
From Literary Memory to Platformed Culture: South Slavic Diaspora Identity and Algorithmic Marginalization in Canadian Multicultural Literature

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Abstract

This paper examines Canadian multicultural literature in relation to diaspora marginalization, focusing on Joy Kogawa's exploration of silence and erasure in *Obasan* (1981), Dionne Brand's fragmented constructions of identity in *A Map to the Door of No Return* (2001), and M. G. Vasanji's articulation of hybrid identity in *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* (2003). These literary perspectives are then extended to the digital age through an analysis of South Slavic diaspora communities in Canada (Serbian, Croatian, and Bosnian) and their forms of online cultural production and engagement. In the digital era, cultural marginalization is no longer solely produced through colonial discourse, patriarchy, or state violence, but is increasingly intensified by algorithmic regimes of visibility, self-representation, and surveillance. The paper demonstrates that digital platforms have transformed diaspora identity from print-based cultural memory into a participatory and continuously evolving system shaped by algorithmic logics. Therefore, marginalization occurs less through direct exclusion from literary production and more through language loss, reliance on dominant digital platforms, and the replacement of traditional publishing with informal online storytelling. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate that digitization has not resulted in the democratization of the literary and linguistic sphere, but rather that algorithmic filtering has contributed to the marginalization of languages with lower economic capital, including South Slavic languages.

Keywords: Canadian multicultural literature, cultural marginalization, digital era, minority voices, diaspora identity, hybrid identity, algorithm.

1. Introduction

This paper examines the construction, representation, and visibility of diasporic identities through diaspora studies, postcolonial theory, critical discourse analysis, and intersectionality. The relationship between diaspora, cultural memory, and identity has long been a central concern in Canadian multicultural literature. Literary representations of migration, displacement, and belonging have offered important insights into how marginalized communities respond to historical trauma, preserve cultural continuity, and construct forms of social recognition within multicultural societies. Canadian writers such as Joy Kogawa, Dionne Brand, and M. G. Vassanji have explored the complex intersections of memory, silence, language, and hybridity, revealing how diasporic identities are shaped through processes of exclusion, cultural transformation, and representation. While earlier forms of marginalization often emerged through colonial discourse, racial hierarchies, state policies, and exclusion from literary and cultural institutions, contemporary forms of cultural visibility are increasingly mediated by digital platforms and algorithmic systems. Search engines, social media platforms, recommendation algorithms, and data-driven systems of content distribution have become influential structures through which cultural narratives circulate, gain recognition, or remain invisible. The paper argues that the transition from literary memory to platformed culture has transformed the conditions under which diasporic identities become visible, shifting processes of marginalization from forms of cultural exclusion toward forms of algorithmic mediation and linguistic invisibility.

The paper therefore explores how identities are shaped through migration, memory, representation, and discourses of difference, focusing on South Slavic diasporic communities in Canada, whose histories of migration, displacement, and cultural memory have produced complex forms of belonging across national, linguistic, and generational boundaries. It also examines South Slavic languages as carriers of cultural memory and identity while considering their marginalization within digital environments dominated by major linguistic groups. Through a comparative analysis of Kogawa's *Obasan*

(1981), Brand's *A Map to the Door of No Return* (2001), and Vasanji's *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* (2003), the paper examines how Canadian multicultural literature conceptualizes silence, fragmentation, hybridity, and exclusion as constitutive dimensions of diasporic experience. These literary insights are subsequently extended to contemporary digital environments in order to examine the experiences of South Slavic diaspora communities in Canada and the conditions that shape cultural and linguistic visibility online.

2. Diasporic Identity Between Representation, Memory and Mediated Visibility

Diaspora studies, postcolonial theory, critical discourse analysis, and intersectionality are crucial for understanding how diasporic identities are constructed, represented, and shaped within literary and digital-cultural environments. Hall's (1990) conception of cultural identity is of paramount importance since it emphasizes that identity is not a fixed origin "to which we can make some final and absolute Return" (1990, p. 226), but rather it is a production that is always in process, formed through representation and unequal relations of power. Hall views identity as shaped through historical experience, displacement, memory, and representation, emphasizing its continual transformation across time and space. This understanding is particularly relevant for diasporic communities whose sense of self emerges through migration, transnational connections, and evolving relationships to both homeland and host society. Hall's emphasis on identity as a dynamic and relational process provides a starting point for examining how literary texts represent diasporic belonging. Even though Hall's idea of identity as fluid and continuously produced has become foundational to diaspora studies, its focus on relational construction can overlook how institutions fix identities through bureaucratic, cultural, and algorithmic classifications, which often make diasporic subjects appear stable and predefined. In this sense, fluidity becomes not only descriptive but also ideologically convenient, potentially masking the durability of racialized, ethnic, and linguistic hierarchies that structure visibility in both literary and digital regimes. In order to account for the social and spatial conditions through which identities are negotiated and regulated, Hall's conceptualization of diaspora can be further developed through Brah's (1996) concept of diaspora space, which highlights the social and cul-

