh WWII hero Baurzhan Momyshuly, and Soviet Kazakh leader Dinmukhamed Qonaev. In contrast, awareness of Alash leader Bokeihan was at 68.7 percent, Baitursynuly at 82.2 percent, and Communist Kazakh leader Rysqulov at 82.7 percent. Notably, 33 percent of ethnic Kazakhs view the creation of Alash autonomy positively, compared to only 18 percent of ethnic Russians. Bokeihan and Turkestan autonomy leader Mustafa Shoqai is less well-known than Rysqulov and Baitursynuly, possibly due to fewer references in street names and textbooks.

Non-Official Narratives

Political movements like Azat (Freedom) and the Alash emerged, claiming succession from the historical Alash movement at the time of Kazakhstan's declaration of sovereignty within the Soviet Union in 1990 (Darimbet 2001, 11, 47). Some intelligentsia and politicians who left the Communist Party of Kazakhstan founded the Azat movement in June 1990 to expedite the adoption of the declaration of sovereignty (Kozybaev 2018, 278). According to Jasaral Quanyshalin, the deputy chairperson Azat followed the path of the Alashordashylar in the gradual move towards independence. Azat members understood that moving forward with complete independence would be difficult due to the Kazakhs' long connection with Russia from the Tsarist period onwards. Azat contemplated acquiring confederation status within Russia as the first step towards independence (Expertonline, 2019). Mikhail Isinaliev (1998, 78–79), former KSSR foreign minister and co-chairman of Azat, paid tribute to the poem Dulatuly *Oyan, Kazakh* (Wake up Kazakh) to appeal to the Kazakh nation for unity, solidarity, and national consciousness. During the nationalization of the Communist Party's property, Azat requested Nazarbaev to return buildings and transport for the ownership of their organization. Azat considered itself the successor of the Alash movement and underlined that the Bolsheviks' terror in 1920 had confiscated these properties.⁸ Oraltai, then director of Radio Free Europe's Kazakh edition, met with the Azat movement to share their common goal toward independence (Darimbet 2001, 24–25).

Azat sent their draft of the Declaration of the Sovereignty of Kazakhstan to the Supreme Soviet of the KSSR and to the media on 16 July 1990. It was in August 1990 that the Supreme Soviet

announced the preparation of the declaration of sovereignty without mentioning Azat's draft declaration in their references (Isinaliev, 1998). The commission chair on state sovereignty at the Supreme Soviet underscored a heated debate over the content which prolonged its adoption (Zimanov 2011, 141). KSSR President 457, considering the significant number of ethnic Russians and strong economic ties with Soviet Russia, was cautious and slow in endorsing the declaration. On 25 October, 1990, the KSSR was the fourteenth out of fifteen members of the Soviet Union to adopt such a declaration. Another factor contributing to this cautious approach was the potential prime ministership for Nazarbaev of all the Soviet Union republics in the event of preserving the Soviet Union under a new union. This failed at the August coup in 1991 when communist hardliners attempted to seize power from Soviet leader Gorbachev (Ustinova, 2016).

Aron Atabek, a poet and activist, established the Alash movement, connecting Kazakh nationalism, Islam, and pan-Turkism to near sovereignty and independence in 1990. (Hyman 1997); Atabek and his supporters printed the Alash newspaper to add appeal to this revival, but the paper was denied registration based on allegations of "Insulting the President." However, such grounds were absent in the law. Atabek opposed Nazarbaev and continued to print this newspaper in Moscow (Sviridov, 1993). Atabek associated his movement with the ideas of resistance by the Alash movement and an immediate disruption from the Soviet Union (Abenov, 2006). Atabek (1991) singled out Kazakh-Soviet intelligentsia for their denunciation of Alashordashylar to Soviet officials. Following the clash of Atabek followers with the Kazakh government over the leadership crisis in the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan, he left for Moscow. He later promoted Pan-Turkic ideas in Azerbaijan. Atabek returned to Kazakhstan to be involved in activism, including the Shanyraq shanty town defenders' protests and was sentenced to 18 years imprisonment for his alleged involvement in killing a police officer during such demonstrations. Following the worsening of Atabek's health after 15 years in prison, activists requested his release in October 2021. He refused to apply for early release until he was fully acquitted. However, as per Atabek, "he was put on a plane and taken to Almaty," and no more than two months later, he passed away (Omarova, 2022). One of his poems, *Pomilovka* (Clemency) from prison, referenced the resistance referencing the Alash ideas (2023, 122):

However, if (only five years left!)
 A "ring" is necessary –
 Then I can declare my age.
 Moreover, reconsider ("grow younger"!)
 And in reality, I will accomplish
 The great Alash Revolution!
 For only AR [conscience and honor in Kazakh]–Alashism
 (Not thievery and Fascism) –
 It is the bright future of humanity!

