

The Fourth World and Politics of Social Identity in Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* Trilogy

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Abstract

With the advent of the 21st century, the way characters and identities interact under the influence of dominant powers has brought a new world into existence, a world dubbed by Manuel Castells as the 'Fourth World'. Within the Castellsian theoretical matrix of the Fourth World and politics of identity, the present study seeks to investigate the true nature of the futuristic world Margaret Atwood has created in the *MaddAddam* trilogy. The trilogy literarily reflects a global crisis that ultimately leads to dystopia and the destruction of the human race: what remains of humanity is a small group of survivors who must struggle to conserve what remains of humanity. Identity as the main determining factor in the Fourth World represents personal and public privileges, characteristics, and means of differentiating oneself from others. The Fourth World and its political peculiarities reflect contemporary powers, i.e. the power of the network society, network communication and media. Humankind, in this wheel, is just a toy in the hands of an intelligence broker. What exactly happens to human and semi-human characters in Atwood's trilogy is the result of Fourth World structures and values, and how they shape and reconstruct identities to lead the world toward fabricated truths and values, and terminate in dystopia.

Keywords: Fourth World, Identity Manipulation, Information Age, Media, Network Society, Power

1. Introduction

Throughout history, literature and identity have continually hinged upon macroeconomic and economic policies, thus the latter are deemed to be influential in the construction of philosophical and sociopolitical theory. Although identity has never been considered the major concern of literature, these two concepts, i.e. identity and literature, are inextricably tied together, as if they emerge from each other. Literature has always been the symbolic representation of the identity and culture of people. Geographic boundaries are integrated based on the experience and translation of these very same literary words, and this common understanding has resonated in the four corners of the world. Any researcher seeking to examine major economic and cultural challenges in the world should consider the transition from the modern and post-communist period to the collapse of illusory walls and the creation of a vast network of exchanges and, consequently, the formation of new communities. Hence, the construction of network societies has gained pivotal significance in the literature of some Western countries where multicultural politics is welcomed. Meanwhile, authors and artists, due to their capabilities and sensitivities, fight against and criticize severely the shortcomings of such societies.

Margaret Atwood as one of the greatest postmodern writers has dedicated her writing career to critically discussing the identity crisis facing Canada as a multicultural nation. According to a sociopolitical Castellsian reading of literature, Atwood is an epitome of a writer whose literary work symbolically reflects the nature of network societies in the present century. The impetus for choosing the *MaddAddam* trilogy for analysis is that not only is the trilogy Margaret Atwood's best 21st century contribution to the contemporary literary canon, but it is also a symbolic

representation of a destructive apocalyptic future. The novels of the trilogy, i.e. *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009) and *MaddAddam* (2013), narrate the oral history of the *MaddAddam* in which a survivor of *The Year of the Flood* explains the roots of all destruction. The characters in these three novels are mostly bioengineered creatures a scientist has made before the initiation of a man-made plague that led to the destruction of the human race. In contrast to the zombified creatures in most post-apocalyptic stories, the creatures in the *MaddAddam* trilogy are supposed to be utopian creatures, childlike and unclothed. Still, the world created through these constructed identities is nothing but dystopia.

A thorough analysis of the *MaddAddam* trilogy could not be achieved without appealing to sociopolitical theories to decode the political and social identity concerns Atwood describes in her narratives. In view of social science theories, what Margaret Atwood has metaphorically portrayed echoes Manuel Castells' theory of the Fourth World, a world which as a result of monopolization by industrial giants, has forgotten its history and whose people are left virtually abandoned and without identity. Multicultural societies have lost their indigenous roots due to immigration and cultural fusion, and countries with the highest immigration rates and which embrace many cultures are most at risk of racism, poverty, and isolation that can lead to identity manipulation and culminate in the collapse of cultural systems.

The present research takes a novel approach: no sociopolitical study of a literary work from a Castellsian perspective has been attempted before. However, the analysis of a futuristic literary work can yield valuable sociopolitical conclusions. Sociopolitical researchers proffer analysis of the issue of identity in social and

political studies and the role of media in the Fourth World. Dahlsgaard and colleagues believe that the definition of social responsibility varies according to time and theoretical approach. Within these social fluctuations, social responsibility is what is inculcated by sociopolitical power in ensueing a sense of commitment (Dahlsgaard et al., 2005, pp. 203–213). Berkowitz and Lutterman evaluate social responsibility and how identity is affected by society through assessing attitudes related to each individual's responsibility to help others and about a range of political and social issues.

This social responsibility becomes more challenging as the Fourth World becomes more network based. Seton-Watson (1977, p. 3) in his *Nations and States: An Enquiry into the Origins of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism*, considers two major issues in contemporary political economic analysis, including globalization and the emergence of differences between geographic regions. At the same time, Seton-Watson suggests that the differences in the world are defined by sovereigns, who usually deem themselves superior and others inferior.