tural spaces where multiple histories, identities, and experiences of belonging intersect. According to Brah, diaspora is not simply defined by dispersal from a homeland but by the complex relationships that emerge between migrants, their descendants, and the societies in which they reside. Similarly, Clifford (1994) challenges homeland-centered definitions of diaspora by emphasizing movement, routes, and transnational connections rather than fixed origins. His approach draws attention to the fluid and mobile character of diasporic identities, making it particularly relevant for communities whose cultural affiliations extend across national borders and generations. Within this perspective, questions of belonging are inseparable from questions of memory. Marianne Hirsch's (2012) concept of postmemory addresses the transmission of cultural and historical memory across generations. Hirsch examines how descendants inherit memories of events they did not directly experience, particularly through stories, images, and cultural narratives. This concept is especially useful for understanding how memories of war, displacement, and migration continue to shape the identities of second- and third-generation members of the South Slavic diaspora in Canada.

Beyond issues of memory and transmission, belonging is likewise inseparable from representation. Edward Said's (1978) concept of Orientalism demonstrates how dominant cultures produce images of the "Other" that reinforce unequal relations of power. Revisiting the political consequences of Orientalist thinking, Said (2003) further argues that "Without a well-organized sense that these people over there were not like 'us' and didn't appreciate 'our' values — the very core of traditional Orientalist dogma — there would have been no war" (p. 4). While Said focuses on colonial constructions of the Orient, these insights also illuminate how migrant communities are imagined within multicultural societies, where inherited patterns of othering continue to shape cultural perception. In this regard, South Slavic identities often occupy an ambiguous position within European and North American cultural narratives, frequently associated with stereotypes of ethnic conflict, cultural backwardness, or peripheral European status. Such representations, in turn, shape the conditions under which diasporic subjects become visible and intelligible. Said's discussion of Orientalism can be extended through Maria Todorova's (1997) concept of Balkanism, which examines the Balkans as Europe's internal "Other." Todorova demonstrates that the region

has frequently been represented through narratives of violence, instability, and incompleteness, occupying a liminal position between East and West. Such representations contribute to the marginalization of South Slavic identities and continue to shape perceptions of the region and its diasporic communities. A further dimension is provided by Milica Bakić-Hayden's (1995) concept of nesting Orientalisms, which illustrates how processes of othering function not only between East and West but also within the Balkans themselves. Bakić-Hayden shows how hierarchical distinctions are reproduced among neighboring groups, with each positioning itself as more "European" than those located further east or south. This perspective is particularly useful for understanding the internal complexities of South Slavic identities and the ways in which cultural hierarchies may persist within diasporic communities. Said's Orientalism, Todorova's Balkanism, and Bakić-Hayden's nesting Orientalisms provide important approaches for analyzing how identities are shaped through discourses of difference and hierarchy. At the same time, these approaches remain primarily concerned with representation and the production of cultural meaning. While this focus is indispensable for understanding discursive forms of othering, it is less equipped to account for contemporary forms of power that function through digital infrastructures and algorithmic systems. Algorithmic marginalization does not always emerge through representational misrecognition; rather, it can be produced through processes of classification, ranking, and visibility that function independently of explicit cultural narratives.

Postcolonial approaches also emphasize the fluid and dynamic character of diasporic identity. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2006) highlight hybridity, displacement, and cultural translation as defining features of postcolonial and migratory experiences. The Post-Colonial Studies Reader directs attention to the in-between spaces inhabited by migrant subjects and to the multiple cultural influences that contribute to identity formation. Understanding how such identities become visible and intelligible requires attention not only to cultural negotiation but also to the broader systems of power through which knowledge and recognition are organized. Accordingly, Foucault's (1978) analysis of discourse becomes particularly relevant. Foucault explains how knowledge, social norms, and systems of recognition are shaped through institutional and cultural practices. Power is expressed not only through prohibition but also

through the production of categories, truths, and forms of visibility. Literary texts can thus be read as spaces where meanings associated with migration, ethnicity, and belonging are circulated, reinforced, or challenged. This emphasis on visibility becomes particularly significant when considering contemporary digital environments in which algorithms increasingly influence whose stories, identities, and experiences receive attention. Judith Butler's (1990,1997) theory of performativity extends this discussion by demonstrating that identities emerge through repeated social practices and normative expectations. Subjectivity is formed through discourse, yet individuals remain capable of contesting and reshaping the categories through which they are understood. Within diasporic communities, identity is enacted through language, memory, cultural practices, and acts of self-representation. Butler's insights help bridge literary and digital contexts by highlighting the continuous performance of identity in spaces where visibility and recognition depend upon both social and technological forms of mediation. Nevertheless, both Foucault's theory of discourse and Butler's theory of performativity are limited by their historical grounding in pre-platform regimes of power. Their accounts presume discursive circulation within relatively legible fields of social and institutional authority, whereas algorithmic systems redistribute discursive power through automated classification, machine learning models, and engagement-based visibility metrics that exceed traditional notions of discourse. In such contexts, subject formation is no longer only discursive but also computationally pre-structured.

