

“We are the Others//The Change we Need//The Change we Demand”: Resistance and Queer Kinship in Catherine Hernandez’ Novel *Crosshairs* (2021)

Katharina Röder

ABSTRACT: In Catherine Hernandez’s novel *Crosshairs* (2021), queer, non-biological kinship functions as the foundation for an uprising against a fascist government. This paper analyzes the relationship between queerness, kinship, and resistance in the context of the novel based on theoretical works by T. Bradway and Elizabeth Freeman, José Esteban Muñoz, Judith Butler, and others from the fields of queer and kinship studies and contextualizes the novel through references to the shooting at Pulse Nightclub in Orlando in 2016 and the Stonewall Riots in New York in 1969. In doing so, the paper argues that queer kinship and community are the basis for resistance in *Crosshairs*, as the protest at the end of the novel would not have been possible without protestors recognizing each other as (non-biological) kin.

KEYWORDS: Queer Studies; Resistance; Kinship; Dystopia; Contemporary Fiction; Fascism

Pulse nightclub, Orlando

Here is what I dreamed:

They were there.

Forty-nine of them.

Crowding the light of a Bathroom.

Playfully fighting for space along a smudged mirror.

Fingerprints of those who came before us.

To place upon lips a shine.

To dull a shine upon the nose.

Ready to dance.

(Hernandez 15, italics in the original)

Introduction

Catherine Hernandez’s novel *Crosshairs* (2021) opens with a dedication to the 49 victims of the shooting at Pulse Nightclub in Orlando in 2016, which, at the time, was the deadliest mass shooting in US history (“Memorial”). The reference to this event, which heavily impacted queer people around the world and continues to be present in the minds of many, sets the tone for the novel that follows and evokes an early emotional reaction, especially from queer and trans readers who remember the attack. The poem reminds readers not only of the event itself, but of the emotions they felt in the immediate aftermath of the shooting and the grief they might have experienced, even if they never met the people who died that day. During a concert by the band Queen that took place on the day after the shooting, singer Adam Lambert dedicated the song “Who Wants to Live Forever” to the victims of the shooting: “This

song is dedicated to those that lost their life last night, in Orlando Florida, and anybody that has been victim of senseless violence or hatred” (Bird and Lupton 01:06:36-01:06:59). The moment was included in the *Netflix* documentary *The Show Must Go On: The Queen + Adam Lambert Story* and is contextualized by an additional interview with Lambert that interrupts the recording of the performance, in which he talks about the impact that the shooting had on him: “That morning, I remember hearing about the Pulse shooting, in Orlando, and just thinking to myself ‘That could have been any club, that could have been my group of friends, it could have been me’” (01:07:16-01:07:28). Both the interview and Lambert’s speech on stage show the impact the shooting had on him and is an indicator for the emotions many queer people felt in the aftermath of the shooting. Through referencing the thought that “it could have been me,” the documentary shows the relationship that was created between the victims of the shooting and queer people from all over the world. The poem in the dedication of *Crosshairs* evokes the feelings that Lambert names in his speech and reminds readers of the emotions they might have felt in the aftermath of the shooting and, in doing so, invites them to keep these emotions in mind when reading the novel that follows.

Crosshairs depicts a dystopian reality and is set in Canada—specifically in Toronto—after the country had to partially rebuild following a flood that primarily impacted people in precarious circumstances, especially non-white and Indigenous as well as queer and disabled people. In the immediate aftermath of the flood, a fascist regime assumes political power in the Greater Toronto Area and starts what they refer to as the “Renovation,” a movement that has the goal of removing and displacing marginalized people who are referred to as “Others” into so called workcamps that are clearly established as concentration camps throughout the text.¹ The novel is told from the perspective of Kay, a Jamaican-Filipino drag queen who, at the beginning of the novel, hides in the basement of Liv, a white lesbian, before joining a resistance group that is organizing a public uprising to create global attention for the situation in Canada. Even though their situations are vastly different, the novel immediately creates a sense of closeness between Kay and Liv that is characterized by understanding and mutual respect, and continues to explore situations with similar constellations between different characters. I argue that, through these relationships, the novel portrays the respective characters as kin, as their relationships are characterized through trust and a familiarity that far exceeds what readers might expect from characters that become close within hours, sometimes even minutes, of meeting for the first time. Therefore, I argue that in *Crosshairs*, queerness and queer kinship

