

## The Personal Voice

### Zoheira 3: My father doesn't ...

**Michal:** Zoheira defines herself and her relations with all the figures in her surroundings by means of these contrasts. The central contrast appears as early as in the first line: "My father doesn't relate to me only as his daughter." This is actually the contrast between her relations with her father and the relations of other girls that are based on the accepted norms that seem self-evident and well-known to us, too.

**Miri:** On this page, the central contrast is between "we" and "them", that is, relations of "I" and "my father" as opposed to the accepted relations among the other Bedouins who "are always slightly conservative". Throughout the text there is harmony between them, between the father and the daughter. The difference in these relations as opposed to what is customary among the others highlights the relationship. The inner relationship. The others stand in the background.

**Anat:** In the family, there is "I" and "we" in the relations with the father. There are statements in which she includes herself among the other siblings, "all of us", "us", and there's a statement in which she relates only to herself.

**Michal:** It seems to me that when Zoheira speaks about father-daughter relations, she is including herself with her siblings, but she attributes the relations between a male friend and a female friend to herself only.

## Organizing Voice

We will analyze the text according to Levi Strauss's method, at the center of there are binary opposites and the compromise between them.

On the first page, there are many contrasts:

My father	Other girls' fathers
Father-daughter relations	Relations between a male friend and a female friend
Father-daughter relations	Brother-sister relations
To be something in my life	Not to be something in my life
A good life	Not a good life
Me	My siblings
Pamper	Don't pamper

### Zoheira- page 1, My Father

- 3 My father doesn't relate to me only...
- 4 As his daughter, I am like his friend. Like my brother, he knows everything about
- 5 my life. Gives me everything. Uh... he likes me to study, wants me to be something
- 6 in my life. He wants me to have a good life. Worries about me... a good life and also
- 7 for my siblings. Although there are uh... many of us at home from the point of view of people uh...
- 8 What else can I say here, yes, my father, he spoils us. We're all spoiled
- 9 with him. He loves us very much. Uh... Yes, I'm attached to him, so he always gives me
- 10 whatever I want. I always consult with him about everything. I speak to him about
- 11 uh... about my problems. Share things with him. He also shares things with me and speaks
- 12 to me and tells me his problems. And what is happening, with him. And it's rare between, a relationship
- 13 Like this is rare between a Bedouin girl and her father. Because they're always
- 14 Slightly conservative

In this excerpt, there is a contrast between the description of the father-daughter relations, which are perceived as irregular because of the father's one-sided and exclusive commitment to his children in general and to Zoheira in particular. A more daring deviation from the norm is expressed in relations of another kind, and it defines them as relations between a male friend and a female friend or brother-sister relations. These relations include intimacy and reciprocity, which remove the hierarchical barriers between a father and his daughter and an adult man and a girl. These relations can be classified by means of a table:

Father-daughter relations	Relations between a male friend and a female friend, brother-sister relations
Likes me to study	Knows everything about my life
Wants me to be something	
Wants me to have a good life	I'm very close to him
Worries about me (also about my siblings)	Always gives me what I want – a father
Pampers me, us	I consult with him about everything
Loves us very much	I speak to him about my problems
Always gives me whatever I want	I share things with him
	Confides in me / Shares things with me
	Speaks

She sums up the relations by saying: "It's rare, relations like these between a Bedouin girl and her father."

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### Zoheira 22: “Yes I’m betrothed . . . .”

**Michal:** The topic of betrothal comes up at a relatively late stage of the interview; apparently it is repressed. Betrothal is a commitment that one cannot get out of.

**Miri:** She “thinks” she became betrothed a year and a half ago as if she is speaking about something that happened a long time ago. She places reference points as if in order to remember something almost forgotten, or to make an effort to retrieve something that has been repressed in the

subconscious: “a year and a half ago... yes, a year and a half... at the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> grade.”

**Michal:** It turns out that it’s not only a reference point of the time of the betrothal, but she also unconsciously expresses the contrast between betrothal and studies by using precisely this reference point. This contrast is immediately revealed in the next line, “It’s not good to become betrothed at that time.”

**Miri:** The words “**It** happened” and “**It** was very difficult” and “**It** influenced”. The word “It”, which indicates and doesn’t say explicitly, is a concealing word, as if it’s difficult for her to say the

“thing” itself. Like people talk about “it” instead of cancer or menstruation or sex.

**Michal:** That’s why she said “Yes, I’m betrothed” at the beginning. Not as an answer to a question but rather as an inner difficulty to overcome by saying the “thing”.

### Zoheira 25: “I didn’t intend to become betrothed...”

**Michal:** With her words, Zoheira creates the impression that the difficulty with the betrothal lies only in her studies, but another difficulty echoes through her words as well: “I didn’t intend to get married or become betrothed.”