The consequences of these processes are further developed by Fanon's (1986) analysis of colonial subjectivity, which foregrounds the affective and existential consequences of being constructed as an object within dominant regimes of representation. Fanon shows how dominant images and narratives influence self-perception, often producing experiences of alienation, exclusion, and fragmentation. Describing this experience, he writes, "I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects" (Fanon, 1986, p. 109). This observation reveals the transformation of the subject from an active agent seeking meaning into an object defined through the gaze and assumptions of others. Although developed in relation to colonialism, Fanon's work offers valuable insight into the ways diasporic subjects

encounter narratives that position them as culturally different or socially peripheral. Nevertheless, Fanon's analysis of racialized objectification presupposes a recognizable structure of othering organized around a perceivable gaze. Algorithmic marginalization, by contrast, often produces exclusion without encounter: invisibility without a subject, erasure without representation, and exclusion without recognition. This limits the explanatory reach of Fanon when applied to platformed environments where power is distributed, anonymized, and continuously adjusted. In relation to these questions of differential visibility, Crenshaw's (1991) concept of intersectionality becomes particularly important. Crenshaw demonstrates that identity cannot be reduced to a single category such as ethnicity, since experiences of inclusion and exclusion emerge through the interaction of multiple social positions, including gender, class, migration status, and cultural background. This perspective allows for a more comprehensive understanding of South Slavic diasporic experiences and of the different forms of visibility and recognition available to individuals within multicultural and digital environments. These processes of uneven visibility and recognition are further shaped by broader institutional and cultural structures. Within Canadian multicultural discourse, Walcott (1997) observes that multiculturalism simultaneously promotes diversity and restricts the recognition of minority experiences. While multicultural discourse celebrates cultural difference, it may also establish boundaries around which identities become legible and acceptable within the national narrative. This tension is especially relevant for South Slavic diasporic communities, whose experiences often remain less visible within dominant accounts of Canadian multiculturalism. Relying on concerns with visibility beyond institutional discourse, McKittrick's (2006) spatiality and exclusion shows how power is embedded within geographical, cultural, and symbolic spaces. Her concept of "cartographies of struggle" draws attention to the ways marginalized communities create alternative forms of belonging despite experiences of exclusion. In this study, McKittrick's insights make it possible to examine both literary and digital spaces where diasporic identities are produced, contested, and reimaged.

In this respect, South Slavic diasporic communities are significant for examining the intersections of migration, memory, representation, and belonging. The historical experience of displacement, political transformation, and transnational mobility linked to

the former Yugoslavia has produced complex forms of identity that extend beyond fixed national categories. Western representations of the Balkans, often marked by narratives of instability and marginality, continue to shape how these identities are perceived, as noted by Todorova (1997) and Bakić-Hayden (1995). The experiences of South Slavic migrants and their descendants highlight the relevance of cultural identity, diaspora space, and postmemory. Memories of migration, war, and rupture are transmitted across generations and interact with changing linguistic and social conditions, producing forms of belonging that are layered and fluid. These processes are also shaped by discourses that position the Balkans as Europe's internal "Other," influencing recognition and representation. South Slavic languages preserve cultural memory while also changing within multilingual environments. They transmit historical experience across generations but also adapt in diasporic life. Language plays a key role in discourse and recognition, shaping how identities are formed and expressed. In digital environments, however, visibility is uneven, as dominant languages are often prioritized, which affects how cultural memory and belonging are shared.

3. Visibility, Silence, and Diasporic Fragmentation across *Obasan*, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, and *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*

Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981), Dionne Brand's *A Map to the Door of No Return* (2001), and M.G. Vassanji's *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* (2003) explore memory, language, and identity through silence, displacement, and contested visibility. These authors show how historical violence and diasporic experience are shaped not only through narrative and discourse, but also through changing conditions that determine how subjects and communities become visible and understood within colonial and contemporary systems. Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981) examines how silence and erasure shape the production of memory and the representation of historical violence. Through withheld testimony, fragmented recollection, and the marginalization of Japanese Canadians during wartime displacement, internment, and dispossession in and after the Second World War, the novel highlights uneven conditions under which histories are preserved or forgotten. This resonates with Foucault's (1978) understanding of discourse as a system that regulates not only what

can be spoken but also what remains unspeakable. At the same time, Naomi's gradual reconstruction of the past reflects Hirsch's concept of postmemory, as her knowledge of historical events emerges through inherited narratives, archival fragments, and affective traces rather than direct experience. Silence therefore functions not merely as absence of speech but as a condition through which trauma, exclusion, and erasure become embedded within familial memory and national historiography. This tension between what is articulated and what is withheld is explicitly established in the prologue of *Obasan*, where Kogawa's distinction between "a silence that cannot speak" (1981, p.7) and "a silence that will not speak" (p. 7) reveals the relationship between memory, identity, and historical erasure. The former refers to trauma that resists articulation, while the latter points to silence produced through fear, shame, cultural expectations, or institutional pressures. The prologue further asserts that "Unless the stone bursts with telling, unless the seed flowers with speech, there is in my life no living word" (p. 7), suggesting that testimony is necessary for transforming silence into cultural memory. This movement from silence to speech functions as resistance to the historical exclusion of Japanese Canadian experiences from dominant national narratives. Kogawa's emphasis on remembrance remains relevant in the shift toward platformed culture, where diasporic communities increasingly rely on digital narration and visibility to sustain collective identity. In the context of South Slavic diasporic communities in Canada, algorithmic systems may produce new forms of silencing through reduced discoverability, limited visibility, and uneven circulation of cultural narratives. Consequently, the struggle against historical erasure depicted in *Obasan* finds a contemporary parallel in the challenges minority communities face in preserving collective memory within digitally mediated environments. The novel further demonstrates how official multicultural narratives may recognize cultural difference while limiting its political expression, echoing Walcott's (1997) critique of managed multicultural visibility. The delayed recognition of Japanese Canadian dispossession illustrates how certain histories remain peripheral to dominant accounts of the nation despite their significance. Thus, *Obasan* shows that historical exclusion functions not only through overt suppression but also through selective remembrance that determines whose experiences become publicly legible. Aunt Emily observes that Japanese Canadians were subjected

