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Cultures of risk: On generative uncertainty and intergenerational memory in post-Yugoslav migrant narratives

Špela Drnovšek Zorko, University of Warwick

Author's manuscript accepted for publication in Sociological Review.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026120928881>

“There is a way,” mused Goran,ⁱ “in which the particular experience of the 1990s, and the various instabilities of all that, manifest in discussions today. About various normal everyday things.”

The “discussions” in question were conversations between Goran, now in his 30s, and his parents, who had relocated the family from Serbia to North England in the early 1990s, shortly before the final disintegration of socialist Yugoslavia. Well-educated and highly skilled, Goran’s parents had not been among those who arrived in Britain from the Yugoslav region as refugees, primarily from Bosnia. Nonetheless they had left behind a country they no longer recognised as home, and in the case of Goran’s father, fled the possibility of army conscription.

This article examines migrant family stories of contingency in the aftermath of Yugoslavia, asking how “the particular experiences of the 1990s” become repurposed for more “everyday” visions of risk and uncertainty. Drawing on sociological and anthropological approaches to uncertainty, the article uniquely brings these into conversation with the literature on intergenerational memory to explore how post-Yugoslav family stories become reinterpreted in the diasporic British present. By focusing on research with migrants from the Yugoslav region and their British-raised children, it shows how past experiences of state collapse, war, and unexpected migration combine with the demands of diasporic identity-building in what I refer to as intergenerational cultures of risk. Capable of apprehending both the negative risks and positive opportunities of open-ended futures, cultures of risk are both attuned to and cut across the complexities of collective identities. Notably, the intimations of risk that emerge from post-Yugoslav experiences of rupture are not entirely beholden to Western

modernist logics, but nor do they belong to those parts of the world that are more commonly understood as “non-North-Western” (Brown 2015).

The first element of the diasporic post-Yugoslav narratives explored by the article is the theme of rupture. For those interlocutors who were raised in socialist Yugoslavia and migrated as adults, their sense of having “ended up” in Britain was often tied to the existential break represented by the traumatic collapse of their homeland, and resulting discontinuities with previously imagined futures. In contrast to Ulrich Beck’s (1992; 1999) risk society thesis, these discontinuities did not stem from social transformations associated with Western late capitalist modernity but from alternative genealogies of Yugoslav socialist and nation-building projects. Their British-born or British-raised childrenⁱⁱ, on the other hand, sought to reconcile the difference between “before” and “after” they had gleaned from family memories with their own visits to the post-Yugoslav space. In both cases, experiences of migration play a key role in how rupture is imagined as a sense of “postness”.

Second, the article explores how parents in my research recounted the specific post-Yugoslav rupture as proof of the fundamental and unavoidable uncertainty of life – the “certainty of uncertainty” (Korf 2013) – and oriented young people toward dwelling in the present as a means of mitigating the universal effects of potential future catastrophe. For the younger generation, the re-narration of such cautionary tales was always in dialogue with their migrant backgrounds, their lives in present-day Britain, and their possibilities for the future. The article shows how such approaches differ from the assumptions that underpin most accounts of the risk society, which privilege “‘universality’ and ‘ubiquity’” (Chang, Jackson, and Sam 2017, 330), while also engaging with underexplored spatial dimensions of risk and uncertainty (Müller-Mahn 2013).

Finally, the article examines the productive potential of risk in my interlocutors’ narratives of open-ended futures. Both first- and second-generation interlocutors valorised the younger generation’s prospective mobility as a route to promising futures, emphasising the socioeconomic benefits of diasporic cultural competencies. While such optimistic narratives relied on contrasts with the post-Yugoslav space as being existentially “stuck” (Hage 2009) in order to promote hybrid second-generation

identities, they should also be understood in the context of the unchosen migrations that had befallen the parental generation. Harnessing future uncertainties for optimistic imaginaries, I suggest, restores some measure of control and intergenerational continuity to post-Yugoslav family stories.

In asking how family memories of Yugoslav ruptures are deemed to be “inheritable”, the article further contributes to research on intergenerational memory in contexts of migration (Hirsch and Miller 2011; Bloch 2018; Creet 2014). This literature explores the complex “intersections of the past and present on memory and intergenerational narratives” (Bloch 2018, 650) while accounting for the difference that migratory uprootings and regroundings (Ahmed et al. 2003) make to the re-narration (Welzer 2010) of personal and collective memories. As I show throughout the article, what emerges is not a straightforward or linear transmission of memory but an intergenerational co-production, where the awareness of potential uncertainty is just as inheritable as – and deeply entangled with – those diasporic narratives that offer descendants of migrants a sense of connection with their “originary homelands” (Hirsch and Miller 2011, 3).

