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From Fence to Wire. Dating and Getting Married in Novi Pazar¹

In the paper, we will give a brief historical overview of the ways in which young couples could meet i.e. enter into a relationship for the purpose of dating or marriage, in the territory of Novi Pazar and the surrounding villages from the beginning of the 20th century until today. We chose this field because of the multicultural and multi-confessional environment that allows us to compare opportunities in two culturally and religiously different communities – Serbian and Bosniak. First, we will follow the genesis of the practice of young people's dating through socio-political circumstances. We will also present the role of the two religions within the given topic. The third aspect of changes in the way young people connect is the one that has influenced their separation due to anti-socialization, while on the other hand giving rise to new ways of connecting couples, namely the emergence of the Internet (applications, social networks and dating sites). Therefore, our goal is to show the ways of getting to know young people, the changes that have occurred in that connection over time, as well as the reasons for which these changes occurred, but let's also point out the two common threads that, despite the drastic changes, are not missing, namely the intermediary and the need for a soulmate.

Key words: ways to meet a guy and a girl, mediators in matching couples, socio-political and religious influences, modern age, Novi Pazar and its surroundings.

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Од тарабе до жице. Упознавање и склапање бракова у Новом Пазару

У раду ћемо указати на начине на које се млади парови упознају, тј. ступају у везу ради забављања или брака, на територији Новог Пазара и околним селима током 20. века као и протеклом времену 21. века. Рад је базиран на теренским подацима, а терен Новог Пазара смо изабрали због мулти-културалне и мултиконфесионалне средине која нам омогућава поређење прилика у два културно и верски различитим заједницама – српској и муслиманској. Праксу склапања љубавних веза младих пратићемо и кроз друштвено-политичке прилике. Паралелно са реченим, представићемо и улогу две вере у оквиру дате теме. У раду ћемо се осврнути и на аспект промена у начину повезивања младих – на појаву Интернета (апликације, друштвене мреже и сајтови за упознавање). Циљ рада је да се прикажу начини упознавања младих, промене до којих је у том повезивању долазило током времена, као и разлози због којих су се дешавале те промене, али и да се укаже на оно што траје, а то су посредник и потреба за сродном душом.

Кључне речи: начини упознавања момка и девојке, посредници у спајању парова, друштвено-политички и верски утицаји, XX и XXI век, Нови Пазар са околином.

A love relationship,² within the framework of our research, is viewed as a “cultural construct” (Baćević 2006, 26). These connections can be viewed in different ways, precisely because they take place in different societies, cultural practices, religious, historical-political, and other occasions. We began this research with the assumption that, as Baćević confirms, we cannot find a completely universal model, but rather “that cultural construction is inevitably a process, that therefore various factors influencing this process are what needs to be researched, and perhaps would enable us to understand this phenomenon in a more profound manner” (Baćević 2006, 26).

² I. Bašić wrote about emotions and/or feelings, with a special focus on love from an anthropological perspective, and that “the Western ideal of romantic love has prevailed over the traditional understanding of marital, love, and sexual relationships in different cultures” (Bašić 2021, 65).

In this regard, in the paper we will present the ways in which young love couples have been meeting then and now, on the territory of Novi Pazar. Videlicet, for the field we chose Novi Pazar, a town in South-West Serbia where, during centuries, Serbs – Orthodox Christians and Bosniaks – Muslims have lived. In addition to reviewing the ways that young people meet, the paper also indicates the religious aspect of this topic, which is a significant factor in constructing the cultural habits of the population of Novi Pazar, especially among Bosniaks.

A love relationship is most often interpreted as a romantic relationship,³ often idealized in Western romantic terms. So, it can be viewed as “the type of pair-bonding that entails metaphysical thoughts about another human being or, as Singer (1987) put it, ‘bestowal’ of value upon another, is then an invention of a certain number of European cultures, that has gradually evolved or, in every case, transformed itself” (Baćević 2006, 31). Nevertheless, this cultural construct, as we can define a love relationship, also existed in other non-European cultures, and today it is certainly global. “All of this came to change towards the end of modernity, as people (...) were becoming more independent and self-sustainable, and ‘traditional’ values eroded” (Baćević 2006, 32).

Another theory that is important to us for the topic is the evolutionary anthropology theory of romantic relationships, which through this type of relationship actually offers “a framework or context in which reproduction can occur” (Baćević 2006, 30). Although “reproduction can occur outside and independently of the context of romantic relationships” (Baćević 2006, 30), we will still take this theory into account due to the cultural context of the place (Novi Pazar) and the time to which our research relates (from the beginning of the 20th century to the present) – traditional, patriarchal culture, religious correction, lower economic status, especially of the rural population, and the community’s aspiration for the young people to have offspring as soon as they enter into marriage.

Given that we view a love relationship as a cultural construct, we add to the above the theory of evolutionary ecology, according to which “individuals develop behavioral strategies designed to solve adaptive goals” (Čvorović 2008, 160). We consider this perspective on our topic important, especially since we will also discuss the issues of differences in starting romantic relationships in the countryside and in the city,

³ About the concepts of love, such as “romantic love and democratic and fluid love” especially in the context of starting and maintaining love relationships, and getting married, see more in Lajtman 2015.

therefore in different spatial units, and then at the level of real and “on-line” space.

Social, and especially family factors, play a significant role in constructing the personalities of young people, primarily when we talk about traditional culture, and then also pertaining to their views on entering into love relationships, i.e. marriages. This is also specifically discussed by J. Čvorović (Čvorović 2008), who dealt with the influence of the father figure on the daughter and her choice of partner, relationship with the partner, and even on her reproduction in the Sandžak region, both among Serbian and Bosniak women. As J. Vukićević concludes, even for the cultural space of “contemporary Serbia”, “cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity in general, and especially in terms of sexuality, largely determine the understanding (and practice) of sexual relations, thus limiting the freedom of both men and women. Due to gender inequality, which still exists today, it is assumed that the restriction of freedom in the sphere of sexuality is greater for women” (Vukićević 2015, 130). This can certainly be taken as a hypothesis for our research, because the area of Novi Pazar in particular has remained under considerable influence of traditional, patriarchal, but also religious patterns of life.

All the theoretical premises and assumptions that we have presented here are actually hypotheses of our research and the types of general questions that we will try to answer: is a love relationship also a romantic relationship and is it based (only) on the goal of marriage and reproduction, and what factors influence the establishment and survival of love relationships and in what way?

As we have already mentioned, the field research was carried out in Novi Pazar. The city was founded under this name by Isa-beg Ishaković in 1461, not far from the fortifications that included the Serbian medieval state of Raška, with its capital Ras, the birthplace of the Nemanjić family. “The arrival of the Turks, and their garrisons were already in Zvečan, Jeleč and Gluhavica in 1396, had a significant impact on the overall historical development, and therefore on new ethnic processes. (...) Thus, in this region, as early as the 15th century, the process of Islamization was noticeable, which gained momentum in the 16th century, and a new population was formed from these Islamized people – Muslims” (Mušović 1978, 8–9). This primarily trading city had been under the Ottoman rule until the First World War, when the Austro-Hungarian army completely destroyed it, while in 1918 the French army liberated it. After the WWI, numerous national-ethnic and economic problems arose, and they only deepened until the advent of socialism. After the Second World War, No-

vi Pazar rapidly developed economically, socially and culturally, and the culture of living was increasingly modeled on global, modern lifestyles. Nevertheless, the strong traditional and religious culture, which was suppressed during socialism, was not neglected in private spheres. Thus, after the collapse of the Yugoslav state in the 1990s, what ensued was the strengthening of these practices and revitalization of the religious tradition, which has particularly been evident among the Muslim population, as an element for strengthening the Bosniak ethnicity. The population structure from the founding of Novi Pazar to the present day has favored the Muslim population,⁴ and according to the 2022 census, 85,204 Bosniaks and 14,142 Serbs live in the municipality of Novi Pazar.

