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VALUE TRANSITIONS IN CIVIL DISCOURSE AMID CONFLICT INSTITUTIONALIZATION IN KAZAKHSTAN: A SPIRAL DYNAMICS APPROACH TO HUMAN RIGHTS RHETORIC

Under conditions of increasing political transformation and change in the realities of Kazakhstan, the human rights discourse becomes increasingly important as a site for the articulation of alternative value systems and critical reflection of public order. A crucial part of conflict resolution will always be to understand the sources and dynamics of conflicts in order to develop more effective strategies and mechanisms for resolving it. Another crucial part is to live to embrace conflict and use it to improve life conditions, instead of trying to avoid the inevitable. The more positive we are towards conflict, the easier it is to develop a good understanding and desire to make the most of it. This study aims to identify levels of value consciousness in the public rhetoric of four leading Kazakh human rights defenders based on the theory of Spiral Dynamics. The study analyzes the texts of four human rights defenders with a legal education, actively participating in public space between 2016 and 2024. The methodology of work is based on a combined content-analysis, paragraph coding and construction of a categorical matrix vMEMEs, adapted to the human rights and legal discourse. The reliability of the coding was tested using the Cohen's Kappa method ($\kappa = 0.82$), which indicates a high degree of consistency in the evaluations. The results of the analysis show the dominance of three levels of value consciousness: One is Blue about normative, legal and order. The second Green implies inclusion, solidarity and humanism, and the third Yellow includes systemic thinking, reflexivity, and adaptability. For each of the speakers, individual variations in the configuration of levels and rhetorical strategies are fixed. Elements of RedPurpleTurquoise levels of value consciousness were also identified, which indicates the existence of transitional forms of consciousness and strategic adaptation. The scientific novelty of the research is the first empirical application of the human evolutionary theory of Spiral Dynamics to the analysis of human rights rhetoric in the Kazakh context. The theoretical significance lies in the development of a cognitive-value approach to the study of civil consciousness and sources of conflict and social tension. The practical applicability of the results consists in the possibility to use the proposed methodology for monitoring value transformations, predicting the evolution of civic rhetoric, as well as for educational and primary education purposes.

Keywords: Spiral Dynamics, human rights discourse, vMEMEs, social conflicts, Kazakhstan, civic consciousness.

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Қазақстандағы қақтығыстардың институционализациясы аясындағы азаматтық дискурстағы құндылықтар трансформациясы: адам құқықтары риторикасына спиральды динамика әдісі

Қазақстандағы саяси трансформацияның күшеюі және әлеуметтік-саяси шындықтардың өзгеруі жағдайында адам құқықтары дискурсы баламалы құндылық жүйелерін артикуляциялау және қоғамдық тәртіпті сын тұрғысынан қайта қарастыру алаңы ретінде барған сайын маңызды бола түсуде. Бұл зерттеудің мақсаты спиральды динамика теориясы негізінде төрт жетекші қазақстандық құқық қорғаушының жария риторикасындағы құндылықтық сана деңгейлерін анықтау. Зерттеу 2016 жылдан 2024 жылға дейін қоғамдық кеңістікте белсенді әрекет еткен, заңгерлік білімі бар төрт құқық қорғаушының мәтіндерін талдауға негізделген. Әдіснама құқықтық және құқық қорғау дискурсына бейімделген vMEME категориялық матрицасын құрумен бірге

бірге параграфтық кодтау мен мазмұнды талдауды біріктіретін аралас әдісті қамтиды. Кодтаудың сенімділігі Cohen's Kappa әдісі арқылы тексерілді (κ = 0.82), бұл бағалаушылар арасындағы жоғары келісімділікті көрсетеді. Талдау нәтижелері үш құндылықтық сана деңгейінің басым екенін көрсетті: Көк деңгей нормативтілік, заңдылық және тәртіпке басымдық береді; Жасыл деңгей инклюзивтілік, ынтымақ және гуманизммен сипатталады; Сары деңгей жүйелік ойлау, рефлексия және бейімделгіштікке бағытталған. Әрбір спикердің риторикалық стратегиялар мен құндылық деңгейлері конфигурациясында жеке айырмашылықтар байқалады. Сонымен қатар, кейбір жағдайларда Қызыл, Күлгін, және Көгілдір деңгей элементтері де тіркеліп, сананың өтпелі формалары мен стратегиялық бейімделуді көрсетеді. Зерттеудің ғылыми жаңалығы Қазақстан контекстінде адам құқықтары риторикасын талдауда спиральды динамика теориясының тұңғыш эмпирикалық қолданылуында. Теориялық маңыздылығы азаматтық сананы зерттеудің когнитивтік-құндылықтық тәсілін ұсынуында. Практикалық мәні бұл әдістемені құндылықтық трансформацияларды мониторингтеу, азаматтық риториканың эволюциясын болжау, сондай-ақ білім беру және құқықтық сауаттылық бағытында қолдану мүмкіндігінде.

Түйін сөздер: спиральды динамика, құқық қорғау дискурсы, vMEME, әлеуметтік қақтығыстар, Қазақстан, азаматтық сана.

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Ценностные трансформации в гражданском дискурсе на фоне институционализации конфликта в Казахстане: подход спиральной динамики к правозащитной риторике

В условиях нарастающей политической трансформации и изменении в казахстанских реалиях правозащитный дискурс приобретает всё большую значимость как площадка артикуляции альтернативных ценностных систем и критической рефлексии общественного порядка. Цель настоящего исследования выявление уровней ценностного сознания в публичной риторике четырех ведущих казахстанских правозащитников на основе теории спиральной динамики. В исследовании проанализированы тексты четырёх правозащитников с юридическим образованием, активно участвующих в публичном пространстве в период с 2016 по 2024 год. Методология работы опирается на комбинированный контент-анализ, абзацное кодирование и построение категориальной матрицы vMEMEs, адаптированной под правозащитный и юридический дискурс. Надёжность кодирования проверялась с помощью метода Cohen's Kappa (κ=0.82), что свидетельствует о высокой степени согласованности оценок. Результаты анализа показывают доминирование трёх уровней ценностного сознания, а именно синего, где речь идет о нормативности, законности и порядке. Далее зелёного, что подразумевает инклюзию, солидарность и гуманизм и жёлтого уровня, который включает системное мышление, рефлексия, адаптивность. Для каждого из спикеров зафиксированы индивидуальные вариации в конфигурации уровней и риторических стратегиях. Выявлены также элементы красного, фиолетового и, в отдельных случаях, бирюзового уровней, что указывает на наличие переходных форм сознания и стратегической адаптации. Научная новизна исследования заключается в первом эмпирическом применении теории спиральной динамики к анализу правозащитной риторики в казахстанском контексте. Теоретическая значимость заключается в разработке когнитивно-ценностного подхода к исследованию гражданского сознания. Практическая применимость результатов заключается в возможности использовать предложенную методику для мониторинга ценностных трансформаций, прогнозирования эволюции гражданской риторики, а также в образовательных и правопросветительских целях.

Ключевые слова: спиральная динамика, правозащитный дискурс, vMEMEs, социальные конфликты, Казахстан, гражданское сознание.

Introduction

In the context of transformation, Kazakhstan is facing contradictory processes of political liberalization, increasing digital mobilization of citizens and institutional instability. These processes contribute to the activation of the human rights movement and the public discourse on civic values. Public statements by human rights defenders in the face of growing authoritarian trends become essential not only as acts of civic courage, but also as forms of dissemination of alternative value models opposed

to state rhetoric of stability, hierarchy and obedience (Falk, 2000: 10).

Despite the growing research in this field of human rights activities, there is little attempt in the academic literature to analyse in depth the structures of value consciousness transmitted through the discourse on human rights. The prevailing approaches focus on institutional arrangements, international norms and legal implications, while domestic cognitive-value frameworks of human rights rhetoric remain outside of research attention (Satter, 2020).

One of the reasons for conflict being such an elusive subject and commonly misunderstood is the fact, that we interpret aspects of conflicts in very different and sometimes erroneous ways. Assuming that a conflict is indeed a manifestation of differences, the issue here is to understand the causes and manage the conflict environment and variables pertinent to a given conflict situation. In that regard, it is important to note, that the conflict persists regardless of the environment, but the task is to understand the contrasts and recognize the sources of conflict (Katzenback, p. 89)

Ano important dimension which needs to be addressed as an environmental factor in any given conflict situation, is related to personal or group values and culture. In their book: Spiral Dynamics, mastering values, leadership and change, Don Edward Beck and Christopher C. Cowan built on the theory originally developed by Clare W. Graves, where the concept of vMEME and its implications on individuals, organizations and societies is explained (Beck, 2014: 33).

