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

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CHAPTER 10

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In Chapter 2 it was discussed that within academic literature, much attention has been paid to the influence that parents can have on their children's development. However, the ways in which extremist ideas could be transmitted from parent to child have only sparsely been examined. The systematic literature review presented in Chapter 3, showed that at an international level, little is known about the ways extremist parents raise their children and the extent to which they are able to (un)intentionally convey their ideas. So, although there is no lack of discussion in the media, empirical research into extremist parents remains scarce.

In this dissertation, I aimed to shed light on extremist parents and their children. Based on 30 interviews and a review of 12 Public Prosecutor's files and 27 court rulings, I analyzed the family lives of right-wing extremists and jihadists. I tried to understand the ways in which the intergenerational transmission of extremism may take place in their households, by focusing on the socialization mechanisms, parenting practices and narratives of parenthood employed by extremist parents. I additionally considered the longer-term effects of extremists' family lives, which showed that not just children, but parents too, often appear to struggle with their extremist family history.

The diverse array of sources used in this project allowed for a nuanced picture of extremist parents and their children. This makes the current study valuable to anyone working with families where extremist transmission could occur. It should be noted, however, that this dissertation illustrates first and foremost what extremists' family lives *can* look like. While various patterns were observed, differences among households should not be ignored. The results of this study are therefore not intended for interpretating individual cases – in which a tailor-made approach should always take preference. Nonetheless, the findings of this project do provide a first insight into the mechanisms and dynamics through which the intergenerational transmission of extremism may take place.

In this Chapter, I will reflect on the most important observations of this study, the insights that can be derived from them, and the ways in which these insights help to answer the research questions. I will also discuss how my findings fit within existing theoretical frameworks, and their possible implications for both policy and practice. Finally, I will discuss the methodological limitations of this study and provide some recommendations for future research.

ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This dissertation served several purposes. The aim was not only to study how processes of intergenerational transmission can manifest themselves in extremist families, but also to learn about parental motivations for socializing their children into their ideologies, the family dynamics and interactions associated with these processes, and the long-term effects on those involved. Each of these objectives and their corresponding research questions are addressed below.

1. *What is the estimated scope of the intergenerational transmission of extremism in the Netherlands? How many children are at risk of being raised with extremist ideas?*

Throughout this research project, gaining reliable quantitative data to assess the potential scope of the intergenerational transmission of extremism in the Netherlands proved difficult. Since extremist socialization processes generally take place behind closed doors, practitioners and academics have limited access to (data on) these families. Moreover, legal and ethical constraints further restrict (quantitative) research methods, particularly when minors are involved. Ultimately, I was able to analyze the most comprehensive national-level dataset for the jihadist community in the Netherlands through a collaboration with the Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service (Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst, AIVD). This dataset was based on information that the AIVD gathered in the context of its organizational tasks and duties, which was subsequently matched to the Personal Records Database (Basisregistratie Personen, BRP). This allowed me to examine the family relations and household composition of Dutch individuals identified as jihadists by the AIVD.

From this endeavor, it became clear that the intergenerational transmission of extremism (jihadism in particular) is indeed a phenomenon that may occur in the context of the Netherlands. Overall, it was observed that the parents in the Dutch jihadist community collectively have 665 children (551 minor-aged), all of which could theoretically be raised within a jihadist family environment. Moreover, data indicates that 4.4% of children with jihadist parents have themselves been identified by the AIVD as jihadists. While admittedly, the direction of ideological influence (parent-to-child or child-to-parent) cannot be clearly determined in these instances – it is possible that processes of intergenerational transmission might be at the root of this figure. Additionally, it was observed that nearly half of the minor-aged children in the study grow up in dual-jihadist parent households, which research on "mainstream" religious continuity suggests may increase the likelihood of successful ideological transmission, due to parental homogeneity in worldviews (e.g., Myers, 1996).

The study also identified other factors that might indicate a risk of intergenerational transmission within Dutch jihadist families. For example, the dataset suggests that children of the study population might grow up with limited exposure to moderate influences: only 8.7% of children in jihadist families live in extended households with relatives beyond parents and siblings, and 33.1% of children grow up in single-parent households. In total, 93 children even reside in a single-parent household in which the main caretaker is identified as a jihadist by the AIVD. This suggests that a vast amount of children of the study population lack regular contact with potentially moderating family members who could offer ideological counterbalance to extremist parental views, creating environments where jihadist ideas may go unchallenged. In the long run, this could contribute to the intergenerational transmission of extremism.

