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

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CHAPTER 7

PARENTING PRACTICES

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INTRODUCTION

The everyday choices parents make in raising their children are an important aspect of (the study of) the intergenerational transmission of extremist ideologies. Ultimately, seemingly irrelevant everyday interactions can play a crucial role in the development of an individual's personality and beliefs. In their parenting practices, parents may inadvertently convey certain norms and values, which lay the foundation for children's worldviews. Moreover, parent-child interactions can influence children's social-emotional development, as seen in Chapter 3. A loving, supportive and safe upbringing will support healthy identity development in children, which may inhibit the appeal of extremist messaging.

As discussed in Chapter 3, according to attachment theories based on the work of John Bowlby (1979), "secure" parenting involves parents being sensitive, responsive, and consistent in addressing children's needs. Parents provide comfort, affirmation and support when a child requires it – helping them in developing a sense of security and trust in themselves and the world around them. At the same time, parents are able to set clear and appropriate boundaries, thus providing their child with consistency and structure. Finally, they encourage their children to develop a sense of autonomy and encourage their children to explore the world independently and to take risks (Bowlby, 1979, see also Bretherton, 1992; Stevenson-Hilde, 2007). When parents exhibit unstable parenting practices, these elements are missing, which may result in the emotional bond between parent and child being damaged, ultimately potentially causing children to develop insecure attachment styles.

As discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, insecure attachment styles may increase susceptibility to extremist views among children. The theories discussed in this chapter suggest that insecure attachment can cause children to develop an unhealthy need for recognition and appreciation from their parents. Adopting their parents' extremist views may be a way to gain this sought-after parental approval (see, for example, Magai et al., 2000, on the relationship between insecure attachment styles and approval-seeking behavior). Moreover, following Merz, Schuengela and Schulze's (2007) thinking on intergenerational solidarity, it can be suggested that insecurely attached children may become overly emotionally commit to their parents' ideologies, due to misplaced feelings of moral obligation. This could in turn facilitate processes of intergenerational transmission.

Yet, attachment theory could also aid to these processes in more indirect ways. It has been well-established in psychological studies that insecure attachment styles are associated with a lack of self-esteem (e.g. Foster, Kernis & Goldman, 2007; Passanisi, et al., 2015). From this, it can be hypothesized that insecurely attached children may also be extra vulnerable to the false sense of security and 'belonging' presented by extremist messaging. In extremist families, the parental ideology can offer children a sense of community and identity that they may not be able to find outside of the family context. Furthermore, insecurely attached children tend to be more anxious about the outside world (see Lee & Hankin, 2009), and so the social isolation often employed

in extremist households (see the section 'Social isolation' in the previous Chapter) may have a stronger effect on their development. Likewise, it is possible that the fearful and hostile disposition of extremist parents is more easily embraced by insecurely attached children because of their limited identity development, which may similarly prompt the transmission of extremism.

In this Chapter I will examine the ways in which extremist parents raise their children, focusing on three different domains. First, I will describe the ways in which parents raise their children within their regular home environment. Here, I am specifically interested in the elements that may indicate secure or insecure parenting practices. Second, the ways in which jihadist parents raised their children while residing in Islamic State territory will be explored. The observations regarding this specific subgroup likely do not translate to extremist families who did not travel to warzones abroad. Nonetheless, examining the parenting practices exhibited in this context is all the more relevant if we want to understand the intergenerational transmission of jihadism in the Netherlands and beyond. Third and last, I will consider the ways in which incarcerated interviewees raise their children. The unique obstacles and challenges posed by parenthood while residing in a correctional facility will be discussed, alongside a reflection on the potentially implications for the intergenerational transmission of extremism.

PARENTING IN THE HOME ENVIRONMENT

Secure parenting practices

Although popular perception suggests otherwise, the current study indicates that extremist parents are generally capable of providing their children with a secure childhood. For example, almost all interview respondents who come from an extremist family background indicate that as a child, they felt loved by their parents. Brooke, the daughter of right-wing extremist parents, recalls: "I think to most people, we seemed like a pretty normal family (…) My parents loved me, I loved them." She describes having positive memories of her childhood, despite the fact that her parents harbored a lot of hatred and anger. "My father in particular was very playful and engaged with me," she explains (Interview Brooke). She remembers how her father would often be play-fighting with her or tickling her, and that he regularly took her to amusement parks. Another interviewee from the United Kingdom, Madison, talks about her former right-wing extremist grandmother, who played an important role in her upbringing:

> "I loved her very much, although she was a very complicated person. She had a very upper-class formality about her. But on the other hand, I did also really, you know, I loved her… She did do funny things with me. She taught me little bits of cooking and she had a chair in her kitchen which she used to spin me on, that chair. So, she would occasionally do fun things as well" (Interview Madison)

These observations reflect the loyalty and trust that was discussed earlier (see section 'Loyalty and trust' in the previous Chapter), which could have had a distorting effect on respondents' memories. Yet the stories of parents themselves also seem to support the suggestion that they can offer a secure climate for their children. For example, a Dutch right-wing extremist father makes explicit that he is very involved in the lives of his children. As he explains, he helps his children with their newspaper route, builds Playmobil castles with them, and bakes cupcakes as a school treat on his children's birthdays (Interview Vincent). He is also the trainer his sons' soccer team, and participates in the parents' committee of his children's primary school (Interview Vincent).

In a jihadist context, parents also seem to be able to offer their children a safe and stable upbringing. Dutch interviewee William, for example, talks about his (former) jihadist brother and his children. "They [the brother and his partner] were very involved parents. Very caring, almost overprotective", he says. "Bordering on obsessive even." According to William, the mother of the children (his brother's partner) did everything she could to protect her family. "Everything in their home was neatly trimmed, spick-and-span, everything was exactly where it should be. I'd even be afraid to move or touch anything. (…) And their children were like that, too." Nevertheless, his brother's family was "warm", according to William, and the parents and their children were "very close" to each other. A Dutch grandmother also describes her (former) jihadist daughter as a very caring mother. "She can be very protective, even when [her son] goes outside to play and so on, she is very afraid that he will get dirty" (Interview Irene). She emphasizes that this overprotectiveness comes from good intentions. "She just wants the best for him. (…) There is really a lot of love between those two [the mother and her son]" (Interview Irene). Former jihadist William is therefore of the opinion that extremist families do not necessarily constitute "problem families":

> "In theory, you can be a Nazi or an ISIS supporter, but that does not make you incapable of raising your children. Unfortunately, there are a lot of people who think that. But you can be a very normal parent in all other respects" (Interview William)

Especially between mothers and their children who have returned from Syria and Iraq, a remarkably strong bond seems to exist, the interviews indicate. "Everyone thinks that those women who have returned are extremely tough on their children," one of them says about her (former) jihadist sister (Interview Rachelle). "But that is not at all the case. They are very gentle and loving. (…) All of those mothers are very busy with caring for each other's children and so on" (Interview Rachelle). Detained interviewee Karim says explains his view on the women returning from IS territory: "Every mother loves her children. Of course, there is no doubt about that," he says. "And no child will ever say: I don't want my mother. That bond between them is so incredibly strong. Especially among

mothers who have been detained in [Kurdish] camps with their children." According to him, policy makers and politicians tend to disregard these considerations (Interview Karim).

Seven of the court cases and six of the Public Prosecutor's (PP) files similarly show that jihadist parents can indeed raise their children with loving warmth and kindness. For example, Court Case 19 describes a radicalized suspect as "a loving, caring mother" and emphasizes that there are "no signs of immediate danger" regarding her children, according to the judges. Court Case 26 additionally indicates that the bond between a mother (who has traveled to IS territory) and her daughter is very strong, despite the fact that the mother in the case tried to transmit her jihadist ideas to her daughter. Furthermore, in PP File 8, a witness describes a radicalized suspect as a "sweet, devoted and driven mother". Another witness from the same case file claims: "The child was doing well there [with the parents]. She was well cared for, the mother often played with her" (PP File 8). Although the child's parents could at times be violent towards each other, the child itself was never maltreated, according to the witness (File 8). This statement is supported by the rest of the case file.

Contrary to my expectations, this loving involvement in children's lives does not only apply to mothers. In extremist households, fathers too, seem to find it important to build a good relationship with their children, the data shows. In PP File 12, for example, witnesses describe the radicalized suspect in this case as being "crazy about his children" and "always busy with the children", and claim that he "always likes to look after the children". In another file, a forensic psychiatric report writes about a jihadist father: "He treats the children well and is loving towards them" (PP File 1). Moreover, PP File 9 similarly shows that male extremist suspects consider their bond with their children important. For example, the file describes confidential recordings of a conversation between the suspect (being the father of young children) and his friend. The friend indicates that he is tired because the day before, he spent the entire evening at a local cafe. The suspect responds:

> "You are crazy. I'll always be home at half past eight, nine o'clock. By then I'm already home with my kids. I read to them, and sometimes I wear this kind of robe and I make them laugh. I have a lot to do at home. Why would I spend my time sitting at this cafe?! I'd only be looking at those ugly faces!" (PP File 9)