YOUNG LOVE COUPLE – FUTURE NEWLYWEDS

Interlocutors who participated in the conversation about meeting, dating and entering into marriage can be seen as the most important subjects in the stories told. The ones who participated in falling in love, meeting, starting the love relationship, entering the marriage are the young from Novi Pazar and surrounding villages, who lived in city and/or the villages surrounding it in 20th and 21st century; met over mediators or independently; at the promenade, dancing, in cafés, on line, loved each other before the wedding, or didn't even meet each other; were meek, morally pure, virgins or have had premarital relations. Considering that intermediary introductions – over matchmakers, members of the family, friends and online – are the most common type of young love couple's meeting, the main subjects thus become passivated subjects upon which the action is being taken, with other people sometimes even making decisions in their name (especially when young people meet over a matchmaker, or the marriage is concluded through an agreement between the families, without the couple even meeting beforehand).

Conversations in the field were taken between 2021 and 2024, with around 20 interlocutors of different ages, men and women, Orthodox and

⁴ In Novi Pazar, "in 1911, 44,793 inhabitants were registered (25,826 Muslims, 18,967 Serbs). (...) The number of inhabitants in the Novi Pazar municipality in 1920 was 36,966, of which 18,516 were Serbs, 18,243 were Muslims and 207 were Jews. Finally, in 1941, the Deževski district (the current territory of the Novi Pazar municipality) had 41,630 inhabitants. These data indicate, among other things, that the majority of the inhabitants in the city were Muslims, and in the countryside Serbs" (Mušović 1979, 109). In 1971, according to the census, there were in total 25,076 Serbs, of which 5,322 lived in the city itself, while there were 37,140 Bosniaks, of which 22,571 lived in the city.

Muslims.⁵ We divided our subjects into groups, according to the historical-social circumstances in which they lived, i.e. those who met in the period of socialism – until the eighties, followed by those who met during the eighties and nineties, and the youngest – i.e. those who have met from 2000 until today.⁶

For our research, we took into consideration the conversations with the interlocutors who didn't go to college or had longer work engagements outside the city, so that we could see the most realistic picture of the local identity, habits and culture, without a bigger influence of the culture taken from other local surroundings (for example meeting and dating with more than one guy before the marriage, meeting on the parties and student nights out, etc).

WAYS OF MEETING – HOW TO MEET, HOW TO BE IN A RELATIONSHIP...

When we talk about youths meeting each other and entering a relationship, especially in the period until World War II, and in some cases afterwards too, it involved, in the first place, the wish of potential marriage, to be preferably concluded as soon as possible. Before World War II, and in the first decades after it, youths didn't date long, sometimes because of the long distance (secluded villages in the mountainous areas around Novi Pazar), but primarily due to moral regulations and avoiding coming into the temptation of premarital physical contact. Therefore, dating basically didn't exist. "Connected with religion, morals and norms of behavior in traditional society also was the common law with which was imbued the whole social life" (Pavićević 2001, 12). To enter a marriage, especially before World War II, but also after it, involved certain preconditions, among the Orthodox and the Muslim populations alike, which were not official, but nevertheless comprised significant elements within the framework of traditional culture. In addition to the parents' blessing, checking the affinity, etc., it was important that there had not been premarital relations,

⁵ I cordially thank colleague Biljana Anđelković, research associate of The Institute of Ethnography SASA who supplied segments of her notes from the field and thus made the analysis and conclusions about the topic in this paper more valid.

⁶ The text will contain segments of transcripts marked with the following abbreviations: SF- Serbian female, BF – Bosniak female, SM- Serbian Male, BM- Bosniak male. These abbreviations will be followed by the year of birth of the interlocutor and possibly some data necessary for clarification of the transcript, like the year of getting married, meeting the partner, etc. We will provide the transcripts in English, to facilitate better understanding for foreign readers, and although the original text is in dialect, the translation might only lose the color that the dialect gives to the text, but will not change its essence.

since these were undesirable, according to the traditional (common),⁷ as well as ecclesiastical law.⁸ These norms were valid for the entire Serbian population, but also for the Muslim population in Novi Pazar, since patriarchal morality was one of the important segments of traditional culture for almost entire population of the Balkans.

Considering that the main goal of meeting was marriage, in that sense, "dating", i.e. love relationship needs to be observed almost inseparably from the ways of getting married. Therefore, in the period until the World War II and the first decades after it, there were 3 basic ways of getting married:

1. Negotiated marriage / arranged marriage – approved by the parents; with a previously unknown person; the choice of the matchmaker; someone who wasn't wanted (more in Đurđević 2005, 104). Until WWII, marriage negotiations, especially in rural surroundings, were managed by so-called mediators. Those were the wisest, oldest or the most eloquent persons in the village, who know very well almost every inhabitant and all families in the village, and were therefore capable of determining the most compatible matches and connecting them.
2. Negotiation of marriage between the families with the same or similar social status. "Two families can be unknown to each other, they may know each other, or are distant relatives. (...) Then, love was considered as a big impediment in the process of matchmaking and regulation of contracts" (Đurđević 2005, 104). Namely, the wealthier of the two families had a say in making the match, and one of the most important regulatory elements was the social status and reputation of the other family.
3. Marriage for love – made of its own initiative; does not require the parents' blessing; with a known person; one's own choice; someone who is wanted. One of the ways of connecting the future spouses also involved often arranged abduction of the bride. "Today in our country, there are

⁷ "The popular attitude in Serbian culture towards illicit love, carnal love, and even towards the topic of child sexuality, judging at least by the Serbian Folk Songs from the unpublished manuscripts of Vuk Stefanović Karadžić (*Osobite pjesme i poskočice*, book V, SANU, Belgrade 1974) was very free and marked not only by lasciviousness and humor, but also by a kind of approval of 'sexual freedoms'. (...) Judging by the recorded folk songs, erotic, free love between a young man and a girl was not uncommon, nor were premarital sexual relations. Christian concepts of love and church prohibitions apparently penetrated Serbian folk culture of the lower classes slowly and not very successfully, and, as in everything else, the pagan attitude towards life remained" (Bašić 2021, 255).

⁸ More about moral and premarital relations in church canons in: Pavićević 2001.

still parts where they kidnap or buy women. But this is not characteristic only for Yugoslavia, but it is rather an old Indo-European heritage. (...) Yet, the latest development is now placing an entirely different perspective: today's difficult economic conditions in our villages. Many of those 'kidnappings' are arranged consensually to avoid the costs of expensive traditional weddings" (Dvorniković 1990, 345). Among Muslims, mediation in reconciling the in-laws, was performed by *muslihun*:

And then that other man who kidnapped her in order to marry her would have to find three men in the village who were called Muslihuns [mediators]. These were the most respected people at the time. Those men went to that housefather to make peace. To forge peace, so that his daughter could come to him then. Until that doesn't happen, she cannot come to the groom. And no one from the family can or should talk to that bride. It wasn't allowed to speak to her (BM 1966).