Focusing on Atwood's trilogy, this paper seeks to examine a Fourth World formed in the modern network society due to its politics of social identity. Accordingly, the paper's main research question is, 'How can the world Margaret Atwood has created in her *MaddAddam* trilogy be considered as a symbolic reflection of the true dystopian nature of the present age according to Castellsian ideas of the Fourth World and its politics of identity?' To address this question, the three sub-questions to be discussed in this paper are: 1) based on Castellsian identity theories, how are the characters in the *MaddAddam* trilogy reconstructed and controlled by sociopolitical agents of power and wealth? 2) what is the role of

network communities and media in the Fourth World politics of identity as reflected in the trilogy? and 3) how would Castellsian theory of the Fourth World justify the dystopian future awaiting humanity depicted in Atwood's trilogy?

To answer these questions, the researchers first discuss Manuel Castells' theories of the Fourth World and politics of identity to justify how different types of identities are sociopolitically constructed through wealth or power in today's postmodern network society. Taking an interdisciplinary approach to the analysis of today's network society, the researchers then turn to Margaret Atwood's trilogy as a symbolic literary depiction of a dystopian society constructed as a result of power relations in a network community. The present study uses textual criticism and close reading to apply its theoretical framework to the selected novels in order to investigate the futuristic sociopolitical facts Atwood represents literarily. Hence, the Fourth World and the dystopian politics of identity are examined in the novels of the trilogy, i.e. *Oryx and Crake*, *The Year of the Flood* and *MaddAddam*. All these novels symbolically represent the end of the 21st century in which hatred, oppression, and environmental destruction are emblematic features of the network state, and reveal how power is exercised through network communities. The last part of the paper discusses the direction in which humanity in the postmodern age is moving, i.e. towards a dystopian network society in which identities are fabricated by sociopolitical forces.

2. The Fourth World and Castellsian Politics of Identity

Manuel Castells, a Spanish sociologist and critic ranked as the 5th most-cited social scholar and the most-cited communication

theoretician in the 2014 survey of the Social Sciences Citation Index, proposes the idea that “power relations in the networking community affect the social identity that a person experiences” (cited in Anttiroiko, 2015, p. 2). Castells proposes the theory of ‘network society’ to demonstrate the true nature of the global era in the 21st century. He stresses the fact that in this global world, digital communication technologies, media and content are rapidly flourishing, thus affecting social identity. He applies the idea of a network to sociopolitical analysis of states and accentuates that networks are becoming the most important form of social organizations, societies and states. Network states in fact originate from “multifaceted networks of power in multi-sector decision-making systems” (Castells, 1996, p. 271). This idea transforms the essence of a state from being “the cause of restructuring and meaning-making to becoming the coordinator of complex processes in a society” (Carnoy & Castells, 2001, p. 14). As Anttiroiko claims, “this is how Castells anchors his discussion of state restructuring on network logic, which eventually became a key concept in governance discourse” (Anttiroiko, 2015, p. 5). The most significant evidence of Castells’ Marxist legacy is his commitment to offering a holistic explanation of the world today—the latter is well portrayed in his trilogy, *The Information Age*.

Networks in the second half of the 1990s played an important role in Castells' theory of society and he proposed that economics, society and culture are interrelated and they are all affected by network systems. Explaining the network society, Castells states that the most important social, economic and political aspects should be examined and analyzed as elements that are related to each other in the global age. His approach emphasizes the connections and relationships formed in the network society, but he accentuates that most of them are conflicting in nature. Castells, in

his theorization of 'the network society' as 'the Fourth World', "has created one of the most ambitious macro-level theories of our time" in an effort to expand the interpretation of the transformation of contemporary society as a reflection of the transition from industry to information (Anttiroiko, 2015, p. 2). Castells (1989, p. 32) believes that:

These networks, which could not exist on such a large scale without the medium provided by new information technologies, are the emerging organizational form of our world, and have played a fundamental role in ensuring the restructuring process... Networks, on the basis of new information technologies, provide the organizational basis for the transformation of socially and spatially based relationships of production into flows of information and power that articulate the new flexible system of production and management.

Castells makes a connection between various concepts such as political economy and the sociology of culture. Of course, these are not the same as the Marxist concepts of integrity and monopoly, but nevertheless, the influence of the Marxist tradition on Castells' theory of the network society is undeniable.

