A Complaint About Potential Ziyali

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A *ziyalı* (roughly *intellectual* – ed.)[1] is obligated to create public discussions and give direction to existing discussions. There is a shortage of *ziyalı* in Azerbaijani society, because people who could be *ziyalı* are not engaged in public affairs and, as a result, cannot establish any authority. Without authority, they can't set the agenda of public discussions. In order to set the agenda, it is important for a *ziyalı* to clearly explain their views on socially important issues to the public, and the best way to do this is to write an article. Potential *ziyalı*, however, are not using this tool. Below, I define the word *ziyalı*, and then I attempt to demonstrate the lack of *ziyalı* in Azerbaijan by looking at one issue – the 44-day war and the Karabakh conflict more generally.

What is a *ziyalı*?

Based on a linguistic analysis of the Azerbaijani word , I have come to the conclusion that it is used in three senses. The first meaning of *ziyalı* is *a well-educated person*, and the second is *a person engaged in academic work who thinks about complex ideas*. However, these are not the most socially significant meanings of the word *ziyalı*; that would be the third meaning of the word – *a person meeting at least one of the above definitions who is involved in social activism and has a certain authority*. When I use the word *ziyalı* in this text, I am using it in this third sense. Thus, the socially significant, i.e. the third definition of the word *ziyalı* is as follows:

A ziyalı is a person who is (a) well-educated or (b) engaged in academic work, thinking about complex ideas, and (c) is

both a social activist and has a certain authority.

Now I will explain the definition a bit. Suppose a university professor is considered a *ziyalı* in the second sense. At the same time, this teacher thinks about social problems and advances ideas or offers solutions to those problems; they do not write all this in academic articles that few will read, but rather convey their ideas to the public in more accessible ways. A *social activist* is a person engaged in such activities. Suppose that this professor – using the media, taking the podium in demonstrations, participating in public discussions, and conveying their views to the public – is considered to have fulfilled the condition of *social activism*. No academic can be considered a *ziyalı* in the third sense above if this condition is not fulfilled. For example, someone could be one of the world's most famous chemists and a Nobel laureate (like Aziz Sancar) but not a social activist or *ziyalı*. On the other hand, any run-of-the-mill university professor can be considered a *ziyalı* if they fulfill the condition of social activism. The main thing is not a person's profession or their genius, but the fulfillment of the condition of social activism.

What does it mean to *have authority*? Let us take the same example: this professor is a respected academic in their field, and therefore they have *epistemic authority* (that is, their thought circulates among academics, and when they speak or write something, other academics take their opinion seriously, even if they do not like it; in the academy this person's words carry *weight*). At the same time, because they are a social activist, people have a certain respect for them, and because people see them as a *guide*, a *voice of conscience*, it can be said that this professor is also accorded *moral authority*. If at least a certain part of the society sees the professor as a *guide* or as a *voice of conscience*, that is sufficient for *moral authority*. When I gave the third definition of *ziyalı*, I simply wrote "authority" because sometimes the existence of only epistemic or moral authority

is enough to call the professor a *person with a certain authority*. Sometimes, after fulfilling the condition of social activism, the professor has both epistemic and moral authority among the general population.

Thus, a person who is a *ziyalı* in the first or second sense and fulfills the conditions of both social activism and authority is a *ziyalı* in the sense that interests us in public discussions.

Are there *ziyalı* in Azerbaijan?

Of course, the word *ziyalı* is very widely used in the third sense, and its components can be interpreted in different ways. But is there a *ziyalı* in this sense in Azerbaijan? I do not know any. But I know a lot of people who have serious potential to be *ziyalı*, and I am sure there are more than those that I know. They fulfill the conditions (a) or (b) but are not social activists and have no authority among the public as a result. My goal in this article is to call on these people to use their potential, because Azerbaijani society needs *ziyalı*, and the current situation without *ziyalı* is not at all heartening. There are no significant and serious public discussions on economic, social, or cultural issues in Azerbaijan. Even when these issues are widely discussed in society for some reason, they are discussed in a very simple way, and there are no *ziyalı* who can direct these discussions.

The lack of *ziyalı* can be illustrated with many examples, but I will focus on one issue – the 44-day war and the Karabakh conflict in general. I will not touch on whether the 44-day war last year was just or unjust, good or bad. The main thing is that this war and the Karabakh conflict more generally have affected and continue to affect everyone in Azerbaijan in one way or another. Everyone has a position on the war and a majority of the public supported it, while very few people opposed it for various reasons. Were there *ziyalı* in either of

these two groups? I do not think so. Below I will examine the lack of *ziyalı* in both the pro- and anti-war groups.