In the period of socialism, especially from the seventies onwards, the things have changed, so the youth started dating, but in most cases they don't express it publicly, especially not in front of the elders. Considering that, in the period of socialism, Novi Pazar was a territory that still maintained traditional values, especially the ones with patriarchal elements, the function of the traditional family survived, and so did the traditional models of youths meeting each other and getting married. Therefore, the basic and primary purpose of meeting was still entering into a marriage union. However, after WWII the mixing of elements of traditional and modern value systems took place. "New time brought weakening of parental authority when it comes to choosing spouses, so in the most parts as proclaimed and as real model appears intra-family arranging or individual choice of the future spouse" (Pavićević 2001, 111). We have to notice that the traditional model was more persistent among the Muslim population of Novi Pazar than it was with the Serbs, especially in rural areas, which has been confirmed by the interviewees, and the similar analysis made in Former Yugoslavia; "Namely, while the institutions of marriage and family (...) with Muslim and with Christian population of North Macedonia, and with Bosnian Muslims, still functioned based on the traditional model and values, Serbia, Christian Bosnia and Croatia, according to the same criteria, have been classified as areas of 'turbulent turmoil'" (Pavićević 2001, 110); on the other hand "Islamic religion doesn't allow young couples to be alone before marriage. If they want to spend time together, this always has to include a third person, so called *mahram*.

They could only show affection by looking at each other. Serbian youths were more liberal, while dancing the traditional kolo, they held each other's hands, and that was the best reason for marriage" (Glišović 2019, 82):

[Father] allowed me to go, as he was alive. My child, how can you go to Tenkovo, in Golija. I say to him, I will go with my best friend, she's taking me to her house. And then I went up there, and that night gathered a bunch of young people. There was that boy, and the music, this klanet (instrument similar to clarinet). And there's the dance and all that... And now [...] approaching me, I dance, and he comes, dances, and he takes my hand like this. At that time it meant that he fell in love with me. And so it happened (SF 1953, year of the event 1973).

In youth's mutual relations, not just parents, but the entire society gradually loosened the restraints, which was also reflected in Serbian population in the village, through, for example, "the role of the sokadžija, the one who notices (soči) a girl or a guy, respectively informing the family about desirable bride or groom", and its weakening after the 1960s, as it "wasn't important or crucial anymore, because of the development of new customs which enabled for boys and girls and their families to meet, at occasions such as dance, assemblies, etc." (Glišović 2019, 78). Likewise the parents have been less and less included in the selection of partners, i.e. future spouses for their children:

He said his name and announced that he had the intention to meet me and work it out. My father shouts, as for me, she knows, she's an adult, I swear to God, I am not getting involved. Whatever you decide, I will not come in between (SF 1947).

Certainly "the weakening ratio of traditional moral can clearly be seen in the category of premarital relations of the youth" (Pavićević 2001, 112). Purity is desirable, but not obligatory. Frequency of extramarital partnerships is higher, so is that of divorce and adultery, a direct consequence of the collapse of traditional families and religious traditions, and the transfer of all responsibilities to civil authorities. Although we are talking about the period of socialism, we have to point out that the folk tradition of Bosniaks, tightly connected to the Islamic religious tradition, still had stronger influence to family and social relations, and in that way to the ways in which youth would meet each other, compared to the Serbian folk and Orthodox religious tradition, which in their essence, especially the Orthodox tradition, was partly milder when it comes to moral, and not

that judgmentally (retributively) oriented. Because of the intimacy of the topic, we couldn't talk openly about the methods of dating with the interlocutors, i.e. we couldn't find out from all the interlocutors if there were sexual relations before marriage. Reading between the lines, and at times based on what was clearly said, we can conclude that, especially in rural environments and in women's population, there had not even been any kind of physical contact until the wedding, or the "kidnapping" of the girl. Not even in the urban environments, sexual relations were that frequent, especially when it comes to the Muslim population, but neither among the Serbs, who were more liberal in that sense.

They brought her to me, I came home drunk, then the army... The army captured me, and for 15 days I had no one to ask where my wife was. Had she run away... I had no sex with her, or anything of that sort... (BM 1950, married 1985).

We came to this conclusion also based on the confirmation that not even kissing, especially in public, was desirable, i.e. that the youth were ashamed to be seen. Of course, this doesn't mean that there was no kissing in hiding, and perhaps even sexual relations before marriage, though we however could suspect this only for the period since the 1970s and for urban environment:

Did we hide? Well, so we hid so we wouldn't kiss (In front of others or?) No, that was dishonor to walk around kissing (SF 1953, example from 1973). (And were you allowed to hold hands?) 1: No way, how could we hold hands. We walked separately. 2: Only when it was dark, we could kiss and all (SF 1956 and SF 1953).

1: What, she didn't? All right, younger, but Nina, that's how it was here. 2: What's wrong with you, it's all the same. 1: And now, they are walking in the street naked, but don't give themselves, and hold each other and everything, but well. Better, better than, well that ours, hide... 2: Hide, hide (1. SF 1956 and 2. SF 1966).

Considering that, just like the times before WWII, the period of socialism also involved patriarchal model was still respected in social and family surroundings, "it could be said that in that world sexual life, with its branches and reflections in other mental spheres, was almost rudimentary – if we compare it with the hypertrophied sexual life of the modern West-European type. It looks like the frigidity of women in that world is

more widespread than the civil environment can guess. (...) The sexual act is subdued to its primary and biological function: reproduction" (Dvorniković 1990, 342). Some interlocutors, especially women of Muslim religion, assert that in the urban environment it was almost unacceptable during the first two decades after WWII that two young people generally date, i.e. meet, especially alone:

I met my husband, and it wasn't like you go out to town to see each other. My father was strict, mine was one patriarchal family, so I wasn't allowed. Not just me, but the majority of our girls. On the street we would see each other, or write at least one little letter and send it via someone. (...) But I was going out sometimes when my father travelled somewhere. I would go out for a walk with my husband (then actually the boyfriend – future husband). There I lived in the same street as he did. He lived here, and I a little further down the road (BF 1938).

When it comes to getting married, after WWII, and especially since the 1970s, this has become more liberal and young people have been getting married mostly out of love. Still, quite often, the abductions of girls were happening, especially in rural environments, but that was more for practical, mainly economic reasons, or it was simpler for a guy not to come and ask for the girl's hand. With this "many formalities and arrangements between the two families are skipped, and the process of the wedding accelerates" (Anđelković 2025, in print). When we talk about rural environment and Muslim families, patriarchal patterns, which implied "protection" of the daughter even from the male glance, were very strong including the entire period of socialism, so the boy could see the girl just on special occasions, and after that there was no dating, but the expected step was getting married, so the easier way was to abduct the girl:

And I also stole over someone else, via letters. At the party I saw her, I knew her from school, but her parents were very strict and you couldn't reach her. They watched over her, going straight home from school. Always somebody watched over the daughter. So, she couldn't come... There was the bazaar on Tuesdays, and she couldn't come alone. She had to come with her mother or older sister or brother (BM 1966).