The social lives of risk and uncertainty

In 1992 Ulrich Beck's influential *Risk Society* proposed a new stage of society, characterised by the proliferation of human-produced risks that have emerged as a by-product of industrial modernization. Not only do such “manufactured uncertainties” (Beck 1999, 50) differ from traditional or “natural” hazards, they are accompanied by our heightened awareness of the possibility of risk. Beck and others referred to this as a form of “reflexive modernity” (Beck, Giddens, and Lash 1994): the knowledge that “we increasingly live on a high-technological frontier that no one completely understands and which generates a diversity of possible futures” (Giddens 1998, 207). Most criticism of Beck's risk society has hinged on the presumed universality of his thesis, articulated in two key ways. The first notes that a conception of risk developed under specific conditions of Western late capitalist modernity cannot be generalized to all cultural and social contexts (Mythen 2007), giving rise to studies of risk and uncertainty in non-

Western contexts (Brown 2015; Chang, Jackson, and Sam 2017; Korf 2013). The second concerns Beck's contention that since manufactured catastrophic risks affect everyone equally, "class differentials are rendered increasingly irrelevant" (Curran 2016, 6). In contrast, Curran has argued that the risk society exacerbates existing social inequalities, now understood as unequally distributed exposure to environmental and other disasters.

Another pertinent question is whether categorical distinctions between "risk" and "uncertainty" (Korf 2013) are analytically productive, which relies on underlying assumptions about human actors' ability to manage indeterminacy. For Giddens, the notion of risk is inextricable from a desired mastery of the future (1998, 208). The modern insurance industry, which calculates the statistical probability of particular risks, was developed to mitigate the uncertainties faced by maritime traders (Zinn 2008, 441), including, infamously, by slave traders (Rupprecht 2007). Attitudes to risk and uncertainty, however, are as historically changeable as the conditions that bring them about. Louise Amoore has described recent transformations in risk management as a shift from mapping probable risks to tracking "associated possibilities" (2013, 56) in order to act "on the basis of what is not known" (2013, 57), where the unanticipated nature of the 9/11 attacks acts as evidence that cataclysmic events cannot be predicted on the basis of past patterns.

Yet strategies available to insurance agents and security analysts may bear little resemblance to how risk is managed in everyday life. Challenging the orthodox division of "rational" and "irrational" responses to indeterminacy, Zinn highlights the significance of prior experience, intuition, and "affect as an orienting mechanism" (2008, 445) to everyday decision-making in the face of uncertainty. Individuals are further constrained by broader socioeconomic structures of inequality: Deana Jovanović describes inhabitants of an industrial town in postsocialist Serbia as "bargaining with risk" (2016, p. 7) in the hope of eking out some material benefit from the damage they know is being done to their health by the smelting plant that is the town's most lucrative employer. As Brown notes in his survey of risk in "non-North-Western" societies, all responses to uncertainty are both syncretic and situational (2015, 193), and ethnographic research is perhaps particularly well positioned to highlight the diverse social lives of

uncertainty without assuming fundamental differences between synchronic cultures.

My aim is therefore not to reify a singular post-Yugoslav culture of risk as a contiguous formation spanning both time and space, but to highlight the interpretive work that risk and uncertainty do within specific contexts of migration after Yugoslavia. Like Stef Jansen, whose work on indeterminacy emphasises the plurality of “many potentially incompatible hopes oriented at different objects” (2016, 449), I show how my interlocutors harness intergenerational narratives of uncertainty for different goals or even seemingly contradictory affects. In the following section, I set out the context for (post-)Yugoslav migrations and the research project that framed my ethnographic data, before moving on to discuss these narratives in further detail.

Locating the post-Yugoslav conjuncture

Founded in 1943, socialist Yugoslavia, which succeeded the interwar monarchist Yugoslavia, was based on the autonomy of six recognised republics and two semi-autonomous provinces, an arrangement encapsulated in the slogan “brotherhood and unity”. Josip Broz Tito’s split from Stalin in 1948, his role in the Non-Aligned Movement, and the freedom of movement granted to Yugoslav citizens in the 1960s led to Yugoslavia becoming known as an “exceptional” example of East European socialist modernity. When Yugoslavia splintered in 1991 after almost a decade of economic and political crises, the interlocking causes of the collapse and the violence of the wars that followed became lost in a sea of international headlines about ancient ethnic conflicts.ⁱⁱⁱ