## Organizing Voice

### Zoheira 23: ...at the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. It’s not good to become betrothed

Here the contrasts are between her betrothal and wedding on the one hand and her studies on the other. She mentions the words *betrothal* or *wedding* five times in the excerpt, and in contrast, *tests*, *preliminary matriculation exam*, *examinations*, *grades* – four terms that are connected with studies and appear as a contrast.

In other words, all the confidence she displayed, that she has a father who consults with her and is like a friend. or like a

brother, is undermined.

Perhaps she also finds the separation from her father and from her relationship with him difficult, as well as her disappointment in him for handing her over to someone, and perhaps there are also romantic dreams.

**Miri:** There is a conflict here between the demands that arise from her being a pupil and the demands that arise from her being a Bedouin girl, who has to get married at this age and agree to what her father demands.

**Michal:** Failure at her studies is an indirect way of expressing her objection to marriage, since her father wants both her success at her studies, in accordance with the

### Zoheira – page 12

#### The story of the betrothal

- 22 Yes I’m betrothed, I became betrothed a year and a half ago. I think
- 23 yes, a year and a half when... at the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. It’s not good to become betrothed uh... in that
- 24 at that time. Because it was a very difficult time for me.
- 25 Because I didn’t intend to... become betrothed or get married but
- 26 uh...I don’t know uh...it happened and... and it was very difficult. It affected
- 27 me... also ...in... I had tests, preliminary matriculation exams, and I... uh... didn’t feel
- 28 that I was doing everything in... in those exams. I didn’t get high grades

**Western model, and her marriage** to the man he’s chosen for her, according to the Bedouin model. However, Zoheira also has a way to punish him in that the more the father “won” and forced his will on her, the more she “won” by failing at her studies. In this manner, she equalizes the balance of power between them.

**Anat:** It’s also possible to look at this from the cultural-social point of view. We chose the texts on the basis of contrast: the betrothal with the man as a contrast to her love for her father. Perhaps the daughter does not perceive the betrothal as a contrast at all, but rather as a reality in which she doesn’t have any other option. In her cultural world, it’s very clear that her father is responsible for a betrothal. We as Jewish women “see” a loving father, who subsequently obliges her to become betrothed. Perhaps for her it’s a natural process. Her nervousness is a result of the transition from childhood to womanhood.

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**Zoheira 2-3:** “That’s how a person is, I don’t know [him] ...don’t know [him] so he has a different nature...”

**Michal:** The topic of her principal complaint is the strangeness of the bridegroom. It seems to me that when she speaks about a suspicion of some kind of “different nature” that will be revealed in the bridegroom and about the anger he ignites in her, she is directing emotions at him that she in fact feels toward her father. Because she built herself an image of a father, friend and brother who breaks down all the conventional barriers, while during the betrothal episode she found out that he has “another face” as well.

To her astonishment, it became clear to her that when it came down to “the things that matter”, her father exercised his authority over her in the traditional way.

**Michal:** In this life excerpt, she is alone. Here she is no longer a friend and a sister, and she keeps her thoughts about the bridegroom to herself. She defines herself as “a girl” whose sensitivity and feelings are different than those of a man, and every “little thing” can affect her emotionally. That means that she differentiates herself from her father, and hints that in her, too, there is strangeness, that he can’t understand her.

**Miri:** There really isn’t any talk about consulting here, or about the sharing of his problems and her problems. Perhaps it all seemed like that to her, but she learned that what she wants cannot be realized without a compromise in the reality of life. Perhaps the whole relationship she had with her father was just an illusion, but she learned that she is first and foremost a

Bedouin girl, that it is only her father who determines the social conventions according to which she behaves and when.

**Michal:** But she’s not prepared to destroy the integrity of her image of her father prior to the betrothal, and the proof of that is that she related the opening of her life story, in which she described her unconventional relations with her father, after that event and not before.

**Miri:** In any event, Zoheira ultimately does not complain overtly about her father. Perhaps not just because she is defending his honor from the interviewer. She is also afraid of shattering the positive image she has of him, because it also illuminates *her* as an exceptional figure. She is an eldest daughter and the daughter of an eldest son of the head of the tribe, and, like in many stories, her fate is also unusual. She won the knight on the white horse, who is not her husband, but her father, **and she doesn’t want**

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**Zoheira 1:** “What I expected or what I would have liked”.

Here the contrast is with the opening.