The usage of mobilization for the sake of hastening sovereignty and resistance led to narratives from the Alash movement by Azat and the Atabek-led Alash movement by marginalization (Ertysbaev 2001, 216–17; Isinaliev 1998, 284) by co-optation (Kudaibergenova and Shin, 2018), and by restructuring due to their effect on popular opinion. Internal documents directed to Nazarbaev recommended that Azat, Birlik Jeltoqsan, Memorial, Shanyraq, Democratic Unity, and many other movements could influence public opinion and gain future political support.⁹ Despite the marginalization of these movements, their members and leaders have continued to shape public opinion in Kazakh-speaking media (Laruelle, 2016).

In the post-1995 period, bearers of non-official narrative representatives criticized the lack of remembrance of the Alash movement in the official narratives. Beibit Qoishybai, leaders of the Adilet historical society and its director from 2008 to 2011, said that the authorities did not sufficiently remember the leader of Alash autonomy, Alihan Bokeihan. He has been remembered

in Turkey and by UNESCO, but not by the authorities of Kazakhstan.¹⁰ Muhtar Taijan, an activist of Kazakh nationalism, pointed out that the propagation of the historical figure of Bokeihan contradicts Nazarbaev's central role in the foundation of Kazakh statehood in the official narratives.¹¹

At the same time, in opposition to the overshadowing of the Alash movement in the official narratives, conveyors of non-official narratives criticized the insufficiency in the implementation of the goals of the Alash movement. Dos Koshim, a former deputy of the Azat and chair of *Ult tagdyry* (Destiny of the Nation), highlighted that the Nazarbaev government could not escape from referring to the Alash movement because it increased their favourability along the Kazakh spectrum which would not support them if they did not recognize Alashordashylar. However, ruling elites have remained silent regarding implementing the Alash movement's ideas and goals. According to Koshim, the ruling elites only implemented one point from the Alash movement's draft program of autonomy that was announced in 1917. This program included the establishment of the rule of law, state property on land, and religious rights.¹² The ruling elite ignored the rest of the program.

Oppositional politicians referred to the non-official narratives and continued to criticize present-day authoritarianism by highlighting Alash's goal of achieving a democratic state. Janbolat Mamai, a political activist and journalist, romanticizes that, if the Alash movement had continued to govern, Kazakhstan could have become a democratic country. This was highlighted in his documentary movie, which is based on an interpretation of documents and archival materials of the Alash movement and its members (*Demokratialy Qazaqstan*, 2018). Later, he was sentenced to six years probation and a prohibition in any involvement in socio-political activities for his agitation regarding the mass riots at the nationwide protests in 2022 (*Azattyq*, 2023).

The Alash movement's narratives on the subject of land became a source for the mobilization of the activists. A land dispute or *jer dauy* (land conflict) has been a central narrative stipulating the people's land ownership since the Kazakh Khanate, which has been continued in the Alash movement. Given the increase of settlers from Tsarist Russia, Alash figures advocated a land issue or *jer maselesi* (land issue) to seek a just settlement for nomads. The government amended the land code in November 2015 by increasing land rents from 10 to 25 years for citizens and foreigners. In late March 2016, it was announced that 1.7 million hectares of agricultural land would be offered for bidding starting in July 2016, sparking debate on social media amid concerns that this code could enable foreigners to buy the land. The Kazakh intelligentsia wrote an open letter opposing land sale to foreigners. In April 2016, protests began in the western city of Atyrau, where people perceived it as a land sale to foreigners. Although Nazarbaev commented that this means only nationals, not foreigners, could buy the land through these auctions, the protests spread across most cities of Kazakhstan (Isaacs 2022, 107-109).

Some activists created *Alash Joly* (the Path of Alash movement), connecting itself to the legacy of the Alash movement. They argued for preserving the people's and the state's land ownership by referencing excerpts from Alash. They also pursued broader nationalization issues, including exit from the Eurasian Economic Union and Kazakh-only language instruction for primary schools. The government pacified the protests by imprisoning most of the activists, placing a moratorium on land sales for five years, and creating a commission. Although the government allowed *Alash Joly*'s registration, the court closed it after several months, premised on some founders "having nothing to do with the organization's creation" (Joyamergen, 2017). In 2024, near the moratorium period's expiration, Toqaev signed a law banning foreigners from owning or leasing agricultural land (RFERL, 2021).