While Yugoslavia was eventually succeeded by seven states, millions of its former citizens, including more than half of Bosnia’s pre-war population, had migrated or were left internally displaced, joining a mass movement of postsocialist migrants (Morokvašić 2004). Migration from the Yugoslav region has a longer history, including rural workers who travelled to the Americas and the Antipodes in the late nineteenth century, self-declared anti-communist émigrés, guest workers who settled in West European countries such as Germany, and those simply seeking adventure or a new life. Although Britain was never the most popular destination a sizeable number of Serbs settled there

after World War II, including members of the exiled royal family, while Bajić-Hajduković notes that “London held a special appeal for ‘atypical migrants’ from Yugoslavia” (2008, 27). In the 1990s, during the Bosnian War, approximately 4000 Bosnian refugees were resettled in Britain, with thousands more arriving under their own steam (Kelly 2004).

The data for this article is drawn from a research project that explored intergenerational memories of socialist Yugoslavia amongst migrants from the region and their children living in Britain. Throughout the 15 months of my ethnographic fieldwork (2013-2015) I conducted participant observation at community spaces and events, including supplementary schools, picnics, cultural gatherings, and dance classes, primarily in London with several trips to other English cities. I also spent time with people individually, in parks, cafés, and private residences. I came into regular contact with over 100 individuals and held repeat conversations with about 35 to 40. While I met some interlocutors through personal contacts, I came to know most by attending events organised by (primarily) Bosnian, Serbian, or Croatian community organisations, and through volunteering over a number of months at a Bosnian weekend school for children. My data consists of extensive field notes as well as 11 interview recordings; while the line between interview and conversation was sometimes blurred, my interlocutors were always aware of my research and gave verbal consent to take part in the project. Interviews were conducted in BCS and English, with all interviews with second-generation participants conducted in English, and were translated by me where necessary.^{iv}

The fact that I come from Slovenia – and belong squarely to the postsocialist generation – injected all my research interactions with an inherent “Yugoslavness”, as interlocutors marvelled aloud at my interest in the socialist past or commended my efforts to learn BCS (Bosnian-Serbian-Croatian). Not everyone I met was excessively enthusiastic about the Yugoslav past, but I also encountered little overt hostility. It is of course possible that my interlocutors self-selected in this regard: while I did not always emphasise Yugoslavia as my primary research focus, seeking diverse emic accounts of the past, it was no secret that I was also conducting research with “other” former Yugoslav communities, which may have made some disinclined to take part.

Although my interlocutors came from different parts of the former federation and had migrated for a range of reasons, the majority were Muslim Bosniaks, many of whom had left as a direct result of the Bosnian war. Like Munro (2016) I found that the line between forced and voluntary migration was often porous, especially among those who left the region in the 1990s, as was the case with all participants cited in this article. Whilst not everyone I encountered agreed on the weight or value they ascribed to the various Yugoslav “posts” – post-disintegration, post-war, and post-socialist – and differed in their relative attachments to the various successor states, the fact of “postness” itself was shared and indisputable (cf. Gorup 2013).

How did this state of post-Yugoslavness intersect with experiences of migration? The unexpectedness of “ending up” in Britain was epitomised by Nedim, a man from western Bosnia who arrived in the early 1990s as part of a humanitarian convoy. Strolling together through a London park one summer afternoon, we passed by Kensington Palace. Nedim huffed out a laugh and told me about taking compulsory English courses as a student in pre-war Bosnia. They had learned about the royal family, Paddington station, 5 o'clock tea... “How could I have imagined then that I would be living here?” he asked rhetorically. In his blackly humorous memory, the chance of Britain also symbolised the existential contingency of post-Yugoslav lives. Nedim often remarked that he had lived a better life in Bosnia than he did in London: memories of short work days and long afternoons spent in cafés sat uneasily alongside the present reality of his underpaid and lengthy night shifts.

While the rupture represented by the demise of Yugoslav socialism was less prominent in first-generation narratives than the ruptures of ethno-national conflict and displacement, such comparisons between working lives and free time implicitly also referenced the bygone socialist system.^v Where these stories differ from other narratives of the “last Yugoslav” generation (Spaskovska 2017) is in their explicit references to migration and settlement, including the downward social mobility experienced by many former Yugoslavs of my acquaintance.^{vi} My point here is two-fold. When re-embedding themselves into new social patterns in Britain, my first-generation interlocutors already had a reflexive awareness of the fundamental contingency of all such patterns, which they had once (pre-war, pre-transition) assumed to be constant (Yurchak 2005). At the

same time, the experience of migration not only expanded the possibility for comparisons between different systems (Croegaert 2011), but also underscored the extraordinariness of what had befallen all former Yugoslavs regardless of their political stance or ethno-national identification.

