Rotten trees, bad apples? Understanding the intergenerational transmission of extremism

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

The influence that parents have on their children's development has been a topic of study for decades, if not centuries. Authors from a myriad of disciplines, ranging from biogenetics (e.g., Cavalli-Sforza, & Feldman, 1973) to cultural economics (e.g., Bourdieu, 1986) and behavioral psychology (e.g., Bandura, 1969), have tried to understand how previous generations shape the behavior and beliefs of the next. Positioned at the intersection between *nurture* and *nature,* the importance of our parents for our personal development in the broadest sense can therefore hardly be overstated, and has been well-documented in academic research. It is widely accepted that many aspects of our adult lives, including dietary behavior (Rhodes et al., 2016), political preferences (Jennings, Dalton & Klingemann, 2007), and spending habits (Britt, 2016), are largely influenced by our family background. Moreover, it has been well-established that engagement in antisocial or violent behavior, such as intimate partner violence (Ehrensaft et al., 2003), organized crime (Spapens & Moors, 2020) or bullying (Lawrence, 2022), can also be transmitted from parent to child.

Nonetheless, little is known about whether violent *ideologies* (as opposed to violent behaviors) are similarly passed down from one generation to the next, nor do we know what such processes may look like in practice. When it comes to the first part of this puzzle, anecdotal evidence suggests that extremist ideologies can indeed be indeed transmitted from parent to child. For example, after the 2012 attack in Toulouse, France, which left seven people dead, it soon became apparent that the gunman, Mohammed Merah, was raised with his parents' violent extremist beliefs. According to his brother, Merah and his siblings were brought up with attitudes of antisemitic hatred and intolerance, which ultimately encouraged him to act on these beliefs (France24, 2012). Several years later, the 2018 attack in Surabaya, Indonesia, further illustrated the detrimental effects parental extremism may have on children. Here, a family of six, including four young children, committed a suicide attack on Christians attending three different churches, killing over a dozen (Kapoor, 2018). In a right-wing extremist context, similar examples can be found. For example, Gudrun Burwitz – the only daughter of SS leader Heinrich Himmler – grew up as a convinced supporter of Nazism. Until her death in 2018, she continued to fiercely defend her father's actions and ideas (Sandomir, 2018). More recently, the Joseph Hall case – in which a 10-year-old Californian boy killed his neo-Nazi-father – similarly sparked debate about the effects of parents' violent ideas on children's development (CBS News, 2011).

Interestingly, we know at the same time that not all extremist parents actually manage to produce extremist offspring: some children are able to leave their parents' harmful ideologies behind at some point in their lives. Consider the case of Omar Bin Laden – who is the fourth eldest son of the mastermind behind the attacks of September 11, 2001. Despite his father's notorious legacy and extremist beliefs, Omar Bin Laden has taken a strikingly different path. Upon leaving Afghanistan at the age of 20, he moved to France where he nowadays works as a painter. Over

the years, he has allegedly become an America fanatic who has strongly distanced himself from his father's actions and ideology (Butler & Fazal, 2021). Omar has publicly condemned terrorism and expressed a desire for peace, advocating for a more positive relationship with the West (NBC News, 2008).

Remarkably similar is the story of the American Dakota Adams, 27-year-old son of right-wing extremist and founder of far-right militia the Oath Keepers, Stewart Rhodes. Rhodes played a pivotal role in the Capitol Riots of January 6th 2021, for which he is currently serving an 18-year prison sentence. According to Dakota, he and his siblings were raised in "extreme isolation" in a "particular cultural bubble in increasingly paranoid and militant right-wing political spheres" (Hanson, 2024, n.p.). His father sabotaged the children's homeschooling, and did not allow them to speak about their home lives in public. Ultimately, however, Dakota managed to completely break away from his extremist upbringing, became a self-identified "socialist" (Gabbatt, 2024), and is at the time of writing even running as a progressive Democrat for the Montana House of Representatives.