¹ *Crosshairs* repeatedly invokes references to the Holocaust and famous texts from and about that time like *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank, Imre Kertész’s semi-autobiographical novel *Fatelessness* (1957), and the French documentary short film *Night and Fog* (1956). It is established early on that the workcamps that the “Others” are brought to function like concentration camps, which is reinforced throughout the text with references that become more specific as the narrative unfolds. Additionally, scenes like the opening of the novel can be read as references to texts like Anne Frank’s diaries, as Kay is in a situation that is very similar to that of Jewish people who were in hiding during the Nazi Regime in Germany. While these elements of the text are not at the focus of my analysis, it is necessary to name them, as they are central to the novel.

are the foundation for revolution, as they create a form of resistance rooted in shared trauma and mutual respect, but also queer joy, ultimately allowing for an uprising that challenges the established status quo. I open this paper by outlining different understandings of kinship and the relationship that can be created between kinship and queerness, before offering a close reading of Hernandez's novel that focuses on moments of queer kinship, the shaping of resistance, and, ultimately, the uprising that occurs at the end of the novel.

Although *Crosshairs* is depicted as a dystopia, the novel raises many questions and offers commentary on a range of issues that impact marginalized communities, especially queer and trans communities in the US today, making it a timely and relevant text. Many of the decisions made by the fictional Canadian government are reminiscent of those made by Donald Trump and his administration following his second inauguration on January 20, 2025. Trump began his second presidency by signing a number of executive orders that continue to impact and limit the rights of queer and trans people in the US, with three of them signed immediately on the day of his inauguration itself.² The targeting of the rights of queer and trans people, as well as other marginalized groups, therefore became obvious early on under the Trump administration and appears to have set the tone for the duration of his second presidency. Beside the attacks on the rights of queer and trans people, the violence of ICE and the detention centers for immigrants to the United States, creates a picture that complicates the reading of *Crosshairs* as a dystopia in the established understanding of the genre. In his 1994 essay "Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited," Lyman Tower Sargent defines dystopia as "a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived" (15). Considering the last part of Sargent's quote, I believe it is necessary to ask the question of whether *Crosshairs* still fits the categorization of a dystopia, since the novel seems to reference many of the issues that are happening in politics in 2026, just five years after the novel's publication. However, even though I believe it to be important to keep the question of genre in mind with a text like *Crosshairs*, it shall not be the focus of my analysis. Instead, as mentioned above, I am primarily interested in the role of queer kinship and how it is used to create resistance within the novel—whether we read it as a dystopia or not.

² The following executive orders are referenced here: 1) "Ending Radical And Wasteful Government DEI Programs And Preferencing", 2) "Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government", and 3) "Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid" (United States). While the executive order regarding the United States Foreign Aid does not immediately appear to impact the lives of queer people, it impacted the sales and circulation of HIV medication abroad, specifically in countries with limited access to these medications. While Marco Rubio issued a limited waiver that allowed for some distribution of the medication, the distribution of Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) was limited to "pregnant and breastfeeding women," therefore excluding gay men as one of the groups that are most at risk regarding an HIV infection ("Waiver").

(Queer) Kinship

Queer forms of kinship stand in opposition to more established understandings of the term, as they challenge common notions of what it is that kinship refers to. Colloquially, kinship is often understood as a “[r]elationship by descent” (“Kinship”) or, when considering the field of cultural anthropology, as “[t]he recognized ties of relationship, by descent, marriage, or ritual, that form the basis of social organization” or “the system of relationships traditionally accepted in a culture and the rights and obligations which they involve” (“Kinship”). Within Western and settler-colonial discourses, both of these interpretations tend to reference Western understandings of what a family is ‘supposed’ to look like which becomes specifically noticeable when reading the works of anthropologists like Bronisław Malinowski or Claude Lévi-Strauss, who have historically used the category of kinship as part of broader practices of colonial Othering directed at Indigenous communities. Throughout his studies, Malinowski used his understanding of kinship to belittle Aboriginal communities as “[standing] on a very low level of culture” and “[having] but primitive forms of social organization” (“Tribal Male Associations” 201). Malinowski argued later that his goal in studying kinship was to “analyze accurately family life and the general social structure and to investigate their mutual dependencies and external conditions” (“Sociology” 260), but in doing so, he, like many of his contemporaries, failed to remove his settler-colonial bias.