Five of the Public Prosecutor's (PP) files contain confidential recordings, describing both fathers and mothers regularly playing or frolicking with their children (PP File 1; PP File 2; PP File 3; PP File 8), laugh or make jokes (PP File 2; PP File 12), and that they take their children to amusement parks, playgrounds, the local carnival, the theater or a ball pit (PP File 2; PP File 3; PP File 8; PP File 12). Jihadist parents, just like non-extremist parents, take their children to school every day (PP File 2); think it is important that children eat enough fruit and vegetables (PP File 2; PP File 12) and that they

go to bed on time (PP File 8). Two male suspects from PP File 12 even regularly exchange children's clothing, again suggesting that it is not just the mothers who bear the caretaking responsibilities.

All these examples together point to the loving involvement that extremist parents might exhibit in their children's upbringing. Although public opinion and media reports suggest otherwise, they are not different from non-extremist parents in that respect. Ultimately, these observations suggest that children from extremist families may indeed be able to form healthy attachments to their parents, which could mitigate the risk of intergenerational transmission.

Insecure parenting practices

Regardless, even though extremist parents can provide their children with a safe and loving upbringing, this is not necessarily always the case. The data shows that less favorable parenting situations also occur in extremist households. Seven interviewees from right-wing extremist families discuss their dysfunctional childhood, which included physical and emotional abuse (Interview Jeffrey; Interview Charlotte; Interview Liam; Interview Michael), neglect (Interview Liam; Interview Jeffrey; Interview Brooke), substance abuse and addictions (Interview Brooke; Interview Ethan) and sexual abuse (Interview Charlotte; Interview Ethan) by their parents. Three interviewees explicitly mention criminal behavior among parents (e.g., Interview Ethan; Interview Brooke; Interview Lukas). Moreover, in various cases broken family situations or parental separations are mentioned (Interview Liam; Interview Michael; Interview Jocelyn; Interview Lukas; Court Case 6; Court Case 11; Court Case 14; Court Case 16). The American interviewee Jeffrey talks about his right-wing extremist father:

> "My father was a very abusive man, so growing up with him was no fun at all. By the time I left home I was severely damaged by, you know, the way my father treated me and the way he abused me. It took me many years to even start the process of trying to heal from that, and even now it is still work in process" (Interview Jeffrey)

Later he adds:

> "[My mother] said that during the very earliest years of our childhood, [my father] wouldn't really do anything, he wouldn't take us out, really, he wouldn't hold us, he wouldn't change our diapers or anything like that. (...) He really didn't want to have anything to do with us" (Interview Jeffrey)

US interviewee Brooke claims that as a child, her family situation was equally unstable and unsafe. "You could take the [right-wing extremist] ideology out of it, and you'd still have a very dysfunctional situation," she says (Interview Brooke). She remembers as a child being so afraid of her right-wing extremist father and his explosive personality that she did not dare to use the toilet – which was located next to her father's bedroom. Even though her mother insisted, she continued to refuse, resulting in frequent stomach aches, she says. "I was too scared; I was too paralyzed. My mom eventually had to put an empty lard can there on the kitchen floor for me to defecate in, because that's how afraid I was" (Interview Brooke).

Dysfunctional parenting practices also appear to occur in a jihadist context. Court Case 24 and 25 involve "structural physical and verbal abuse" between radicalized parents. In Court Case 22 it is mentioned that a jihadist suspect calls his wife "slut" and "whore", and forces her to eat mouthfuls of sambal (Court Case 22). Furthermore, Court Case 9 describes children being profoundly fearful of their radicalized father. According to the mother in this case, they are extremely afraid of him and "completely estranged from him" (Court Case 9). The children themselves have indicated "with great certainty" that they do not want to stay in touch with their father – not by telephone calls or post cards – according to the Child Protection Service (Court Case 9).

Various Public Prosecutor's (PP) files also discuss concerns about domestic violence between parents (PP File 1; PP File 3; PP File 8). "He was a very good father, but a terrible husband", a female jihadist suspect says about her partner (PP File 3). Some case files additionally mention suspicions of substance abuse among suspects, including the abuse of hard and soft drugs, alcohol and nitrous oxide (PP File 1; PP File 2; PP File 9). In one of these cases, a jihadist father also appears to be involved in drug trafficking.