In the opening on page 1 lines 9-10, Zoheira said of her father: “so he always gives me whatever I want,” and at the end of page 12 and the beginning of page 13a, she says: “I didn’t get high grades ... what I would have liked.” Her feeling is that because of the betrothal, “whatever I wanted” became “everything I would have liked”. In other, words her father, who

### Zoheira – page 13, 1-12, the story of the betrothal

- 1 What... what I expected or what I would have wanted um...It affected
- 2 because always uh... that’s how a person is, I don’t know [him], of course there was nothing between us before
- 3 the betrothal. I don’t know [him] so he has a different nature and it is when I’m sitting, then if he
- 4 behaves in a way I don’t like, then I get angry and think and ...
- 5 and it bothers and preoccupies the girl very much because. And I’m very sensitive, which means that a thing
- 6 can, something that is small or a little thing can affect me or [affect] me from the psychological point of view.
- 7 How do you say uh... So it’s a bit difficult
- 8 uh... \_\_\_ so I went through, I went through a time but uh... now [it’s] OK
- 9 more or less. Uh... I’ve begun to understand uh... the contents of things. Let’s hope that we’ll live
- 10 uh... a good life.
- 11 Who decided on the betrothal?
- 12 Who decided? What can I tell you. Yes, I wouldn’t want to... uh... but uh...

previously made every wish come true, as if with a magic wand, is the one who, by forcing the betrothal on her, causes the wish and the intention not to be realized.

In the opening of the story, there were contrasts between “we” and “them”, but in this part, the contrasts are not only within the “we”, but rather arise from the dismantling of the integrity of the “we”. The contrasts in the “I” were also revealed:

I am betrothed	I am studying
Want to	Don’t want to
Yes	No
Now	Before
Betrothal	Tests
What I expected, what I <b>was</b>	What there is

to go back to the fate of an ordinary Bedouin girl, but rather wants to keep on holding on to her adored father and to see him as he always was, because of the lack of choice that was imposed on her, both because of her social environment and because of the emotional structure she developed.

**Anat:** She tries to adapt, both in her behavior and in her mind, to the reality that has been forced on her. She says that now she is beginning to understand the “contents” that she didn’t understand before. Perhaps the meaning of those “contents” is found in the continuation of the sequence of the story, when Zoheira says that she hopes to live a “good life” with her bridegroom. One of the father’s goals, as she described them on the first page, was to give his daughter “a good life”, but there the term had a different meaning: “(My father) likes me to study, wants me to be something in my life.

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wants me to have a good life, worries about me... a good life". The future "good life" was supposed to be attained through resources that she would acquire for herself by means of her studies, while the good life in the present is contingent on the continuation of her childhood under her father's protection.

There is no mention of a good life as being contingent on a suitable marital relationship,

even though, as we said before, Zoheira's opening words were also spoken after the betrothal.

### Zoheira – page 13, 1-12, the story of the betrothal

1 What... what I expected or what I would have wanted uh...It affected

2 because always uh... that's how a person is, I don't know [him], of course there was nothing between us before

3 the betrothal. I don't know [him] so he has a different nature and it is when I'm sitting, then if he

4 behaves in a way I don't like, then I get angry and think and ...

5 and it bothers and preoccupies the girl very much because. And I'm very sensitive, which means that a thing

6 can, something that is small or a little thing can affect me or [affect] me from the psychological point of view.

7 How do you say uh... So it's a bit difficult

8 uh... \_\_\_ so I went through, I went through a time but uh... now [it's] OK

9 more or less. Uh... I've begun to understand uh... the contents of things. Let's hope that we'll live

10 um... a good life.

11 Who decided on the betrothal?

12 Who decided? What can I tell you. Yes, I wouldn't want to... uh... but uh...

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**Anat:** In Bedouin society, the father decides for the daughter without asking her. In Western society, the daughter decides. Zoheira suggests another option – the father suggests, there’ll be a consultation, but it won’t be mandatory. From a sociological point of view, there is a transition process here between what has been and what will be.

**Miri:** Precisely because of the special relations Zoheira has her “exceptional” father, one of her roles is to defend his honor in the face of society and to behave like a Bedouin woman. When her father opposes his father, and demands his exclusive right to choose a

husband for her as he pleases, Zoheira cannot oppose her father and refuse this husband. By ostensibly “becoming convinced”, she is behaving like a traditional Bedouin girl. She does not have the option not to marry.

**Anat:** There’s a matter of “my heart belongs to Daddy” here. I think she sees that he’s taking her away from him and transferring her to another man, and she doesn’t want this at all. Her problem is not a social problem, but rather a personal problem. Focusing on the conflict between her studies and her betrothal says: “I want to remain a little girl.”

**Michal:** Maybe it’s also the father’s test. Maybe it’s also difficult for the father to give her to another person. He doesn’t want her to love her betrothed. Unconsciously, he is marrying her off to someone whose relationship with her is shaky, and will not be able to compete with the relationship between father and daughter.

**Miri:** The father is an educated man and he sees that in the Western system, marriages are set in a different way, and he wants to change the existing system.