Decades later, in the 1950s, Claude Lévi-Strauss made the argument that “kinship and its related notions are at the same time prior and exterior to the biological relations to which increasingly we tend to reduce them” and went on to argue that “[k]inship relations offer immediately to the mind a framework of logical classification; this framework, once it is conceived, is used in order to situate, by reference to these pre-established categories, individuals with whom anyone happens to be, or not to be, empirically related” (qtd. in Korn 2). Lévi-Strauss’ writings on kinship recognize that kinship does not necessarily have to be based on biological relations. However, his work has often been mobilized within anthropological frameworks, and the applications of his theories have frequently participated in processes of Othering Indigenous communities, as established by Francis Korn in 1973, when he used Lévi-Strauss’ approach to theorize about the family and kinship structures in different Indigenous communities in Australia and Papua New Guinea (Korn). So even though understandings of kinship have shifted throughout the twentieth century, biological and genetic links have remained at the center of studies in anthropological kinship studies.

Importantly, the studies discussed above were not interested in the biology underlying the observed kin relations. However, their understanding of who could be kin in the first place was rooted in biology and genetics, which is mirrored in Janet Casten’s 2004 book *After Kinship*. Here, she explores how the study of kinship has long differentiated “between ‘social’ and ‘biological’ kinship as fundamental to an analytical understanding of this domain” (Carsten 6). But even though the focus of anthropological studies in this field is often based in the

cultural implications of kinship, even the structures Carsten analyzed in the twenty-first century are still primarily focused on parent-child relationships that correlate to biological relations. Nevertheless, she concludes her book by making an argument for looking at different understandings of kinship together, as considering them side by side instead of using them to construct non-Western communities as cultural others might be “the way to achiev[e] a new kind of comparative understanding of kinship” (189). In doing so, Carsten opens the discussion around kinship to a more critical approach, and creates space for voices like Judith Butler, T. Bradway,³ or Elizabeth Freeman who explore kinship beyond the more established understandings of the term.

In an article on queer kinship, Butler references anthropological and colloquial understandings of kinship by describing that “although the discovery of genetic links among people often does no more than establish genetic links, these connections are often taken as signs of kinship, if not the defining criteria of kinship itself. When this happens, genetics is collapsed into kinship” (30). Butler hints towards modes of kinship here that stand in opposition to those primarily connected to genetics, which are also the ones I am interested in in the context of this paper. Instead of genetics, queer kinship is focused on the emotional bonds that can be created between people, be it through similar experiences, mutual feelings of care, or other non-biologically charged circumstances. Elizabeth Freeman and T. Bradway open the introduction to their anthology on queer kinship by stating that “[q]ueer theory has always been a theory of kinship” (1) and go on to argue that “[k]inship theory—as practiced in queer, feminist, and critical race studies—contests structuralist accounts of kinship, particularly as the latter naturalize the mutual imbrications of heteronormativity, patriarchy, white supremacy, and Western imperialism” (1). Their argument shows the importance of kinship models that stand in opposition to a biological approach, especially when drawing on the experiences of queer and trans people.

One of the most prominent and well-known examples of queer kinship relations can be found in US American Ballroom culture and the houses that were created within that scene.⁴ Marlon Bailey describes them as “familial structures that are socially rather than biologically configured. Although in some cases houses serve as homes where members live and congregate, by and large, houses are social configurations that serve as sources of support for the diverse membership of the ballroom community” (367). The houses are often led by older

³ Most of Teagan Bradway’s work on kinship was published under a dead name with the same initial. In order to avoid using her dead name in this paper, I refer to her by using the initial T.