In academic research too, this ideological resilience of children has been a topic of interest. For example, studies on children raised in other extreme environments, such as sectarian movements, suggest that while some remain members their entire lives, others eventually manage to rid themselves of the family ideology (Danley, 2005; De Baets et al., 2021; Lalich & McLaren, 2017). Nonetheless, these case-to-case differences remain difficult to understand. What caused Omar to break away from his upbringing, whereas Gudrun did not? What factors are at play here? And more generally speaking, what do we know about the ways in which extremist ideologies are passed on from one generation to the next? These questions are at the heart of this dissertation. I will approach them using the concept of 'intergenerational transmission', which refers to the process by which parents pass on various behaviors and beliefs to their children. The concept of intergenerational transmission has its roots in (evolutionary) biology, social learning theory, and cultural reproduction theory, but has generally become well-embedded in fields such as psychology, pedagogy, sociology, and criminology. Using a multi-disciplinary approach, insights from these fields will provide the backdrop of my empirical work.

In this Chapter, I start by reflecting on the concept of 'extremism' and its use in this dissertation. I will then describe the role of family members in processes of extremist radicalization, and how the concept of intergenerational transmission may help us to understand how these ideologies may persist across generations. Lastly, I will provide an overview of the core objectives of this dissertation, alongside an outline of the chapters to come.

DEFINING EXTREMISM

Although this dissertation revolves around 'extremist' ideologies, there is hardly an academic consensus on what extremism entails exactly (Bötticher, 2017; Stephens, Sieckelinck, & Boutellier, 2021; Williford, 2019). In academic literature, authors distinguish between ideological and behavioral extremism (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2010; Stephens, Sieckelinck, & Boutellier, 2021; Weine et al., 2017); violent and non-violent extremism (Holt et al., 2018; Schmid, 2013); collective and individual extremism (Hogg & Adelman, 2013; Wibisono, Louis, & Jetten, 2019); and political and religious extremism (Ezinga & Boelens, 2019; Lösel et al., 2020). Additionally, extremism is sometimes mentioned in conjunction with radicalism, even though these two concepts are notably distinct (Feddes, Nicholson & Doosje, 2015), particularly regarding the acceptance of violence in pursuit of ideological goals (Brunt, Murphy & Zedginidze, 2017; De Graaf, 2018). Extremists, unlike radicals, aim to subject society to their dogmatic and rigid ideology through the suppression of dissent, by use of violence if necessary (Borum, 2011; Van den Bos, 2019; Stephens, Sieckelinck, & Boutellier, 2021; Williford, 2019). In his fundamental work, Schmid (2013) identified four characteristics of extremists and their organizations. In his view, they are (1) anti-constitutional, anti-democratic, anti-pluralist, and authoritarian; (2) fanatical, intolerant, uncompromising, and adhering to strict black-and-white thinking; (3) against the rule of law and advocating a philosophy where ends justify means; (4) willing to achieve their goals through any means, including the use of mass political violence against opponents. To achieve their agendas, extremists prefer violence over persuasion, uniformity over diversity, collective goals over individual freedom, and command structures over dialogue (Schmid, 2013).

Since this dissertation is largely rooted in the Dutch security context (in its use of court rulings, Public Prosecutor files and various detained interview participants), I choose to follow the definition of extremism as used by the National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security (NCTV) of the Dutch Ministry of Justice. The NCTV defines extremism as "a phenomenon where individuals or groups, driven by ideological motives, are willing to violate the law to a serious extent or to engage in activities that undermine the democratic rule of law" (NCTV, 2020, translated from Dutch). However, while this definition provided an operational starting point, in practice I focused on two particular extremist movements: jihadism and right-wing extremism. The Dutch national intelligence services consider these two forms of extremism the most prominent threats in the Netherlands today (NCTV, 2023), which justifies a focus on these ideologies. While I acknowledge that intergenerational transmission can occur in various contexts, including left-wing extremist environments, these ideologies fall outside the scope of this project, for reasons of both perceived (security risk) relevance and feasibility constraints imposed by the limited means and timeframe of this research project.