The second question underpinning my research concerned the relevance of the past for children raised in Britain. How are such interconnected ruptures interpreted by members of the second generation? While supplementary schools endeavoured to instil in their pupils at least a rudimentary knowledge of parental homelands, I wondered what role, if any, was played by the memory of united socialist Yugoslavia. Although the schools I attended during my fieldwork largely focussed on post-Yugoslav national identities and explicit references to Yugoslavia were rare, "Yugoslavia" at times appeared in the guise of a ghostly legitimating entity to establish the global significance of the post-Yugoslav nations that British-born children were being asked to identify with. For example, one notable lesson at a Bosnian school revolved around the 1984 Sarajevo Winter Olympics, with the teacher emphasising that Yugoslavia had beaten a number of high-profile countries to host the event.

However, second-generation interpretations of "postness" are coloured not only by first-generation narratives but also by young people's own experiences as diasporic subjects. In the following section I examine the multidirectional nature of family memories of rupture, which are not only received but co-constructed by the second generation, before going on to explore the specific role of uncertainty in the post-Yugoslav inheritance.

Intergenerational memories of rupture

The nature of intergenerational memory has long intrigued scholars working with traumatic or contentious histories. In her influential work on postmemory, Marianne Hirsch (2008) suggests that transmitted family memories have the power to trigger an embodied sense of connection with the past, such that one's own experiences are almost "evacuated" (2008, 107) by the inherited experiences of another. Astrid Erll argues that

“culturally available” (2011, 313) motifs and plot structures affect the narration of the past, while Harald Welzer and his team have shown that intergenerational family memories of Nazi Germany become selectively “re-narrated”, drawing on those elements of the past that “make the most sense” (Welzer 2010, 6) in the present. Julia Creet, in turn, has challenged the “reification of first-generation memory”, which makes peripheral those who are counted by their degree of separation from an event: “we have placed ourselves at the margins of memory by insisting on the unassailable firstness of our parents and grandparents” (2014, 81).

When it comes to descendants of migrants, it is not only time that marks this mnemonic separation but also the distance of space (Hirsch and Miller 2011). Analysing the family narratives – and narrative silences – received by children of refugees, Alice Bloch emphasises that intergenerational memories are always shaped by “the contemporary experiences of the teller and the recipient” (2018, 653). Like my own second-generation interlocutors, and in contrast to the second generation of Hirsch’s postmemory thesis, Bloch’s interviewees associated parental memories with first-hand visits to their places of origin (2018, 657). The young people I interviewed thus formed their own impressions of the effects of the past on Yugoslav successor states from the vantage point of the diasporic present, blending them with their parents’ partial stories.

Sixteen-year-old Sanija, born to Bosniak refugees in a city in England, had visited relatives in Bosnia since she was a child. When I asked what she learned at home about “her parents’ stories and about Bosnia’s histories”, Sanija responded: “I was told there was a war and that’s why my parents had to move to England”. However, this brief account did not mark the extent of her knowledge. Where she found a reticence to disclose details of the past, Sanija, like Bloch’s interviewees (2018, 660), filled them in herself:

After, I was quite interested in what was happening and I started doing some research of my own. I’ve read a couple of books as well, about the war. Obviously there’re a lot of different perspectives about the war. It really depends what side you came from. But I kind of know what

happened and what went on, I think, especially with my mum being from Banja Luka.

Sanija explained that Banja Luka – the largest city in the Republika Srpska entity in contemporary Bosnia – is very “Serbian-dominated”, and that she can “sense that difference” from her father’s hometown in another part of Bosnia. When she last visited Banja Luka, she told me, an elderly man had just been attacked on the street for wearing the “wrong” military emblem, and in Banja Luka Sanija would hesitate to call her father *babo* (Dad). Both the emblem and the word are associated with Bosniaks rather than Bosnian Serbs.

However, Sanija had heard stories about a time when things were different: “My dad was telling me about before the war. He said: ‘When Tito was alive everything was great, you could sleep on the floor outside and no one was allowed to touch you.’” With Bosnians, she went on, it’s all about “before the war” and “after the war”: “there’s just no kind of time difference.” She had been told a bit about the time before, “how everyone lived as one: it didn’t matter if you were Catholic, Christian, Bosnian, Muslim, whatever”. I probed further about the nature of her father’s stories: were things so great because everyone got along, or also because people “lived in a socialist utopia and everyone had a job”? She paused. “A bit of both, maybe”.