First of all, I am not interested in the causes of this problem. Potential *ziyalı* may not reach their potential for many reasons. For example, they might think that Azerbaijan is an authoritarian country and it is dangerous for them to express their views, and they have little power and will not be able to change anything. Or they might think that Azerbaijan is located in an unfavorable geographical environment, it is a small country, and change here depends not on the domestic situation, but on changes in the foreign, international situation, so it is not worth the effort to be a *ziyalı*. I am not interested in these ideas because I consider them excuses. For the sake of clarity, I agree that there is some truth in these views, but neither the fact that Azerbaijan is an authoritarian country, nor that it is a small country, nor anything else shows that Azerbaijani society has no need for *ziyalı*. Therefore, I consider inaction based on these ideas an excuse, and my goal is to call potential *ziyalı* to action.

Those who did not support the war

Let us start with the small group that was against the war. Though it may surprise some people, this group was by no means monolithic. Some of the people in this group were *liberals*, *socialists*, and *anarchists*[2] who opposed the war for ideological reasons, while others were *pragmatists* who opposed the war for practical reasons because they did not believe Azerbaijan would succeed (some of the pragmatists changed their minds as Azerbaijan's successes multiplied). The third group – the most talked-about and cursed– were the *humanists* (who believed that it was wrong for people, especially young people, to die in order to reclaim their lands) and *pacifists* (who are opposed to any war). Of course, some people opposed the war on the basis of not only one, but two or all three of

the positions I have listed here.[3]

The anti-war group tried to communicate its views to a large audience, either by tweeting or posting on Facebook. But tweets and posts are both short and short-lived, i.e. they are quickly lost and forgotten. As someone who followed these discussions during the war, I can say that I do not know in detail the full position of any of the anti-war groups; I do not know exactly what they want. The reason is simple – none of them has written an article explaining their position. They either tweeted, or shared posts, or argued with people in the comments under those posts. But without exception, none of them wrote an article to explain their opinion or what they wanted. Seven months after the war, no one from the anti-war group has written an article explaining their position. To be clear, maybe someone wrote an article for an academic journal or a foreign media outlet, but that does not interest me because those articles do not make that author a *ziyalı* in the third sense of the word. When I say here that *they did not write any article*, I mean *an article written in the Azerbaijani language for public discussion and clearly reflecting the author's position*. For example, what do *liberals*, *socialists*, and *anarchists* want? Why are they against the war? What do they offer instead? And what did the *pragmatists* want, why did they believe that Azerbaijan would fail? And what are the claims of the *pacifists* and *humanists*, how do they think the Karabakh conflict can be resolved without war? We do not know the answers to these questions, because none of them explained their opinions in articles. All their thoughts are lost in tweets, posts, and comments. Maybe they did not write anything because they do not even know what they want.

Of course, I can learn about liberalism, socialism, anarchism, pragmatism, pacifism, and humanism, look at their histories, read the writings of similar anti-war groups when there was a war in another country, and get an approximate idea about

those in Azerbaijan. But that is not the point. The point is that these groups in Azerbaijan should explain and justify their positions in the context of the Karabakh conflict and present this to the public for discussion. Other *ziyalı* and people are aware of the positions of these groups and join in discussions resulting in a debate, and at least each side (both anti-war and pro-war groups) knows each other's positions.

Those who support the war

Now let us turn to the pro-war group – the absolute majority of Azerbaijanis. It is hard to classify this group because it is so big, but let me try. One group of people supported the war on the grounds that Karabakh is the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan under international law (according to the United Nations and its relevant resolutions), and when years of negotiations have failed, it is just for Azerbaijan to take what it is due – the return of territory – by war. I will call them the *UN-ists*. The second group believed that during the First Karabakh War, Armenians took Azerbaijani lands, expelled them, and humiliated them. Therefore, Azerbaijanis must return their lands through war in order to restore self-confidence and their spirit as a nation. The people in this group believed that if Azerbaijan regained the occupied territories, Azerbaijanis would consider themselves a *victorious people* and would begin to demand their rights from the government within the country. In short, the *victoryists* thought that in order to democratize Azerbaijan, first of all, its lands must be retaken. A third group said that the Karabakh conflict was not primarily a land dispute; it was a matter of honor. By occupying those lands, the Armenians tarnished our honor, and now we must take revenge on them. I call them the *revanchists*. Of course, most of the supporters of the war agreed with not only one, but two or all three of the groups I mentioned here.[4]