Like with the concept of extremism, there is no universally accepted definition for jihadism (Sedgwick, 2015; Stenersen, 2020). This term is often used interchangeably with other concepts

such as Salafist-jihadism, violent Islamism, or militant Islam (De Poot et al., 2009; Lefèvre, 2021; Sedgwick, 2015). Jihadism is derived from the term 'jihad', which has two different meanings. In the Quran, 'jihad' refers to the moral duty for individual Muslims to live virtuously. Next to this 'greater' jihad of inner struggle is the 'lesser' jihad, also known as the 'holy war' (Berger, 2006; Peters, 1996; Wittendorp et al., 2017). The latter refers to the armed struggle that jihadists wage against those they perceive as enemies of Islam (Leede, 2017). In literature on extremism, this is the way the concept of jihad is most commonly used and understood – and this dissertation follows this practice.

Although jihadism is not synonymous with terrorism, adherence to a jihadist worldview has, in the past, led to terrorist actions. As professor in Arab and Islam Studies Mark Sedgwick (2015) states, "jihadism closely resembles terrorism in being essentially a means to an end, not an end in itself" (p. 39). Because jihadists seek fundamental societal and/or political change, it cannot be ruled out that they are willing to employ extreme means in achieving their goals (Sedgwick, 2015). In this dissertation, I once again follow the NCTV definition, which considers jihadism "[a] current within political Islam that, based on a specific interpretation of Salafist doctrine and the ideology of Sayyid Qutb, strives for global Islamic dominance through armed struggle (jihad), and hence for the re-establishment or preservation of the Islamic state (caliphate)" (NCTV, 2020, translated from Dutch).

In my research I am not only considering transmission processes in jihadist contexts, but also in right-wing extremist spheres – in light of the security threat posed by these ideologies (NCTV, 2023). The definitional struggles regarding the concept of jihadism also apply to right-wing extremism, albeit to a lesser extent (Carter, 2018; Pillo, 2023). While in the literature right-wing extremism is often conflated with related concepts (such as neo-Nazism, neo-fascism, and white supremacist extremism), there is generally a reasonable consensus on its definition, as noted by political scientist Elisabeth Carter (2018). Drawing on previous research by Dutch political scientist Cas Mudde (1995) and an analysis of 15 academic definitions of right-wing extremism, Carter identifies the five main characteristics of right-wing extremism. These include: (1) authoritarianism, or emphasizing conventional norms and values and traditional forms of governance; (2) nationalism, or a strong belief in the importance of one's own national or ethnic community; (3) racism and xenophobia, or exclusion of individuals not belonging to the national or ethnic community; (4) anti-democratic tendencies, or resistance to both the democratic system and its underlying principles; and (5) populism, or focusing on a perceived divide between the 'people' and 'the elite' (Carter, 2018; Mudde, 1995).

While some authors consider (the legitimization of) violence to be a core component of right-wing extremism (e.g., Lefere et al., 2015; Lucardie, 2007; Perry & Scrivens, 2018), this element is absent in Carter's (2018) definition. However, Carter (2018) follows Canadian psychologist Bob Altemeyer's (1983) work in acknowledging that authoritarianism can be accompanied by

aggression when one believes their in-group is under threat. According to the Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service (Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst, AIVD), right-wing extremism can take on violent forms, but this is not a necessary condition. The key elements that characterize right-wing extremism according to the AIVD are "xenophobia, hatred towards foreign (cultural) elements, and ultranationalism" (AIVD, 2022). Moreover, the AIVD notes that right-wing extremists pursue undemocratic goals, "with or without undemocratic means" (AIVD, 2022), with the use of violence being one of these potential means.

In my research, I diverge from the AIVD definition by placing greater emphasis on right-wing extremists' willingness to use violence, as to maintain a clear distinction between extremism and radicalism (see also Bötticher, 2017). In other words, I will focus on groups and individuals who directly or indirectly legitimize the use of violence in pursuit of their ideological goals. This approach aligns with a broader tradition of researchers who consider the legitimization of violence an inherent part of (right-wing) extremist ideologies (see, for example, Wahlström, Törnberg, & Ekbrand, 2021; Stakić, 2016).