to internment, property loss, and forced dispersal, noting that these policies were designed to ensure they would “never be visible again” (1981, p. 33). Her comparison foregrounds how internment functioned as a broader technology of dispossession and fragmentation. In Canada, the liquidation of property, enforced relocation, and prohibition of return to the West Coast disrupted communal continuity and systematically dispersed Japanese Canadian communities rather than allowing their reconstitution, underscoring that “official racism was blatant in Canada” (p. 33). Internment thus targeted visibility itself. By dismantling material and spatial foundations of community life, it disrupted collective identity formation. Silence and invisibility emerge here as politically produced conditions that extend historical violence beyond confinement and shape long-term memory and belonging.

Throughout Obasan, silence takes multiple forms. For Aunt Emily, it becomes politically dangerous because it enables historical erasure. She criticizes those who remain neutral, stating that “some people are so busy seeing all sides of every issue that they neutralize concern and prevent necessary action. There’s no strength in seeing all sides unless you can act where real measurable injustice exists. A lot of academic talk just immobilizes the oppressed and maintains oppressors in their positions of power” (p. 34). Silence here is a political practice that sustains oppression. The novel documents wartime uprooting, internment, dispossession, and marginalization of Japanese Canadians, while official accounts often minimized or justified these actions, producing institutional forgetting. Aunt Emily’s archival work resists this process through letters, documents, and testimonies, embodying counter-memory as recovery of excluded histories. Obasan thus shows literature as a space for restoring marginalized narratives and emphasizes storytelling and documentation as forms of political resistance. This concern extends to digital environments, where marginalization functions through visibility systems rather than direct censorship. Algorithmic ranking and recommendation structures determine which narratives circulate widely and which remain difficult to access. Aunt Emily’s critique of neutrality therefore aligns with contemporary debates on platform power, where systems present themselves as neutral while shaping cultural visibility. This politics of visibility and erasure is further deepened through Naomi’s reflections on Japanese Canadian identity, which emerges as

simultaneously rooted in and disrupted by the nation. She states, “Where do any of us come from in this cold country? Oh Canada, whether you admitted it or not, we come from you we come from you” (p. 182), redefining belonging as inseparable from the space that excludes it. Canada becomes both origin and site of suffering, where identity is shaped through removal and invisibility. This paradox is further developed through imagery of dispossession:

“We come from the country that plucks its people out like weeds and flings them into the roadside. We grow in ditches and sloughs, untended and spindly. We erupt in the valleys and mountainsides, in small towns and back alleys, sprouting upside-down on the prairies, our hair wild as spiders’ legs, our feet rooted nowhere. We grow where we are not seen, we flourish where we are not heard, the thick undergrowth of an unlikely planting” (p. 182).

Survival is thus shown to occur in marginal spaces outside recognition. Yet these spaces also sustain continuity. Naomi emphasizes this persistence: “We come from our untold tales that wait for their telling. We come from Canada, this land that is like every land, filled with the wise, the fearful, the compassionate, the corrupt” (p. 183). Identity is thus tied to narratives that remain awaiting articulation. The image of cemeteries “full of skeletons with wild roses in their grinning teeth” (p. 183) fuses death and regeneration, suggesting that historical violence remains embedded within the national landscape. Silenced histories therefore persist rather than disappear. This also extends to platformed culture, where visibility does not ensure recognition due to algorithmic filtering and ranking systems. While rooted in wartime Canada, Obasan also offers a way of understanding contemporary cultural marginalization. In digital environments, exclusion increasingly functions through visibility systems rather than direct censorship. Content may remain accessible but circulate unevenly due to ranking and engagement logics. This shift suggests that erasure now often occurs through the management of attention rather than outright removal. This pattern of selective visibility in Obasan thus connects to the algorithmic marginalization of South Slavic diasporic identities. Just as Japanese Canadian histories were delayed in recognition and fragmented in public memory, South Slavic diasporic experiences shaped by migration, war, and the dissolution of Yugoslavia encounter uneven visibility across literary and digital spaces. Whereas Obasan reveals silence produced

through institutional exclusion and archival absence, platformed environments extend these processes through computational systems that regulate discoverability. South Slavic cultural expression is therefore shaped not only by orientalist and postcolonial discourses but also by algorithmic systems that govern circulation, memory, and visibility in contemporary digital culture.