The positions in the non-official narratives on the relationship between Alashordashylar and Kazakh communists diverge. A historian close to the Presidential Administration indicated that parts of the national intelligentsia have stated that both Alashordashylar and the first Kazakh communists contributed to Kazakh culture and died during the Great Purges. The other position supports de-Sovietization by singling out Kazakh communists.¹³ Koshim underscored that an open discussion over the contentions between Alashordashylar and Kazakh communists would enable everyone to learn from past mistakes.

Following some articulators of the non-official narratives that joined the Toqaev government, the *memleketshildik* narratives highlighting the absolute value of independence and sovereignty came to the forefront (Massaget, 2017). In the same way, both official and non-official narratives coalesced on the language issue. Despite Alash members being bilingual and using both Kazakh and Russian languages, articulators of both narratives accentuate their struggle to develop the Kazakh language. For example, the official Kazakhstani peoples languages day was changed from 22 September when the language law was adopted in 1989 to the 5 September birthday of Alash leader Baitursynuly who is celebrated for reforming the Arabic script of the Kazakh language in 2019 (Tilshov, 2022). Identically, a common theme emerged from the interviews with the bearers of the non-official narratives referring to the Alash movement about the greater use of the Kazakh language.

A post-January 2022 protest against political prosecution led oppositional activists to mobilize over connecting the Soviet period of prosecution of the Alash members with similar patterns during the Toqaev presidency. Several activists created the 31 May organization, commemorating the victims of the Stalin era political repression and famine. A member of this organization, journalist and poet Anar Aqqozy, during a press briefing, questioned: Why do we have political prisoners in our country today? Because they are imprisoned for justice and truth for our people. During the time of the Alashordashylar, Kazakhs who served in the State Duma were repressed.” The organization member suggested changing this commemoration from 31 May to 27 September when Alash leader Bokeihan was shot in 1937 (Masa, 2023).

The remembrance of the Alash movement is becoming a source for movies, discussion topics, and performances, demonstrating the discursive contestation of the official and non-official narratives. The *Mirjaqip. Oyan Kazakh*, a movie titled from a banned book of poems with an identical title in 1909, was a version of the original television tele-series broadcast on state-owned Qazaqstan television channel. Following an unexpectedly high demand at the cinemas, Qazaqstan stopped the film’s distribution to show it on their channel, citing their initial contract with the cinemas covered only one week, which caused discontent among the viewers, prompting them to extend its availability for another week. This led to movie director Murat Esjan explaining that the core idea of the *Oyan Kazakh* is unity for the intellectual and spiritual awakening of the nation in response to Russian social media emphasis that it was inciting Kazakh youth against Russia (Qaz365, 2023). Simultaneously, this coincided with a speech by Eldos Dosanov, a member of the unregistered Alga Kazakhstan party, before the people at the cinema in Semei after a screening of this film, where he compared the repression undergone by Alash members with the political repression against artists by the Toqaev government. He was subsequently brought to court based on disobedience to a lawful order or demand of a law enforcement officer (Tirek, 2023).

At the same time, Kazakh feminists refer to the Alash program on gender equality to appeal to opponents of feminism by highlighting the non-Western indigenous nature of gender equality. In 2024, the government did not permit a march on gender equality on 8 March in Almaty. In an interview about the march, lawyer and feminist activist Aigerim Qusainqyzy emphasized that Kazakh feminists often face arguments such as “feminism is a Western concept” and “feminism is foreign to Kazakhs,” which led her response that this struggle was also part of the Alash movement’s agenda (Qurmangazinova and Qaisar, 2024). According to Qusainqyzy, the declaration of the Alash party adopted at the first congress in 1917 included gender equality. She referred that Alash members advocated the abolition of *qalym* (bride price) and polygamy; they also mentioned that women’s rights were not connected with tradition and religion, which articulated a progressive agenda by the indigenous elite (Koemets, 2022). By doing this, Qusainqyzy questions the democratic agenda of Toqaev’s government by underlining that the representation of women in politics is below 20 percent. In comparison, they make up 53 percent of the population. For example, when the government was formed in 2024, only four out of 26 members were women, and only 10 out of 88 deputy ministers were women (Qurmangazinova and Qaisar, 2024).