EXTREMISM AND THE FAMILY CONTEXT

Over the past decades, a plethora of studies has been conducted on the social drivers and facilitators of extremist radicalization. For example, the role of peers has been relatively well-explored (e.g., Helfstein, 2012; Holt, 2019; Pels & De Ruyter, 2012). However, the role that family members might play in processes of radicalization, only gained scholarly attention in recent years (Noor, 2021). Weggemans, Van der Zwan, and Liem (2018) identify three different roles in that regard, based on interviews with experts and family members of radicalized individuals who travelled Syria. First, family members may play an inhibiting role, where they actively try to counter the radicalization of an individual. Second, family members may play a latent role – either being ambivalent towards the radicalization process or refraining from interference. According to the authors, the majority of the family members they interviewed fell into the latter category (Weggemans, Van der Zwan & Liem, 2018). Yet, at the ultimate end of the continuum, family members can also play a stimulating role in processes of radicalization. Here, family members "[support] to a greater or lesser extent a radicalization process or departure [to Syria], or hinder – in a later stadium – the return or reintegration of an individual" (Weggemans, Van der Zwan & Liem, p. 7, translated from Dutch). This stimulating role can be both direct (e.g., providing assistance in departure to Syria) or indirect in nature (e.g., encouraging participation in extremist activities).

These observations regarding the stimulating influence of family members, are mirrored in other studies as well. For example, Orbach (2004) previously described the material benefits that involvement in suicide terrorism may have for family members, which in some contexts might provide parents with an incentive to encourage children to engage in such actions. In a more

recent study of 44 Spanish jihadists and their recruitment methods, Vicente (2022) even found that half of these individuals had (attempted to) recruit next of kin. Similarly, in the context of right-wing extremism, Copeland and Marsden (2020) identify having family members with extremist worldviews as a potential risk factor for radicalization – although authors admit that for most radicalized individuals, having another family member involved in right-wing extremism is not the norm.

Two recent systematic literature studies similarly confirm the stimulating influence that family members may have in extremist radicalization. Wolfowicz et al. (2021) conducted a meta-analysis of 127 studies and found that having radicalized family members has a small but significant effect on the radicalization of individuals. Zych and Nasaescu (2022) also found that having extremist family members significantly increases the likelihood of radicalization. However, it should be noted that the latter systematic review includes merely two studies that examined the effect of family members' extremism on radicalization (Zych & Nasaescu, 2022). Finally, LaFree and colleagues (2018), using data on 1473 radicalized individuals in the US, found that having radicalized family members increases the likelihood of (participation in) extremist violence when compared to radicalized individuals that do not have this background. Although this effect might be caused by the (indirect) transmission of radicalization risk factors as opposed to the (direct) intergenerational transmission of ideology, it does support previous findings suggesting that family members play a key role in either stimulating or countering radicalization processes.

Nonetheless, questions regarding the nature of transmission processes within extremist families persist. This research gap is problematic not only from an academic or policy perspective but may also lead to incorrect assessments and/or harmful interventions in individual cases. With this dissertation I aim to shed light on the ways in which extremist parents raise their children, the processes and mechanisms that may stimulate or hamper generational continuity of their violent beliefs, and the long-term effects associated with these processes. For this, let us turn to the concept of 'intergenerational transmission', which I will briefly reflect upon in the next section.

FROM 'BRAINWASHING' TO INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION

While as we have seen, empirical research on family members' roles in the transmission of extremism is generally lacking, media have not refrained from paying attention to this phenomenon. Over the last decade, general awareness of family influences on radicalization seems to have increased. Specifically, the role that parents may have in the radicalization of their children gained media attention following the collapse of the so-called Islamic State caliphate in 2019. Ever since, European countries have been grappling with the challenge of repatriating women and their children residing in camps in Syria and Turkey. Although in the Netherlands, the Supreme Court ruled in 2020 that the Dutch government is not legally obligated to repatriate foreign fighters and

their family members (Hoge Raad, 2020), at the time of writing, several dozens of them have been brought back to the Netherlands. This decision has been met with both praise and skepticism in the media. On one side of the coin, repatriation allows for these individuals to be subjected to a due legal process in their home country, simultaneously relieving Kurdish authorities from the burden of their captivity. Moreover, with regard to the children of foreign fighters, it has been argued that they may have been at risk of being radicalized while residing in Kurdish camps, and that this process can be reversed through a well-structured process of reintegrating them into Dutch society. This consideration has previously inspired other European countries, including Belgium, Germany and Finland, to repatriate the children of (former) IS-fighters (Eelbode, 2021; Lamote, 2020).