Castells theorizes that a new world, i.e. the 'Fourth World', has emerged due to the rise of network societies which have culminated in the increase of poverty, polarization, inequality, misery, and social deprivation throughout the world. While Castells' ideas justify new forms of societal and political oppression in all network societies around the world, he himself has chiefly directed his focus towards the United States and its "increasing tendency toward geographic, social, and material deprivation of given parts of the population from labor markets and the network society" (Dotson,

2014, p. 165). As stated in *The Global Transformations Reader: An Introduction to the Globalization Debate*, Castells discusses the “considerable disparity in the evolution of intra-country inequality in different areas of the world” (Held & McGrew, 2000, p. 349). Also, in *End of Millennium* he contends that “If the evolution of intra-country inequality varies, what appears to be a global phenomenon (albeit with some important exceptions, particularly in China) is the growth of poverty, and particularly of extreme poverty” (Castells, 1998, p. 81). Indeed, he believes that the increase of concurrent inclusion and exclusion of different people in a society is a sign of informational capitalism that leads to polarization and the augmentation of the misery of people. Castells (1998, p. 70) further contends,

Polarization is a specific process of inequality that happens when both the top and bottom of the scale of wealth distribution grow faster than the middle, therefore contracting the middle, and sharpening the social differences between two extreme divisions of the population. Poverty is an accepted defined norm concerning a level of assets below which is not possible to reach the living standards considered to be the minimum norm in a certain society at a certain time (usually, a level of income based on members of household, as defined by governments or authoritative institutions).

The fundamental questions posed by Castells are how the society can promote public participation and prevent private retreat, offer communicative incentives instead of exploitative strategies, and facilitate multiple and universal identities rather than monopoly cultures. The theory of the Fourth World is a way of examining and understanding the extent of suffering and discomfort that usually

occurs in the cores of multicultural cities as a result of “historical separation and discriminatory patterns” (Dotson, 2014, p. 155). In fact, the Fourth World connotes structural deviation in the new order, as Castells (1996) suggests. In this new order, flexibility and employment demands in the short term lead to the social deprivation of poor people in the network society. The rapid pace of communication through network features of the Fourth World affects many traditional workers who are not able to respond quickly to rapid changes in the global market. Social deprivation is a punishment for late response to information changes, and although such exclusion is not a new phenomenon, it seems that its normalization in the current system is permanent. The normalization of a structurally deprived class is a subject that arises frequently in contemporary science fiction. In the systemic information age, one is exposed more than ever to anxiety, since with the possibility of radical freedom, the individual is no longer confined by previous restrictions on human identity.

Other researchers and scholars have also discussed the features of the network society that Castells describes as the defining feature of the Fourth World. It is observed in modern psychology that a modern patient is more exposed to the problems of what to believe in and who he is, because identity in the modern time is “a process located in the core of the individual and yet also in the core of his communal culture, a process which establishes, in fact, the identity of those two identities” (Erikson, 1968, p. 22). Politics of identity in today’s network society is affected by the flexibility of modern organizational structures and as a result, “societies are constituted by the interaction between the ‘net’ and the ‘self,’ between the network society and the power of identity” (Castells, 1998, p. 388). Digital technology and network societies have “brought questions of identity into sharper focus in recent years by

providing the opportunity to form social bonds with more people than your grandparents met in their entire lives” (Richardson, 2014, p. 51). Surpassing all other scholars in the field, Castells states that, “we must adapt to this emerging and volatile society, or take the risk of exhaustion and complete aging” (Castells, 1998, p. 172).

As an interdisciplinary theory, the concept of the Fourth World is a description of certain conditions of the network society, and how they affect identity. The Fourth World theory confirms that the network society’s form and features are always under development, and this permanent transformation is in direct response to the various cultural and structural forces in a society. Akin to critical race theory, the theory of the Fourth World is an analytic magnification of increasing disparity and inequality. Resonating Castellsian theory of the network society, Scott (1991, p. 115) contends,

It should be recalled that, the main issue in the economic analysis of Castells has always been power, which open some thematic connections to network analysis. He assigns himself a decisive role in his theory of corporate interests and networks, which is in his idea of global networks of organizational exchanges. His analysis of the post-revolutionary state of affairs in the 1980s and 1990s shows that he turned his attention to the shift from individual companies to a large corporate network.

The structures and institutions of capitalism in the network society transform individual and social identity respectively.

In *Power of Identity*, Castells (1997) states that the world, people’s lives and the network society are formed by the conflicting powers of globalization and identity. As life has no

meaning other than what a person feels, social movements cannot be criticized as good or bad. Social transformation and any minute change in society or identity may lead either to utopia or dystopia, but further perusal of Castells' work reveals his propensity toward dystopia. Power relations are then subjective, reflecting the fragile nature of power in the Fourth World:

Identity is considered to be that process of construction of meaning on the basis of a cultural attribute enabling people to find meaning in what they do in their life. Identity is a reconstruction of the meaning of the life of people when what they had as a form of aggregation, of organization – which in the Modern Era was mainly the state – is lost. (Castells, 2010, p. 94)

On the other hand, despite the consensus on the principle of the impact of cyberspace on the sociopolitical life of humans and national identity, there is a lot of controversy regarding the nature of this influence and its bias and value. As Burke (1991, p. 838) states, modern network society creates a situation in which national identity “suffers from various disorders and injuries” and “the growth of modern information and communication technologies offers few opportunities for rebuilding and redefining individual identities”.