**Michal:** Perhaps he’s right. At the Tuvia Institute, they conducted a survey that examined the extent to which the Bedouins value their marriages. It transpired that only 4% were satisfied with their marriages. On the other hand, Zoheira’s father wants to reserve his right to choose the betrothed. Actually, by not accepting the convention he is expanding his paternal authority over

## Organizing Voice

### Zoheira 15: “My father convinced me about this person”...

The central contrasts in this excerpt are:

“my father” – “the person”

convinced – not convinced

want – don’t want

In contrast to the father, who is “mine”, the betrothed appears as someone who has no name whatsoever. “a person”.

The other contrasts show

hesitation, leading to a decision that is the compromise between the contrasts, in order to permit life to continue. Her betrothed turns from just “a person” to “a good person”.

From her point of view, the compromise permits the continuation of the close relations with her father, because that is the center of her life. However, this compromise is also a real rift, which she tries to cover by seemingly being convinced. Zoheira repeats the word “convinced” six times in this excerpt, and it seems that she is saving it to convince herself.

his daughter, because he does not have to keep to the limits set

### Zoheira – page 13, 13-21, the story of the betrothal

- 13 I told you because of the relationship that... it’s also good, but from a second point of view  
14 it has a positive and a negative effect and here it has a negative effect on me. He...  
15 my father convinced me about this person. Then I was convinced. Of course, I sat with him  
16 first. And I spoke to him. I also became convinced that he is a good person. That... it’s possible  
17 to li.. it’s possible to get on with him so uh...  
**because if it wasn’t for my father’s convincing**  
18 and when I sat with this person and I was convinced about him. So here  
19 I reached the... the conclusion that I am convinced about it, about the situation. Even if I  
20 didn’t want. But uh... mainly and for that reason I made a decision, of course  
21 my father asked me first. If you want to uh... yes, if you don’t want,

by the leaders. The Israeli pedagogy instructors say that the Bedouin girls ask their help in convincing their parents to agree to their choices. The college is an arena for the encounter between the sexes without adult supervision. And so sometimes a new type of communication is created. I sometimes see all kinds of couples hiding in corners and talking to each other with slightly exaggerated energy. Perhaps Zoheira also sees this, and romantic love is a hidden option that is not spoken about, but perhaps it exists as something repugnant.

**Anat:** Even in our society, the non-romantic considerations of the parents are not always misguided. When I was a young girl, we had a maid, a 16-year-old girl, an immigrant from Iran. She studied at night and worked for us. She taught me belly dancing, and took me to see Turkish and Indian movies. One day, she told me tearfully that her parents were forcing her to marry 27-year-old Ben-Zion.

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**Miri:** Why isn't he – the father – satisfied with the cousin?

**Anat:** I know another explanation for the whole business with the cousin. In Bedouin society 20 years ago, there were marriages between cousins, as a marginal phenomenon. Except that the moment you take a society and you destroy its natural texture, something goes wrong in the natural balance. Because of other collapses in the society, there are extreme

phenomena of marriages within the family. We are also witnesses to the dramatic process of the increase in wives there. Many have two and even three or four wives. On the other hand, the educated ones know that marriages between relatives lead to the birth of children with problems, and some of them are against it.

**Michal:** I want to suggest an alternative explanation for the question of why the father doesn't want the conventional marriage arrangements. This is part of the father's rebellion against Bedouin society, the unions that are obligatory as dictated by the custom of the extended family.

I had a Bedouin student who said in class that although his best friend was a great guy, he would not let him marry his sister because he was not a member of his tribe.

**Anat:** It's also a possibility that the father doesn't want his daughter to live in a traditional family framework. He is expanding the limits of the norms.

**Miri:** That seems correct to me. The father.

## Organizing Voice

**Zoheira 25:** "They say [in the family], it's a shame about her cousin, why doesn't he take... why doesn't he marry her..."

There are three interesting contrasts here: I vs. Father, Father vs. the family, and the family vs. another family.

In this excerpt, she blurs the contrast between her and her father.

**Miri:** In this excerpt, Zoheira creates a kind of dialogue between quoting the voice of the family,

### Zoheira – page 13, 22-28, the story of the betrothal

- 22 then uh... you don't have to. And that's it, and I made that decision.
- 23 No, my father didn't compel, force me. Uh... The members of the family were not
- 24 pleased that I was going outside of the family and marrying into another family. They say,
- 25 It's a shame, her cousin, why doesn't he take and... why doesn't he marry her.
- 26 Either a cousin or something like that. My father said, It's my daughter and I am responsible
- 27 for her. No one will decide about my life except she and I. Because of my role,
- 28 I will direct her. You, don't you interfere in my life.

which is the normative voice, as opposed to quoting the voice of her father, which goes its own way. It seems to me that she erased the words of the family in a slightly sanctimonious or perhaps snake-like tone, like whispering behind somebody's back in the third person: "It's a shame... why doesn't he take... why doesn't he marry her...". Her father's words are uttered directly and aggressively in the second person, for instance: "No one will decide about my life except she and I... You, don't you interfere in my life."