On the other side, there are fears that returning children are beyond redemption and should be kept outside of Dutch borders, some even referring to them as a 'Trojan Horse' (Van San, 2019). Others draw parallels between the debate around IS-children and the way in which children of members of the Dutch National Socialist movement (NSB) were perceived following the Second World War. Here too, it was feared that children of individuals with extremist ideas might follow in their parents' footsteps, and fostered the belief that these children were in need of 'moral re-education' (Van San, 2019).

In both cases, the main question revolves around the susceptibility of a child's mind, and what it takes for children to adopt their parents' violent ideas. Yet, in understanding the relation between extremist parents and their children, media outlets often resort to a rather specific discourse, revolving around terms such as 'brainwashing' and 'indoctrination' (see Moore, 2018). Generally speaking, the assumption underlying these concepts is one of parents using psychological manipulation and/or coercion to instill extremist ideologies into their children's minds (see Stein, 2021). Over the years, it has become apparent that in academia, too, the use of this terminology seems increasingly common when it comes to discussing the role of family members in processes of radicalization (e.g., Cuevas, 2008; McCue et al., 2017; Vale, 2018; Vicente, 2022). In this dissertation, I argue against the use of terms such as 'brainwashing' and 'indoctrination' to understand this phenomenon, and instead propose a more general adoption of the 'intergenerational transmission' framework.

First, the concepts of 'brainwashing' and 'indoctrination' enjoy little empirical support. These terms were first introduced in the United States, following the Korean War (1950-1953) and the Cold War (1945-1991) (Introvigne, 2004), where they served to understand how seemingly 'normal' people could convert to putative 'evil' ideologies, such as Communism. At the same time, the concept of brainwashing grew popular due to a strong anti-cult discourse within American society, as a reaction to all kinds of New Religious Movements (NRM's) that emerged in the 1970s (Young, 2012). Since then, decades of research have been conducted on the scientific validity of the brainwashing and indoctrination theses, yet with little convincing results. Authors have pointed out

that the concept of brainwashing disregards the social context in which radicalization takes place (Greil & Rudy, 1985); while others take issue with the term's apparent negation of free will (Hintjes, 2019) and its dismissal of individual differences in ideological formation (Richardson, 1985). Nowadays, the general academic consensus is therefore that 'brainwashing' and 'indoctrination' are empty and unfulfilling explanations for processes of radicalization (Young, 2012).

Second, these terms suggest a general passivity regarding children's own role in the transmission process. This contradicts the assumption that intergenerational transmission is a co-creation of both parent and child, which predominates in contemporary social-constructivist socialization theories. These theories propose that transmission arises from everyday interactions within the family (LaRossa & Reitzes, 2009; Plourde & Alawiye, 2003) rather than being a linear, parent-driven process (see Goodman, 1985). From this perspective, the indoctrination frame simplifies a complex phenomenon in which both parent and child play a part.

Third, the use of these terms is normative, in the sense that it is usually applied to ideologies that mainstream society views as problematic – or at the very least as *abnormal*. The fact that 'indoctrination' is chosen over terms like 'training', 'education', or 'upbringing' reveals our own disapproval of the beliefs in question (Moore, 2018; see also Coates, 2016; Young, 2012). As such, the persistence of this terminology in public discourse underscores the importance of a broader recognition of intergenerational transmission as a concept and phenomenon.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the indoctrination and brainwashing frame is deterministic, as it negates the fact that children raised in extremist environments may ultimately break away from the family ideology. Contrary to what these concepts imply, children are nor merely passive receivers of the family ideology – nor do parents hold the power to determine their children's worldviews throughout all stages of their lives. This is clearly illustrated by the cases discussed in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, which aptly show how individuals raised in extremist ideologies are sometimes able to break away from their extremist families (and might even undergo a 180 degree shift ideological convictions) Although there is still limited research on the factors stimulating desistance among children from extremist households, these examples suggest that even children raised by prominent terrorists are not pre-determined to follow in their parents' ideological footsteps.