In the 21st century, with the advancement of communication and network relationships, people are able to construct virtual identities. Virtual identity is considered to be an important proposition in philosophical equations. Features of today's network society—that also affect politics of identity—include the breaking of the time and space borders, the speed of transferring data, and the relatively lesser constraints of the cyber as opposed to the physical world. In the information network society, mentality and

identity are unstable, multi-layered and scattered. According to Poster (2013, p. 78), in the new era of the information age, “there are virtual organizations that affect the identity of individuals”. Religious and cultural identity as attributes of network societies also affect individual identity, and reflect the history of beliefs and experiences (Castells, 1997, p. 29).

In the global network society today, immigration has also been one of the factors that has augmented identity crisis. On the one hand, in the construction of identity, whether gender identity or social identity, the self, the other, and the land are influential. On the other hand, there are dual and triangular relations such as panic, escape, and lies that augment the process of identity formation within cyber nation-state relationships. As Bakhtin (1996, p. 68) states, “a novel would be a true representation of these interplays of powers as the novel is a miniature of being”.

However, in the network society, identity and identity-based networks and movements are prioritized. Castells (1997, pp. 8–10) categorizes social identities that are based on gender, origin and racial background into three identity types, i.e. legitimizing, resistance and project:

1. Legitimizing identity: This type of identity is created by the “dominant institutions of society to extend and rationalize their domination *vis à vis* social actors (Castells, 1997, p.8). Castells focusses on social and political movements that are formed by the interaction of the three types of identity and lead to the creation of legitimizing identity.
2. Resistance identity: The imposition of domination always leads to resistance. Subsequently, as opposed to

legitimizing identity, resisting identities are formed in religious, national, and other valued identities.

3. Project identity: This kind of identity is shown when resistance identity, as Castells (1997, p. 8) declares, “moves out of the trenches.” In the new world, Castells asserts, project identity emerges from civil society while in the network society, it is born out of general resistance. Therefore, project identities plan to construct new identities and are motivated to change social structures.

Whereas in traditional communities, the origin of identity was the dominant power of the state, in the network society of the Fourth World, identity is constructed by the resistance of values and cultures to the dominant power.

In undertaking interdisciplinary research in the global era, the researchers use Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy as a symbolic literary scene reflecting a dystopian society constructed due to power relations in a network society. Social identities constructed through network relationships are not utopian identities guaranteeing liberty and prosperity for all. Rather, what exists in this Fourth World is a destruction of values and identities leading to a dystopian landscape: a caution to the reader against the rapid pace of identity formation and transformation in the existing digital network society today.

3. The Fourth World and Dystopian Politics of Identity in Atwood's *MaddAddam* Trilogy

Margaret Atwood, who is considered Canada's most distinguished literary figure, is a prolific author who enjoys a career of remarkable distinction and success. The present research focuses

on the *MaddAddam* trilogy, consisting of three novels, i.e. *Oryx and Crake*, *The Year of the Flood* and *MaddAddam*. Dealing with global issues, Atwood's novels adopt an antiheroic perspective, reflecting the ravages of the age of industry and technology, poverty and drug mafia networks, and many other themes of the modern age. Analyzing the trilogy within the Castellsian matrix of power and politics of identity sheds new light on how the trilogy can be considered as an investigation of injustice in a post-industrial age that has no means of salvation. All of the novels of the trilogy are set in the last years of the 21st century, while the devastating vision Atwood presents in the novels can be considered an account of the present world. Hence, hatred, oppression, and environmental destruction as emblematic features of the three novels find sociocultural significance as side effects of the Fourth World network society. As Phillips (2017 p. 146) asserts,

A reading of the *MaddAddam* trilogy as a series of interlinked historical novels, or as a single grand narrative telling the story of the rapid decline and fall – the collapse – of contemporary industrial civilization can be achieved without any undue fudging of the details Atwood presents.

The theoretical framework described above can identify and decode contemporary identity strains in network societies; its application to the postmodern *MaddAddam* trilogy yields character types that are emblematic of the Fourth World. As Castells (1998, p. 70) aptly states, the most important features of the contemporary age, and the Fourth World, can be considered “social deprivation, poverty due to advances in technology, inequality and injustice, governments’ legislative ambitions, racism and patriarchy and exploitation and episodic work.” The present paper focuses on these dystopian effects of the network society, illustrating how identity is manipulated by power networks.