The theory holds that individuals, groups, organizations and whole societies develop a sort of "mental filter", which can be characterized and grouped into different value MEMEs along a spiral, which again represent the value codes at play when dealing with a certain life conditions. Beck and Cowan have used colors to distinguish between the different vMEMEs as follows (Beck, 2014: 49): Beige (survival sense), Purple (Tribal order), Red (Powerful self), Blue (Absolute order), Orange (Enterprising self) and Green (Egalitarian order). These are all called 1st tier vMEMEs, which tend to exclude the worldview of others when dominant. Thus, Green does not accept the values of Orange etc. Furthermore there are so called second tier vMEMEs, Yellow (Integrated self) and Turquoise (Global order), which on the other hand have the capability to include and tolerate the difference in culture and value codes in the 1st tier.

In order to create a mutual understanding, one must realize which vMEMEs or value codes are at play in order to address the cultural/value dimension of the equation. If not, there will be a communication breakdown in case of 1st tier vMEMEs where parties will stop talking to one another. Instead they will talk at one another, determined not to accept the others point of view, not even understanding it at all. Beck and Cowan argue this is the result of different vMEME codes being in conflict where they e.g. state that: "Both upheaval and stability are products of vMEMEs on the move, though few analysts manage to look through the fog of confusing ideas to see them" (Beck, 2014: 33)

The theory of Spiral Dynamics, developed by Clare Graves and Don Beck and Chris Cowan, is an evolutionary model of individual and collective consciousness development based on the concept of value memes (vMEMEs), corresponding to different cultural stages of psychological maturity (Beck, 2014). The model makes it possible to classify utterances and forms of behavior by levels of complexity of thinking, from impulsive and authoritarian to humanistic, systemic and integral. Within this paradigm, human rights rhetoric can be seen as a manifestation of a desired transition from the dogmatic (Blue) and revolutionary (Red) levels to more inclusive forms of thinking as Green, Yellow and potentially Turquoise (Wilber, 2001), (Laloux, 2014). In connection with the above-mentioned in this study, a Spiral Dynamics model was applied for the first time to an empirical analysis of human rights discourse in Kazakhstan.

The subject of the study is the public discourse of Kazakh human rights defenders and lawyers Zhanna Urazbahova, Ermek Narymbay, Zhaslan Aitmagambetov, and Alnur Ilyashev, which is placed in the digital space.

The object of research is the value structures reflected in the human rights discourse, interpreted according to the levels of consciousness described in the theory of Spiral Dynamics.

The aim of the study is to identify and interpret levels of vMEMEs dominant in the public rhetoric of human rights defenders mentioned in the study, as well as to analyze the combination of several vMEMEs and their dynamics. In order to achieve the stated goal of the study, the following **objectives** were fulfilled:

- collection of primary sources of public statements and texts for substantive analysis;

- content analysis and categorization of vMEMEs expressed in speech, based on the theory of Spiral Dynamics;

- quantitative and qualitative evaluation of the distribution of vMEMEs by levels according to the theory of Spiral Dynamics;

- analyzed the dominant and auxiliary value codes of each speaker and their dynamics over several years.

The research hypothesis suggests that the discourse of speakers represents a complex configuration of value levels, in which Green and Yellow vMEMEs predominate the desired state. However, elements of Blue and Red thinking remain, reflecting the transition phase inherent to human rights defenders.

Theoretical and methodological approaches. The framework of this study is based on an integrative, interdisciplinary approach in which the theory of Spiral Dynamics functions as a meta-theoretical model, and additional areas of cause lawyering theory, a critical approach to human rights. The study of repressive regimes and the role of media is used to contextualise and deepen analysis. As the theoretical basis, the theory of Spiral Dynamics is used, developed by Clare Graves and theorised by Don Beck and Chris Cowan (Beck, 1996) as explained earlier. According to this theory, the public and individual consciousness develop step by step, passing through successive levels of set of values, or value systems, that govern the beliefs and behavior, manifested in type of response to given life conditions. Each of these thus correspond to a specific type of thinking, behaviour and reaction to the complexity of the social environment. In the context of human rights discourse, the theory allows for the identification of which levels of consciousness are at the basis of the speech practices of legal defenders and how they reflect stages of development of civic consciousness. Within this theory, three additional directions are integrated, each of which focuses on a particular aspect of the human rights phenomenon.

First, the theory of cause lawyering developed within the framework of sociology of law is used (Sarat, 2008: 321). This approach sees human rights defenders not simply as professional lawyers, but as agents of social change, consciously involved in the processes of transformation of society (Cummings, 2011). The theory makes it possible to interpret the rhetoric of human rights defenders as a practice of symbolic action aimed at redefining justice, legitimacy and public order. From the perspective of Spiral Dynamics, cause lawyering is understood as a behavioural form characteristic of the levels of Green and Yellow vMEMEs because it combines the values of inclusion, social justice and systemic transformation.

Second, the study employs a critical-structural approach to human rights, incorporating elements of feminist jurisprudence, post-colonial criticism, and cultural relativism (Mutua, 2016). These approaches enable the identification of limitations in universalistic models of human rights, as well as mechanisms of institutional and cultural pressure applied to human rights practices in authoritarian regimes. From the perspective of Spiral Dynamics, such critical positions indicate an internal evolution of the Green level of consciousness, seeking to move beyond moral humanism towards more reflexive and integral positions characteristic of the Yellow vMEMEs.

Third, the study uses an integrated approach to analyze the external context of human rights discourse, including institutional repression, sociocultural attitudes and media environment. Studies on restrictive mechanisms (Levitsky, 2010) show that violence, hierarchy and the mechanization of order are manifestations of Red and Blue levels of vMEMEs embedded in the structure of political power. Complementing the analysis, work on the influence of education, ideology, international relations and public opinion reveals how these factors shape the level of support for human rights and affect the dynamics of civic mobilization.

Finally, the role of independent media and digital platforms is seen as a key trigger for activating higher levels of Green and Yellow vMEMEs, providing space for the articulation of alternative narratives of justice and legitimacy. Together, these directions contextualize the systemic barriers in which human rights defenders shape their rhetoric and explain how the external environment contributes to either the suppression or the development of value consciousness. The Spiral Dynamics function in this study as a single ontological model, ensuring categorization of the human rights discourse, while additional approaches provide empirical, contextual and behavioral concretisation of vMEMEs, and reveal the reasons for their dominance or suppression in a particular socio-cultural and political environment.

Materials and methods

The present study employs a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches within the framework of a single content analysis strategy. This approach enables the identification of structural levels of vMEMEs and the measurement of the fre-

quency of various vMEMEs in the speech practices of our speakers. The presented results are part of a larger research project aimed at analyzing the evolution of vMEMEs in Kazakhstan through the prism of the theory of Spiral Dynamics. Within the framework of the project, a comparative study of different professional categories of speakers involved in the formation of the public narrative is carried out. For each category group, four representative figures were selected to meet several criteria. Within this category is analyzed a group of human rights defenders with legal education, which includes the following participants: *Zhanna Urazbahova, Ermek Narymbay, Zhaslan Aitmagambetov, and Alnur Ilyashev.* Each speaker met the following criteria:

- systemic involvement in civil or human rights activities;

- active presence in the public sphere;

- professional identity, corresponding category;

- the diversity of public formats and rhetorical modalities.

Moreover, the choice of speakers is based on both their legal background and their longstanding practice of publicly expressing a human rights position. These figures represent different generations, styles of rhetoric and types of human rights activities, which provide intra-group diversity while maintaining the categorical integrity of the sample.

In terms of the unit of analysis within content analysis, the study combines categorical content analysis with elements of narrative and frame analysis, which records both lexical and semantic markers, as well as the structure of argumentation and value orientation at the level of utterances. The analysis covers text and media materials published and recorded prior to 2025 with varying volumes (see Table 1). The period 2025 is excluded from the sample of the analysis unit because, at the time the data collection was completed (March 2025), the current year's arrays were incomplete. All materials were included for analysis, namely:

- author articles, blogs and posts in social networks;

- interviews (video and text formats) in YouTube, national and international Internet media;

- public lectures, podcasts, conference presentations;

- expert comments and analytical remarks in professional media.

The beginning of each speaker's data collection period varies by year. However, the different beginnings of public activity for each speaker have not affected methodological integrity because the analysis is not aimed at comparing chronological phases between speakers, but rather a static reconstruction of the prevailing vMEMEs levels expressed in their rhetoric.