Representation of the Alash movement in the History of Kazakhstan Textbooks

Although the examined textbooks predominantly reflected official narratives on the unity and consolidation themes of the Alash movement, the interviewed textbook authors expressed their disagreement with the limited focus on the Alash movement, and which placed more emphasis on the Nazarbaev period in Kazakhstan's history. Since the history of the Alash movement was prohibited and distorted in the Soviet-era school textbooks, the first history of Kazakhstan textbooks published following the independence in 1992 introduced the Alash movement to the readers. The key narrative in Qozybaev and Qozybaev's (1993, 30-31) textbook for the tenth graders depicted the linear continuation between the Alash movement with an emphasis on the latter's goal as the liberation from colonial oppression of the Tsarist Russia and the creation of an autonomous entity. This narrative further explained how Alash members and Kazakh communists contributed to the development of the Kazakh culture and literature within the Soviet institutions before their deaths during the Great Purges. One of the textbook authors of the early independence period reminiscences:¹⁴

The main goal of the textbook was to show how the national state was created and what the points of view [on this national state] were. The activity of Alash Orda was reflected differently [from the Soviet canon]. Therefore, this side had to be revealed. This material [national state idea] was not in the previous [Soviet] textbooks. The main emphasis [in the 1990s textbook] was the disclosure of white spots, as they said then. Conceptually, this was a path toward forming a corresponding historical worldview for school students. At that time, these were all new things.

This focus on post-1991 history has overshadowed the coverage of the Alash movement since the introduction of the new-generation textbooks in 2005. The Alash movement did not receive a separate theme in Qozybaev, Nurpeis and Jukeshev (2005, 41-44) and in Ayagan and Shaimerdenova (2005, 44-46) textbooks. Although, both of these textbooks continued discussing similar narratives as above emphasising a linear continuation between the Alash movement and Kazakh communists. For example, Qozybaev, Nurpeis and Jukeshev (2005, 41-44) emphasized a non-rebellious and non-revolutionary way toward the determination of national statehood within the declaring Kyrgyz (Kazakh Autonomous Socialist Republic) and within the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic in 1920. Both Alash members and Kazakh communists contributed during the demarcation of ethnic territorial borders in the 1920s by historically justifying Kazakhs living in the current territory of Kazakhstan to create republics united under the Bolsheviks.

However, the interviewed textbook authors of the new generation textbook expressed their discontent at the dominance of post-1991 developments in the textbooks as both Soviet and independence periods covered in the same ninth-grade textbooks. Following excerpts from the textbook, author #2 exemplified this discontent and expressed their disquiet with little focus on the Alash movement in their textbooks:¹⁵

There is such a thing [interpretation] that history has been made since independence. Everything beautiful has just begun from the moment of independence. However, more than one generation of Kazakhs fought for this independence. One of the people who fought for this independence and thanks to whom we have a modern territory is Alash [movement]. It is not a secret for anyone that Bokeihan and others talked to Lenin and defended every strand of the land. They [school students] should learn that history did not begin in 1991. Long before 1991, people gave their lives. Now, we live in such a large territory. Bokeihan took part in the expedition of Shcherbin [organized by the Tsarist Russian government to collect information about "surplus land" for the resettlement policies], where he studied everyday life, culture, etc. Therefore, he proved [historical rights of Kazakhstan to these territories] when Lenin had questions about Eastern and Northern Kazakhstan. Our intelligentsia fought for every strand

of the land. Therefore, we must tell children that this was the merit of not only one person who has been since 1991 [referring to Nazarbaev].”

Similar unity-type narratives on the Alash movement are present in the eleventh-grade social science and natural science and maths classes of the history of Kazakhstan textbooks that cover the most important periods of Kazakhstan’s history from the Soviet to the post-1991 period of history. The Qoigeldi et al. (2007, 174) social science direction textbook highlighted a bold step that was taken [by the Alash movement] to unite the whole Kazakh land and its people under the banner of a single state. Turlugul et al. (2007, 104-105) maths direction textbook included references from Nazarbaev’s speeches on the gradual change of Kazakh society by Alash members whose main legacy was cultural and historical uniqueness and national spirit. One of the textbook authors of eleventh grade expressed discontent with such dominance:

The struggle for independence, first, they [Alash members] stood at its origins. It is what we have achieved now. Now, they tell us that Nazarbaev brought independence. Before this, Alash strove for this. They also dreamed about it. They created a party. Then [now], it [Alash ideas] fosters patriotism. Our ancestors not only hung around the steppes but [also] dreamed of independence from the Russian autocracy [samoderzhavie]. Then they [Bolsheviks] took this intelligence and exterminated it. We became a colony.