Somewhere the abduction was expected from the families, because they were already acquainted with their daughters' partners. The abductions rarely happened when it comes to the marriages arranged by a clas-

sic matchmaker or through family agreement, mainly in rich families, or where the parents wanted some guy from a good family for the girl, but due to disagreement with their parents, the girls decided to run away, i.e. that the boys should kidnap them:

I didn't have matchmakers. But, sometimes happened that in Pazar they have matchmakers (SF 1936, married 1956).

I could, but at the time the father would give the girl away just to someone that he approved of. Because he wanted to give her to more powerful people: this one had a house in Pazar, that one had a job, this one had the land, that one had a car. They searched for their son in law where people lived well, and didn't care how he looked (BM 1966).

Still, in this period we also have examples of getting married to an unseen partner, also through matchmakers. Mediators were matchmakers, or the couple's families, which were arranging marriages according to the tribal system, thinking about the social status of the other family. "The father or other older member of the family (paternal or maternal uncle, , brother) was asked who to give the daughter, and the girl was not deciding for herself. Someone from the groom's family would come to him, usually no more than one or two most close relatives, to talk the readiness of the family 'to give the girl'. When the readiness existed, they would arrange the proposal and engagement" (Anđelković 2025, in print):

One old [...], well known woman from Pazar. She knew the entire Sandjak. Everybody's origin (BM 1950).

Also, there are examples of the guys who were "restless", so the family would decide to marry them and "settle them down". Sometimes even where the guy was from a good, wealthy, city family, nobody from the city would want them for their daughter. So the "restless" guys (going out and drinking a lot) would bring girls from the countryside, quite often a lot younger than them:

I haven't met her, nor ever saw her in my life. (The son adds): During the communism, he was always in the barrooms and they brought her to him. I didn't know anything. I would come from a barroom drunk, and they took her to one room downstairs, where we could see each other. And I looked, and she had very big feet and fuck it, I said, who had they brought to me. And she was like, I was drunk as hell, oh my god, where would I go

with this drunkard. I said will you want me baby? I ...want you, and she nodded her head like this. She was like 15, 16 at the most. You want me? Then my younger brother come on too. They made an arrangement in the village, so got into the car and brought her (BM 1950, married 1985).

Strong moral norms in the country were also present in the period of socialism, especially in the Muslim population. Namely, if the girl would send a gift to a guy and he to her, that was considered as some sort of engagement (betrothal) i.e. a promise that they would be getting married, although they only met once. The gift was sent by the mediator, or the girl, usually with an older sister, would go to a so-called “exchange”, “engagement”. Even in situations where the father or the families wanted some other guy for their daughter, if the young couple exchanged the gifts, this had to be honored, because rejection represented a big embarrassment for the family, and the girl needed to find another guy:

I got a gift from her when we got engaged. I bought a necklace and from her I got a wedding ring. She gave me the wedding ring, and I gave her the necklace. And then she was promised to me. She couldn't have taken anyone else. I could even, if I hadn't stolen her, I could go to her parents, if she didn't want to go, and tell them your daughter gave this to me. I will go with my father, with someone else, and she had to do that at that time. In those times, if the daughter had done that, her father would give her even if he didn't want to, just to avoid arguing or fighting. It was dangerous. You know, I made a deal with her, there was an engagement... I made a deal with her to come to Pazar, you know. And she wrote a phone number to me, secretly, on the guitar. I played the guitar then. And I memorized that number. I would be there and there, at my brother's house. And I called her and she told me she would come with her sister to Parice, at the appointed time. And that was our first date. And she came with her older sister, but that lasted for 10 minutes and that was that. And they were not allowed to lift their eyes, or to say hello. God forbid that someone saw her with me. She could have been beaten, understand, this was that dangerous (BM 1966).

In making connections between the young couples, imperceptible mediators were quite often the mothers. In a traditional society, they were the “mediators” for a lot of things, including their daughters’ desire to choose their future partner at will. Mothers would sometimes buy a ring and give it to their daughter so that she could, once she had chosen her future husband, give that ring to him:

Maybe the mother bought it. Mothers did everything for their children. She bought her a ring. She didn't know that she would give it to me as a token. Because mothers, at that time, knitted stockings, wove carpets, wove rugs and stuff like that. Her mother probably sold that and bought it. And I already had it (BM 1966).

After WWII, the youth from villages were coming, more and more, to the city, for school and work, so they got under a stronger influence of the media and the western culture, which significantly changed the family relations too, as the women's rights were strengthened so the community had less influence to the behaviors and actions of the youth. This is also partially manifested in the way that couples have been meeting. Going to school in Novi Pazar, going out to the promenade, the movies, theatre, in the pastry shops etc., the youth have opportunities to meet their peers:

Just a recommendation. That's the recommendation, to hear about her. Someone always has to be the reason. It means that somebody always has to recommend, nothing happens by accident. Somebody has to be the initiator of something. It's the same for girls and guys (BF 1967).

However, although the opportunities to meet future partners changed and the possibilities expanded, the intermediary role still survives, but now frequently performed within the circle of peers. Participation of the family and relatives in finding a partner and marriage mediation, "shows that the marriage in this period is primarily an institution which provides continuity and reproduction of the family, as a kinship relationship between the two families, and the wider circle of their relatives, and not a matter of love and closeness between the youth" (Zlatanović 2003, 53). Namely, through the conversation with the interlocutors who met their partners in the period of socialism, one gets the impression that mainly the sisters of the boys, and sometimes even of the girls, were the ones who matched their siblings with their friends, which usually resulted in love, which is confirmed by an example of successful matchmaking from 1974, where the girl acquainted her friend with her brother, although she knew that her friend already had a boyfriend:

On one occasion, I had to go with [...], with [...] sister (future sister in law), to his house in the village. Yes. And, hmm, I went to Saronje and there was dancing and all that. And we agreed that he (the boyfriend at the time) will come from Kragujevac, and I will go with her. But, what happened

was that he couldn't come, and that night [...] (future husband) was there in the village and it everyone would come together, that's how it was back then, the youth and all, when she..., and also the neighbor came to tell me that he [...] won't come. (...) Oh my, and I had gone to Tenkovo, man, my father had allowed it. (...) I said I would go with my best friend, she would take me to her place. And I went up there, and there were lots of young people. There was [...]. And there was dance. And now [...] comes to me, I dance, and he comes and dances too, and he took my hand like this. That meant that he fell in love with me. And he did nothing, and I, because he held my hand tight, I was so embarrassed, and I immediately went to the kitchen, and said [...], [...] did you bring me here? She said [...] What is it? I say so and so. Well, nooo, it's not that, he was joking. And what would be wrong with that anyway [...]? I have two brothers, younger, unmarried, [...] in Belgrade. What would be wrong, she said, Olgica, he is very nice, and not because he is my brother. And nothing, that night was good. And for a while I didn't go, well there he came and sat by my side and said: I won't be long, I know everything about you, all the best, and I know that you have a boyfriend. Is that serious? I say I won't be getting married soon. And he said to me very clearly, I like you... And that's how it all began (SF 1953, an event from 1974).