Table 1 – Scope and Timeframe of Discourse Analysis for Each Speaker (Source: authors' compilation based on survey data)

Speaker	Period of Analysis	Word Count
Zhanna Urazbahova	2016 – 2024	128,185
Ermek Narymbay	2016 – 2024	89,432
Zhaslan Aitmagambetov	2019 – 2024	85,183
Alnur Ilyashev	2019 – 2024	77,417

The chronological aspects of each speaker are considered individually, which does not lead to a violation of the methodology. A paragraph was used as the unit of analysis, which allows for maintaining the contextual coherence of the blocks of meanings, avoiding fragmentation and taking into account the narrative intensity of the utterances.

The paragraph encoding was justified by the fact that it is at the level of the paragraph that vMEMEs appear most clearly. The specially developed vMEMEs categorical matrix, adapted to legal and human rights discourse, was used for coding. The matrix includes lexical markers, generic speech constructs, cognitive styles and thematic contexts, covering all key levels in the theory of Spiral Dynamics from Beige to Turquoise.

Although the basic coding was carried out by one researcher, a double-blind coding procedure on a sub-sample of 10% of the total volume of texts per speaker was conducted to increase reliability and subjectivity control. The matrix was applied to the same set of texts, and Cohen's Kappa (κ) consistency coefficient was calculated based on the coding results. The Cohen's Kappa calculation formula is shown in Figure 1.

$$\kappa = \frac{P_o - P_e}{1 - P_e}$$

Figure 1 – Cohen's Kappa calculation formula

In this study, the value of Cohen's Kappa was 0.82, which indicates a high degree of consistency. The results confirm the reliability of the coding

procedure used and the compliance of the selected categories with the content of the investigated material.

In the course of this study, all ethical norms were respected, and the analysis was carried out exclusively based on publicly available data placed in open sources (social networks, YouTube, media interviews, etc.). All analyzed materials do not contain personalized confidential information and were published by the authors themselves with the intention of public dissemination. Therefore, no ethical review was required. Nevertheless, within the framework of academic ethics, when quoting speech fragments, the correctness of context transmission is respected, excluding distortions or manipulative interpretation of statements. All sources have been recorded and preserved in the project's research archive. Moreover, the personal consent of all speakers for the analysis of their discourse was obtained.

Methodological limitations. Despite the measures taken to ensure the reliability and completeness of the analysis, the study has several limitations. First, the deep binding of the coding to the theory of Spiral Dynamics implies a theoretical interpretation, which can generate discrepancies when trying to transfer the model into other contexts. Second, the speech material covers only one categorical group of human rights defenders with a legal education and does not claim to cover the entire spectrum of human rights discourse in Kazakhstan. Third, since the length and character of speech vary from speaker to speaker, there is an uneven distribution of codes due to stylistic, generational and rhetorical features. However, these limitations do not Reduce the significance of the results, since the study is qualitative and analytical and aims to identify meaningful patterns, rather than statistical representativeness.

Literature review

The study of human rights discourse requires an integrated theoretical and methodological approach capable of taking into account both the internal cognitive and value structures of utterances, as well as the external contextual constraints in which they are formed. In the context of the Kazakh political environment, human rights rhetoric often performs a double function. On the one hand, it expresses alternative models of social organization based on the values of inclusion, freedom and systemic justice,

On the other hand, it adapts to the Kazakh regulatory framework, producing sustainable forms of expression in a context of censorship and institutional bias. In order to understand such speech strategies, this study applies the theory of Spiral Dynamics, which functions as a metatheoretical framework for analyzing the evolution of levels of social and individual consciousness (Beck & Cowan, 1996).

Theory of Spiral Dynamics, developed initially by Clare Greaves and subsequently conceptualized by Don Beck and Chris Cowan, is based on the premise that human consciousness develops in stages, passing through changing levels of value systems so-called vMEMEs. Each level corresponds to specific cognitive schemes, rhetorical constructs and behavioral practices, ranging from survival (Beige), strength (Red) and hierarchy (Blue), to achievement (Orange), inclusion (Green), system thinking (Yellow) and integral consciousness (Turquoise). From the second level vMEME (Red), the levels shift from sociocentric to egocentric center of gravity, like a pendulum, or from the emphasis on self to the emphasis on social order. Thus, the Red represents the powerful self, whild the Blue represents an absolute order coming from above (God). By combining the Red (Power) and Blue (order) the next level represents a new form of self, the Enterprising Self, which has learned to use power within limits (order). As a response inequality caused by the Enterprising Self, the Green vMEME enforces a new form of order based on social justice and inclusiveness. Thus, the way of thinking and response creates an ever-increasing complexity, whereby humans develop the capacity to deal with that complexity as it becomes overwhelming. The evolution constitutes a spiral, where the consciousness swings from "taking things in our own hands" to "we need to deal with this together", i.e. from egocentric to sociocentric level of consciousness which capability to include new level of complexity in life conditions, thus becoming more mature as it takes into account previous vMEMEs. The vMEMEs from Beige to Green are called First Tier vMEMEs. The First-Tier levels of thinking form as a reaction to unhealthy practices and life conditions created by the previous one. Therefore, they are inherently opposed to one another, which, as previously stated, are a fundamental source of conflicts between persons or within societies. However, as the evolution has reached the Green vMEME, the next level represents a fundamental shift in consciousness, where it has gained the

cognitive capability to integrate operationally all the previous vMEMEs and thus being able to incorporate all the elements of the previous vMEMEs for the greater good. This new level of thinking is defined as Second Tier where the first vMEME (Yellow) is the integrative way of thinking designed for a new pathway towards a balanced or vertical view through all previous vMEMEs when it comes to the First Tier vMEMEs having created a level of complexity and challenges it cannot cope with anymore. By the same token the last identified vMEME, Turquoise is taking a more global view, acknowledging the fact that there is only one Earth, and all inhabitants are equally affected by what happens on Planet Earth.

More detailed information on each level is given in Table 2.

Table 2 – vMEMEs in Spiral Dynamics definitions and characteristics

Color	Name	Core values and beliefs	Typical behaviors / worldview	Key motto
Beige	SurvivalSense	Instincts, physical survival, basic needs (food, safety, reproduction)	Individualistic, focused on immediate survival; often found in infancy or extreme deprivation	*«Stay alive at all costs.»*
Purple	KinSpirits (Tribal order)	Tradition, safety through belonging, ancestral spirits, and magical thinking	Tribal loyalty, rituals, sacRed customs, family or clan-centric thinking	*«Protect the tribe and its ways.»*
Red	PowerGods (Powerful self)	Power, domination, impulsiveness, immediate gratification, heroism	Egocentric, aggressive, seeks control, loyal to strong leaders; often linked to rebellion.	*«I do what I want, because I can.»*
Blue	TruthForce (Absolute order)	Order, duty, purpose, discipline, obedience to absolute truth (often religious or legal)	Rules-based morality, belief in one right way, law-and-order mentality	*«Life has meaning through obedience.»*
Orange	StriveDrive (Enterprising self)	Success, achievement, autonomy, rationality, innovation	Competitive individualism, goal orientation, science, and capitalism	*«Act to win and make life better.»*
Green	HumanBond (Egalitarian Order)	Equality, community, emotional intelligence, diversity, and ecological awareness	Consensus-seeking, human rights focus, pluralism, care for others	*«Love others and the planet.»*
Yellow	FlexFlow (Integrated Self)	Systems thinking, integration, functionality over ideology, and adaptability	Accepts complexity, self-aware, non-judgmental, problem-solving across paradigms	*«Live fully and flexibly.»*
Turquoise	GlobalView (Global Order)	Holism, unity, planetary consciousness, interdependence, spiritual integration	Global thinking, interconnectedness, and collective consciousness transcend ego.	*«We are all one living system.»*

In the context of human rights rhetoric, this model makes it possible to classify statements not only by their content, but also by the level of value complexity, integrativity and readiness to transform the existing order. In particular, the transition from Blue absolute order to the Green egalitarian and Yellow systematicity vMEME, adaptability, and reflexivity levels can be empirically recorded through content analysis of human rights texts. Content analysis in this study is the primary methodological tool, providing both quantitative and qualitative evaluation of discursive structures. Based on the principles of categorical and frame analysis, the study records the frequency and distribution of vMEMEs at the level of paragraphs. Also, it identifies semantic clusters that reflect certain stages of consciousness, allowing one to trace not only the dominant value paradigms in each speaker but also the trajectories of their development over time, as well as the contextual factors that modulate changes.

Moreover, this study also integrated into the analysis three interrelated directions that were previously mentioned in part of the research approaches, namely cause lawyering theory, which treats human rights defenders as agents of symbolic and political action, Critical-structural approaches to human rights, including feminist jurisprudence, post-colonial criticism and cultural relativism, and research on repressive structures, psychological attitudes and the role of media as external regulators of human rights discourse. All three areas are integrated into the theory of Spiral Dynamics as a tool for the operationalization of levels of value consciousness, which makes it possible to evaluate

human rights rhetoric not only as legal practice, but also as a form of manifestation and transmission of complex worldview systems.