Based on these considerations, I conclude that the 'brainwashing' and 'indoctrination' frame is inaccurate at best, and harmful at worst, when trying to understand extremist family dynamics. I therefore propose a broader general incorporation of the concept of 'intergenerational transmission', which allows for a multidisciplinary analysis of the (dis)continuation of extremist ideas. In this dissertation, I understand this concept as to refer to a multidirectional process in which both parents and children directly or indirectly influence each other's beliefs, norms, and values (Bernardi, 2013; Roest, 2007). I will specifically focus on intergenerational transmission from parental figure (including biological, step-, foster-, grand- and adoption parents) to child, to

better understand parental influences in the ideological formation of children. In Chapter 2 of this dissertation, I will further elaborate on the (theoretical) background of this concept, and its use in a plethora of academic disciplines.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This dissertation aims to understand processes of intergenerational transmission in contemporary extremist families. As such, it provides a first unique insight behind the closed doors of these families, using conceptual and theoretical tools to interpret underlying family dynamics. Ultimately, this dissertation can serve as a guide to help better understand what processes of transmission *may* look like in practice, while acknowledging the unique characteristics of each case. As previously mentioned, the focus of this study is on right-wing extremist and jihadist families, in light of the potential security threats associated with these ideologies (NCTV, 2023). Approaching intergenerational transmission (IGT) from a largely unidirectional[1] (parent-to-child) perspective, I am interested in the three core elements of transmission processes: (1) the parents as 'transmitters'; (2) children as 'recipients'; (3) the family ideology as the object of transmission. When referring to 'parents', my scope encompasses not just biological parents but also extends to foster parents, adoptive parents, stepparents, and grandparents. Additionally, I adopt a broad interpretation of the concept 'ideology', including the transmission of both cognitive and behavioral patterns within extremist milieus. As such, I am not just focusing on the doctrines that parents may transmit to their children, but also the problematic (i.e., intolerant or violent) and non-problematic behaviors that may flow from these worldviews.

Using a wide array of data, including existing academic literature, interviews with practitioners and (former) extremists, court rulings, aggregated intelligence data on Dutch jihadist families, I aim to answer the following research questions (see also Table 1):

1. What is the estimated scope of the intergenerational transmission (IGT) of extremism in the Netherlands? How many children are at risk of being raised with extremist ideas?
2. How can we explain the intergenerational transmission (IGT) of extremist ideologies? What mechanisms are involved in this process?
3. To what extent and how can various factors and dynamics (within and beyond the family) stimulate or inhibit extremist transmission (IGT) processes?
4. To what extent does the intergenerational transmission (IGT) of extremism have long-term consequences for the families involved?

[1] That is to say, this dissertation only looks at those instances in which parents are the main 'source' of the extremist ideology. While it has been generally acknowledged that children, too, can influence parents in their radicalization process (with several of such examples discussed in the media, see Elibol, 2018), these cases fall beyond the scope of this dissertation.

In answering these questions, I opt for a multidisciplinary approach, drawing from various fields, such as psychology, sociology, and criminology, to comprehensively understand how extremist ideologies are transmitted from one generation to the next. By taking this approach, this dissertation contributes to our (currently still limited) empirical knowledge about the intergenerational transmission of extremist beliefs. The insights gained will not only deepen our understanding of this phenomenon, but also offer a basis for developing targeted interventions and policy recommendations aimed at mitigating the intergenerational transmission of extremist ideologies and its long-term societal impacts.

Table 1. Schematic outline of research objectives

RQ	*Focus*	*Data used*	*Discussed in Chapter*
#1	Scope of IGT	Intelligence data	5
#2	Mechanisms of IGT	Interviews, PP files & Court rulings	6, 7, 8
#3	Stimulating/inhibiting factors of IGT	Interviews, PP files & Court rulings	6, 7, 8
#4	Long-term consequences after IGT	Interviews, PP files & Court rulings	9

BACKGROUND OF THIS PROJECT

The research presented in this dissertation is based on two subsequently funded projects, for both of which I served as the main researcher. The first project, which was funded by the Research and Data Center (Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek- en Datacentrum, WODC) of the Dutch Ministry of Justice, ran from August 2020 to June 2021 (final report: *Van Ouder op Kind,* 2021). The goal of this study was to understand existing empirical insights on the intergenerational transmission of extremism, based on a systematic literature review. The main findings of this study are presented in Chapter 3 (Empirical Background) of this dissertation. Although originally, radical groups, sectarian movements and cults were also included in the WODC project, only its results regarding transmission processes in extremist families are included here – in light of the security threats associated with jihadist and right-wing extremist ideologies (see NCTV, 2023). The observations pertaining to processes of transmission in extremist households, ultimately laid the groundwork for its empirical follow-up study.