In another interview textbook, author #5 emphasized the propagation of the individual figures of the Alash movement who contributed during the border demarcation in 1920.¹⁶ This contribution demonstrated implicit resistance to the prevalent assertion in the official narratives that Kazakhstan’s modern borders were established under Nazarbaev (Mamasuly, 2011).

I tried to give as much information as possible about the Alash period. When I was brought up as a child, history was personified. When my father told me about history, he said about Kenesary Qasymuly. I learned about these heroes in the nineteenth century. I tried to put more emphasis on personality [in the textbook]. I believe that the image of Alimhan Ermekov is vital. Ermekov, at the age of 29, contributed to the modern borders of Kazakhstan in Moscow during the heated discussion. He scientifically substantiated these borders. We even lost these border territories, which then went to others. Young people need to study this at school.

Currently, in-use ninth and eleventh-grade textbooks Qabyldinov et al. (2019, 33, 2020, 44), Oksembaev et al. (2019), Jandosova et al. (2019, 172-173) offer more content on the Alash movement. According to the textbook authors, this is related to the official response to the increase of ethnic Kazakhs in Kazakhstan who want to see Alash movement reflected in the textbooks.¹⁷ At the same time, these textbooks explicitly cemented the figure of Nazarbaev to the core of discourse on founding the great nation of Kazakhstan.

Conclusion

The Alash movement narratives are a “symbolic marker of change” for the Kazakhstani collective memory which enable official and non-official narratives to be employed to highlight aspirations toward statehood. Such markers of change allow a greater level of ambiguity. Official narratives cannot ultimately assert the symbolic mechanism of control as that would remain intrinsically insatiable and contestable by any non-official narratives. As the article has shown, non-official narratives expanded their focus on the symbolic struggles following the increase of the official master commemorative narrative, ranging from the Alash movement to the land issue, Kazakh feminism, and criticisms of democratic development in Kazakhstan. Master’s commemorative

narrative on the Alash movement in the government accounts mostly underlines unity and consolidated state, which hides its resistance narrative in its attempt to become a democracy. In response, non-official narratives use these narratives to criticize the lack of achievement of democracy during the Nazarbaev and Toqaev presidencies. Given the discursive contestation, school history textbook authors have expressed their disagreement with greater emphasis on the post-1991 Kazakhstani development, while the Alash movement's coverage lacks such a portrayal. The persistent discursive contestation reveals that the narratives of the Alash movement's legacy are not only historical but remain a battleground in which alternative narratives resist the domination of the political regime's endeavor to control the discursive field. In response, the official narrative increased the Alash movement's commemorative salience by incorporating non-official narrative members so that the legacy is no longer a "struggle." In non-democratic Kazakhstan, such battlegrounds remain the few avenues for the oppositional actors to dissent and challenge authoritarian apprehension.

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Notes

- 1 Tileshov, and Qamzabekuly. *Alash qozgalysy entsiklopedialyq anyqtamalyq* [Alash Movement. Encyclopedic reference book] was used to reference the factual information about the Alash movement.
- 2 Senior Historian close to the Presidential Administration, October 2019, Astana, interviewed by the author.
- 3 The historian of the Alash movement, April 2021, Zoom, interviewed by the author.
- 4 Historian of the Alash movement, Astana, October 2019, Astana, interviewed by the author.
- 5 Senior Historian close to the Presidential Administration, October 2019, Astana, interviewed by the author.
- 6 Senior politician, October 2019, Astana, interviewed by the author.
- 7 The author interviewed a historian who attended this conference in April 2021, Zoom.
- 8 Letter from Civic Movement of Azat to President of Kazakh SSR Nazarbayev, August 1991, 2-1/153, Box 7, Folder 5. President of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic funds, Archive of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Almaty, Kazakhstan.
- 9 Correspondence from Burkitbai Ayagan, the President's Head of the Press Department, to Nazarbayev. "Presidential Administration Fund 5, Archive of President of the Republic of Kazakhstan." 23 November, 1992.
- 10 April 2021, Zoom, interviewed by the author.
- 11 October 2019 Almaty, interviewed by the author
- 12 August 2019, Almaty, interviewed by the author.
- 13 Senior politician, October 2019, Astana, interviewed by the author.
- 14 Textbook author of the early generation textbook #1, August 2019, Almaty, interviewed by author.
- 15 Textbook author of the 2000s produced textbook #2, September 2019, interviewed by the author.
- 16 Textbook author of the 2000s produced textbook #5, September 2019, Astana, interviewed by author.
- 17 Textbook author of the 2019 produced textbook #7, September 2019, Almaty, interviewed by author.

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