The data indicates that physical, verbal and emotional abuse of children also occurs (observed in five Public Prosecutor's (PP) files). PP File 2 describes that a (former) jihadist suspect regularly hits her children and shouts at them. During these outbursts of anger, she calls her children *kelba* (bitch) and *zabal* (shit). In PP File 12, a suspect gets angry because his daughter states something with certainty, which she later turns out to be unsure about. The suspect calls her a "brat" and threatens her, saying he never wants to see her lying to him again (PP File 12). An excerpt of the confidential recordings in the same file:

> "[Suspect] hits one of the children, the child starts crying.
> [Suspect] reads the Quran and shouts at one of the daughters to go stand somewhere else. The child says "no, no" while sobbing. [The suspect] says at one point: "If you don't answer, I'm going to pinch you." [The child] starts sobbing and says it hurts. [Suspect] says: "good for you"" (PP File 12)

Nevertheless, two of the Public Prosecutor's (PP) files suggest that parents sometimes correct each other when they lose their temper. In PP File 9, a mother appears to experience so much stress from her husband's criminal conviction, that she takes it out on her children. The suspect – being the father of the children – tries to bring her to reason, even though he resides in custody. Over a phone call, he tells her: "Don't hit [the children], don't hit them. When they grow up, they will start doing the same". The mother responds: "But they are behaving badly". To which the suspect says: "Then go outside with them and walk it out" (PP File 9). A similar dynamic occurs in PP File 12. Here, a male jihadist suspect tells his wife that their daughters were bullying each other, which is why he was "a little strict" with them. An excerpt of confidential recordings in the file:

> "[The suspect] tells his wife not to get angry with [daughter 1], and asks her to only tell [daughter 2] that daddy was sad and angry with her, and that she should give her sister a kiss more often. (…) Later, the parents talk about the children again. The suspect says [to his wife]: "Don't get angry with [daughter 1] and give kisses to both, [daughter 1 and daughter 2]" (PP File 12)

In both cases, it turns out to be the father who corrects the mother in her approach to raising the children. This observation goes against previous studies discussed in Chapter 4, which claim that in extremist families, mothers bear the main task of childrearing (see Copeland, 2019; Dauber, 2017; Windisch, 2019). Moreover, the father in PP File 9 exhibits a great deal of self-reflection regarding the possible intergenerational transmission of domestic violence ("Don't hit [the children], don't hit them. When they grow up, they will start doing the same", PP File 9). This was not observed in the rest of the case files.

Ambivalent parenting practices

In some instances, parenting practices seem to be rather ambivalent, with parental expressions of love or appreciation quickly turning into anger. This is illustrated by four Public Prosecutor's (PP) files on jihadist families and three interviews with respondents from right-wing extremist family backgrounds. In PP File 12, for example, confidential recordings describe a suspect playing with their children ("They are clearly having a lot of fun", according to PP File 12), yet, the following morning, the suspect shouts at their children for not getting dressed. In the same case file: "[The suspect] and the children laugh together. A little later [the suspect] scolds one of the children because she was talking through something" (PP File 12). PP File 2 further underscores this ambivalence. An excerpt from confidential recordings:

> "[The mother] gives [her son] a kiss. [The mother] tells him to be nice. [The son] is not allowed to touch something, starts crying and is sent to his room. [The mother] says: "Unbelievable, what a child. I hate you, I swear, I hate you. I hate how you act. You drive me crazy, you really do. I'm going to tell them to come pick you up. Even better, I will send you to the *mushrikeen* [polytheists] – that will be better for you than you stay with me, *wallah*. I can't handle you. You are being very difficult" (PP File 2)

This quote illustrates how quickly parents can switch from loving to loathing. It also shows how parents use threats of rejection ("I'm going to tell them to come pick you up (…) I will send you to the *mushrikeen*", PP File 2) in an attempt to get their children in line. This suggests that powerlessness is the main driver of this ambivalence: the particular mother in PP File 2 clearly indicates that she does not know how to deal with the child's behavior and that she feels desperate.

Said ambivalence is similarly observed in three interviews pertaining to right-wing extremist contexts. Being the daughter of right-wing extremist parents, the British interviewee Jocelyn was never really sure of her parents' mood. "Sometimes there were moments when they would show their care and concern, but in the blink of an eye they would be guilt-tripping me and accusing me of betraying my roots" (Interview Jocelyn). According to her, it did not matter whether she had actually done something wrong: her parents would always find something that to them illustrated her lack of commitment to the family ideology (Interview Jocelyn). This is also reflected in the story of the former right-wing extremist Brendon. While he does not doubt the love his mother had for him, he thinks that she was not always able to express it: "My mother's love for me was unconditional; her relationship with me was very conditional", he summarizes (Interview Brendon).