Sanija’s story evokes multiple ruptures, from the loss of unitary Yugoslavia and the collapse of the socialist system, to military conflicts and forced migrations. These all combine to form a singular rupture, the sharp distinction between “before” and “after” the war shared by Bosnians of her acquaintance. The first thing to note is that in Sanija’s account, “the war” comes to stand for a broader “sense of difference”, a milestone that marks a whole series of social and political transformations. The second is that Sanija had gleaned this difference not only from the stories and memories transmitted by her parents, but from her own visits to post-Yugoslav Bosnia. By drawing a comparison between two sets of streets – a street in present-day Banja Luka and the streets “when Tito was alive” – Sanija was able to fine-tune her understanding of “what happened”, removing herself from the “margins” (Creet 2014) of family memory.

My interview with Sanija furthermore highlighted the inextricability of the multiple and collective “posts” that characterized the 1990s from her family’s individual migration (“why my parents had to move to England”). As in Nedim’s case, where it was a stroll past a royal palace that evoked a time when “ending up here” had seemed unimaginable, Sanija’s diasporic standpoint was in its own way an integral part of her family’s post-Yugoslavness. While Sanija’s interpretation of the past is necessarily partial, it demonstrates that Yugoslav stories of rupture are constructed intergenerationally rather than transmitted in any linear sense (cf. Bloch 2018). In the following section, I examine how interlocutors from both generations used this past rupture as proof of the fundamental uncertainty of life, in ways that are particular yet imbued with a universalizing potential.

“You can’t plan life”: expecting the unexpected

Goran, who appeared at the start of the article, was a young child at the time of his family’s move to England. He was still however able to detect the ghostly presence of the 1990s in conversations with his parents many years later:

That experience of things getting seriously, like, fucked up, then colours how you view your level of security. And so then it comes out, it gets mentioned a little bit, not really explicitly, because I don't think they're necessarily fully, fully aware of how on a psychological level that affected them. But it does come up, whether you're discussing [...] how a younger generation might plan for the future, it might crop up in the discussion of, well, this is their life experience with... A very unusual and extreme example of it, which then means that when you plan for the future you’ve got to be aware of the fact that, you know, a lot of things you can't take for granted.

Although Goran’s parents’ biographies represented a particular – “unusual and extreme” – example of existential insecurity, Goran interpreted their general warnings against taking the future for granted as a direct result of those historical events. In addressing

a “younger generation”, their experience also acquired a distinctly intergenerational, as well as universal, interpretive potential.

While Goran allowed for the fact that his parents may have been subconsciously affected by their experiences, other interlocutors made explicit connections between the interrupted trajectories of their lives and messages about the future they wanted to communicate to their children. Lejla, who had left Bosnia during the war, told me she constantly warns her London-born teenage children that things can change at any minute. She herself had had such plans when she was her daughters' age, only to have them turned on their head: it's best to be prepared for anything.

Although the changes that affected her projected life course were linked to the collapse of the Yugoslav state, Lejla also cited the more recent unexpected death of a close family member as an example of the suddenness of change that she was keen to pass on to the next generation. This introduced an additional form of rupture not caught up in the historical “postness” of state collapse, war, or post-Yugoslav migration. Yet when I interviewed Lejla's daughter Lana, asking whether her family's story had given her the impression that life is uncertain, it was the collective rather than individual experience that came through in her answer:

Yeah, I think so. Because Bosnia has experienced quite a lot of wars. I think that's just, like, what's unexpected is just... expected. Because we don't know what's going to happen and when. Because that was just out of the blue. In the twentieth century. Not enough people expected it. So for example, in World War I and the assassination of Franz Ferdinand, none of them knew it was going to happen.

While Lana agreed that her “family's story” was important to her understanding of uncertainty, the “unexpectedness” she saw as central to the Bosnian experience was given a much longer timespan than the events of the 1990s. The example of Franz Ferdinand's assassination may well have been gleaned from her British history curriculum – or Bosnian supplementary school lessons – rather than Lejla's stories, and pointed to a broader collective united by historical experiences of contingency. These more epochal uncertainties, however, existed side-by-side with her reflections on the

diasporic present and near-future. When I asked Lana whether she was worried about the uncertainty posed by the 2008 financial crisis, she mentioned reforms of British higher education as a key source of her anxiety about the future.

These three dimension – family stories, collective historical memory, and the implications both have for the future – came together in the following quote from Lana, in response to my suggestion that education is important to Bosnian parents:

[If] we're not educated, we might not get that sense of reality. For example, if there are conflicts in the future, if they impact on a lot of people who don't have a lot of education... I think it's for most Bosnian parents, it's just, for generations past, we have to.