Brand's *A Map to the Door of No Return* (2001) further develops this focus on memory, language, and diasporic identity. Brand describes diasporic identity as historically produced and unstable rather than fixed or coherent. As she writes, "I am interested in exploring this creation place – the Door of No Return –, a place emptied of beginnings as a site of belonging or unbelonging" (2001, p. 6). She highlights how slavery and displacement disrupt linguistic continuity, suggesting that language retains traces of erased histories without being able to fully recover them. She develops the "door" as both historical reference and enduring structure of meaning: "The door is a place, real, imaginary and imagined. As islands and dark continents are. It is a place which exists or existed. The door out of which Africans were captured, loaded onto ships heading for the New World" (p.19). The door is not only a historical site of forced departure but also a symbolic threshold that continues to exist in memory and imagination. By linking it to islands and dark continents, Brand places the door within global histories of colonial extraction and forced migration, showing displacement as an ongoing spatial and conceptual condition. She argues that the door "accounts for the ways we observe and are observed as people, whether through the lens of social injustice or the lens of human accomplishment. The door exists as an absence" (p. 25). Building on this, Brand intensifies the historical and relational dimensions of the door when she writes that "it was the door of a million exits multiplied" (p.19). She foregrounds mass forced movement, particularly the transatlantic slave trade, while also suggesting repetition across histories of displacement. In relation to South Slavic diasporic identity, this echoes how migration is layered across generations and geopolitical ruptures, producing multiple "exits" that shape fragmented belonging within Canadian multicultural contexts. She further observes that the door "makes the word door impossible and dangerous, cunning and disagreeable" (p.19), indicating that language itself becomes unstable after extreme historical violence, as ordinary terms can no longer neutrally describe experience. In relation

to algorithmic marginalization, this instability parallels how digital systems reduce complex diasporic histories into simplified categories such as “immigrant,” “refugee,” or “ethnic community.” These classifications function as a new “door,” shaping visibility and recognition within platformed culture. This connection between literary memory and digital mediation is central to Brand’s work: the door marks both the limits of representation and the persistence of historical violence in language. In platformed culture, similar limits emerge through algorithmic systems that govern visibility, circulation, and recognition. This perspective is especially relevant for South Slavic diasporic languages, which exist under conditions of fragmentation, multilingual influence, and generational shift within Canadian multicultural contexts. As these languages move between heritage use and English-dominant environments, they function both as carriers of memory and as practices undergoing gradual transformation. Language here is not a stable marker of identity but a shifting medium through which belonging is continuously formed and partially lost. Brand’s work thus opens a way of understanding diasporic identity beyond literary memory toward platformed cultural existence, showing that fragmentation is not only historical but also structural to contemporary visibility regimes.

In contemporary algorithmic environments, Brand’s fragmented textuality becomes even more significant. Algorithmic systems rely on classification, metadata legibility, and linguistic standardization to make content visible and circulable. Texts and languages that resist standardization—such as hybrid or non-dominant linguistic forms—are therefore more likely to be marginalized. South Slavic languages in diasporic digital spaces face similar pressures, as platform infrastructures privilege dominant languages and high-engagement content, reinforcing uneven cultural visibility. In this sense, *A Map to the Door of No Return* exposes a tension between archival and algorithmic memory. Where traditional archives, as critiqued by Foucault (1978), regulate what can be known through institutional selection, algorithmic systems regulate what becomes visible through computational ranking. Brand’s refusal of narrative closure thus anticipates a condition in which diasporic histories are fragmented not only by historical violence but also by digital infrastructures that shape visibility through opaque processes of selection and exclusion. The partial survival of South Slavic languages

in Canada, maintained through family transmission and community practice rather than institutional support, mirrors Brand's account of fragmented linguistic inheritance. In both cases, language functions not only as communication but also as a site where memory, power, and visibility intersect. Within algorithmic environments, these languages face additional marginalization, as platform systems priorities dominant linguistic codes and limit the circulation of minority or heritage-language expression. Brand questions whether conventional language can adequately describe forced displacement, noting that "Leaving? To leave? Left? Language can be deceptive" and that to "leave" presupposes a destination and a form of self-possession that does not exist in conditions of coercion (p. 21). She then proceeds: "Their 'taking'? Taking, taking too might suggest a benevolence so, no, it was not taking. So having not 'left,' having no 'destination,' having no 'self-possession,' no purpose and no urgency, their departure was unexpected; and in the way that some unexpected events can be horrific, their 'leaving,' or rather their 'taking,' was horrific (p.21)". Words such as "leaving" or "taking" are shown to misrepresent coercion by implying choice or direction where none existed. The rhetorical question—"What language would describe that loss of bearings or the sudden awful liability of one's own body?" The hitting or the whipping or the driving, which was shocking, the dragging and the bruising it involved, the epidemic sickness with lite which would become hereditary? (p.21)—signals the collapse of conventional vocabulary under extreme violence. The accumulation of verbs such as "hitting," "whipping," "driving," and "dragging" underscores both the intensity and systemic repetition of bodily harm, suggesting that language itself fractures under the weight of historical trauma. In relation to South Slavic diasporic identity, this resonates with how migration is often represented through neutral terms such as movement or settlement, which obscure histories of war, displacement, and political rupture. As South Slavic languages move across generations and into English-dominant environments, they also undergo simplification and partial loss, reinforcing Brand's concern that language cannot fully preserve lived historical intensity. Brand's questioning of "migration"—"Can it be called migration?" (p.24)—further destabilizes conventional terminology by challenging assumptions of purpose and direction. While migration is typically associated with choice and intention, she introduces instead forms of instinctive, in-