⁴ Another example that needs to be mentioned in the context of queer kinship is the unpaid labor of lesbian women during the AIDS-crisis who, in many instances, cared for gay men who were HIV positive or had AIDS at a time when medical professionals were still unsure of how the virus could be transmitted. Simultaneously, many lesbian women were also involved in organizing protests to generate public attention for the failures of governments in handling the virus. Therefore, the genuine care many lesbians at the time showed for other members of the queer community should be mentioned here as an example of queer and trans people accepting each other as kin.

queer (and often transgender) people who take younger members of the community under their wing as so-called mothers or fathers. They support the members of their houses by providing guidance on the reality of being a queer or trans person in an often homo- or transphobic world and—as Bailey points out—in some cases even housing. Importantly, the language that is used within the context of the houses is still referential towards biological kinship structures, even though they are distinctly different from them. These references create a familiarity but are, at their core, subversive and manage to challenge a more traditional understanding of what it means to be kin, especially given that many members of a house often need a new support system because they no longer have support from their biological families.

Considering the different approaches to kinship and the tension that exists between them I want to return to Freeman and Bradway, who conclude that

kinship is at once a scene of violence—psychological, imperial, neoliberal, interpersonal—and of creativity. Kinship is a technique for exclusion and inclusion, and a set of conceptual building blocks for forms of relationality that obviate and lay bare its biopolitical work. Kinship is a domain without which we cannot think in some ways but beyond which we absolutely must think, act, and live. (21-22)

I am following this understanding of the term as well as Donna Haraway's call that the task we are facing is to "make kin in lines of inventive connection as a practice of learning to live and die well with each other in a thick present. Our task is to make trouble, to stir up potent response to devastating events, as well as to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places" (1). At their core, the theories introduced here examine kinship through a lens of community and potential. In these kin relationships, it is not central how people are related to each other on paper or based on genetics. Instead, I argue that queer kinship can be understood as a connection that is often formed through mutual experiences and, in some instances, mutual trauma, but also through an active choice to care and take on responsibility for each other. Based on this understanding of queer kinship, I analyze the relationships in *Crosshairs* to show how the novel represents a queer mode of kinship and the effect this has on the resistance that is central to the novel.

Queer Kinship in *Crosshairs*

In the following part of this paper, I analyze passages from the novel that show the relationships and instances of kinship that are formed between the protagonist Kay and other queer and non-white characters throughout *Crosshairs*. Noticeably, many of these kinship relationships appear to be formed within hours, sometimes even within minutes, of the characters meeting each other, making them particularly striking. One of the first scenes illustrating this dynamic happens during Kay's escape from Toronto towards a safe area. In the back of a van that is supposed to take him towards safety, he meets Bahadur, who is already



hiding beneath some blankets. In the back of the van, they manage to comfort one another within minutes of being in the same space:

“Pssst.” Bahadur’s hand taps my blanket. We join blankets as if we are at a slumber party. Only we are not wearing pyjamas. We are two smelly Queers wearing our runaway clothes, acting like teenagers whispering gossip with glee. It has been a long time since I have had a decent conversation. I pray that the odour between us will become bearable sometime soon.

“So? How did you get here?” I tell them my story. I tell them about you. I tell them about Fanny and her dog. I tell them about Liv’s basement and the lynching. I tell them about sandwiches on windowsills and children through fences.

They tell me their story. (104)

The scene takes place within minutes of Kay and Bahadur introducing themselves to one another. However, seemingly based in nothing but joined trauma, they not only share anecdotes from or basic facts about their lives but, as Kay mentions repeatedly, they share their “[stories],” implying that what they share is more than just past events but elements of their lives that run deeper than simple retellings. In doing so, this moment shows that Kay and Bahadur feel safe enough with each other to open up and allow themselves to be vulnerable, leading them to share things about themselves that extend far beyond what one would usually share with someone who is more or less a stranger. Therefore, in this moment, even though their situation remains dangerous and potentially life-threatening, they can allow themselves to let their guards down and form a bond with each other that is much closer than readers would expect between two strangers. This immediate closeness leads me to read this scene as Kay and Bahadur immediately recognizing, choosing, and accepting each other as kin, which allows them to show as much vulnerability as they do. In doing so, they allow themselves and each other a moment of shared happiness that makes a dangerous, if not potentially deadly, situation much more bearable.