Human rights action as a transformative practice

The cause lawyering paradigm, which has been widely developed within the sociology of law (Sarat, 2001), considers human rights legal activity as a form of symbolic and transformative action that goes beyond the traditional understanding of the legal profession. Her focus is on lawyers who seek not only to represent the interests of clients, but also consciously intervene in social transformation processes, challenging legal norms, hierarchical structures and political institutions. Contemporary literature on cause lawyering highlights the strategic diversity and contextual variability of human rights practices.

Studies by Cummings (2020), Capulong (2009), Dominguez (2005) and Lobel (2006) demonstrate that human rights defenders act at the intersection of legal, political and ethical spheres, using advocacy as a tool for resistance and collective mobilization. In terms of Spiral Dynamics, this strategy can be understood as an expression of the Green and Yellow levels of vMEMEs.

The Green layer manifests itself in the emphasis on empathy, inclusion, social justice and support for vulnerable groups (Pow, 2017), (Tully, 2020), (Tyner, 2013), while the Yellow one is in a systemic, integral approach to social engineering and legal innovations (Petrarca, 2014), (McCluskey, 2020). In conditions like those of Kazakhstan, human rights lawyers function as bearers of transitional values, combining critical legal practice with ethical and political reflection (Krishnan, 2018: 241). Particularly significant in the context of «hereditary transformation» (McEvoy, 2019: 529), when the rhetoric and strategy of human rights defenders reflect a long history of resistance and carry value patterns across generations.

Elements such as the professional dilemma between legal norms and moral calling (Parker, 2007: 243), (Erichson, 2004: 2090) are revealed in the context of the conflict between the Blue vMEME, where it is about law, order and hierarchy, and the Green and Yellow, where the emphasis is on ethics, reflection and systemic interdependency. Research by Agarwal N., Simonson J. (2010) and Manzo (2016) shows how the transformation of professional identity leads to a horizontal legal practice where the lawyer becomes an ally, not an expert, which fundamentally undermines the Red/Blue norms of the power hierarchy and promotes the transition to Green structures of meaning.

The above-mentioned theory not only serves as an explanatory model of rhetorical and strategic practices of human rights defenders but also provides a heuristic bridge between empirical human rights activities and the meteorology of Spiral Dynamics. It allows for viewing human rights defenders as agents of inter-level transition, whose rhetoric and actions represent the dynamic struggle between rooted systems of repression and evolving structures of consciousness.

Critical-structural approach to human rights through the prism of Spiral Dynamics

Critical approaches to human rights that have emerged within feminist jurisprudence, post-colonial theory and cultural relativism question universalist models of rights, criticizing them for epistemological blindness, cultural asymmetry and institutional reproduction of power (West, 2019: 13), (Dale, 2018: 41).

Contrary to the assumption of the neutrality and universality of human rights, these approaches treat law as an arena of conflict in which representation, affect, identity and corporeality become the basis for alternative models of justice. In terms of Spiral Dynamics, this critique expresses a transition from the late-Green to the Yellow level of vMEMEs, where moral humanism gives way to systemic reflexes and pluralistic approaches to truth and norm creation. This theory offers an interpretation of law as a narrative space in which trauma, experience, emotional expression and vulnerability are legitimate sources of legal significance, which corresponds to the Green vMEME, oriented towards empathy, inclusion and respect for others but at the same time opens the way to Yellow, because it requires reorganization of the very structures of knowledge, language and institutional thinking. In parallel, post-colonial approaches criticize

Western hegemony in human rights rhetoric, showing that the concepts of universality, autonomy and rationality are embedded in colonial hierarchies that exclude other forms of legal cultures (Dale, 2018: 43). Alternative narratives, forming in the global South, seek not to renounce rights, but to redefine them in terms of local epistemology, solidarity, interdependence and communal subjectivity, which is not Green humanism, but not either a return to traditionalism. Therefore, in the logic of Spiral Dynamics this can be understood as an attempt

to integrate multiple levels through a systemic reinterpretation of legal thinking, characteristic for the Yellow systemic vMEME.

Here comes the meta-knowledge that universalism itself is a cultural construct, and the task is not to replace it with a new dogma, but to turn into an open system of value coordinates (Dale, 2018: 47), (Kaplan, 2017: 114). This approach also covers the psychological forms of adaptation of human rights defenders to an authoritarian environment, where human rights defenders are forced to resort to a strategy of «ethical care», tactical silence or symbolic protest. Such forms of behaviour can be interpreted as a regression to the Blue vMEME, where institutional loyalty, legalism and caution are involved, but also as conscious management of one's vulnerability and attempt to operate in the prevailing level of consciousness in order to communicate to the current way of thinking as a natural next step to preserve the mission, which creates unique configurations of Yellow consciousness that are non-linear, flexible and strategically adaptive. They accept old values, but recycle them under the pressure of an external environment and for long-term transformation (Naravage, 2016: 772), (d'Astros, 2024).

Contextual limitations and media mediation in the articulation of human rights values

The study of human rights discourse requires special attention to macro- and micro-structures that limit the articulation of value positions associated with higher levels of consciousness in the theory of Spiral Dynamics, namely Green, Yellow and Turquoise vMEMEs. Traditional measures, rooted in the institutions of power, interact with the internal cultural and psychological attitudes of citizens and create specific restrictions for the free expression of a human rights position. Together, they form a complex pressure ecosystem in which the human rights defender not only speaks but also navigates between systemic threats, cultural norms and limited distribution channels. How is this considered in the scientific space?

First, institutionalized forms of repression, including criminal prosecution, censorship, threats and delegitimization, serve as a crystallization of the Red and Blue levels of vMEMEs (Levitsky, 2010), (Williamson, 2021). The Red level is characterized by power domination, fear, and direct control, while the Blue level is characterized by institutional allegiance to order, moral legalism, and the secularization of hierarchy. In such

circumstances, a human rights defender who tries to articulate the values of pluralism, critical thinking and social inclusion falls into a situation of systemic repression. In the content analysis of our speakers, this manifests itself through the rhetoric of forced defense, code words that detract from direct accusations, or strategic silence; all these practices are a form of adaptive expression of high vMEMEs in the environment.

Second, psychological and sociocultural attitudes play an important role in how human rights ideas are perceived and conveyed (McFarland, 2015), (McFarland, 2022). In this case, variables such as level of education, political ideology, individual authoritarianism, cultural norms and religious beliefs are directly correlated with a willingness to perceive the human rights discourse.

For example, research by McFarland (2022) shows that low levels of education and high rates of authoritarianism contribute to support for repression and denial of the universality of rights. In the theory of Spiral Dynamics, such individuals function predominantly on the levels of Red and Blue vMEMEs, where the values of hierarchy, power, subordination and order dominate, and the very idea of universal rights is perceived as a threat to the established order. However, a high level of education can also show Red vMEMEs, but as a healthy manifestation as part of the reinforcement of a Blue or higher level.

Third, media and digital space have a dual function. On the one hand, they enhance the visibility of human rights defenders by creating network channels for vMEMEs to circulate, promote horizontal linkages and internationalization of value structures (Zhou, 2013).

On the other hand, under authoritarian conditions, the media itself is subject to pressure and censorship, which creates fragmented and risky windows of opportunity. Within the framework of Spiral Dynamics, media platforms can function as transition triggers, stimulating movement from Blue to and Yellow levels especially in cases where discourse is based on emotional closeness, testimonies, personal stories and inter-subjective connections. Analysis of the digital discourse of our speakers shows that platforms like YouTube, Instagram and Facebook are used not only as platforms, but as spaces of alternative socialization where a human rights identity is formed and maintained.

An additional aspect is the transnational nature of information communication, where global

institutions correlates with a high level of support for human rights in society, which paves the way to a Turquoise vMEME, within which the global consciousness, Complexity and ethical integrity become the norm of thinking.

However, our data show that in the context of Kazakhstan, the transition to the Turquoise discourse is still episodic and more often expressed at the level of fragments of appeals to transnational ethics, environmental responsibility or universalized humanism. The above points make it possible to understand that the human rights discourse is not an act of linear expression of position, but the result of a complex strategy of navigation between political, cultural and medial aspects. Repressive and cultural constraints in this context do not block, but modulate the trajectories of expression of vMEMEs. The investigation of such conditions allows for the revelation of internal tensions between levels of consciousness and records which vMEMEs are the most resistant to external repression. It can penetrate public space even under control.

Results and discussion

The results of content analysis of the public rhetoric of our speakers revealed a multi-level structure of value orientations, represented through the prism of the theory of Spiral Dynamics. Despite individual stylistic differences and thematic focuses, overall analysis demonstrates the steady dominance of mature and post-conventional levels of consciousness, which in the Spiral Dynamics is expressed through Blue, Green and Yellow vMEMEs that structure the core of human rights discourse.