This second research project, which was funded by the Dutch National for Counterterrorism and Security (Nationaal Coördinator Terrorismebestrijding en Veiligheid, NCTV) ran from March 2022 to June 2024 (final report: *De Intergenerationele Overdracht van Extremisme,* 2024). This study built upon the WODC project, as it aimed to gain more empirical insight into the mechanisms through which extremist transmission might take place within families. Analyzing qualitative data involving right-wing extremist and jihadist households, the project provides a layered picture of the dimensions of intergenerational transmission, which largely rests on the model that arose out of the systematic literature review. The methodology of the NCTV-project is described in Chapter 4, and its empirical results are presented in Chapters 6 to 9.

Alongside these two funded projects, I conducted a study together with the Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service (Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst, AIVD). Here, intelligence data was used to examine the scope of jihadist families in the Netherlands, and as such, to better understand the total amount of children possibly raised by jihadist parents. This project ran from June 2021 to August 2024. No funding was received for this project. The findings of this project were submitted for publication in *Tijdschrift voor Veiligheid* (as of February 2025). They are presented in Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

OUTLINE

This dissertation follows the following structure. To understand the theoretical framework of intergenerational transmission, Chapter 2 provides an overview of the theories that laid the groundwork of this concept. I explain how historically, disciplines such as (behavioralist and developmental) psychology, sociology, victimology, criminology, and theology have all attempted to study various aspects of the intergenerational transmission process. I specifically zoom in on the ways intergenerational transmission as a concept has previously been used to understand generational continuation in delinquency, religious beliefs, and (collective) trauma.

In Chapter 3, I focus on the empirical background of the intergenerational transmission of extremism. What is known about this phenomenon within academic literature? Based on a systematic literature review of empirical studies, I describe the most recent insights on this topic, and identify the gaps that still require attention. I discuss how the literature shows that, in understanding the intergenerational transmission of extremism, ideological socialization mechanisms, as well as everyday parenting practices and internalized narratives of parenthood, are of pivotal importance. It is through the interplay of these three dimensions that intergenerational transmission can take place. This observation forms the basis for the rest of this dissertation, and Chapter 6 to 8 in particular.

Chapter 4 contains a description of the empirical methodology of this dissertation and a discussion of the ways data from intelligence sources, interviews with practitioners and (former) extremists, and the analysis of judicial case files aid to answering my research questions. In the empirical chapters that follow, I specify the results of my research. First, Chapter 5 contains an overview of the nature and scope of jihadist families in The Netherlands. Based on unique intelligence data, I outline the quantitative details of the family context of individuals that the Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) perceive to pose a potential jihadist threat. This allows us to better understand the nature and characteristics of these families and the scope of this phenomenon, which serves as a backdrop for the qualitative chapters to come.

Chapter 6 (Socialization mechanisms), Chapter 7 (Parenting practices) and Chapter 8 (Narratives of parenthood) coherently provide insight into the mechanisms of extremist

transmission. By subsequently discussing the socialization mechanisms that extremist parents employ, the everyday parenting practices that may stimulate intergenerational transmission, and parents' internalized narratives regarding extremist parenthood, I demonstrate how extremist ideas can take hold in children raised in these environments. Such an integrated approach acknowledges the complex and layered nature of this phenomenon.

In Chapter 9, I focus on the long-term effects intergenerational transmission. How do (former) extremist parents and their children look back on their family histories? What helped them in breaking away from these beliefs? In answering these questions, I hope to ultimately contribute to the development of prevention and intervention measures for (children of) extremist families. Finally, in Chapter 10, the Discussion and conclusion, I reflect on the key take-aways of this dissertation. I combine the empirical insights from my research with the theoretical and empirical background discussed in Chapter 2 and 3, to answer the research questions and to explain how these findings aid to existing knowledge. I discuss the limitations of my methods and make several suggestions for future research endeavors.