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Survival Through Rebellion and Perseverance

Canada, from its inception, has been a nation of many differing voices and cultures that make up its citizens. Despite each group's differences however, all Canadians, from Indigenous communities to immigrants, have formed a shared identity centered around surviving the internal and external challenges levelled against us. This Canadian identity focused around survival is explored through the main character of Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale". Through Offred, it is revealed that, in extreme circumstances, Canadians may acknowledge that they have become victims but refuse to let their victimhood define them. This Canadian identity manifests in Offred as a mindset of quiet rebellion and a hope for the future, enabling her to both preserve her identity and survive the totalitarian regime's rule.

Offred's quiet rebellion throughout the novel mirrors the ways Indigenous communities preserved their culture against government assimilation. Offred's very telling of this story is rebellious and mirrors how Indigenous communities would use oral story to communicate their culture and traditions to younger generations. Offred's commentary reveals how sharing experiences in this way allows her and Indigenous communities to resist internal and external challenges from the government: "Tell, rather than write, because I have nothing to write with and writing in any case is forbidden. But if it's a story, even in my head, I must be telling it to someone. You don't tell a story only to yourself" (44). By telling this story, Offred is rebelling

against Gilead's oppressive laws that seek to silence its female population. Moreover, by rebelling in this way, Offred acknowledges that she is a victim, but refuses to let that define her, enabling her to be critical of the apparent norms of her society of and doubt what may or may not be true about her society. Offred also feels connected to some external figure who can perceive her emotion and recognize what her situation is putting her through. Offred's quiet rebellion through telling her story mirrors the way Indigenous communities have used story to communicate lessons and traditions to younger generations. Members of Indigenous groups and Indigenous elders recognize that they must be critical of the world around them to integrate meaningful lessons into their stories, much like Offred does in her inner commentary. Furthermore, Offred's small ceremonies of rebellion remind her of the power she truly has and mirror secret, underground potlatches that many Indigenous communities held that were integral to sustaining their culture against a government attempting to assimilate them. After her ceremony with the Commander and Serena Joy, Offred goes to her room and uses some butter as moisturizer, thinking that "As long as we do this, butter our skin to keep it soft, we can believe that someday we will get out, that we will be loved again, in love or desire. We have ceremonies of our own, private ones" (111). Although meaningless to the regime, Offred's use of butter helps her safeguard some of her identity from the state and reinforces her perception of her identity as more than simply a "two-legged womb" (223). The importance of this small act of rebellion also helps her develop her communal identity as she feels connected with the eccentricities in the personalities of other Handmaids and herself before the regime came to power. The impacts Offred's short, private ceremony has on her perception of her identity is mirrored in secret,

underground potlatches Indigenous groups held. These potlatches helped to continue their culture and traditions despite being illegal, and strengthened their communal identity with each other.

Offred's hope for the future is mirrored in the hope for the future many Indigenous groups have held to retain to advance their rights. Offred's belief that she can one day truly return to the life she once lead with Luke and her daughter where she is respected and loved mirrors the hope many Indigenous groups have held that they can finally have equity and equal opportunity to the rest of Canadians. Offred maintains this hope throughout her commentary: "If it's a story I'm telling, then I have control over the ending. Then there will be an ending to the story and real life will come after. I can pick up where I left off" (44). Offred's narration of her story helps her believe that she is not simply a victim to the state's oppression, rather, she has the ability to achieve the change she desires if she survives long enough to live in her better future. Moreover, she believes that if she survives long enough, she will be rewarded by being able to enjoy her life with her partner Luke and their daughter. Her unrelenting belief in a better future mirrors the hope many Indigenous communities have held onto while attempting to preserve their identity and culture from government assimilation. Furthermore, Offred uses this undying belief that she will survive to some day in the future where she can finally enjoy her life with Luke and their daughter as justification for enduring the present, which mirrors the struggles Indigenous leaders face in getting Canada to understand their experience. This drives her to hoard her sanity: "Sanity is a valuable possession; I hoard it the way people once hoarded money. I save it, so I will have enough, when the time comes" (125). Offred's belief in the future justifies enduring the present, and Offred attempts to safeguard her sanity against the state's oppression. To do so, she recognizes that it entails conforming to the state's oppressive laws for

women and appearing as if she accepts the state's values as her own. This is mirrored in the Indigenous struggle to educate Canadians in an evolving process about their challenges.

Although Offred is not Canadian, she shares the quiet rebellion and hope for the future that Indigenous groups in Canada have held onto to advance their rights. Offred's telling of this story and her private ceremonies help her quietly rebel against the government similar to Indigenous traditions, while Offred's belief in the future and what she's willing to endure to survive to enjoy it mirror Indigenous struggles to educate Canada about their challenges and safeguard their identity.