At the same time, differences between actual and semantic frequency indicate the existence of hidden value codes, not always directly articulated in language, but manifested in intensity and reasoning logic. The Blue vMEME was most pronounced at the total sample level for all four speakers, reflecting regulatory coordination, institutional fairness and a focus on the rule of law. It constitutes not only the professional basis of legal rhetoric but also the symbolic core of a human rights identity. Furthermore, as previously outlined, the current social conditions point to the fact, that the authorities are operating on the Red authoritarian level, which has a tendency to bend rules and order to its own good. Therefore, emphasis on establishing a more healthy Blue order system is crucial on the pathway towards the more aspirational value levels of Green and Yellow. The Green and Yellow levels, showing respectively humanistic and system-reflexive orientation, vary in expression that is also present in the rhetoric of all analyzed speakers as dominant, which was initially proposed in the hypothesis of the study. These are clearly aspirational in the sense, that the vision or desired state is based on the characteristics of the Green and Yellow Value Systems. Low representation of Turquoise, as well as Purple and Beige level, indicates the continuing barriers to integral and transcendent forms of thinking in the Kazakhstan realities.

As was said earlier, the most pronounced level of vMEMEs in all cases in the rhetoric is the Blue vMEMEs, where it is on average equally represented in the area of 23% to 30% of the total text by all speakers, which indicates the prevalence of the normative-legal paradigm based on the ideas of a healthy institutional order, universal procedures and the rule of law (see Figure 2). The Blue level, with all the variability of topics, constitutes the cognitive and professional core of human rights rhetoric and performs the function of systemic coordination of human rights messages.

The vMEME Blue level, reflecting the values of order, debt, legality and institutional responsibility, acts as the dominant cognitive and rhetorical matrix in the discourse of all four Kazakh human rights defenders. It structures the concepts of justice, justifies the legitimacy of human rights activities and sets out the logic of normative interaction with state institutions. A visual analysis of the lexical Blue level markers is presented in Figure 3, where a generated cloud of words captures the most frequent terms used by all four speakers in the legal context.

The most frequently occurring words *«law», «right», «protection», «order», «citizens», «justice», «state», «code», «constitution», «norm», «responsibility», «duty», «appeal»,* and *«court»* represent the core semantic fields characteristic of a healthy Blue vMEME expressing normativity, institutional legitimacy, moral obligation, and legal security. Despite a general adherence to legal language and normative thinking, each speaker manifests the Blue level differently, shaping unique stylistic and strategic emphasis. For some, the focus lies on rules, authority, and command as pillars of social structure, while others highlight the role of officials, organization, and system in securing security and justice. This diversity of rhetorical framing under the Blue vMEME umbrella reveals a shared commitment to order and responsibility, while allowing for variation in how punishment and legal institutions are invoked to legitimize political or civil discourse.

Figure 2 – Distribution of the semantic frequency of vMEMEs levels in rhetoric
(Source: authors' compilation based on survey data)

Figure 3 – Cloud of keywords associated with Blue, Green and Yellow vMEME in speakers' rhetoric
(Source: authors' compilation based on survey data)

Zhaslan Aitmagambetov demonstrates the most consistent and institutionally oriented expression of the Blue vMEME. His rhetoric is rich in references to legislative articles, legal norms, and procedural frameworks. Frequently used terms such as «draft law», «code», «appeal», «voting» and «legal status» reflect his focus on the normative and educational function of discourse, aimed at strengthening citizens' legal awareness and literacy. In this context, the Blue level serves as a foundation for legal peda-

gogy and the rational legitimation of social order. Example:

«Иногда бывает, вам выдают решение суда, которое вступило в законную силу, да, оно является правоустанавливающим документом, но если какой-то спор по данной недвижимости был и не прошёл допустим инстанцию Верховного суда… то сторона может оспорить… и тогда все сделки на основании данного решения суда будут признаны недействительными…»

[In some cases, you may be issued a court decision that has entered into legal force and indeed constitutes a title-establishing document. However, if a dispute over the given property arises and, for example, has not passed through the Supreme Court instance, the opposing party may still challenge it at which point all transactions based on that court decision may be declared invalid].

Zhanna Urazbahova expresses the Blue vMEME through an ethical-humanistic lens, integrating moral and emotional categories into normative rhetoric. In addition to references to law and state institutions, her discourse is saturated with vocabulary such as *«duty», «fear», «life»,* and *«responsibility»,* which signals the humanization of legal language. For her, the Blue level functions not only as a mechanism of regulation but also as a tool for the moral protection of vulnerable groups, primarily women. Example:

«Особенно в делах о насилии. А сейчас они пытаются навязать жертве страх .. «а вот не докажем, а потом тебя за ложный донос посадят. Лучше примирись, забери заявление и возьми деньги. На тебе никто не женится, уят болады». И это слова людей, которые и должны обеспечить доказательства. Вместо этого перекладывают ответственность на жертв и запугивают их. Один вообще отправлял несовершеннолетнюю жертву просить прощения у насильника, мол так будет лучше для всех. В голове не укладывается. Просить прощения у насильника, потому что он, как следователь, не сможет доказать преступление и наказать его? За это девушка должна просить прощения у преступника?..И эти же намысты (гордые) джигиты бегут на разборки, когда наши девушки выходят замуж за иностранцев или озируют голыми. Честь изнасилованных соотечественниц не так важна, как честь девушки, которая полюбила мужчину другой нации?»

[Especially in cases involving violence. Now they try to instil fear in the victim "What if we cannot prove it, and then you will be prosecuted for a false accusation? Better reconcile, withdraw the statement, and take the money. No one will marry you **«uyat bolady[1]»** These are the words of those who are supposed to ensure that the evidence is collected. Instead, they shift responsibility onto the victims and intimidate them. «One investigator even sent a minor victim to ask the rapist for forgiveness, saying it would be better for everyone. I can't wrap my head around it. Ask a rapist for forgiveness because the investigator can't prove the crime and secure punishment? And for that, the girl is supposed to apologize to the criminal?..» «And these same proud **«dzhigits[2]»** rush to intervene when our girls marry foreigners or appear nude. But the honor of raped compatriots is apparently less important than the honor of a woman who has fallen in love with a man of another nationality]

Alnur Ilyashev employs the Blue level in the form of critical-reformist rhetoric, using universal legal norms as a basis for delegitimizing political arbitrariness. His argumentation is grounded in references to *«code», «constitution», «article»,* and *«legal order»,* yet his goal is not to consolidate the institution, but to expose its erosion. Among all speakers, Ilyashev most consistently integrates the Blue vMEME with Yellow and Green levels, forming a hybrid framework of normative critique. While the other speakers often invoke the Blue level independently of the Green or Yellow vMEMEs, Ilyashev always combines it with at least one or even both of these higher levels. This suggests a stronger tendency toward a complete transition to the upper vMEMEs, with the Blue level remaining as a peripheral support for more advanced structures of consciousness. Example:

«Существующая власть и правящая партия заявляли и будут заявлять о своей легитимности до тех пор, пока на фактах не будет продемонстрировано всем обратное. Лишь активным участием в выборах мы можем доказать, что заявленная широкая поддержка населения партии власти в действительности отсутствует…»

[The existing power and the ruling party have declared and will declare their legitimacy until the facts prove otherwise. Only by actively participating in the elections we can prove that the declared broad support of the ruling party's population does not really exist...]

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[1] «ұят болады» (uyat bolady) means shame, disgrace, or moral condemnation from society. It is a key concept in traditional Kazakh culture, closely tied to notions of honor, dignity, and both family and social reputation.

[2] «Джигит» (dzhigit) it is a Turkic word widely used in the Kazakh language to refer to a young man, traditionally a brave, skillful, and noble horseman or warrior.

Despite his sharp and confrontational style, Ermek Narymbay actively draws on the lexicon of the Blue vMEME, using it as a tool for moral and legal indictment. In his texts and public speeches, the Blue level is evident in terms such as «court», «law», «state», «violation», «responsibility», and «norms». However, these are employed within a rhetoric of mobilization aimed at denouncing arbitrariness and rights violations. In this context, the Blue level functions as a resource of righteous anger and political mobilization. Example:

«Если вы не можете обеспечить врачей ИВЛами, масками и защитой, то вы должны быть уволены. Это ваша юридическая и политическая ответственность. Почему главный санитарный врач до сих пор работает? Почему не уволен министр здравоохранения? Где государство, где закон? Почему людей заражают в больницах, а виновные не несут ответственности? Это преступление!»