3.1. The Fourth World and Politics of Social Identity in *Oryx and Crake*

The first novel of the trilogy, *Oryx and Crake*, begins with an image of the post-technological world that terminates in dystopian poverty, misery, and decay. This techno-cultural dystopia is clear from early in the novel: “the shrieks of the birds that nest out there and the distant ocean grinding against the ersatz reefs of rusted car parts and jumbled bricks and assorted rubble-sound almost like holiday traffic” (Atwood, 2003, p. 10). The society depicted in the novel is a futuristic society in which network communication is so advanced that the creatures, whether humans or hybrid animals, live in their own private networks devised by Crack, the scientist. They live in a privately owned complex far from the so-called populace, with facilities generally far removed from the chaos and traffic and labyrinths of streets, smoke and noise pollution of the city:

The house, the pool, the furniture – all belonged to the OrganInc Compound, where the top people lived. Increasingly, the middle-range execs and the junior scientists lived there too. Jimmy’s father said it was better that way, because nobody had to commute to work from the Modules. Despite the sterile transport corridors and the high-speed bullet trains, there was always a risk when you went through the city (Atwood, 2003, p. 32).

This is a literary representation of the Castellsian Fourth World in which network societies govern. Within such a society, the digital network communication transforms the nature of traditional relationships and affects the identities constructed. The paradoxical nature of the communication within such a digital network society is what Atwood well represents in her narration of the hindered

communication among people in contrast to the fast-paced means of communication:

Compound people didn't go to the cities unless they had to, and then never alone. They called the cities *the pleeblands*. Despite the fingerprint identity cards now carried by everyone, public security in the pleeblands was leaky: there were people cruising around in those places who could forge anything and who might be anybody, not to mention the loose change – the addicts, the muggers, the paupers, the crazies. So it was best for everyone at OrganInc Farms to live all in one place, with foolproof procedures (Atwood, 2003, p. 32).

However, characters living in such digital network societies cannot trust others and are cautious of outsiders, those outside their own network. In this novel, Jimmy is confronted by various global challenges through television and other media. Although he is familiar with the frustrated characters battling against the mechanisms of the modern world, and sees his parents at the forefront of these movements, he cannot oppose the power of the media and has no other option but to surrender to the fake representations. The transmission of information within a digital network society is so fast and strong that it can be considered as the Fourth World power. In turn, media is a forum for expert and repetitive roleplaying whereby commentators in stylish suits use reckless language to argue for and against, but then shake hands with each other at the end, showing their shared status as wealth and information holding elites.

The digital network society and the power mafia represented in Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* thus metaphorically represent the Castellsian Fourth World in which human destiny is affected by

sociopolitically powerful agents. According to Castells (1997, p. 162), power “is no longer concentrated in institutions,” capitalist corporations, the media, or the church. Rather, everything is centralized in the global networks of wealth, information, power, data and images. Castells even claims that information is an independent source of power in the universe, based on information technology, i.e. the Fourth World. So the network society is in fact a social community in which social and media networks affect all levels of society including individuals, groups and organizations. Evidence of this theory can be found in Atwood's trilogy as well. As Jimmy contemplates the decline of civilization in the media, his mother is shown through the same media resisting and ultimately facing a calamitous death. Jimmy watches the fight and death of his mother on television. His first impression of the city is through television, and the latest news of the declining world situation is broadcasted on television. Eventually Jimmy pursues resistance movements through the media, movements that stand against the network society and technological ambitions, and favor traditional order.

Within the matrix of the Fourth World driven by network societies, time is one of the main drivers of power. Industrial and technological time is also considered as state time. Time is a source of power and wealth because in a network society, time deconstructs the traditional stereotypes and eliminates continuity and sequencing in favor of network values and permitted behaviours. Time in the network society also negates “the cosmic time” that necessitates respect for the relationship between humans and nature (Castells, 1997, pp. 184–185). In *Oryx and Crake*, Jimmy, as a member of the network community, is trapped in the gridlock of time:

He has to find more and better ways of occupying his time. His time, what a bankrupt idea, as if he's been given a box of time belonging to him alone, stuffed to the brim with hours and minutes that he can spend like money. Trouble is, the box has holes in it and the time is running out, no matter what he does with it (Atwood, 2003, p. 43).

Atwood's Fourth World crafted in *Oryx and Crake* is so ideologically controlled through the network society that the Crakers consider Crake as their god, and 'Snowman', the post-network version of Jimmy, as their father. This echoes the concept of the Fourth World and how its features affect identity construction. The Fourth World theory confirms that the extent and aspects of the network society are always under development, and that a permanent transformation takes shape in direct response to the various cultural and structural forces in a given society. In *Oryx and Crake*, Atwood artfully illustrates how large corporations exercise power, and how the negative consequences of scientific progress and bioengineering supported by economic superpowers distort her characters' identities.

In the end, the result of this networked civilization and science is really nothing but the fattening of a small number of elites, marginalization of others, and mass poverty. This marginalization and poverty leads many of Atwood's characters to become disillusioned and to seek refuge in escape mechanisms such as drug use. Jimmy, who narrates his miserable story from the beginning is one of these people:

So every night had been party night, party of one. Or every night he'd had the makings, whenever he'd been able to locate another stash of alcohol in the abandoned pleebland buildings within reach. He'd scoured the nearby bars first,

then the restaurants, then the houses and trailers. He'd done cough medicine, shaving lotion, rubbing alcohol; out behind the tree he's accumulated an impressive dump of empty bottles. Once in a while he'd come across a stash of weed and he'd done that too, though often enough it was moldy (Atwood, 2003, p. 106).