Whereas the relationship between Kay and Bahadur develops in a matter of minutes and is based on their shared experiences as queer people of color, the relationship between Kay and Liv is a more difficult one. As a white lesbian, but publicly closeted ally to the “Others”, who pretends to be in a relationship with one of the leaders of the Renovation, Liv is in a privileged, albeit dangerous, situation that creates a clear power imbalance between her and Kay. This power imbalance leads to strict rules that protect Liv but do not help Kay feel comfortable in his hiding place in the basement of her house. Kay must follow a protocol created by Liv, which outlines that “if [he] had to run, [he] was to stack the containers without any crumbs on the canned-goods shelf, lean [his] makeshift bed against the wall and toss the coats into a pile so that it wouldn’t look like anyone was staying there. It would just look like a messy basement” (26). Through these precautions, the novel establishes that even though Liv is willing to open

her home to Kay and does her best to create small moments of freedom for him, she still also prioritizes her own safety. The fact that she is able to hide her identity as a lesbian allows her to pass as straight, which is a privilege in their situation and although she tries to create somewhat comfortable moments for Kay, she is ultimately the one who holds power between the two. But even with this underlying tension, the scene that opens the novel's frame narrative still shows the deeply ingrained feelings of care that the two feel for each other, especially through a routine they developed that makes it possible for Kay to come out of the basement from time to time. The routine allows Kay to reminisce about his past life as a drag queen and, in the scene depicted in *Crosshairs*, is established enough for them to refer to it as "[their] usual" (27). It begins with Kay taking a bath and cleaning himself, while Liv washes his laundry. Although this act of cleaning himself might appear to be a small part of a larger ritual, Kay, as the narrator of the novel, states that it "reminds [him] of who [he is]" (28), highlighting the impact that being clean can have on a person. Once Kay emerges from the bath, Liv offers him some of her clothes and make-up before helping him transform into a version of himself that resembles who he was before the start of the Renovation. Throughout this process, Liv shows her love for Kay by taking care of him, which is defining for their relationship.

When Liv starts applying nail polish to Kay's toenails—once again performing an act of care—she opens up about her fears for the safety of her wife who fled Toronto as soon as the Renovation began. The reference to Liv's wife allows Kay to make a connection to his own experiences and fears. He comments that Liv "has a problem with tenses too, which are dependent on how hopeful [they] are of reuniting with those [they] have lost" (38). Here, Kay is referencing his partner Evan, who he believes to be on the run but, as readers later learn, is already dead. During his time of hiding in Liv's basement—and throughout many parts of the narrative that follow—Kay addresses Evan directly: "Evan. My beautiful Evan. Here in the darkness of this hiding place, I write you these words. Without paper, without pen, I trace these words in my head, along the perimeter of your outline" (19). Comparing this to the moment when Liv remembers her wife highlights the similarities between Kay and Liv's stories and creates a familiarity between the two of them that forms the basis for them becoming kin, as their kinship is rooted in shared fears and trauma, as well as similar memories of love. While they have to separate once Kay must escape from Toronto, their relationship continues to be important throughout the text and strengthens as the story progresses, especially once they reunite towards the end of the novel.