[If you cannot provide doctors with ventilators, masks, and protection, then you must be dismissed. This is your legal and political responsibility. Why is the Chief Sanitary Doctor still in office? Why hasn't the Minister of Health been fired? Where is the state, where is the law? Why are people getting infected in hospitals while that responsible face no consequences? This is a crime!]

The Blue vMEME in the rhetoric of the four human rights defenders does not function as a static structure of legal language, but rather as a flexible and multidimensional resource. It may serve as a normative-educational model (Aitmagambetov), a means of ethical protection (Urazbahova), a framework for systemic critique (Ilyashev), or a mobilizing force (Narymbay). Despite these differences, all four speakers share a common feature: it is precisely through the Blue level that they formulate their human rights legitimacy, appeal to universal legal norms, and oppose themselves to the arbitrariness and repressive discourse typical of the Red and unhealthy Blue levels in state propaganda. In the background, yet with a high degree of salience, the Green and Yellow levels are also prominently represented to express a more complete picture of the Desired State. As shown in Figure 2, these levels occupy distinct positions across all four profiles, forming complex configurations of value articulation. The Green vMEME reflects a consistent presence of a humanistic perspective, incorporating empathy, solidarity, and moral sensitivity toward vulnerable groups. The Yellow level, in turn, indicates an orientation toward systemic thinking, analytical autonomy, and

strategic interpretation of institutional processes.

The analysis of discursive practices, along with the word cloud generated from the collective texts of the four speakers (Figure 3), clearly identifies key thematic dominants such as *«people»*, *«society»*, *«justice»*, *«thinking»*, *«responsibility»*, *«order»*, *«citizen»*, and *«system»*. These lexemes form the core of a humanistic discourse in which the central focus is not on abstract law as an institution, but on the human being as a bearer of vulnerability, dignity, and moral value. The Green vMEME, across all four human rights defenders, is represented as an ethical-political tension between the values of inclusion and the repressive structures of the state. However, the realization of these values varies stylistically and strategically for each speaker.

Zhanna Urazbahova's rhetoric reflects a form of «civic humanism», combining appeals to justice and responsibility with pragmatic knowledge of mechanisms of social solidarity. Her discourse emphasizes notions such as «compassion», «engagement», «participation», and «moral integrity». Unlike Ilyashev, Urazbahova avoids excessive abstraction; her Green vMEME is grounded in concrete figures of suffering and moral obligation women, detained activists, and migrant children. The image of «people» in her discourse is not a theoretical construct, but a living social fabric. In this way, her Green discourse acts as an ethical mediator between abstract norms and lived experience.

Ermek Narymbay demonstrates the most expressive and emotionally charged variant of the Green vMEME. His texts are dominated by markers such as «people», «suffering», «betrayal», «against», and «justice». His rhetoric is saturated with protest tones, and the Green level frequently borders on the Red particularly in emotionally intense calls for mobilization. However, within the deeper structure of Narymbay's speech acts, a persistent Green modality can be discerned, expressed through emphasis on social pain, solidarity with the oppressed, and the necessity of building a society grounded in mutual respect. His Green vMEME takes the form of moral indignation, in which legal correctness yields to ethical urgency.

Zhaslan Aitmagambetov's Green level assumes a more normative-reflexive form. He appeals to universal principles of humanism, but articulates them within the framework of legitimate legal procedures. In the word cloud corresponding to his texts, frequent constructions include «civil society», «peaceful coordination», «human rights», and «nonviolent protest». Zhaslan Aitmagambetov operates as an

«ethical lawyer» whose discourse integrates morality into the language of legal literacy. His Green vMEME is especially evident in his demands for transparency, equal opportunities, and respect for human dignity as a universal value. He represents a case of institutional Green thinking aimed not at dismantling repressive frameworks, but at reforming them from within by embedding moral imperatives.

For Alnur Ilyashev, the Green level functions as a cognitive foundation for the critical analysis of power and its legitimacy. Although quantitatively the Green vMEME is less pronounced in his discourse compared to the Yellow, its semantic density is notably high. The word cloud reveals frequent use of terms such as *«values», «citizens», «responsibility», «equality»*, and *«social systems»*. His rhetoric is structured around the idea of social justice as a systemic category that requires not only the transformation of norms but also of cognitive frameworks. In this sense, Ilyashev's Green vMEME is less emotional than it is philosophically and analytically charged. His version of *«ethical humanism»* serves as an entry point into higher levels particularly the Yellow and the emerging Turquoise.

Despite the shared focus on inclusion and justice, the Green vMEME is articulated across different rhetorical registers among the speakers: from normative humanism (Aitmagambetov), through civic solidarity (Urazbahova), emotional protest (Narymbay), to analytical humanism (Ilyashev). The word cloud reflecting the frequency core of the Green discourse demonstrates both shared value clusters and individual trajectories of meaning-making, underscoring the need for a comprehensive approach to interpreting vMEMEs as dynamic and contextually adaptive structures of consciousness.

The Yellow vMEME, as one of the higher levels in the Spiral Dynamics model. it is classified as a second tier vMEME, as it is capable of incorporating all the internallhy conflicting previous 1st Tier vMEMEs in a holistic and functional operating system. It is characterized by a focus on systems thinking, integration of complex perspectives, rejection of dogmatism, and the ability to navigate flexibly under conditions of uncertainty. In the speech practices of the four speakers, the Yellow level appears less frequently than the Green. This is to be expected, as the Yellow is still emerging as a mainstream way of operational thinking. However, it plays a critically important role in shaping strategy, argumentation, and meta-reflection. The word cloud corresponding to the Yellow vMEME (Figure 3) reveals key categories such as *«thinking», «manifests», «system»,*

«integration», «analysis», «constructs», «change», and *«reflection».* These lexemes point to the cognitive orientation of statements in which human rights activity is not framed as an emotional or ethical act, but rather as an intellectual process of restructuring reality.

The Yellow vMEME is most vividly expressed in the discourse of Alnur Ilyashev. His rhetorical strategy is built on the deconstruction of official narratives and the analytical repositioning of state institutions. He employs concepts such as *«systems thinking», «institutional crisis», «architecture of justice», and «normative shift»,* which together constitute a metalinguistic framework aimed at rethinking the very notions of law, justice, and citizenship. The Yellow level in Ilyashev's discourse manifests as a capacity for cognitive distance, he sees not just a specific issue but the systemic structures that produce it, and proposes alternative conceptual frames that do not conform to the binary logic of *«power/ opposition».* His language aligns more closely with metatheory than with mobilizational rhetoric, positioning him as the most cognitively mature representative within the studied group.

While Ilyashev's philosophically analytical position represents the most developed and autonomous form of the Yellow vMEME in the analyzed human rights discourse, the discursive practices of Zhaslan Aitmagambetov, Ermek Narymbay, and Zhanna Urazbahova reveal an integrative configuration of this level. Here, systems thinking and conceptual flexibility are combined with other value modalities, primarily Green and Blue. Despite variations in stylistic tone and frequency, the Yellow vMEME among these three speakers functions as a secondary but strategically significant framework, enabling a transition from normative critique to institutional rethinking, from ethical judgment to adaptive modelling.

In Zhaslan Aitmagambetov's discourse, the Yellow vMEME is realized through structural pragmatics that is, the ability to perceive legal, administrative, and political mechanisms not only as normative frameworks but also as embedded ideologies subject to transformation. His rhetoric, built on expressions such as *«system reform», «reframing procedures», and «value integration»*, reflects a tendency toward systemic reconfiguration. Notably, this form of thinking remains embedded within legal rationality and does not break from normative infrastructure. Aitmagambetov's Yellow level does not dismantle the legal discourse but expands it through conceptual depth. He demonstrates a key characteristic of

mature Yellow thinking tolerance for ambiguity and the capacity for multiperspectivity. His discourse avoids dualistic oppositions and seeks to synthesize legal, ethical, and political foundations.

In the case of Ermek Narymbay, the Yellow vMEME takes on an intuitive-adaptive character, manifesting primarily through tactical flexibility and semiotic play. His ability to shift rhetorical registers depending on context, from political aggression to civic dialogue, indicates the presence of non-linear thinking, a hallmark of the Yellow level. The use of allusions, symbolic constructions, cultural codes, and irony points to a metalinguistic mastery of social reality, even though it is not accompanied by formal theoretical justification. Narymbay's Yellow vMEME operates alongside the Green (ethics of solidarity) and Red (rhetoric of conflict) levels, forming a unique synthesized trajectory in which strategic adaptation does not contradict ethical commitment. His Yellow level is not systematized, but appears situationally as a reflexive attunement to the complexity of the environment. This is particularly evident in his critique of the legitimacy of power and institutional violence, where he simultaneously deconstructs dominant narratives and offers new symbolic frameworks for their reinterpretation.