voluntary return, “as with birds or butterflies or deer or fish” (p.24), suggesting that belonging may be embedded in bodily memory rather than rational decision. Diasporic subjectivity therefore emerges not through stable origins but through tension between remembered continuity and irreversible displacement. Identity becomes layered, fragmented, and defined through absence as much as presence. The idea that return requires “a place to return to, a way of being, familiar sights or sounds” (p. 24) highlights disrupted cultural and sensory continuity. In relation to South Slavic diasporic identity, this reflects histories of forced migration and generational dislocation, often expressed through partial memory and shifting linguistic affiliation rather than unified origin narratives. In platformed environments, this fragmentation is intensified as algorithmic systems classify identities into searchable categories and data profiles, reducing complex histories into fragments. The “Door of No Return” thus marks a rupture in historical continuity, while algorithmic infrastructures create similar fragmentation by shaping what becomes visible, circulated, or obscured.

A similar form of fragmented and mediated identity appears in Vassanji’s *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* (2003), which extends the analysis of diaspora, racialization, discourse, and regimes of visibility. Set within colonial and postcolonial Kenya, the novel foregrounds the instability of racial and cultural categories, presenting subjectivity as continuously produced through shifting systems of classification. In line with Hall’s (1990) understanding of identity as an ongoing process, Vikram’s position between racial, linguistic, and national categories shows identity as a relational effect shaped by historical and political forces. This instability is further expressed through the novel’s representation of language as a hierarchical system. English functions as the dominant colonial language, while indigenous and migrant linguistic forms are marginalized or rendered informal. This stratification resonates with the South Slavic diasporic condition in Canada, where heritage languages exist in tension with English as the primary medium of institutional and digital communication. Language here functions as a key medium through which visibility and marginality are distributed. Vikram’s identity is repeatedly redefined by colonial and postcolonial authorities through shifting racial classifications, aligning with Foucault’s (1978) conception

of discourse as a system that produces subjects through classification and the regulation of visibility.

Vikram describes his position as one of radical in-betweenness, describing himself as “with neither the prestige of whiteness or Europeaness behind me, nor the influence and numbers of a local tribe to back me” (Vassanji, 2003, p. 237). His identity is defined through absence, positioning him outside both European and indigenous African categories. Relying on Bhabha’s (Bhabha, 1994) concept of the “third space,” Vikram can be understood as occupying a liminal zone in which identity is continuously negotiated rather than fixed. His East African Asian identity therefore encompasses overlapping positions as Kenyan, Asian, colonial subject, and later Canadian immigrant. This complexity is destabilized by collective memory, as he carries “the stigma from a generalized recent memory of an exclusive race of brown ‘Shylocks’ who had collaborated with the colonizers” (Vassanji, 2003, p. 237). Identity here is shaped not individually but through inherited narratives that reduce communities to fixed stereotypes. The figure of the “Shylock” illustrates how collective memory compresses complexity into enduring social judgments. Comparable processes appear in South Slavic diasporic experiences, where identities are often shaped through inherited narratives of war, nationalism, and ethnic conflict. Individual self-identification frequently diverges from externally imposed categories, as minority subjects are placed within simplified classifications that obscure internal complexity. In Vassanji’s novel, this occurs through colonial discourse, racial stereotyping, nationalist historiography, and collective memory. In contemporary platformed culture, similar mechanisms emerge through algorithmic systems that compress complexity into recognizable categories and shape patterns of visibility and interpretation. Vikram’s reference to a generalized recent memory further clarifies this process. In digital environments, algorithmic classification similarly depends on aggregated data that produces standardized identity profiles. Just as Kenyan society constructs Vikram through inherited assumptions about Asians, algorithmic systems categorize users through demographic and behavioral patterns. This becomes most evident in Vikram’s statement: “I had been simply put, dropped—because I was the convenient scapegoat, the disposable outsider, and my usefulness had run out” (p. 300). His position reflects exclusion as well as instrumentalization, since belonging is conditional on utility. Throughout

the novel, he occupies an in-between position, neither fully integrated into the African political elite nor aligned with colonial authority. The designation of “scapegoat” highlights marginalization as structurally produced rather than individually caused. This novel shows that marginalization functions through reduction: complex subjectivities are translated into functional categories defined by external systems of interpretation. In parallel, algorithmic infrastructures reduce users to data profiles and demographic segments, limiting hybrid identities to simplified forms of legibility. Vikram’s articulation of being a disposable outsider therefore exposes a structural condition in which visibility is uncertain and recognition remains conditional. This anticipates contemporary algorithmic marginalization, where South Slavic diasporic identities in Canada risk similar forms of compression that obscure the complexity of lived hybridity.