The relationships between Kay and Bahadur, and between Kay and Liv, represent many of the relationships formed throughout the novel between two people who recognize and accept each other as chosen family or kin. The third scene I analyze in this context focuses instead on a larger group and how the characters, through the sharing of one character's memories and the connection that is created between the characters through this memory, allow themselves to be hopeful for a better future. On the evening before Kay, Bahadur, Liv, and their allies make their way back to Toronto to join the protest, they gather around a bonfire and try to

encourage one another, believing that the following days will go in their favor. Through all of the horrors they experience together, this moment of being in each other's presence, of being together, allows them to feel something akin to peace: "Bahadur stands and looks at me. It's a moment in which we can hear each other's thoughts. Just as Firuzeh said, performing in front of each other, being seen, is medicine. It is time to imagine. It is time to play. To be the stars of our own show in our heads" (290). In the scene that follows, the characters allow themselves to remember and imagine a better world; a world in which they can be themselves; a world in which they are not punished just for being who they are. Here, the closeness that was created amongst them, rooted in their shared trauma and the hope for a better future, allows them to visualize what their lives could be.

The chapter ends when Kay returns to his present, as the "cabaret fades away. In its place, a meteor shower streaks the night sky. The sound of crickets singing among the reeds. We hold hands, shaking, crying. The five of us Others. History makers. Soon to be dead. Soon to be free. Under the cosmic light show of our resilience" (295). In this moment, Kay recognizes the impact that this moment of playing pretend has on the group he is surrounded by. While the relationship between them has been close even before this moment, I argue that they can now recognize each other as kin, as their stories and lives are now forever intertwined. Through sharing Kay's memory, the five characters can feel joy, even in a moment that is characterized primarily by the absence of any positive emotions. The scene therefore shows how this moment of queer joy, a joy brought into existence against all odds, leads the characters to either strengthen existing kin relationships or, for those who have not been as close before the scene, become kin. The feelings that are captured here fall in line with concept of queerness as utopia introduced by José Esteban Muñoz in *Cruising Utopia*, where he writes that "Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. The future is queerness's domain" (1). The scene from *Crosshairs* mirrors the sentiment introduced by Muñoz. While the reality the characters are facing is a dire one, they find hope and joy through their shared experiences as queer people, the sense of community that is created by those experiences and the realization that they have become more to each other than they might have expected when they first met.

(Queer) Resistance in *Crosshairs*

Throughout the novel, *Crosshairs* references many instances of resistance that are characterized through the marginalized perspectives of the protestors who are placed in opposition to the military or other governmental forces. The two instances that stand out in this context are a protest against an oil pipeline, told from the perspective of Beck, a former member of the military, and the protest against the fascist regime that occurs at the end of

the novel. Beck's storyline explores the effects that the Renovation had on privileged queer white people and positions them against those who must live through intersectional discrimination. Beck, a gay white man, is deployed to a rural town where he is "responsible for guarding the construction site and controlling large groups of protestors—Indigenous and non-Indigenous—who gathered from across the country and from around the world to try to block the pipeline" (132) that would go through the reservation of a "local First Nation" (132). The imagery that is evoked here is reminiscent of the Dakota Access Pipeline protests in 2016 and 2017 and the connected Water is Life movement that focused on the protection of Indigenous land and water against oil companies. During these protests, the primarily Indigenous protestors were attacked with dogs and pepper spray ("Standing Rock Special"). The scene in *Crosshairs* describes how the military escalates the situation against the protestors, ultimately "cutting off clean-water supply and electricity and deactivating telecommunication towers" (132). Nevertheless, the protestors continue to fight against the pipeline. In the absence of electricity and, therefore, technology, they use a human microphone to amplify what different speakers are saying, meaning that the protesters fall back on each other and the power that lies in the mutual support they have for each other. The technique is a method of amplifying the voice of a speaker that has been used in the US since the anti-nuclear protests in the 1980's and gained more attention during its usage by Occupy Wall Street in 2011 (Moraine). The novel introduces the technique through a group of teenagers who

took turns standing at the front line screaming their spoken-word poetry to the soldiers. An Indigenous teen stepped forward. He adjusted his dusty ball cap and began.

'MIC CHECK!'

The protestors within twenty feet repeated after him. 'MIC CHECK!' The phrase was repeated farther and farther away among the crowd.

'THIS IS A HUMAN MICROPHONE!' Again, the phrase travelled in ripples among the protestors. 'WE AMPLIFY EACH OTHERS VOICES! SO THAT WE CAN HEAR ONE ANOTHER! SO THAT THESE SOLDIERS CAN HEAR US!' (133-34, capitalization in the original)

The human microphone as a technique only functions because all members of the audience participate in spreading the word of the speaker. The scene continues with the unnamed teenager sharing a poem that, through the human microphone, is shared not only with the other protestors, but also with the military and the media reporting on the protests.