Zhanna Urazbahova, by contrast, demonstrates a reflective and moderate Yellow vMEME, which is realized not through analytical depth or cognitive flexibility, but through subtle meta-level judgments that highlight the contradictions between normative frameworks and their practical implementation. Her texts include expressions such as *«norm resilience», «adaptation mechanisms», and «cognitive conflict»*, indicating elements of systems thinking, though not structured as an autonomous narrative. Her discourse does not aim at deconstruction or synthesis, as in Ilyashev's case, nor is it confined to a strictly normative position typical of the Blue level. Instead, Urazbahova's Yellow vMEME operates as a form of localized cognitive sensitivity to systemic complexity one that does not evolve into a full-fledged strategy, yet provides reflexive density to her rhetorical statements.

The analysis revealed that all three speakers exhibit an orientation toward multi-level complexity, a rejection of binary thinking, and an effort to transcend linear oppositions. Their rhetoric, though varying in degrees of analytical maturity, demonstrates a shared tendency to account not only for values but also for structures, not only for norms but also for the contexts in which they operate, and not merely for isolated cases but for systemic patterns.

In the lexico-semantic field of the Yellow vMEME, this orientation is reflected in high-frequency lexemes such as *«thinking», «integration», «analysis», «structure», «reflection», and «system»*. Thus, the Yellow level in their discourse functions as a point of intersection between ethics and strategic thinking, allowing them to move from problem description to systemic comprehension.

In Alnur Ilyashev's discourse, the Yellow vMEME often appears as a relatively autonomous and self-developing layer of thought, enabling an interpretation of his rhetoric as potentially transitional from a classical Yellow mode toward a more highly organized Turquoise modality, as previously discussed. The distinctiveness of Ilyashev's Yellow vMEME lies in its ability not only to structure strategic assessments and institutional critique but also to regenerate cognitive matrices in which the integration of values and systems thinking begins to form a new ontology of political action. Within this configuration, the Yellow level no longer relies directly on the normative-legal foundations of the Blue or the empathic-solidarity orientation of the Green; instead, it constructs its architectural framework, into which Blue and Green elements are incorporated as functional components.

In this way, Ilyashev demonstrates a shift from the secondary relational role of the Yellow level to its semantic leadership. This trajectory opens the possibility of transition toward the emerging Turquoise vMEME of global synergy, systemic wholeness, and transpersonal responsibility.

Peripheral and weakly expressed, the Red, Purple, Beige, and Turquoise vMEMEs play a meaningful role during moments of crisis, mobilisation, or deep reflection. Although their appearances are episodic, they are semiotically dense, allowing for the reconstruction not only of conscious rhetorical constructs but also of the deeper psychological and cultural foundations of value positions. The Red vMEME, associated with impulsive force, will-power, passion, and resistance, is most prominently represented in the discourse of Ermek Narymbay. His rhetoric displays intense emotional polarization, often shifting into mobilizing appeals, indignation, and rhetorical confrontation. In his discourse, the Red level coexists with Green and Blue, yet often comes to the forefront under conditions of pressure, political conflict, or reference to personal experiences of suffering.

In Zhanna Urazbahova's case, the Red vMEME is also activated in moments of extreme injustice, especially in matters related to sexual violence and

femicide. However, in her discourse, it does not shape the structure of rhetoric but rather serves as an intensifying and emotionally mobilizing layer that supplements the primary legal and humanistic narrative. For Alnur Ilyashev and Zhaslan Aitmagambetov, the Red level is either marginal or strategically contained. Ilyashev uses it selectively as a mode of indignation in his critique of repression, while Aitmagambetov rarely invokes it, favoring a logic-oriented and analytical rhetorical style.

The Purple vMEME appears only episodically in the rhetoric of all four speakers. It is most clearly marked in critical assessments of patriarchal norms and everyday practices of violence. In Zhanna Urazbahova's discourse, the Purple level undergoes rhetorical deconstruction and it is interpreted as a source of institutional irresponsibility and domestic violence, transmitted through cultural scripts. In Ermek Narymbay's rhetoric, the Purple vMEME emerges more as irony or allusions to the collective unconscious, exposing cultural codes that obstruct modernization. In Alnur Ilyashev's discourse, the Purple vMEME is virtually absent, except for occasional references to symbolic practices or ritualized forms of authority. By contrast, Zhaslan Aitmagambetov is the only speaker for whom the Purple vMEME plays a constructive and quasi-legitimizing role. This makes his discourse unique within the sample, as he demonstrates the capacity to reconcile modernist and post-traditional perspectives while maintaining the coherence of legal reasoning. Whereas the other speakers tend to present the Purple level as a relic or an object of critique, Aitmagambetov positions it as a bridge linking rights and identity, local culture and universal principles of justice.

An interesting empirical specificity of the vMEME in Zhaslan Aitmagambetov's discourse lies in the fact that, unlike the other human rights defenders, his rhetoric incorporates religious themes as an integral component of human rights argumentation. This facilitates the natural activation of the Purple level, associated with sacred order, moral continuity, and collective identity. However, Aitmagambetov integrates these elements into a modernized human rights agenda, thereby transforming the Purple vMEME into an adaptive resource for public ethics. A particularly notable contrast emerges when compared to Alnur Ilyashev, who also publicly affirms his religious identity, yet does not exhibit a pronounced Purple cluster in his rhetorical repertoire. In Ilyashev's discourse, religion is framed more as an internal ethical orientation–a part of a philosophical or worldview layer that does not shift into the collective-sacred register. His narratives focus on

individual autonomy, systemic critique, and transcendent responsibility categories more characteristic of the Yellow level. This highlights a difference in the cognitive integration of religiosity: despite similarly declared religious identities, the cognitive roles these identities play within their respective discourses are fundamentally distinct. The Beige vMEME is virtually absent from all speakers' rhetoric, which can be attributed to the predominantly rationalized and institutionally oriented nature of their discursive practices.

The Turquoise vMEME is present only in embryonic form and almost exclusively in the discourse of Alnur Ilyashev. It emerges in fragments where issues of ecology, sustainability, leadership philosophy, transcendent responsibility, and civilizational dialogue are addressed. In these instances, Ilyashev's rhetoric moves beyond binary frameworks and appeals to ideas of non-local thinking, cultural synergy, and value-based future-oriented reflection. Nevertheless, the Turquoise level remains latent and non-structuring, suggesting a developmental trajectory of consciousness rather than a fully formed cognitive model. Among the other speakers, the Turquoise vMEME is either absent or appears only in isolated notions such as *«adaptation systems», «inner choice», and «norm resilience»*.

A temporal content analysis of the distribution of vMEME levels in the discursive practices of the four human rights defenders reveals a complex and heterogeneous dynamic of value transformation in their rhetoric over the period from 2015 to 2024 (see Figure 4).