4. Algorithms, Engagement Metrics, and the Marginalization of South Slavic Languages

Digital platforms, which have become an integral part of everyday life and work in contemporary society, are not neutral channels for content distribution. Instead, digital platforms function as complex socio-technical systems designed to collect, rank, and monetize users’ attention. Consequently, cultural and linguistic marginalization cannot be understood outside the broader framework of the attention economy, audience segmentation, search engine optimization (SEO), and algorithmic systems that filter and distribute content based on user interests. These mechanisms determine which narratives become visible and easily accessible in digital spaces, which are recommended to users, and which remain relatively invisible. In this context, the marginalization of South Slavic languages in Canada should not be viewed solely as a consequence of external social conditions; rather, it emerges from the structural characteristics of digital platforms and content recommendation algorithms that operate according to user demands and behavioral patterns (Manias-Muñoz et al., 2025).

Although Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, and other South Slavic languages have been historically embedded within Canadian diasporic communities, they are increasingly categorized within the digital economy as languages with low market and monetization potential. In an environment where every digital interface functions as

a competitive marketplace, languages are evaluated according to engagement metrics and their potential for monetization. Consequently, the marginalization of South Slavic languages is not the result of cultural marginalization, but rather a consequence of algorithms favoring languages with high-yield potential. [Walcott \(1997\)](#) highlighted a similar process through his critique of managed multiculturalism, arguing that diversity is welcomed and encouraged only insofar as it remains measurable and economically profitable. When managed multiculturalism is viewed in the digital era, it becomes clear that discursive recognition alone is not sufficient for visibility. Instead, visibility depends on an algorithmic assessment of whether a language can generate user retention, clicks, and conversions. The algorithms on which digital platforms are based today perform highly precise indexing of content using hashtags, metadata, language, and user behavior within the digital system. ([Vučenović and Stojanović, 2024](#)). As a result, South Slavic languages—shaped by code-switching, multiple scripts, language change, and dialect diversity—do not fit easily into the standardized systems used by algorithms. Digital platforms are based on NLP (natural language processing) models that perform automatic translation and mapping of content for display to users with predefined language profiles. Accordingly, South Slavic languages become nearly invisible in search results on digital platforms.

Digital platforms require a high degree of predictability. Diaspora languages, and especially South Slavic languages, which [Brand \(2001\)](#) pointed out in her work, are considered unstable languages, influenced by frequent historical violence that led to dialect changes and the adoption of terms from other countries in speech and writing. These factors lead to low predictability, which is required by digital platforms. And despite the fact that the mother tongue of diaspora members is the most culturally and emotionally relevant language for the diaspora community, it becomes technically suboptimal for displaying content in search results.

Digital marketing, whose channels today represent the most profitable and important means of communication with audiences, is based on segmentation. Namely, segmentation is carried out according to users' interests and behavior, demographics, and geographic characteristics, with the aim of enabling precise content distribution. The South Slavic diaspora, characterized by a hybrid identity (Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, English, and local Canadian expres-

sions), cannot be placed into a single targeting category. Algorithms, as already noted, require precision and clean segmentation, which leads to the compression of multilayered identities into simpler demographic labels that reduce the diversity of the diaspora (Finn, 2018). Bhabha's (Bhabha, 1994) concept of the "third space" and Vassanji's (Vassanji, 2003) analysis of Vikram's marginalization show that in colonial contexts, hybrid subjects who did not fit into bureaucratic regimes were excluded. If we view this in the context of digital platforms, hybrid languages are similarly excluded because they do not align with the precision required by algorithmic segmentation. Their identities and languages cannot be adequately categorized by algorithms, which is why they become low-priority audiences—similar to historical regimes of erasure and exclusion discussed in the books of Kogawa (Kogawa, 1981) and Brand (Brand, 2001).

Within digital marketing, paid advertising plays a major role today. For paid advertising in particular, monetization is crucial—meaning that more revenue must be generated than the money invested in creating ads and bidding. South Slavic diaspora languages generate significantly lower advertising revenues. This further contributes to the invisibility of South Slavic languages, as low engagement rates and low monetization influence the continued deprioritization of these languages by algorithms. The deprioritization of South Slavic languages on digital platforms does not represent either a cultural or political project; rather, it is the outcome of metrics, algorithms, and monetization processes. South Slavic languages, as non-optimal for algorithmic systems, lose visibility and gradually disappear from public discourse within diasporic communities. According to Foucault (Foucault, 1978), power is not exercised solely through prohibition, but that processes of evaluation and visibility are of central importance. When viewed in the digital context, using the example of South Slavic languages in Canada, it becomes evident that algorithms, engagement metrics, and A/B testing are key factors responsible for their deprioritization. Through Kogawa's poetics of silence, Brand's linguistic instability, and Vassanji's marginalization, which have been analyzed in this paper, it is shown that silence, linguistic instability, and marginalization are historically conditioned, but also that literature can be understood as a site of resistance to the alteration of identity. Digital platforms (algorithms, NLP systems, engagement metrics, metadata requirements, ad-targeting logic, and

segmentation processes) in a sense reproduce institutional forgetting (Kogawa, 1981), the fragmentation of language previously shaped by historical violence (Brand, 2001), and, in a digital society influenced by NLP systems, the reduction of hybridity (Vassanji, 2003), which in digital space is enacted through compression driven by algorithmic segmentation.