In his poem, he discusses the situation of Indigenous people and their ongoing resistance against settler-colonial forces:

*We have been occupied
Papered*



Carded

Listed

Interned

Torn

Ripped

Shorn

Walked

Blanketed

[...]

These are the names they gave us

These are the ways they took from us

These are the ways they tried

But we are like the waters on this land

Slicing mountains in half

We have our own names

We did not lose everything

We survived them

We are more powerful than what hurt us

We will remember our ancestors

[...]

We will remember

We are memory

We will decolonize (134-37, italics in the original)⁵

While the form of resistance that is described is not exclusively queer, the dynamic between the protestors clearly questions the governmental powers that are represented through the presence of the military. Through the usage of the human microphone, all attendants of the protest become an active part of a community that positions itself against the powers that be. While the members of this community are not as close to each other as Kay and the group he becomes part of, they still show how closeness can be created between strangers and how this closeness can be used to fight for a common goal. At the same time, this scene reminds readers that decolonization is a communal effort that can only happen when intersectionally marginalized people rise against the settler-colonial state. Additionally, the inclusion of

⁵ The poem “We Have Been Occupied” was written by Catherine Hernandez’s partner Nazbah Tom who allowed her to include it in the novel. The inclusion of this poem raises questions about queer kinship in connection with authorship, especially because Nazbah Tom is only mentioned in the acknowledgments of the novel, but these implications would require an analysis that exceeds the scope of this paper.

Indigenous communities in this context is not only crucial in locating the protest and referencing settler-colonial violence that exists outside of the scope of the novel, but it is also an important reference in relation to outdated understandings of kinship. As described above, many established understandings of kinship are rooted in genetics and fall back on Western/settler-colonial understandings of what a family should look like. In portraying Indigenous communities and decolonial efforts alongside the queer protagonists, the novel creates an important connection between Indigenous and queer kinship.

Whereas the scene of the protest against the pipeline is portrayed with a focus on Indigenous communities, *Crosshairs* also asks the question of what a queer resistance—and specifically a resistance of queer people of color—can look like. As mentioned above, *Crosshairs* ends with a violent protest intended to incite global attention for the situation faced by the “Others” in the novel. While the group Kay prepared with for the event is small, there are thousands of people at the protest, both “Others” and allies. The protest takes place during a large parade and begins with a speech by two “Others” who have been turned into spokespeople for the fascist government. However, even though their speech begins in a way that sounds like it follows the government’s propaganda, they quickly change their tone and share the reality of their situation, making the government’s crimes public while using the spectacle of the parade as the backdrop for their revelations. In the aftermath of the speech, members of the revolution kill leading figures of the Renovation⁶ before the most important element of the protest can begin. This portion of the novel is once again part of the frame narrative and told through Kay’s perspective, who is at the center of the protest in Toronto, but aware of the many protests that are happening all throughout Canada at the same time:

I feel the words exit my lips, as planned. I hear my voice loud and proud, echoing off the storefronts, knowing that in every workhouse in the city, there are Others saying the same thing, while evacuating the premises. Through the smoke, under falling brick, over barbed wire fences; from the Don Valley to Ward’s Island, from Scarborough to the Junction, people are saying their names. A declaration. We are kites, prayers flying in the sky, knowing freedom. (319)

Kay describes the situation as filled with tension while simultaneously referencing all the other people involved in the protest, showing how all protests are related and fueled by similar emotions of anger, pain, and fear. The central action of the protest, other than the violence that creates global attention for what is happening in Canada, comes from the “Others”. Kay begins this part of the protest by shouting towards the media that “[HIS] NAME IS KAY! [HE IS] THE SON OF GABBY NOPUENTE AND KEITH WATSON SMITH! AND [HE] DESERVE[S] TO LIVE” (319, capitalization in the original). Bahadur follows in proclaiming their name to the public,