PARENTING PRACTICES IN 'THE CALIPHATE'

In addition to parenting practices in the home environment, much of the data concerning (former) jihadist parents describe the ways in which children were raised in Islamic State territory. Dutch interviewee Nour talks about everyday life in the 'caliphate' with her children:

> "Our life in IS territory was not very different from that in the Netherlands. Yeah, sure, the environment was different, but each day I just got up, ate breakfast, and then instead of the kids going to school, I homeschooled them. Simply in Dutch. An Egyptian friend would teach them Arabic and math" (Interview Nour)

She claims that her children "really enjoyed" their time in Iraq – explaining that they played outside a lot and had a lot of friends. "If I have to be honest – and this may sound strange – but I really think they were happy there" (Interview Nour). Even in the Kurdish detention camp where they stayed after the fall of the caliphate, her children had a good time. "Nowadays, they sometimes say that they miss the camp, they have many positive memories of it. They played a lot, built a lot… Very imaginative" (Interview Nour). Another (former) jihadist father also says that he managed to build "a very good bond" with his children while residing in IS territory. "I played with them a lot. I would often take the children to the playground – there are several small amusement parks there – or to friends' houses. My friends there were all married men with children, so they would play there," he remembers (Interview Abdelkader). While in Syria, he considered it crucial for his children's development to continue to go to school– especially stressing the importance language lessons. "We understood that they would be at a serious disadvantage if they only started school at the age of seven, because neither I nor their mother really speak Arabic or Syrian," he explains (Interview Abdelkader). He says he considers himself a good father, although he felt that overall, he could not be there enough for his children while in IS territory. "I tried my best. I also failed at times, because I often could not be there. But when I was there, I tried to give them all of my attention. Yeah, I think they loved me a lot" (Interview Abdelkader).

A female (former) jihadist suspect similarly looks back positively on her time in IS territory. To the police, she describes that she and her family tried to mimic their Dutch everyday routine as much as possible:

> "I'm actually a very good mother. It went very well. In Syria, I tried to do as many European things as possible with my kids. As far as the circumstances allowed, of course. For example, baking cookies and singing songs. I had a routine. I also potty trained the children. [Child 1] after 1 year and [child 2] after 1 year and 3 months" (PP File 3)

When she decided to escape IS territory with her children, she tried to keep the flight as light-hearted as possible. "I built sand castles with my children – I tried to get through it by playing with them," she says (PP File 3). In another case a similar story emerges:

> "Police officer: "What did your children consciously understand from your flight [from IS territory]?"
> Suspect: "(…) At the last place we stayed at, I decorated a room and collected toys, and I started playing with them as much as possible. To keep [my children] away from all the violence as much as possible. To shut out the negative experiences as much as possible. And there I taught [my daughter] … Look, of course she hears all kinds of things, for example about the *kuffar*, which means 'disbelievers'. And so, I taught her that *kuffar* are just (…) people who shoot. They are bad, because they hurt people. By doing so, I tried to protect her from the (inaudible) of ISIS. But I don't think I could have done that for long – if I had stayed there much longer, I wouldn't have been able to. But at that moment, I did my best to protect her as much as possible" (PP File 8)

Other (former) jihadist interviewees look back less positively on their time in the caliphate. A detained respondent, Abdelkader, describes his life in Syria at the time as "very stressful". He lived in Aleppo with his wife and children. "No electricity, no running water. Sometimes no food for days. And also, in terms of medical care, everything was so tiring and so stressful" (Interview Abdelkader). The persistent stress and uncertainty took a significant toll on his relationship with his wife. "We were constantly arguing, and that only became worse when we had children. The situation was intolerable. Eventually we just decided to break up". Abdelkader lost all contact with his children as a result, but he has made peace with that. "I know she is a very good mother. I'm really not worried about that. I know the children are in good hands" (Interview Abdelkader).

Only one interviewee mentions children being trained by IS to become jihadist fighters. A Dutch respondent, former jihadist William, describes his brother's children receiving firearms training while residing in the IS caliphate. In the rest of the interviews, such explicitly violent training for children was not mentioned. Eight of the (former) jihadist interviewees I spoke to are of the opinion that it is therefore not justified that the media continues to maintain this image of returned children as 'terrorists in the making'. "I really don't believe that. I mean, they are *children*," imprisoned interviewee Karim says. "They literally live day to day. They can't even remember what they ate yesterday – and you're going to tell me that they have all those kinds of ideas, or that they have come kind of deep hatred?! Come on, what scaremongering" (Interview Karim). Another (former) jihadist detainee says that she cannot imagine that children raised in IS territory were raised in hatred. "What mother wants her child to walk around with a knife in his

hand?! I really don't believe that" (Interview Samira). In her opinion, the ways Dutch authorities approach returned children is vastly exaggerated. "They look way too much into it. If a child picks up a toy gun, you should not immediately draw all kinds of conclusions. You can just buy those things in store" (Interview Samira).