As with Goran and Lana, my interview with Edina demonstrated the ways in which a parent's exhortations about uncertainty were deemed applicable beyond the particular context of the 1990s. Edina, who was born in London to a Bosniak family and had just started university, highlighted the link between her mother's personal experiences of displacement and a collective "culture", suggesting that such experiences are part of a broader inheritable legacy:

I'm one of those people, I really like thinking about what I want to do. And [my mother] goes to me, "you can't do that. You can't plan." Because god forbid, you don't know what's going to happen today, or tomorrow. [...] So I do feel like that, our culture, our background, does have an effect on that.

Much like Lana's reference to education as a means of remaining aware of "reality", Edina's mother emphasised caution and alertness as a strategy for mitigating the effects of expected unexpectedness. When evaluating her mother's advice, Edina drew on her family's recent migration history as proof of its legitimacy:

There's two things my mum always says to me. She goes: "pamet u glavu" [*lit.* "keep your sense in your head"]. I don't go to uni, I don't go anywhere, without her saying "be sensible". Also, I'm one of those people, I love to have a plan. [...] My mum, she always tells me: "Edina,

you can't plan life. I never planned on coming to England. I never planned on leaving my brothers." [...] I feel like... you know, if we weren't Bosnian, and if we were just, if I was born here and she was born here and her grandmother was born here – if we had 15 generations here, she can't say life is uncertain, because I feel like she'd have nothing to back it up with.

Across the three second-generation narratives, uncertainty is embedded in specific historical and geographic conjunctures linked to family stories. In being mediated by the diasporic present, however, this uncertainty becomes more broadly generalizable. This not only provides young people with the evidence and affective texture to comprehend their parents' break with previously imagined futures, but also offers them interpretive resources for anticipating unknown ruptures in their own lives. The proof of historical events combines with the emotional intimacy of familial experience to produce an orienting mechanism toward risk (Zinn 2008). Again, stories of migration play a significant role in framing narratives of the (post-)Yugoslav past. In Edina's eyes, her mother's warnings were validated by the family's lack of "roots" in Britain, standing in for the lack of groundedness and predictable future that Edina's mother had been denied. Both Edina and Lana used the language of collective "culture" to characterise the effect of their families' biographies on their own understanding of the future, referencing the specificity of the Bosnian (and with the addition of Goran, more broadly Yugoslav) experience, while acknowledging its potential for universality.

It is this universal potential, as well as the possibility of guarding against unknown uncertainty, that can be usefully contrasted with the universalism of Beck's risk society, which glosses over the particularities of non-Western or hybrid social contexts. Much like the "certainty of uncertainty" that Korf (2013) describes as a central feature of Sri Lankan warscapes, the temporality of risk in Lana and Edina's stories is one of barely deferred futurity. In a warzone, writes Korf, "landscapes of risk and uncertainty combine 'ordinary' – in the sense of usual, known – elements of risk and extraordinary levels of alertness that have become an everyday experience" (2013, 69). For the children of Bosnian refugees or Serbian draft-dodgers, alertness stems from the awareness that any given landscape, including the British towns and cities in which they were raised, can

become a landscape of risk and uncertainty. The traumatic nature of Yugoslavia's collapse, which required coming to terms with the existence of societal fault lines that must have previously gone unnoticed (Drnovšek Zorko 2016), contributes to the shape of uncertainty in these narratives. The case of post-Yugoslav narratives also suggests that while the risk society is classed (Curran 2016), some catastrophic risks cut across class positions – or more precisely, that the intergenerational re-narration of such risks exposes a vulnerability to future risk that may otherwise be unimaginable to those occupying higher class positions, particularly in the Global North-West.

Yet while such narratives demonstrate that the future cannot be taken for granted, they also insist that it can be partially anticipated through an orientation toward the present. As in Amore's (2013) post-9/11 calculus of risk, the unpredictability of past events acts as evidence for the unpredictability of future events; however, parental exhortations against making future plans are tempered by the emphasis on education and “common sense”, which children may require to act quickly and decisively in the event of the unexpected. In the final section of the article, I turn to a second set of tools for leveraging prospective existential security in the face of uncertainty: diasporic cultural competencies deemed capable of exploiting the opportunities of open-ended futures, while retaining the socioeconomic advantages that British-born children hold over their peers in the post-Yugoslav space. This final element of intergenerational narratives highlights the significance of imagined relational geographies for assessing relative risk, which is always spatial as well as temporal.