Therefore, the economic growth and technology advancements in network societies lead to dystopia because the politics of identity in the Fourth World is manipulated to safeguard profit for the society's dominant powers.

3.2. The Fourth Network World and Politics of Social Identity in *The Year of the Flood*

The world Atwood conceives in *The Year of the Flood* and the whole *MaddAddam* trilogy is beyond the traditional order of the old times. The global mechanical frameworks of the industrial world are transformed into a digital network culture and economy. This transformation has had destructive side effects in biotechnology and bioengineering. Grimbeek (2017, p. 5) highlights how Atwood's trilogy reveals the destructive effects of advancement:

Biotechnology is represented as the clearest manifestation of the entanglement of 'nature' and venture capitalism. Biotechnological applications are seldom portrayed as innocent in the trilogy: the military-industrial complex appears ever involved, and many miracle products are primarily designed to attract more customers for other biotechnological inventions.

The theory of the Fourth World is a critical review of network society and culture, and the consequent increase in inequality.

Within the framework of these network structures and institutions of capitalism, individual identity and social identity is changing. Castells (1998, p. 92) stresses that in “this global world, digital communication technologies, media and contents are rapidly progressing, thus affecting the social identity”.

In Atwood’s *The Year of the Flood*, religion is also considered to be a source of power and wealth that meddles in identity construction to mesmerize people. In the novel, “God’s Gardeners” metaphorically represent cultural institutions that have active roles in identity manipulations: institutions that use available cultural materials to redefine their position in society as well as enable people to oppose the domination of the interests of global capital flows, power and information. Thus God’s Gardeners create resistant identities. Castells (1997, pp. 8–10) believes that resistant identities are those created when people try to oppose legislative identities. The unfair distribution of resources is a problem caused by capitalistic network societies.

Power agents in the Fourth World do not only affect identities, but the dominant hegemony also impacts other sociocultural institutions as well. In the novel, God’s Gardeners comprise a religious sect that combines some biblical practices and beliefs with some scientific practices and beliefs. This is in fact the overlapping of different networks in the society. Castells believes that in the information age, “the modern state will lose the majority of its sovereignty and independence under the plundering of global networks of wealth, power, and information, and the historic covenant of capital, labor and government will be changed by the decline of the welfare state, and as a result, many of the social security shelters will disappear” (1997, p. 329).

In the Fourth World crafted in the novel, there is a restriction

against 'becoming human'. Crakers are bioengineered creatures whose bodies and minds are deliberately constructed by Crake who is the pole of power in the novel. Crakers' identities reflect a childlike innocence that renders their actions symbolic and primitive. Their identity is constructed through their questioning about everything, and Jimmy, as God's Gardener, only adds to their distorted perceptions with his imaginative responses. On the other hand, God's Gardeners are presented in *The Year of the Flood* as a literary reflection of man's condition before and after the flood, human ideas about religion, and how religion interferes in identity construction and faith-making.

Science is also considered as an agent of power in the novel, and affects the politics of identity in the Fourth World. Atwood's environmental inclinations have led her to represent biology as unethical; therefore, a kind of negative theology of over-humanization is presented as an antitoxin to humanity. When ethics and ideals collapse, the only thing that can strengthen the bond among human beings is faith. According to Castells, it is possible for cultural communities to use available cultural materials to create united agents of social change as well as new identities (Castells, 1997, p. 29). Hence, identity is constructed and manipulated in a contradictory world experiencing different global flows of a network society that relies on capitalism. Castells considers this flow to be part of a networking identity (Castells, 1996, p. 39). In Atwood's fictional setting, the characters are doomed to a dystopian world where the destruction of existence and values makes the lives of individuals difficult.

Within his conception of the network-based Fourth World, Castells identifies advances in artificial fertilization, sperm banking and genetic engineering as factors for controlling and repressing

individuals. He believes that the moral and legal foundations of society collapse from here (1997, p. 193), and that negative media advertising is in fact part of a larger project to reflect bad news. The presence of media as an agent of power in the digital network society is conspicuous in the novel. In *The Year of the Flood*, policies are personalized in television programs, reflecting the role of media in simplifying political messages and superficially portraying the audience as a passive receiver of such messaging. The diminishing and hypocritical role of the media can also be traced in Atwood's trilogy:

You could watch TV or old movies, play your music, and talk on the phone. Or you could visit the other rooms in Scales on the intercom video screens. Sometimes when we were doing plank work we'd wink at the cameras in mid-moan for the benefit of whoever was stuck in the Sticky Zone. We knew where the cameras were hidden, in the snake-skin or feather work on the ceilings. It was one big family, at Scales, so even when you were in the Sticky Zone, Mordis liked you to pretend you were still participating (Atwood, 2009, p. 12).