Zhanna Urazbahova demonstrates the most stable and balanced trajectory of value evolution, progressing along an axiological vector from normative-humanistic to systemic-humanitarian thinking. Between 2015 and 2018, her discourse already shows elevated levels of the Green (26%) and Yellow (18%) vMEMEs, indicating the presence of a mature empathic-humanitarian orientation. At the same time, the Blue level (18%) functions as a foundation for institutional critique. Starting in 2019, a gradual intensification of the Blue component is observed, reaching 30% in both 2021 and 2024, while the Green remains consistently high at up to 28%, and Yellow peaks at 31%. The only notable exception is 2024, when Yellow declines sharply to 9%, while Blue rises to 30% likely indicating a reactive form of institutionalization in response to political or sociocultural shifts. Nevertheless, the overall trajectory reflects a deepening synthesis of mature Green and Yellow levels, underpinned by a stable Blue foundation.
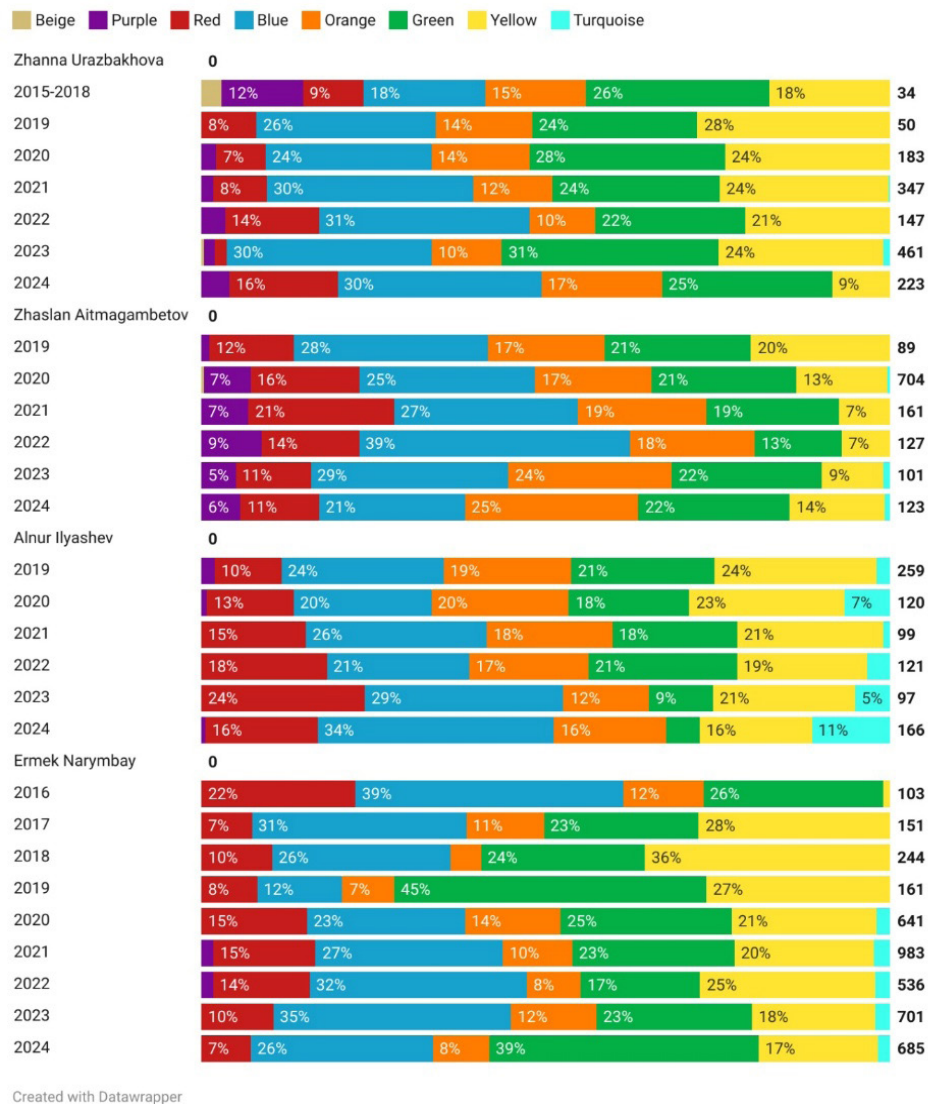
Figure 4 – Dynamics of vMEME-level distribution by year
(Source: authors' compilation based on survey data)

Ermek Narymbay, despite his reputation as an activist with radical and anti-systemic rhetoric, demonstrates a consistent and stable commitment to the Blue and Green levels. Since 2016, his discourse has featured a high level of Blue 27–39%, which functions within a framework of moral indictment and righteous anger. The Green level peaks at 45% in 2019 and remains dominant through 2024, where it stands at 39%. The Yellow level remains consistently within the 17–27% range, while in recent years, Turquoise has also begun to emerge at 5–8%. Unlike Ilyashev, Narymbay does not transition into a systemic or integrative style. Instead, he utilizes the Blue level as a tool of mobilizational critique, often

infused with emotionally charged ethical positioning. Nevertheless, the emergence of Turquoise and the stabilization of Yellow suggest a latent transformation toward more holistic worldview structures. In his case, the Blue level does not suppress others but instead supports the emotional and ethical legitimacy of public criticism and demands for reform. However, no clear integrative shift, such as the one observed in Ilyashev's discourse, can yet be identified.

Zhaslan Aitmagambetov represents a more rigid institutionalist trajectory, marked by the consistent dominance of the Blue level throughout the entire observation period. As early as 2019, the Blue

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vMEME accounts for 28%, rising to a peak of 39% in 2022. Green and Yellow levels are present but remain secondary, ranging from 19–22% and 7–14% respectively indicating a relatively low degree of ethical-systemic reflection and a focus on normative, legal, and hierarchical structures. His rhetoric exhibits minimal fluctuation and overall reflects a stable model of a modernist stance, characterized by a dominant *«legal-rational»* discourse. It undergoes little to no evolution and does not show significant transitions toward post-conventional levels, which may point to a strategy of rhetorical consistency.

Alnur Ilyashev, by contrast, demonstrates the most dynamic and progressive value trajectory. In 2019–2020, his discourse reflects a state of value equilibrium, with the Blue, Green, and Yellow levels each ranging between 18% and 24%, accompanied by moderate shares of Orange and Red. However, beginning in 2021, a rise in critical pathos becomes evident: the Red level increases to 15–24%, reflecting a growing use of expressive and confrontational rhetoric aimed at delegitimizing state authority.

Despite this shift, Ilyashev maintains a high Blue component, reaching 34% by 2024, and exhibits a unique rise in the Turquoise level up to 11%, the highest among all speakers. He is the only individual in the group who shows a likely trajectory toward complex integration of the three upper levels, Green, Yellow, and Turquoise, in the future.

Conclusion

In summary, the study revealed a complex, multilayered structure of value orientations manifested in the public rhetoric of Kazakhstani human rights defenders. Drawing on the framework of Spiral Dynamics theory, we reconstructed not only the dominant vMEME levels but also their internal interactions, temporal dynamics, and contextual constraints.

The data confirmed the hypothesis that human rights discourse constitutes a complex configuration of multiple levels of consciousness, in which and Yellow vMEMEs take precedence. Given that the current life conditions are mainly Red with unhealthy Blue content to serve Red's purpose, the universal emphasis on Blue maintains a stable and foundational presence and keeps the rhetoric on the current operational level within the society. The findings suggest that the human rights consciousness of the speakers is in a transitional phase, characterized by elements of post-conventional thinking alongside structural remnants of earlier stages. Im-

portantly, confirmation of the hypothesis is not binary but gradual: rather than observing an absolute dominance of post-conventional levels, we recorded their stable, yet contextually modulated prevalence. In this structure, the Blue vMEME remains the rhetorical foundation of legitimacy, while the Yellow and Green levels serve as semantic, ethical, and strategic superstructures expressing the visionary form of the Desired State.

The scholarly contribution of this study lies in the development of a quantitative-qualitative content analysis methodology tailored to the human rights discourse and adapted to the Kazakhstani context through the lens of Spiral Dynamics. We demonstrated that human rights rhetoric is neither homogeneous nor a linear expression of political beliefs, but a cognitively complex, multilayered, and dynamically adaptive system of meanings that responds both to internal convictions and external pressures. In particular, the Blue level, contrary to its frequent interpretation as purely hierarchical and dogmatic functions, here serves as a necessary foundation for normative critique, structuring legal and institutional speech as a resource for mobilization and resistance. The Green level serves as a source of ethical motivation and empathic engagement, while the Yellow becomes the core of systemic analysis, strategic navigation, and reflexive reconfiguration of institutional order.

A particularly noteworthy finding is the asymmetry in the distribution of the Yellow vMEME. Although present in all speakers, only Alnur Ilyashev reaches a level of cognitive autonomy and meta-strategic coherence, approaching structural maturity and signalling a potential transition to the Turquoise level of consciousness. The other speakers exhibit either episodic or integrative manifestations of the Yellow vMEME, remaining within the bounds of auxiliary reflexivity. As anticipated, the Turquoise vMEME remains underdeveloped and largely latent, reflecting ongoing limitations on the emergence of integral and transpersonal models of thinking under conditions of institutional pressure and cultural fragmentation. Nevertheless, its presence, however minimal, in the rhetoric of Ilyashev and Narymbay may be seen as an indicator of latent value potential for further evolution. The results open up several directions for future research.

First, it would be methodologically valuable to expand the analysis to include other categories of human rights defenders, such as activists without legal backgrounds, as well as representatives of youth and regional movements, in order to as-

sess whether the identified vMEME configurations are generalizable across the broader human rights community.

Second, a deeper longitudinal analysis is warranted, one that not only tracks individual value trajectories over time but also correlates them with political events, institutional reforms, and shifts in media policy.

Third, the findings lay a foundation for comparative analysis with human rights discourse in other post-Soviet and developing countries, where similar tensions between modernization and repression can be observed. Finally, the proposed methodology can be applied to the study of other professional groups, such as journalists, educators, and cultural figures, in order to identify transversal patterns of consciousness evolution under political transformation. Human rights discourse emerges not as a marginal phenomenon, but as a value-based and cognitive avant-garde zone in which new forms of civic thinking, integration, and responsibility are emerging. It represents a transitional phase in societal consciousness, carrying both the legacy of dogmatic orders and the impulse toward systemic transformation. Applied within this study, the theory of Spiral Dynamics proved heuristically productive, enabling not only the classification of value levels but also the identification of their logics, configurations, and strategic applications in a repressive and simultaneously digital public sphere.

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