Open-ended futures and diasporic mobilities

Following the 1990s, the post-Yugoslav region not only struggled with issues of reconstruction and development, but also faced the question of what constitutes a normal life (Jansen 2016). For Bosnian youth in particular, the perceived abnormality of the postsocialist present has been marked by lack of socioeconomic opportunities and a sense of existential stuckness (Čelebičić 2014). As Jansen notes, open-ended futures in present-day Bosnia are always in dialogue with other places as well as other times (2016, 456). The same is true, in reverse, for my migrant interlocutors. Regardless of

their families' current socioeconomic status in Britain, and despite the parallel existence of positive stories about slower lifestyles in the post-Yugoslav region, both first- and second-generation interlocutors made references to the comparatively poor political and economic situation in contemporary Bosnia, Serbia, and Croatia – and even Slovenia, usually held to have escaped the worst of the ravages of the 1990s.^{vii} This does not mean, however, that the possibility of second-generation return to the region was entirely foreclosed. Narratives portraying the post-Yugoslav space as being mired in a stagnant present provided a backdrop for more positive imaginaries of flexible migration, which viewed the unique diasporic hybridity of British-born children as a potential asset for leveraging optimistic mobile futures.

Sanija mused thus on her relationship to present-day Bosnia and the yet-untapped possibility of moving there:

Who knows, maybe one day I'll end up getting a job in Bosnia that's really cool. I know a guy who finished university and he started working [in the UK], and then his company opened up a company in Sarajevo. So he moved over there and he lives there with an English payslip.

Living in Sarajevo with an English payslip is the ultimate hybrid dream, a scenario that overcomes the socioeconomic limitations of living in Bosnia otherwise. In effect, the young man in Sanija's story had circumvented the obstacles faced by his Bosnian peers by virtue of his family's migration to Britain, which now gives him access to a more advantageous position in a transnational labour market. As Kibria notes regarding the "homeland trips" undertaken by second-generation Chinese- and Korean-Americans, these were not only about "blood and belonging" but also highlighted the advantages – "potential, possibly realizable in the future" (2002, 309) – of being Chinese or Korean while remaining American, nestled within a connected world where the ability to leverage multiple cultural memberships can lead to increased socioeconomic mobility.

Notably, the diasporic competencies required for a hybrid future in Bosnia dovetailed with a core aim of numerous community organisations and supplementary schools I encountered in my research: teaching young people raised in Britain about their cultural origins. This gave parents added leverage when arguing the advantages of speaking

another language alongside English, often to their reluctant offspring. Some parents commented that they had no way of knowing where their children will end up living; others emphasised the importance of learning a second language for honing their children's ability to learn further languages down the line. This open-endedness resonated with the narratives of inherent existential uncertainty explored in the previous section, with one parent summing up the benefits of speaking Bosnian thus: "you never know what will happen, life is unpredictable."

For Ibrahim, whose two young children were born in Britain, learning Bosnian was a means of opening doors. Of all my interlocutors, Ibrahim was perhaps politically most favourably inclined toward independent Bosnia, and may therefore have been expected to promote his children's permanent return, yet even he proposed a more open-ended future:

If my child speaks Bosnian, she has the chance to find a job in Bosnia and Herzegovina. She doesn't have to work in Bosnia, she can also work in the European Union. [...] If she speaks two languages, great. If she speaks five languages, even better. We had a case where a Bosnian woman was the only candidate who could speak both Swedish and Bosnian and she works today for the European Union. [...] If she hadn't learnt the Bosnian language, if she had only learnt Swedish, she wouldn't have been a good candidate. So you never need to shut this door, we need to open that door for the child, to learn about his or her culture and tradition. In any case, I never know where my child will live and work.

In such richly imagined possible futures, the prospects available to young British-Bosnians are constrained neither by the suspended hope that governs Bosnia and many other post-Yugoslav states, nor by the downward social mobility of many migrant parents. The conditions for bringing about this positive uncertainty is closer to the individuating modernity explored by Beck and his contemporaries – yet this Western modernity is necessary for overcoming the deficiencies of postsocialist societies. While narratives of future mobility make a case for investing in "originary" languages and

cultures, such diasporic technologies bestow only a limited form of what Ong (2006) calls flexible citizenship, which relies on the continued socioeconomic inequalities between Western Europe and the South-East European periphery. That the opportunities available to diasporic youth are dependent on their parents having ended up elsewhere, an experience inextricably tied to the collapse of Yugoslavia, goes unsaid in such speculative stories of the future, as do the racialized global hierarchies that reproduce social and economic immobility for some border crossers more than others (Vigh 2009).