In the second novel of Atwood's trilogy, *The Year of the Flood*, the coordinates of the Fourth World described by Castells are clearly visible. The technology-oriented network society has manipulated identities leading to the decline of the humanity and the construction of fake values and ideologies. Network communities are self-focused power agents affecting religion, education, health, and all other facets of life. Modern humans, meanwhile, are forced to adapt themselves to digital technology networks or be cruelly eliminated by unemployment or exploitation. Within such dystopian societies, the large

corporations of capitalist systems ideologically control hegemonies and values and people's blind trust in these companies leads to nothing but destruction.

3.3. Digital Network Society and Politics of Social Identity in *MaddAddam*

The final novel of the *MaddAddam* trilogy begins in sequel to *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*, as a follow-up to the eradication of so many humans by the human plague. What happens throughout the novels reveals a world of terrible dictatorship facilitated by power and money, and horrific and relentless atrocities against humans and the planet. Castells' Fourth World theory can well justify Atwood's reflection of the prominent elements of the modern era in terms of global wealth networks, power relationships, and identity politics.

Atwood analyzes the capitalist ambition as a mean of overthrowing humanity. In fact, this trilogy shows that postmodern conditions have not disappeared, but rather been exacerbated. The meaning and inefficiency of agency have been desctructed by subversive alternative narratives, creating a kind of cultural paralysis. The war on Painballers, who are man-made people, is one of the hallmarks of identity trafficking in the novel. Humans eventually enter the war with the tools which they have themselves made:

“No”, says Toby. “He should stay here. He’s only a child.” She doesn’t think she could live with herself if little Blackbeard got killed, especially in the ways the Painballers would kill him if they got hold of him. “And he has no fear – or none that’s realistic – when it comes to people. He might go running right out into the open, into crossfire. Or get

snatched as a hostage. What would happen then?" (Atwood, 2013, p. 327).

Hence, a Castellsian reading of *MaddAddam* represents a world in which network communities and communication intermingle facts and realities and manipulate truths and values. In Atwood's novel, the fictitious characters detach themselves from their families and choose new lifestyles and later on new identities. Toby, Zeb and Adam, the major characters of the novel, undergo detachment from the past and their previous identities and live their lives with attitudes that are completely different from their parents' attitudes. Applying Castellsian types of identities, Adam's personality in the novel can be identified as a legitimate identity. This type of identity oversees the dominant institutions of society that control and expand it. In Castells' view, the legitimizing identity is reminiscent of what Gramsci ultimately believes that civil society creates (Castells, 1997, p. 359).

Castells (1997, p. 154) suggests that there is only one way to avoid the dystopian Fourth World, and that is through empathy. The family must foster interaction and empathy as a central social core among its members; otherwise, considering Freudian theory, cosmic disorder will eventually lead to catastrophe. Toby and Zeb who are the survivors of a traumatized and pessimistic network society, have the capacity for love and self-sacrifice. They are trying to establish a new identity based on peace and friendship on earth:

He said I'd always had criminal tendencies, and that was why I couldn't understand pacifism and inner peace. I said that by doing nothing he was colluding with the powers that were fucking the planet, especially the OilCorps and the Church of PetrOleum. He said I had no faith, and that the

Creator would sort the earth out in good time, most likely very soon, and that those who were attuned and had a true love for the Creation would not perish. I said that was a selfish view (Atwood, 2013, p. 319).

The female figures in the novel are also under the influence of sociopolitical forces in society. They perceive their identities in relation to their understanding of feminine personality traits. As Stacy Alaimo (2000, p. 5) indicates, “feminist theory’s most revolutionary concept, the concept of ‘gender’ ... is predicated on a sharp opposition between nature and culture”. A key issue of relevance to the women in *MaddAddam* is the prevention of their aging. The bodies of women are considered commodities for giving birth to hybrid babies to save the community: “An experiment in genetic evolution. Reproduction of the fittest. Think of me as a petri dish” (Atwood, 2013, p. 262).

Margaret Atwood’s trilogy, while depicting a special focus on environmental degradation and the manipulation of genetics, accentuates how all such manipulations of nature and identity destabilize the balance of the antecedent world. The concepts of social identity, gender identity and power relationships can be tracked unambiguously throughout the *MaddAddam* trilogy. The main characters, Jimmy, Ren and Toby, live in a fictionalized world that is a futuristic network society. Within such a world, due to the capitalistic features of the network society, animals and human-like creatures experience a sense of alienation and transform the society toward a critically dangerous dystopia.

4. Conclusion

Investigating the novels of the *MaddAddam* trilogy from a socioeconomic vantage point, making use of Castell’s theories of

network society, reveals a literary representation of the truly devastating nature of the network society as well as how, in the post-industrial information society, identity is determined by agents of power and the dominant community. Within the network of information and communication, meaning and ideas are created within the existing conditions, and consequently identity is reconstructed based on the hegemonic system of values of the network society.