Beside the intermediary role of the elderly (non)relatives in meeting of two young people, there is also the mediating role of brothers and sisters, or friends, who passed love messages between the ones in love. In this way, "the dating" was taking place in villages, especially between the Muslims. That was usually the only way of "dating", via letters, after the girl and a guy met only once. In that way the marriages were occasionally arranged by the future spouses:

Write at least one letter and send it via someone. My husband (boyfriend at that time) had a little brother, younger than me and he would walk down the street and I knew that he had something, and so I would go out and take it. Just like that. He would write: go out I am free. He was a driver (BF 1938).

A guy would secretly slip her a letter. In those times you weren't allowed to be so close to her, but you would ask a friend to contact her, or perhaps you saw her on the market or when she was herding cattle and then you could get to her (BM 1966).

At first I asked her if she wanted to run away. I sent her letters via one girl. And then she would respond through her. She would answer

me when, and what. Then I said to her I would get married as soon as possible. Now or never. Then she told me: Ok, come at that time. And then we went with two or three cars (BM 1966).

From the conversations we had, it can be concluded that the contacts between the youth were mostly hidden from the entourage, which aroused great longing and rekindled the love. Just the closest of relatives or friends knew about "the relationship" between the two young people. This could especially be confirmed by the interlocutors who had had boyfriends and girlfriends before the marriage, with whom they separated due to different reasons:

He really wasn't my first love. I had... Before him (husband). I loved one from ... I really loved him. It lasted long, a year and more (SF 1956).

Labour, educational and other (daily) migrations, in the 1980s and 1990s, influenced the majority of the population of Novi Pazar to work and live in the urban surroundings. This resulted in noticeable liberalization of dating, establishment of love relationships and going out, and with the boys and girls of both religions, although the girls still strived to get married and didn't change partners. So, when we talk about families from the city, or the youth who already lived and worked in the city, in most cases dating was allowed for youths of both religions, and in some cases we have examples where the youth had more than one partner before the marriage:

We dated, like these young people today, we decided to have a wedding and to start living together. My parents knew that I dated [...]. My sister had dated her husband for 7 years before that. My parents knew about him. My parents were like that. And this younger sister... Her boyfriend came to our house to pick her up, they would go out together (BF 1963).

How did you not know when we lived there uptown, at... I dated him for two years. I really loved him, for example I still like when I see him today. (But did your parents know about the boyfriend or not?) Mine? Yes, yes, yes they did, yes they did (SF 1953).

(And with that first boyfriend, where did you meet?) Oh, the first boyfriend was from Raska, but for a short time, like, not, not really. (And with the one before your husband. No, not with that one that you loved so much) Aaaa [...]. For two and a half years I dated him (SF 1953).

If the girls decided to get married, sometimes for achieving that goal they were “hiding behind” the moral values which most parents still cared about:

Somewhere around midnight, his girlfriend says: ,I don't know how I will get home. He said I will drive you home, and present myself and say, we know each other, she was at my house, I am sorry. She swallowed her tongue. A lot of girls married like that. Those were excuses that they were late. Women were cunning. Like they were gonna throw her out, didn't have anywhere to go, her father locked her out. In the morning she called and told them she had gotten married. And that was that (BM 1958).

Making acquaintance in those years was also quite often performed through mediators, or some intermediary influenced one's opinion in the selection of partner:

And these friends of mine who were married and with their wives, we were like family, like we were related. If I went out with a girl who they didn't like they would tell me all the worst about her. They wanted to set you up with their cousins... Now it's all repeating with my son (BM 1958).

Excessive consumption of alcohol was one of the most serious problems when it came to selecting a partner. Namely, many guys, especially from good Muslim city families, were denied the possibility to pick a girl from a similar family:

I have had girl from old Pazar family, but nobody wanted me drunk... And the ones who drank like me, none of them took the girl from Pazar. All of our girls took the Albanians from Mitrovica, Djakovica and Peć. All of them - gentlemen, so they looked for wives here (BM 1950).

With the Serbian population, this wasn't of crucial significance, because it was implied that a male who drank and made rakija (brandy) was a good housefather, so he became a desirable bachelor.

After the 1990s war, there has been a tendency to “return to tradition, roots, ‘the origin’. (...) Evidently there is a strong need to establish the continuity, that the period of the nineties attaches to the period before WWII, just like the period of 50 years in between didn't exist” (Zlatanović 2002, 292). In the 2000s this “trend” has continued, but with it came the influence of the modern, often liberal understanding of different segments of

living. In the context of our topic, one can see the young people in the city holding hands, but manifestations of greater tenderness are still almost unnoticed. Therefore, more liberal views on dating before marriage are indeed present, but not much, which especially manifests when it comes to girls. Due to the traditional social norms or personal affinities, they still prefer for their first love relationship to be translated into marriage. With men, this is mainly not the case, but there are also opposite examples:

(But, in your generation there is dating?) *Of course* (BM 1989).

When you date a girl, when you enter an emotional relationship, afterwards you have to go to the police to report her - you can't get rid of her. You can't do that a little with her, just a little, and dump her, if you know what I mean (BM 1995).

We met – at the time of our wedding, we were about a year and two months together. We talked about that early which was shocking to me, because I wasn't expecting that. Maybe we were together for three or four months. It was about his planning to get married and that he was not in the mood like just to date, but he was looking for someone to marry. Then I said ok, I think that it's a little early to talk about this, but yes, this was my idea too. Simply, I enter a relationship to find somebody (BF 1995).

When the young men are asked why the girls want to get married as soon as possible, their answers are that “*they fall in love, they get crazy*” (BM 1989), or that “*someone sees salvation in marriage and an opportunity to escape from some bad things*” (BM 1995). To the traditional and religious, especially Islamic canons, without undermining the aforementioned reasons, we also add the cultural one – social and religious cultural model, almost genetically rooted in the cultural mind of the girls in Novi Pazar, the one which assumes the girl's implicit virginity, rectitude, meekness, purity and modesty. All mentioned is concluded especially based on field research and statements of the interlocutors.

From the conversation with the youth, we have found out that in today's Serbian community, premarital sexual relations are frequent, but the wider community doesn't know about it, just the friends, and that it is not necessary for the first boyfriend or girlfriend to become one's future spouse. Still, considering that the community is relatively small, and that the young people who go out know each other, it is not recommendable, especially for the girls, to be known to have been in a relationship with two or more guys, as they would not “have a good reputation”. So, when we talk about the young Serbs, the corrective role of the community, and

especially the family, neighbors and relatives still plays an important role, yet the religion doesn't significantly affect these moral norms. It appears that even the revitalization of religious tradition after the 1990s has not been of great significance in this segment of young people's lives. For young Bosniaks, with revitalization of the religious doctrine, especially in the last two decades, there have been more and more young people of both sex who absolutely withhold from having sexual relations before marriage, and even any physical contact with the other sex whatsoever. In addition to inner/wider society, religious doctrine also plays a significant corrective role. The testimonies below indicate that more liberal relations between young Bosniaks indeed exist, but this is all more or less individual. The boys manifest more liberal behavior than the girls:

Previously it was a rare case, but now more and more (BM 1995).