The position of the *UN-ists* is partially clear, but none of

them has written any article explaining their views in detail, although the answers to many questions regarding their position are unclear. For example, does the *UN-ists* support the granting of some status within Azerbaijan to local Karabakh Armenians living in the territory of the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region (NKAO)? What form should this status take? If Azerbaijan had reclaimed (it failed to) all the occupied territories, including the war-torn Nagorno-Karabakh region, what would the *UN-ists* offer to convince the Karabakh Armenians to stay and live in Karabakh? Now let us go to the *victoryists* – why did they believe that if they succeeded in the war, Azerbaijanis would demand their rights from the government? What were the counter-arguments of the *victoryists* against those who said that *if Azerbaijan won the war, the people would forgive many shortcomings of the current government and it would become stronger and more repressive*? The war is over, but their expectations have not come true; the war veterans of the victorious people complain that the state does not look after them, and the victorious people is unable to demand their veterans' rights. Why did this happen, how does the *victoryists* explain it? Did they offer any status to the Karabakh Armenians and how do they view the possibility of coexistence with them? At the same time, what exactly was the position of the *revanchists* – for example, how long should Azerbaijanis continue to take revenge? An Azerbaijani political scientist and lecturer at a foreign university tweeted that the problem would not be solved unless all Armenians left the Caucasus. Did the *revanchists* think the same way? Could Armenians live in Karabakh after the war, or should the Azerbaijani government have expelled them all?

Many war proponents from all three groups say that *before the war Armenians could have been given political status, but after the war they lost their right to it*. They have proposed that *Karabakh Armenians should only be given Azerbaijani citizenship, they can stay if they want, if not they can leave*. Anyone who knows anything about the Azerbaijani-

Armenian conflict knows that, faced with such a choice, nearly all Armenians would leave Karabakh. Is that the real goal of those who support this option? *I will not give you status, I will give you citizenship, stay if you like, go if not* – technically that is offering a choice. But does it make any sense to offer such a choice, or is the response known in advance?

The answers to these questions are unknown, because the war proponents also only tweeted, posted, and argued in the comments, without writing articles explaining their views.[5] Proponents of the war did not openly explain their views on the status issue. What exactly is meant by *the highest degree of autonomy*? What kind of status should Karabakh Armenians be given – political or only cultural? What exactly is meant by political or cultural autonomy? Should Shusha be included in that autonomy? Such questions went unanswered then and still remain unanswered.

In lieu of a conclusion

Analyzing the post-war messages of the Azerbaijani government, Vicken Cheterian criticized the government's attitude to the 1915 Armenian genocide, writing that the current denial position of the Azerbaijani government is "a rear-guard fight" because "there is a new generation of Azerbaijani intellectuals *ziyalı* with radical and critical attitudes towards current hegemonic discourses." First of all, I do not know in what sense Cheterian is using the word *intellectual*, but the meanings of the words *ziyalı* in Azerbaijani and *intellectual* in English are very similar, and I think the three meanings I have given for the word *ziyalı* can be seen in the word *intellectual*. Given the context, I think Cheterian is using the word *intellectual* in the third sense of the word *ziyalı* that I used in this article. In this regard, I do not agree with Cheterian. I think his optimism is unfounded. What I see on the Azerbaijani public stage is that there are people in the country who could potentially be *ziyalı*, but they still

cannot meet condition (c) above. Therefore, if I paraphrase Cheterian, there is no new generation of *ziyalı* in Azerbaijan at the moment, but it could develop. However, not all members of this generation of *ziyalı* will oppose the current discourse dictated by the government; some will defend and justify it.

In conclusion, I would like to say that Azerbaijani society needs *ziyalı*. Therefore, those with the potential to become *ziyalı* must get it together, crawl out of the pit of despair, and present their positions to the public for discussion. In my opinion, this is the moral duty of people with the potential to do so (I cannot provide arguments for this moral duty in this article, or it would be too long). Potential *ziyalı* can tweet, post, or cry in frustration, but they must not forget that if they do not try to create a public discussion by writing articles on various issues of public interest in Azerbaijani in a language that everyone can understand, their unfinished ideas, expressed in tweets and posts, will be forgotten and will have virtually no effect. Tweets and posts are like words, they are quickly forgotten, but articles usually are not lost or forgotten – words fly away, but writing remains. Potential *ziyalı*, write!

[1] In this English translation, we have used *ziyalı* in both the singular and the plural. In Azerbaijani, the singular is *ziyalı* and the plural is *ziyalılar*. – ed.

[3] I developed the primitive classification of the anti-war group presented here based on my conversations with Samed Rahimli. These designations are conditional; for example, the meanings of the words *humanist* or *pragmatist* as I use them here are not, of course, the only definitions of those words. However, I believe that this primitive classification is useful in terms of showing that the anti-war group is not monolithic.

[4] Proponents of war can be further divided into groups, but

the current primitive classification is sufficient for the purposes of this article.

[5] Some of the proponents of the war wrote some texts in order to refute the claims of those who opposed the war, and sometimes to curse them. In none of these texts did they fully explain their position. Therefore, I do not consider those articles sufficient. The authors only denied a few ideas, they did not express their views or give answers to the questions I raised above.