Nonetheless, three other interviewees are of the opinion children raised in IS territory will automatically be taught to hate the Netherlands. One of them explains:

> "All those women who returned from IS territory have children. And sure, there will be women who are going to raise their children to *do certain things*. But hey, if you leave those women in a [Kurdish detention] camp for five years, what do you expect? That they will tell their children that the Netherlands is the best country in the world? If that's what you expect from them, you should've repatriated them [from Syria and Iraq] on the very first day, and treat them as you would have treated any Dutch woman. That's the difference" (Interview Mustafa)

Although it is unclear what Mustafa means by '*doing certain things*'– the rest of the interview suggests he is referring to committing a terrorist attack:

> "The Netherlands should not be surprised if something happens. The Netherlands should really not be surprised. Even if those women don't do anything [violent], those children will be raised to (…) Those children will understand that. They lived in those [Kurdish] camps, and they are going to grow up someday. If they don't become terrorists, then they will surely end up as criminals or something like that" (Interview Mustafa)

Imprisoned interviewee Soufiane also believes that children of IS-fighters are able to take on parents' anger. He believes it is likely that they will never be able to build a normal life in the Netherlands:

> "These children will be going down the wrong path. Just watch my words: they will also end up in prison, or commit suicide. (…) If you separate them from their family… That's what I'm really afraid of: "They killed my father or put him in prison because of his religion, I'm not allowed to see my mother, they took everything away from me…" As they grow up, children will start to think about these things. As you get older you, naturally look back to your roots. You don't do that when you are too young. But believe me, they will eventually" (Interview Soufiane)

Regardless, interviews with incarcerated (former) jihadist mothers do not suggest that this anger was indeed reflected in their children's upbringing. On the contrary, some women indicate that they tried their best to keep their children from becoming bitter. For example, Nour, who has returned from Syria, remembers that her children did not understand why Germany did repatriate mothers with children from Kurdish camps, while the Netherlands did not:

> "I simply couldn't tell my children: "The Netherlands doesn't want us" or "the Netherlands is afraid of you". So instead, I said: "Well, the Netherlands is a small country; not as big as Germany. Germany has large planes, but the Netherlands has only small planes, so it can only pick up one mother at a time" (Interview Nour)

Other parents chose to tell their children more about how those who joined Islamic State were perceived by the rest of the world. Four of the Public Prosecutor's files and two of the court rulings suggest that while in the conflict zone, mothers tried to mentally prepare their children for what would await them upon return to the Netherlands. For example, two of these women told their children that they would be separated from each other upon arrival at Schiphol, in the hope of limiting the shock of these events. In Court Case 25, a mother even prepared her children for "years on end" for the fact that upon return to the Netherlands, they would temporarily have to live with their grandparents, and that they would probably not see their mother for a very long time. Here too, however, the mothers at hand appear to be motivated by genuine concern for their children's wellbeing, and narratives of anger do not seem to have played a prominent role in the way they engaged with their children.

PARENTING IN DETENTION

Finally, I spoke to imprisoned interview participants about their views on parenthood while in detention. (Former) jihadist interviewee Mustafa claims in prison, he struggles to build a relationship with his five-year-old daughter. She was only a month old when he was convicted, and he finds it difficult to accept that he was not able to play a more prominent role in her first years. "That powerlessness is the worst part. It just breaks you down, little by little," he says. "You don't play any role in their lives. Nothing. Zero. You are simply powerless. I can't even call [my wife and daughter] enough for me to enjoy their voices" (Interview Mustafa). Like other detainees at the terrorist ward, he is allowed to make four ten-minute calls a week. He tries to distribute these conversations as fairly as possible among his family members, but this implies that he speaks to his wife and daughter less often than he would like. "What should you talk about in those ten minutes? It's just like, "How are you? Did you go to school?" Things like that" (Interview Mustafa). He explains that he tries to keep the conversations with his daughter as simple as possible. "You know what little children are like. Even before they start talking, three or four minutes have already passed. They need so much time

to collect their thoughts (…) And before you know it, all time has passed before she has even said anything" (Interview Mustafa). He says he finds it extremely hard to realize that each day, he cannot be there for his daughter. "She is now just growing up without a father. That just hurts, you know. I would rather just have died somewhere; it doesn't even matter where" (Interview Mustafa).