It depends on the person. I had a lot of girlfriends where we went to summer house, here and there, I couldn't do anything. There was however this one girl, with whom I thought I had not a chance, but she was actually the worst. It doesn't make sense. It's all individual (BM 1989).

When we talk about dating, there is certainly the element of meeting the partner with the family. Although this is not totally accepted from the parents even today, the young people of both religions still bring their partners to their home and acquaint them with the family, but they tend to do this after the relationship has become "serious". Anyhow, the young girls who live in Novi Pazar, Serbian and Bosniak alike, not counting those who go to study outside the city, still try to have only one partner, or as few partners as possible, before the marriage, i.e. to get married with their first boyfriend, and certainly to acquaint their family only with the chosen one, their future spouse:

My mother knew him before our engagement, because he was coming to our house for Eid al-Adha. Because we have this custom just for the men from the family, our neighborhood and acquaintances to come to the house for the first and second day of Eid al-Adha (BF 1995).

With the generations who have been meeting in the last two decades, we notice two new ways of meeting – meeting downtown (café, club, etc.), and online meeting.

The new ways of meeting are coming from various, that is, more liberal social circumstances, which enable young people to go out to cafés

and clubs. On the other hand, technological progress in the sphere of communications, especially the one connected with the internet technologies, also brought the social media which enabled expanding contacts. Perhaps somewhat unexpectedly, but there has also been noticeable intermediary role involved in this communication is. In the cafés, clubs etc., mediators are friends with which one is going out: *You have to get to know each other through friends* (BM 1995), while the mediators on the internet are algorithms which, based on certain parameters, choose persons compatible for a love relationship. In our conversations with young people, we haven't detected using special dating applications, but the general social media like Facebook and Instagram were used, serving more as tools helping in virtual communication, rather than mediators in choosing the partner, like in the case of concrete dating platforms or applications:

That's the hardest. We don't have people approaching you on the street like in Belgrade. There is no wooing in bars. Here you send a request on social media, and you are praying to God that she accepts it. You wait for her to accept you on Instagram. She can like a lot, but still reject you (BM 1989).

Although among the young people in Serbia, meeting through the internet websites and applications which serve that specific purpose is generally more present,⁹ In Novi Pazar social media still serve as a mediator in people's making acquaintance, i.e. arranging a future date, although one has usually already seen, and in some situation even met the girl. When we analyze comments of the interlocutors, we can notice that in most cases, meeting through the internet is basically reduced to help in communication between two young people, in a space where they can feel free from the clamps of society and surroundings, but that for primary meeting, "contact" in person still has the advantage:

(And why can't you approach?) Because they are looking. She doesn't want others to see that you approached her, and make them talk about her. This one knows her, and that one... (BM 1989).

Young people frequently meet in the "offline" world, i.e. on the promenade, in school, or in a café, and then their relationship can be continued

⁹ More about meeting online and similar trends: AllTechBuzz 2023 and BBC News in Serbian 2020.

in 'the safe online zone', often through messaging on social media. Here, we also highlight one topic that has emerged from this primary topic in modern times, that of visibility and transparency of a love relationship on the social networks, as well as its quality in communication via the internet. This „fresh“ topic has been researched from a psychological perspective by I. Barun in Zagreb (Barun 2024), and we believe that it would be interesting for ethnologists and anthropologists as well, although at this point it will remain open for other research.

Accordingly, we can conclude that the mediator or intermediary role of a certain person or community is actually the primary one in connecting couples.

MEETING PLACES – VILLAGE, CITY, THE FAIR, PROMENADE, DANCE, FACTORY....

Based on the results obtained during the conversations done in the field, we noticed that it's necessary to separately look into the ways of meeting in the urban and rural surroundings. Namely, differences in those two types of settlements, as two distinct social contexts, are more relevant for the older generations for two reasons. First, life in the countryside has been lived mostly in big families or communities, so, when we talk about the old times – time before WWII and the period of socialism, the way to meet was through mediators, on country gatherings, or fairs, maybe dance, but also when coming to the market in the city. “Boys and girls met and ‘looked at each other’ at village festivals, weddings and on similar occasions. (...) The girl ready for marriage always came to village festivals, visits etc., escorted by older members” (Zlatanović 2003, 52). In the city, especially after WWII, there were more opportunities to meet – school, work, renting an apartment, going to movies, promenade etc. So, for young people just to meet each other, and then to start dating was significantly easier compared to the village. After the 1990s, there have been significantly less residents in the villages, because of moving and permanent settlement in other locations, which resulted in social norms loosening with younger generations.

In rural environments, in the period of socialism, the young could meet at village gatherings (poselo), fairs, teferić (celebration, Bosniak expression), dancing parties, while they look after cattle, maybe when going to the city to the market etc. “Young people gathered at village festivals, dancing parties and fairs, they danced in kolo and sang folk songs. Village festivals were characteristic for Serbian youth and they were organized during the church festivities. The first step on the traditional path to get-

ting married was initiated at these gatherings, this being soćenje (looking) – when a beautiful girl would catch the eye of someone who thinks her ideal for his son or nephew” (Glišović 2019, 77). Also common on these occasions were boys and girls dancing in kolo and chanting:

I think, when the dances were, here in Pazar. We went dancing to Golija, Rogozna, those older ones. But we, younger ones in the village then, guarding sheep. And my (older brother) was really the best dancer. When he led the kolo, it was really a sight to behold (SF 1953).

There was this St. Sava festival in Vracevo on 27th January.. And I wanted to go at any cost. And one of my sisters came with me. Father yelled at me why would I go to the festival. I said, all the girls were going, and I was not going anywhere. So she came with me and we went there, and he came from Cokovic. I didn't know him. I was standing like this, one neighbor held me under my arm, we stood like this in front of kolo, he danced, and danced and he stepped on my toes. I, thought he was so drunk, or he had some woman there, and wanted her to think he was cool. Who was this bumpkin I asked. (SF 1947, event from 1968).

“With Muslims, the custom was for the young people to go to fairs which are still held today. At the fairs they would ask the orchestra to play kolo, the girls were dressed in traditional costumes – dimije, shirts, they wear shorvane – golden ducats” (Glišović 2019, 80). Rural Muslims were even stricter about patriarchal moral than Serbian village population, especially when it comes to girls:

In those times you weren't allowed to be so close to her, but you would ask a friend to contact her, or perhaps you saw her on the market or when she was herding cattle and then you could get to her. (...) There, at the celebration I saw her and then, I knew her from school. (...) There was the bazaar on Tuesdays, but she couldn't come alone (BM 1966).

And then, I went to Saronje, where there was a dance and so on. And we had an agreement that he will come from Kragujevac, and I to go, with her. (...) And there they gathered, there were a lot of young people and everything, when this... (...) And I went up, and there were a lot of young people there. There was [...], and now klanet, the deceased best man from my wedding, he played the klanet. And there was dance and everything, you know ... And now [...] approached me, I danced, and he came, danced, and took my hand like this 'there'. That meant he was in love with me, how to say. He let me know that (SF 1953, year of happening 1974).