Digital marketing platforms, when examined from the perspective of diaspora communities, their culture, and language, demonstrate that earlier forms of cultural exclusion are today encoded through monetization, metrics, conversion rates, and algorithms (Lane et al., 2018). South Slavic communities in Canada, in various ways, attempt to preserve their culture and language through the creation of digital archives, the use of hashtags to connect community content, and the sharing of information—practices that can be understood as a form of “cartography of struggle,” as discussed in the book of McKittrick (2006). Although such practices constitute a form of resistance and an effort to preserve cultural identity on digital platforms, they are still not recognized by algorithms as sufficiently valuable in terms of monetization when content is ranked and displayed. Digital platforms, along with the factors discussed above, clearly demonstrate that it is not enough for a voice to be heard; it must also be valued by algorithms. When this is combined with the literary analysis of earlier periods and diaspora theory, it becomes evident that the disappearance of South Slavic languages in Canada is not the result of their irrelevance, but rather a consequence of capitalist organization and platform capitalism (Srnicek, 2016), which fails to recognize them as culturally, monetarily, and linguistically valuable.

5. Conclusion

This paper has examined the transformation of diasporic identity from literary memory to platformed culture by placing Canadian multicultural literature within contemporary digital environments. According to Joy Kogawa, Dionne Brand, and M. G. Vassanji, diasporic experience is consistently shaped by processes of fragmentation, silence, hybridity, and shifting forms of visibility. Cultural memory is never fully stable or complete, but is instead produced through absence, displacement, and forms of recognition that remain partial and uneven. By extending these ideas to South Slavic diasporic communi-

ties in Canada, the paper shows that similar forms of marginalization persist in digital contexts, although they now appear through algorithmic and data-driven systems. Whereas earlier forms of exclusion were largely rooted in colonial discourse, racial categorization, and institutional selection, contemporary forms of invisibility increasingly emerge through classification, ranking, and linguistic standardization embedded in digital infrastructures. Therefore, visibility is no longer determined solely by cultural production or representation, but also by the conditions under which content is circulated, prioritized, and made discoverable online.

The paper further indicates that South Slavic languages occupy a structurally vulnerable position within platformed environments, where engagement metrics, monetization priorities, and language hierarchies shape patterns of cultural circulation. As a result, linguistic hybridity and diasporic multilingualism are often compressed into simplified categories that reduce the complexity of everyday experience. This does not signal cultural absence, but rather a reconfiguration of visibility in which recognition is unevenly distributed across linguistic and cultural forms. Accordingly, the transition from literary to algorithmic regimes of visibility does not replace earlier forms of marginalization but extends and reconfigures them. Diasporic identity thus exists between memory and mediation, where cultural survival depends not only on narrative articulation but also on the conditions that govern digital presence. Questions of diaspora and belonging must therefore account for both historical structures of representation and contemporary systems that shape what can be seen, shared, and remembered.

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Od književnog pamćenja do platformске kulture: identitet južnoslovenske dijaspore i algoritamska marginalizacija u kanadskoj multikulturalnoj književnosti

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Sažetak

Ovaj rad analizira kanadsku multikulturalnu književnost u odnosu na marginalizaciju dijaspore, fokusirajući se na istraživanje Džoj Kogave o tišini i potiskivanju u delu „Obasan“ (1981), fragmentarne konstrukcije identiteta u delu Dion Brand „Mapa do vrata bez povratka“ (2001) i artikulaciju hibridnog identiteta M. G. Vasandija u delu „Vikram Lal između dva sveta“ (2003). Ove književne perspektive se zatim proširuju na digitalno doba kroz analizu zajednica južnoslovenske dijaspore u Kanadi (srpske, hrvatske i bosanske) i njihovih oblika onlajn kulturne produkcije i angažovanja. U digitalnoj eri, kulturna marginalizacija više se ne proizvodi isključivo kroz kolonijalni diskurs, patrijarhat ili državno nasilje, već je sve više intenzivirana algoritamskim režimima vidljivosti, samoreprezentacije i nadzora. Rad pokazuje da su digitalne platforme transformisale identitet dijaspore iz kulturnog pamćenja zasnovanog na štampi u participativni i kontinuirano razvijajući sistem oblikovan algoritamskom logikom. Stoga se marginalizacija manje dešava kroz direktno isključivanje iz književne produkcije, a više kroz gubitak jezika, oslanjanje na dominantne digitalne platforme i zamenu tradicionalnog izdavaštva neformalnim onlajn pripovedanjem. Cilj ovog rada je da pokaže da digitalizacija nije dovela do demokratizacije književne i jezičke sfere, već da je algoritamsko filtriranje doprinelo marginalizaciji jezika sa nižim ekonomskim kapitalom, uključujući južnoslovenske jezike.

Ključne reči: Kanadska multikulturalna književnost, kulturna marginalizacija, digitalna era, glasovi manjina, identitet dijaspore, hibridni identitet, algoritmi.

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