Conclusion: generational and generative uncertainties

As I have shown, British-born children of former Yugoslav migrants explicitly connect the maxim that the future is unforeseeable to their family stories and narratives of collective pasts. These are marked as much by the historical break with unitary and socialist Yugoslavia as they are by the migration trajectories that make comparisons between Britain and the post-Yugoslav space central to comprehending the risks as well as opportunities of radical contingency. While the inevitability of uncertain futures lies at the heart of such diasporic cultures of risk, family stories also teach younger generations to mitigate the effects of rupture by focusing on the present rather than the future. At the same time, open-ended mobile futures where one might “live anywhere” generate more optimistic attitudes toward risk, which only partially acknowledge that the potential benefits of diasporic hybridity rely on the socioeconomic and geopolitical inequalities between Western European and the postsocialist Yugoslav region. I suggest that such intergenerational imaginaries go some way toward transforming the loss of the predictable or normal futures experienced by the older generation into potentially more promising outcomes for their children, restoring some measure of mastery to stories of existential dislocation.

Notably, in my research hopeful narratives of future uncertainty were just as multi-temporal and relational as stories of the ruptured past. Ibrahim's reference to the benefits of speaking both Swedish and Bosnian invoked not only a possible future where Bosnia has joined the ranks of EU member states, but an existing present where the Bosnian language already figures as an asset to some second-generation youth, albeit

within the very European institutions that helped keep post-Yugoslav citizens in varying states of immobility (Jansen 2009). Yet they also relied on a selective attitude toward risk, over-emphasising opportunity at the expense of hazard. The flexibility imagined for British-born children in 2014 and 2015 was at least partially predicated on the freedom of movement inherent to the structures of the European Union, which may in future be withdrawn from British citizens.

The article makes a contribution to the sociology of risk by emphasising the cultural specificities of diasporic, intergenerational, and relational narratives of uncertainty. By highlighting South-East European postsocialist migrant communities whose experiences of existential dislocation stem neither from Western reflexive modernity nor what are traditionally understood as non-Western contexts, the article introduces a unique perspective on perceptions of risk. It furthermore emphasises the diasporic dimensions of cultures of risk, which shape how events that occurred in the Yugoslav region are generalized into potential future uncertainties in other places. In interrogating how the second generation engages with family memories while drawing on their own first-hand experiences, the article furthermore contributes to flourishing debates on intergenerational memory in contexts of migration.

Finally, I take this opportunity to call for more attention amongst migration scholars to the diverse histories of rupture and existential contingency that migrants living in Britain experienced before their arrival, not least in the emerging literature on Brexit. Shortly after the 2016 referendum, commentators mused on the possible resonances between Brexit and Yugoslavia (Baker 2016; Kostovicova 2016). Yet while academics have engaged closely with the ways in which Brexit is imbricated in the nexus of race, migration, and nation (Burrell et al. 2019), or explored its effects on Central-East European migrants (McGhee, Moreh, and Vlachantoni 2017), to date little attention has been paid to the collective experiences of past uncertainty that many postsocialist migrants have brought with them to Britain. At a time when British exceptionalism is on the ascendant – not to mention, at the time of writing, at the start of a global pandemic crisis – perhaps a country that had not imagined it could be convulsed by such unexpected ruptures could benefit from hearing stories of a country that had once felt the same.

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ⁱ All names are pseudonyms.

ⁱⁱ Most of my second-generation interlocutors were born in Britain. Some, like Goran, arrived as young children and would rightly belong to the "1.5 generation". While this difference was pertinent in other aspects, it did not appear to affect the intergenerational dynamic I describe in this article.

ⁱⁱⁱ For further reading on Yugoslav history, see Lampe (1996). See Dragović-Soso (2007) for a comprehensive review of explanations for Yugoslavia's demise.

^{iv} In the article, block quotes always indicate recorded interviews. In-text direct speech indicates verbatim quotation from recorded interviews (or in one case, from field notes). Reported speech indicates conversations paraphrased from field notes.

^v Although not everyone had such fond memories of socialist modernity: according to a female interlocutor from Bosnia, the state's rhetoric about the "emancipation" of women obscured the reality of their double burden as both workers and housewives.

^{vi} On the downward social mobility of many former Yugoslav migrants, see Colic-Peisker (2005) and Franz (2005).

^{vii} One Slovenian interlocutor had been born there to Bosnian parents and at least partially ascribed her poor job prospects in Slovenia to her stigmatised background, highlighting the differential inclusion of those from other Yugoslav republics within the federation's most "Western" state.