For imprisoned parents, their involvement in children's lives is hampered even more by their limited contact with romantic partners. Six of the detained interviewees I spoke to, suggest that they are hardly aware of what is going on in the lives of their loved ones. For some, this is a conscious decision. Mustafa says that he finds it difficult that he cannot be the man he would like to be for his wife. He cannot help or protect her, he says, and he experiences shame because of that:

> "If I'm ever [released from prison], we will need to have a long conversation... At least here [in detention], we can keep it nice and short. So, she doesn't have to listen to all of my misery. But when you are outside, she will also start to tell me all of her problems. I'd rather just keep it nice and short. Not that I don't want to hear it, but it's the worst thing when your wife talks about her problems, and you're powerless. That's the worst. Then it's better to just say "I didn't hear it". You understand? That hurts less. "I did not know". Perhaps that means you'll have to lie, but at least you can still sleep at night" (Interview Mustafa)

Three (former) jihadist detainees additionally address their desire for unsupervised visits from their spouse (Interview Mustafa; Interview Ibrahim; Interview Jamaal). During these visits, detainees are allowed to receive their partners in a private room, without prison staff watching or listening. As such, this allows them to be intimate with their partners. Unsupervised visits are allowed for detainees residing at regular prison wards, but not for those at the terrorist ward. The interviewees are frustrated by this, and claim that their lack of unsupervised visits makes it near impossible to maintain a romantic relationship.

Despite these limitations, some of the detained parents do manage to play a role in their children's lives. Irene, the mother of a female (former) jihadist describes currently looking after her grandson – who was born in the warzone – while her daughter is serving her sentence. Whenever she takes her grandchild to visit his mom at the terrorist ward, Irene can see they really care for each other: "They are really very close, you can see that straight away. After visiting, [the grandson] always says: That was far too short, when can we go see mom again?", she says. "There really is a lot of love between those two" (Interview Irene). The Irene's daughter occasionally tries to exert influence over her son's upbringing – even while imprisoned. "I just do my own thing. But if it had been up to [my daughter], there would have been many more Islamic influences [in the upbringing]. I did try to do that, with booklets and such, but that is just not my thing" (Interview Irene). In Irene's opinion, mothers staying at the terrorist ward should receive more support in developing

their pedagogical skills and childrearing capabilities. “They are really left to their own devices”, is her observation. “It is very difficult for those mothers to let go of their children. And then they sometimes say things that you should not say to such a child”. Her own daughter, for example, has previously told her son the date on which she will be released, out of her own enthusiasm. “But of course, you shouldn’t say that to a child. He doesn’t understand that at all” (Interview Irene).

For (former) jihadist parents, building or maintaining a relationship with a child while imprisoned is even more complicated when a parental divorce or separation is involved. Court Case 11, for example, involves an imprisoned mother who is in conflict with her ex-husband (being the father of her daughter) after she herself attempted to travel to Islamic State territory. The father considers the mother (and her ideology) to constitute a threat to their daughter, so he tries to keep the mother at bay as much as possible. As described by the court: “Apart from a one-time exchange with her daughter in the presence of the woman’s parents, the woman has not seen her daughter for several months. The man refuses to cooperate in facilitating contact between his daughter and the woman. The man declines all of her attempts at communication, including phone calls” (Court Case 11). The letters that the mother sends her daughter from the terrorist ward, are withheld by the father. Ultimately, the mother is unable to play any role in her daughter’s life due to her imprisonment and her ex-husbands refusal to cooperate (Court Case 11).

Other detainees do manage to have a say in the upbringing of their offspring (observed in three Public Prosecutor’s (PP) files and two court cases). This is particularly the case for (former) jihadist parents whose children have been placed in a relative’s foster family: whenever possible, children of Islamic State returnees are temporarily looked after by family members or friends, while their parents serve their sentence. A (former) jihadist imprisoned mother tells the family members who take care of her son: “I think I’m going to prohibit [my son] to play with most children” (PP File 3) – suggesting that even in prison she tries to exert control over her children. This excerpt also reflects the element of social isolation, which was discussed in the previous Chapter. In another case, a female returnee decides to loosens the reins a bit when it comes to her children’s upbringing – as illustrated by a conversation she has with the grandfather of her children (PP File 8):

> “Grandfather: “Can we give [the children] everything we want? Even pork and such?”
> [Suspect]: “Yes, yes, that is also allowed”
> Grandfather: “Are you no longer opposed to that?”
> [Suspect]: “No, no, I eat it myself” (…) “I was in an identity crisis, it took a while, but I’m back now. You will see it yourself. (…) I just want to raise my children the same way I was raised. Sinterklaas[7], Christmas, birthday celebrations, all of it, you know” (PP File 8)

[7] *Sinterklaas* is a traditional holiday based on Saint Nicholas, which is celebrated mainly in the Netherlands, Belgium, and some parts of France and Germany, among other places.