⁶ For example, Liv kills Charles, the man she pretended to be in a relationship with to get access to the people in charge of the Renovation.

with many of the people surrounding them doing so as well. What is noticeable here is that after the queer non-biological kinship that was fostered between the characters throughout the novel, the “Others” now reference their biological kin. The relationships to their biological kin are seemingly used to make the “Others” appear more human to a broader white heterosexual audience that stands in opposition to the queer and trans community that was celebrated earlier on in the novel. But while the outside world is approached through references to biological kinship, the protestors simultaneously create a sense of non-biological and queer kinship among themselves that is based in surviving together and protecting each other. By placing both forms of kinship alongside each other, the novel makes these differences more striking and noticeable to readers.

While the protest at the end of the novel is the most obvious moment of resistance within the text, I argue that many of the softer and community-based moments before this final protest can be read just as much as acts of resistance, as they stand in striking opposition to the government’s agenda. The characters continuously work against a government that is trying to kill them, and support each other in working towards this goal, which is a form of resistance in itself. Therefore, even the small moments, like Kay and Bahadur finding a moment of peace by talking to each other and being present in the back of the van, can function as moments of resistance, even though it might not appear that way at first glance.

Finally, I want to link the protest at the end of *Crosshairs* back to the poem that stands at the beginning of the novel. Whereas the poem is an explicit reference to the shooting at Pulse nightclub in 2016, many queer and trans readers might read this final protest as an indirect reference to the Stonewall Riots that mark the beginning of global organized pride movements. While the protest in *Crosshairs* is the result of organized planning, the Stonewall Riots happened organically and in direct response to police brutality. Nevertheless, both protests, one fictional, one real, represent queer and trans responses to governmental violence. In reading the protest in *Crosshairs* as a reference to the Stonewall Riots, the ending of the novel mirrors its beginning, with another reference to an event that is crucial for a collective queer and trans memory. Pride parades worldwide still refer back to the fights between queer and trans communities—and especially queer trans people of color—and the New York police that started on June 28, 1969, which leads me to argue that *Crosshairs* is framed by references to two crucial events in queer and trans history that led queer and trans people to seek each other as kin. These references, therefore, can be seen as a stylistic device that helps readers relate to the events that happen throughout the novel, as they mirror events from their own collective memory.

Conclusion

Crosshairs introduces readers to a dystopian reality that heavily criminalizes and punishes queer and trans people, especially queer and trans people of color. In framing the text with



references to two crucial events from queer history, the novel invites readers to identify with the characters and their experiences, reminding them that many of the things that happen in this dystopian world are not so far removed from their reality. Simultaneously, the novel shows what queer kinship can look like through the relationships among the characters that are introduced in the text. Be it Kay and Liv, who bond over their shared fear for their loved ones, or Kay and Bahadur, who bond over their shared trauma as queer people of color, many of the characters form strong connections within a relatively short amount of time. These connections are only strengthened once they engage further with each other and are able to relate to each other not only based on shared trauma but also through shared moments of joy. The kinship that is created between them through these experiences enables them to organize the protest at the end of the novel, allowing for a hopeful ending by showing that there is a way for the “Others” to resist the fascist government. Based on my analysis and reading of *Crosshairs*, I therefore conclude that in the novel, queer kinship serves as the foundation for resistance, as the final protest would have never been possible without the strong personal connections between different members of the revolution that are, ultimately, based on them recognizing and accepting each other as kin.

In working with dystopian novels like *Crosshairs* and the role of queer kinship, I am continuing to work on the connection between queer kinship and the category of dystopia, as, I argue, the kinship between many queer characters in *Crosshairs* has the potential to challenge the genre of a dystopia in relation to queer dystopias like this novel. Historical events like the Stonewall Riots, the AIDS crisis, or the shooting at Pulse Nightclub, have long impacted and continue to impact queer and trans communities all over the world in ways that are similar to the events outlined in *Crosshairs*. However, as the novel illustrates, there is space and potential for a better future through a mutual fight grounded in resistance, kinship, and joy.

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