Considering that our older interlocutors were mainly living in urban environment when they met and possibly “dated” their partners, one of the places that mentioned quite often as the central point of meeting and “observing”, and *ašikovanje* (kissing, cuddling...) of the young people were the streets they strolled along. Differently from Serbs, Muslim men and women walked the opposite sides of the streets. Also, one of the places that served as pretext for going out and meeting a boy was bakery, as one had to go there to bake bread:

On the street we met and fell in love with each other. On the street. There was one street, ours and my husband's. We were walking there. At the time there wasn't any bread to buy, so we kneaded it and then carried it to the bakery. And I went out to take the bread from the bakery and he followed me and that's how we met (BF 1938).

In the period after the 1990s, the differences concerning this topic have been detected between the city and suburban settlements, rather than in relation to city – village. This is the period when the meaning of the local identity has been highlighted, i.e. differences between the old families from Novi Pazar and the new ones who migrated from the rural surroundings, and today inhabit the outskirts of Novi Pazar:

It was completely different than now. Well, now is even more liberal when we talk about the city families in Novi Pazar. And, it's a little bit different here in Selakovac, in Hadjet, and some other parts of the town. All these were fields once. We would go there for a field trip with school. In the last 20-30 years people have built houses and moved there (BF 1963).

In consideration of the topic, we can't ignore the fact that some of our interlocutors had met in school and then started their life together. The school, in the city especially, wasn't just the place of education, but the school building and yard were also places of meeting, socializing, as well as a “safe zone” for dating.

After the 1990s, the young people who have been going out, primarily go to the promenade, which is mainly the case with the Bosniaks:

The time for going out is short here. It starts at 8 PM and finishes at 11 PM. You will see tonight a man after a man, walking at 11 like somebody dropped the bomb. On Fridays and Saturdays, but also Wednesdays and Thursdays, it's like a car show and girls won't walk on the promenade,

but they walk here and look at the cars, they know all the license plates by heart, and guys are saying hello from the cars. What follows is Instagram, likes, calling out, diverse wooing. For example, I live on the promenade, I don't want to pass there, only here in Stefan Nemanja street. I go out of the way to avoid it (BM 1989).

For Serbs, the places where young people can meet when going out, are mostly cafés that sometimes organize parties. The distinction between “Serbian” and “Bosniak” places is largely clear and geographically certain. Young Serbs mostly go to “Serbian” cafés which are usually located in the part of the town called Varosh-mahala. Mixing is mainly reserved for Bosniaks who come to “Serbian” places, while the opposite is very rare. Anyhow, today, although the young Serbs and Bosniaks hang out together, go to school together etc., love relationships between the two nations are less frequent than in the period of socialism.¹⁰ This is mostly because of the revitalization of religious practices after the 1990s, which has influenced clearer separation between the young people in this sense.

SEASON OF MEETING – WINTER, SUMMER, DAY, NIGHT, (CELEBRATION OF) LEGAL AGE...

The season/time in our love story involves more variables. The first one is about the age, i.e. when the young people meet, start relationships, and in some situations immediately get married. This determinant also involves consideration of the relationship's duration before the marriage. In accordance with traditional culture and patriarchal system of value before WWII and during socialism, it was assumed that “they are getting married young; an older bachelor is a social mockery and doesn't count as ‘a

¹⁰ We have a couple of confirmations that mixed relationships indeed existed, and were sometimes followed by marriage in the period of socialism and in the 1990s. In the first years after WWII, for example, Bosniaks would be marrying Serbian girls from other cities, who came to Novi Pazar to train local women for working in factories:

My mother is from around Belgrade, from Ub. At the time the factory of Raska opened in Pazar. And since our women didn't know how to work in the factory, they looked for someone to teach them. She was looking for an apartment to lease for herself. Here one friend said in a conversation that some women from Belgrade had come, and there was one woman who needed to find an apartment, and my father said, well come on, she can live in my house, there is a room. And that's how they met. And got married. I think it was among the first mixed marriages (BF 1967).

Some of the mixed couples, went abroad in 1990s, to get away from the comments of the surrounding.

man” (Dvorniković 1990, 340). These values were widespread in the traditional society throughout Serbia and in the period of socialism – “marriage and its early establishment were considered very important. Only in rare situations (illness etc.) happened that someone stayed, according to my older interlocutors, (‘neodomen’) ‘unmarried’” (Zlatanović 2003, 51–52). In Novi Pazar, these values are respected even today, which is evidenced by the existence of one folk wisdom which people of Pazar don’t just quote, but really put into action – by the thirties you look for partner on your own, by the forties your friends look for a partner for you, and after the forties the family gets you married. Before WWII, and also in the period of socialism, young people mainly met very early, and already around 17–18 years of age were starting relationships, or in some situations were getting married immediately after turning 18. The majority of our interlocutors who met their partners in the period of socialism, Serbs and Bosniaks alike, and especially women, confirm that in they got married in their young adulthood, while the “dating”, or actually “seeing each other” lasted 3 years at the most, and usually only a couple of months:

After 3 years or so we loved each other. I got married young, at the age of 19. We met after the war, but I got married in 1956 (BF 1938).

No God, twenty two, and in my twenty three, and after I gave birth to [...] (SF 1956).

It wasn’t a rare situation that the bachelors were a lot older than their future brides, and they were sometimes hiding their age in order to persuade a girl to marry them:

(How much older was he?) Thirteen years (SF 1953).

He lied a little about his age, but never mind. He asked me which year I was born in, and I said 1947. And you? I asked just for the sake of talking. He was born in 1938, and he told me that he was born in 1944, so he lied by some 6 years. Well, I said, 6 years was not much. But he was actually 9 years older. But 9 isn’t much either (SF 1947).

Still, the limit for men and women for getting married in the 1980s and 1990s moved to late twenties and early thirties. Namely, that’s the period in which liberalization of life in the city reached a kind of maximum, and this especially applied to Serbian and Bosniak men. Going out to town, cafés, restaurants, movies, to dance, etc., was almost daily occurrence and it was one of the reasons that the limit for getting mar-

ried moved, while dating of the couple in love became an almost normal occurrence:

Now came the time to get married, and [...] and my parents were old friends. We were great friends during the last years. And I had the realization that I had to get married. But 31 years... still... It was common for one to get married between 28 and thirty something. It was the time. It was a time when we were all mischievous. I got married in 1991. It was a time of some national craze, not the nationalist, that came later. But, the cafés, you had everything, some of your best friends ran their bars and you had enough of everything and you couldn't take it anymore. That was the crucial period, if you didn't get married you were gonna stay without a wife, I completely dedicated myself to nightlife. And then I started to think seriously, I saw Supa, a good girl, there were other candidates too. She was 4 years my junior (BM 1958).

We also have examples of the men who were “restless” and got married after turning 30, and some of them were married off by their families who brought them girls who were a lot younger than them and very young village girls, which we highlight, as this practice of girls’ getting married so early had almost died out in the city. We have had such examples since the 2000, which highlights the fact that the traditional, patriarchal model still exists in the culture of living, among Serbs and Bosniaks alike:

I said, do you want me baby? I want... you, she nodded her head like this. She was 15-16 at the most (BM 1950, got married in 1985).

To kidnap, that was the most common. And that's why they did that. If the father didn't wasn't to give her, you'd steal her. This happened everywhere. We have the same mentality... Small town, everyone knows everything (BM 1989).