As is traced throughout the novels, a person constantly expends his or her knowledge and information to redefine and rearrange their activities and his/her own identity; hence, politics of identity in Atwood's futuristic world is reflective, not static. Considering the fact that personal identity is constructed as a result of one's interaction with society, personal identity and social identity are interrelated. Individuals are in an ongoing process of identity-formation, expressing their adopted identities when needed according to the circumstances of time and place. Jimmy's identity analysis in the trilogy illustrates that he has begun to encounter his fabricated identity, that is formed in a subtle attempt to perpetuate his social identity. Jimmy's vulnerable identity is unveiled as he abandons his studies to involve himself in the ideals that elitism has inculcated in his mind, and as a result, he values Crake's fabricated network of power. The creation of strange and extraordinary creatures through bioengineering symbolically reflects identity manipulations achieved through agents of power and wealth, and this identity manipulation is augmented by the propagating media.

In the fabricated network society, everything is controlled by Crake's power and ambitions: Jimmy's manipulated identity leads him to follow Crakian ideology and act as a prophet to Crake's handiwork. Adam is a leader in *The Year of the Flood* who presents

anti-Crakian ideas, thus developing a resistant identity as defined by Castells. His leadership begins right where Crake's leadership ends, inspiring the part of the human mind that seeks peace and identity. His earliest teachings, though very similar to the early heavenly religions, create a kind of temperament that defines social distinction. The present study reveals the politics of identity in the world Atwood has constructed in her trilogy. Accordingly, personal and social identities are radically affected by the values constructed and communicated in the network society through the agents of wealth and power.

Castells' theory of the Fourth World well describes the attributes of the present age as a network society: the same is proffered in Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy. In conjuring up a vision of an apocalyptic society, Atwood intermingles her narrative with a high degree of imagination and anticipation to depict the future of the network society in which everything is controlled through constructed values, beliefs and identities. The present paper, hence, suggests that the process of globalization and networking of economic activities strengthens individual effort and weakens social institutions and this transgression of private and social ambitions creates a society in which the line between truth and fiction is blurred. Further, one's identity can easily be affected and abused through constructed network communities that are in the service of strengthening the hegemony of the dominant network power. Still, as reflected in the novel, groups and people who try to overthrow or transform the dominant identity system transform their own identities into what Castells calls 'resistance identities'.

As Atwood represents in her trilogy, identities are constructed in a world that is compatible with global flows, and any progress in technological and information revolutions reconstructs social structures and builds a new form of world, i.e. the Fourth World

that relies on capitalism. Agents of power make use of media and its identity formation capacity to gain credible legitimacy. That is why Jimmy unwittingly assists Crake's project as a missionary in the spheres of power and trade, despite his views never aligning with those of Crake. As for his future career, he aims to become a librarian to save his past identity by reviewing the older beliefs and values set out in books. Such ambition reflects his tendency to protect his own identity, and avoid being manipulated and abused by the network power. In the postmodern networked and channeled world, Jimmy is symbolically the only creature who seeks out the books of ancient times looking for ancient words. This indicates his search for and discovery of indigenous identities.

What Margaret Atwood has symbolically constructed in her novels, based on the Castellsian theory of network society and politics of identity, are the interactions between a new dominant social structure, i.e. the network society, a new economy, i.e. the information world economy, and a new culture, i.e. virtual culture. In the constructed network society, individuals and communities acquire new identities within new formats, and new definitions of a human being emerge. At the same time, one's own network is influenced by internal driving forces and undergoes constant change, and as a result, new patterns of life and biology are created in different places.

Consequently, in such a network society, the attempt of the dominant institutions of society to expand their dominance over social actors by influencing social and personal identities, is partly nullified. The demise of shared identities is synonymous with the disintegration of society as a meaningful social system, and that is how the novel ends, i.e. the characters' drifting identities have fallen to the lowest possible level, seeking only to satisfy their basic instinctual needs, a condition in which no utopian society is

probable and humanity is forgotten. According to Castells, citizens of the dystopian Fourth World are people with no real individual identities who are increasingly deprived of their rights to political, cultural and economic choices; they will either legitimize the network values, resist the network values, or project a new form of identity, but the network community moves toward the inclusion of the legitimizing identities and the exclusion of resistant identities.

Therefore, what is revealed in the present research is the mechanism of today's post-industrial society and its political, social and cultural equations that are symbolically reflected in Atwood's trilogy. Castells' Fourth World theory can be considered as the setting of Atwood's fictional world, the framework under which her novels are sociopolitically encoded. Hence, human consciousness is undoubtedly dependent on an understanding of these mechanisms, and one can gain a clearer understanding of political games in the modern world through familiarity with the new Fourth World and the network community and its equations of power.

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