It should be stressed that avoiding pork consumption and not celebrating certain holidays are normal religious practices within Islam and are not inherently connected to extremism. However, the suspect's explicit abandonment of these practices in this context suggests a deliberate distancing from choices that had previously been associated with her extremist ideology.

Two (former) jihadist detainees do not have children and claim to be happy about that. "I was never married and I don't have a family of my own. I can try to imagine what it would have been like, but I will never be able to experience it. But as I see it now, I am happy that I am alone," one of them says (Interview Karim). According to Karim, it is impossible to support your family when you are imprisoned. And like others, he cannot imagine what it must be like for children to grow up without a father. While Karim says he would eventually like to have children, he doubts this will ever happen (Interview Karim). Samira, a female (former) jihadist detainee is also relieved that she did not have any children during her stay in Islamic State territory: "No, I would not want to have children in this country [the Netherlands]. So yes, I've made peace with it. I do not want other people to tell me when I can speak to my child, or to be able to take my child away from me", she says. "What I see here [at the terrorist ward] is so harmful to those children. They will never be able to forget that" (Interview Samira). Here, Samira refers to female returnees and their children being separated upon their arrival in the Netherlands, which many women at the terrorist ward have experienced as profoundly distressing

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION

In this Chapter I considered the ways extremist parents raise their children. In doing so, I sought to understand the broader family context in which the socialization mechanisms discussed in the previous Chapter take place. After all, not all parent-child interactions are aimed at the transmission of violent ideas, yet the everyday parenting practices employed may influence the degree to which these worldviews take a hold in children. In this Chapter I attempted to understand the role of parenting practices in processes of intergenerational transmission, by examining interviews, Public Prosecutor's files and court rulings involving extremist parents.

The findings as outlined above suggest that extremist parents are indeed able to provide their children with a warm and loving upbringing – regardless of their violent and hateful ideologies. Both right-wing extremist and jihadist parents may prove to be caring and actively involved in their children's lives. Contrary to my expectations, this observation appears to apply to both fathers and mothers. Findings from previous studies, which suggest that in extremist families, it is mostly mothers who bear the burden of childrearing (e.g., Copeland, 2019; Dauber, 2017; Windisch, 2019), were not reflected in the current study. While the data does not allow for individual assessments of attachment styles among the involved children, results do suggest that even in

extremist households, children may be able to form secure attachments to their parents. These observations naturally mirror the findings discussed in the section 'Loyalty and trust' in Chapter 6. Therefore, it is indeed possible that the stories of interviewees who grew up in an extremist household are to some extent distorted by an excessive loyalty towards their parents, failing to recognize the less-than-ideal circumstances of their upbringing. As such, children's rose-colored perception of their parents could stem from a deep-seated need for parental recognition, and thus may actually point at an insecure attachment style.

Additionally, it was observed that in extremist families, dysfunctional parenting takes place as well. I described the unsafe and unstable conditions under which children of extremist parents sometimes grow up, with emotional and physical abuse regularly being observed. Moreover, extremist parents at times employ an ambivalent parenting style, in which a (false) sense of security is alternated with various forms of belittlement or psychological manipulation. The children growing up in these families are likely to develop insecure attachment styles. This could also be the case for children who travelled to IS territory with their (former) jihadist parents. Although most participants I interviewed about their time in the 'caliphate' said that they tried to keep their children away from violence as much as possible, the hostile conditions of the warzone will likely have disrupted the parent-child relationship to some extent.

Finally, I showed that multiple (former) jihadist interviewees struggle with their role as a parent while in prison. This is partly due to practical limitations (they only have limited time to see and talk with their children), and partly due to the emotional distance interviewees describe. An important factor in being able to build and maintain a relationship with their children, appears to be the extent to which detainees are on good terms with their (ex-)partners. It also makes a difference whether children stay at a relative's foster family, for example when they are temporarily placed with their grandparents. In these instances, parents still seem to be able to exert some influence over the upbringing of their offspring – but here too, they are ultimately dependent on the goodwill of the foster parents. The current study suggests that detained (former) extremist parents would benefit from more (pedagogical and practical) support in raising their children, both during and after imprisonment.

In the next Chapter I will highlight a final dimension of extremist family life. In addition to socialization mechanisms and parenting practices, narratives of parenthood also play an important role in the transmission of extremism from parent to child. After all, parental attitudes and ideas about what it means to be a 'good' parent, will be reflected in the other two dimensions, which can ultimately shape the ways intergenerational transmission may take place. This dimension will therefore be central to the following Chapter.