They brought a wife to him, her sister came, brought her and then they made an agreement. Before that, his parents said that they wanted to get him married (SM 1991, about a Muslim friend who got married in 2016).

After the 1990s, the period of starting the relationship has moved to later age, i.e. young people have been starting to date after they become adults (18), possibly finishing a college or getting a job, and very often they would get married in young adulthood, by the age of 25. This applies to both Serbs and Bosniaks, while in Bosniaks we can particularly connect

this to the Islamic canons, which young people in Novi Pazar have been pointing out:

Here in hadith, in Koran it says People get married while you are young because the older you get it's harder to get married. Because you are experienced, you saw a lot and you thought a lot, count, searching for flaws, you weigh because of the children too. Tomorrow to have more patience and strength for the kids. I agree that this is the right thing (BM 1989).

Considering that the most common way to meet someone is going out, i.e. in cafés or at the promenade, the time in this sense plays an important role. This involves evenings, until the midnight when almost every café closes:

It starts at 8 PM and finishes at 11 PM. You will see tonight a man to after a man, will be walking at 11 like somebody dropped the bomb. (BM 1989).

DESIRABLE FOR A RELATIONSHIP – MORAL, PURE, VIRGIN, RELIGIOUS...

When we observe the period before WWII, but also the first decades after, in the area of Novi Pazar, we have to agree that the patriarchal moral played the key role in the culture of living, and also in young couples' making acquaintance. As Dvorniković points out "the patriarchal Dinaric man is pure. (...) The surroundings, life, society, everything was working on the sex life staying regulated and conforming exclusively to the forms which were prescribed by the strict traditional moral" (Dvorniković 1990, 340).

These values have stayed very strong in Novi Pazar to this very day, additionally reinforced after the 1990s with revitalization of religious practices. In that sense "moral categories, as one of the important segments of every valuable system, were in the majority of the society traditionally connected with religion" (Pavićević 2001, 11). This can also be confirmed by the example of Novi Pazar, especially pointing out the valuing of the religious canons among the Islamic population, and to a lesser degree, as the practice shows, for the Orthodox. This is why a large number of especially Muslim girls "protects themselves" until marriage, while the situation is more liberal with Serbian women. Anyhow, even if something has happened before marriage, this is a well-hidden secret kept by everyone:

Pazar is very specific. In Pazar, it is very dishonorable when a girl is not a virgin. And now just like before...It's a big shame. (...) GIRL. Young. When it's a GIRL this is the most valuable to her. She can't have anything besides her looks and her virginity. (...) She can work in a store, but if she is honest and there are no stories that she was with this guy or that guy. Everyone would want to marry her. But, if there is a story ... guys like to brag... and girls like to hide, but they can't hide when the rumor has been started (BM born in the eighties).

Today this situation is partially regulated through the fact that young people can go out mainly to the cafés that work until midnight, and then they have to go home, as most of them live with their parents. Sometimes young people, who want to hide from the eyes of the public and do something “prohibited”, can rent an “apartment for a day”, go to a holiday home, or maybe to another nearby town, Raska for example, which is certainly more secure.

When we talk about men in Novi Pazar, the situation has been different than that of women's population, which is particularly evident among Muslims. With Bosniaks it is strictly defined that woman's virginity is implied until the marriage, while it has been more liberal for men, while among the Serbs, in the period of socialism, the things were also somewhat more liberal for women. The following statements confirm men's freedom:

This is not the case for men. I got married for the first time when I was 33. The marriage lasted for 4 years, then I got married the second time. (Is it a problem, to divorce and remarry?) For men it is not, if you are wealthy, which is realistic. It's like that everywhere (BM born in the eighties).

At 11 PM girls have to be home, and men can stay out the entire night. There are exceptions everywhere, I talk in general (BM born in the eighties).

Morality, purity, virginity and timidity are mostly connected with patriarchal culture, and are jointly referred to as to patriarchal moral. This mainly refers to women. If we add folk tradition to the religious tradition, which is also founded on patriarchal norms, we get a stronger, important and still alive need for youth's morality, which primarily refers to sexual purity before marriage. With the population of Novi Pazar, as with other patriarchal populations, “avoidance of any allusion to sex life can be seen in speech and behavior. Sex is a sphere from which one shies away, and sexual life is hidden with the veil of shyness and mostly discretion. Sexual life, as

something impure and almost as necessary evil, covers marriage. (...) Sexual shyness is very much appreciated; shyness is considered an important characteristic and virtue of the female being" (Dvorniković 1990, 340–341).

This culture which also persisted during socialism, especially some elements, like virginity and purity, is also called honesty, with "honest girl" being a commonly used phrase, and in the last three decades it has been coming back to the forefront. That is one of the reasons that there are more hidden girls (Muslims) today, for whom this is the question of morality and living in accordance with religious norms, although they go out to cafés and to the promenade, visit social media through which they exchange messages etc. An example from the 1980s tells us that in the Muslim population, it was important that the girl stayed honorable and "pure", which meant that she could not even look at the guy before marriage:

But Nina, it was like that, it, my dear, I went on the one side, he on the other. It was that conversation. And then, he waited for me to take me to my house. And me on one side here, the street was 15 meters long. And my brother's friend noticed that we were going in parallel to one another. And told my brother. He said, I saw your [...] with that yellow one from Lug. And when I came home, my brother came and yelled who is that yellow one you were with. From Lug. Who are you talking about? Tell me or I'll beat you. I don't know, I said, how can I know, where did you get that? [...] saw you. I said come on [...]. Of course, there is no excuse, it means I am going to get beaten up, you have to say. So, you feared the most from your neighbors and from your family. You couldn't stand and hold hands, or hug and kiss (BF 1965, example from 1982).

My name is so and so, my aunt [...] told me about [...], that you are nice parents and that she is an honest girl and I have intention to meet her and to see about that, to make arrangements (SF 1947, married in 1968).

With the Serbian population these behaviors were easier to accept a lot earlier, and without all that judgment, but virtue and virginity were expected and assumed in a way.

CONCLUSION

The general conclusion of the research is that religious practices, especially Islamic, as well as patriarchal and traditional models of behavior, that more or less still survive today in this area, have played a significant part in understanding love and establishing love relationships, and subsequently getting married. It appears that young people, with the help of

technology and media, transcend the limits of traditional patterns, but because of the cultural influence of older generations and respect for them, they also subconsciously fear the society's judgement, and so they do this slowly and carefully.

The possibilities the men had were mostly different than the those for women. Namely, men were in more enviable and liberal positions than women who have been under the big influence of the community which watches over their moral. When we observe the present, when it comes to the Serbian youth and a part of the Muslim youth, there are no big differences in the opportunity to meet and date – they both choose partners freely, use the internet, go out to cafés and clubs, while still living in a kind of patriarchy (parents, family, neighbors).

We can conclude that, although the online space is used more for meeting a partner on the global level, because "this normalization is partly encouraged by decline of popularity of traditional customs of dating, like meeting through friends or on social events",¹¹ In Novi Pazar, elements of the traditional culture of living are still tighter. Therefore, online space serves only as an escape from the eyes of the surrounding, and a safe place for the exchange of more intimate content after meeting in the *offline* world.

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¹¹ AllTechBuzz 2023.

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