Finally, trauma exposure and narratives of victimhood may contribute to risks of integenerational transmission. Over 5% of the children in the dataset were born in Syria, likely experiencing their formative years in Islamic State territory, potentially resulting in PTSD and war-related trauma (Ahdash, 2020; Rousseau et al., 2023). Additionally, approximately 6.6% of jihadist parents died in conflict zones, which could potentially aid to children's ideological radicalization through intergenerational loyalty, stories of (collective) victimhood, and romanticized martyrdom. This would fit with studies discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, which indicate that both collective and individual experiences of trauma can facilitate the transmission of extremist ideas (Rowland-Klein & Dunlop, 1988; Vollhardt 2012; 2020).

In the end, it should be acknowledged that quantitative methods alone cannot fully capture the exact number of children that is actively being socialized into jihadist ideologies, nor can it determine the nature of such processes in individual households. Nevertheless, the results presented in this study provide the most comprehensive national-level assessment available of the potential scope of this phenomenon in the Netherlands, establishing that the intergenerational transmission of jihadist extremism is a reality that warrants ongoing attention from researchers and intelligence services.

2. *How can we explain the intergenerational transmission of extremist ideologies? What mechanisms are involved in this process?*

In this study, I tried to understand what processes of intergenerational transmission could look like within extremist families. I firstly approached this question by focusing on the socialization mechanisms employed by extremist parents, as discussed in Chapter 6. Here, it was observed that intergenerational transmission may take place through direct socialization mechanisms, or the intentional and purposive ways in which parents attempt to transmit their ideas to their children. These direct mechanisms reflect many of the elements that were observed in the systematic literature review in Chapter 3. For example, I described the importance of social isolation in extremist families, where parents attempt to keep their children away from the outside world as much as possible. Within extremist households, parents may exercise strict control over the friendships, hobbies and social relationships that children engage in. They also restrict the media that children consume, only allowing them to enjoy music, TV shows and literature that fit within the parental ideology. In addition to using social isolation as a socialization mechanism, extremist parents may introduce their children to their own network of like-minded people that resonate with the parental ideology. Already from an early age, children are encouraged to participate in the extremist meetings that their parents engage in, and through workshops and games of an 'innocent' and 'playful' nature, they are gently introduced to the hateful ideas of their caregivers. Although rare, it appears that parents in some cases even take their children along in committing

violent acts. Based on the data, however, this does not seem to be norm.

The intergenerational transmission of extremism can also take place through the language used by parents. In interactions with their children, parents' choice of words generally reflects the dualistic, black-and-white worldview that is characteristic of extremist ideologies. By talking negatively about dissenters, while praising their own in-group, extremist parents subtly convey their ideas to their children. These observations fit with the concept of 'othering' – referring to the phenomenon whereby individuals or groups are dismissed as 'The Other' and placed outside one's own ideological group – and which are subsequently framed as different, evil or inferior. Extremist parents use linguistic techniques of 'othering' to strengthen their group identity (as a family, but also as part of an extremist movement), through creating an external enemy, and thus emphasizing an ideological divide between 'us' and 'them'. The observation that children appear to 'parrot' their parents in these extremist discourses fits with the social learning theories discussed in Chapter 2 (see Bandura, Ross & Ross, 1961; Whitbeck, 1999). It illustrates the importance of parental modelling, and suggests that through repetitive exposure to extremist language, these discourses may at some point be adopted and internalized by children themselves. Finally, the socialization mechanisms that parents use to transmit their ideas within the home environment, often have a visual component: parents frequently use various symbols, flags, decorations and, in some cases, attire or uniforms to perpetuate their ideas. As a result, children learn at an early age that the safety and security of the home environment is linked to the (symbolism used in the) parental ideology. Extremist parents also seem to specifically opt for toys that are in line with their ideas, sometimes even stimulating children to play with weapons. The glorification of violence implicit in these socialization mechanisms, could potentially aid the transmission of extremist ideologies.

Regardless, these socialization mechanisms do not take place in a vacuum and are often related to the extremist ideology itself. In Chapter 7, it was observed that the overarching parenting practices employed by parents, play an important role in processes of intergenerational transmission. Drawing on theories of attachment style theory (Ainsworth, 1969; Bowlby, 1968), I demonstrated that parent-child relations are the foundation through which transmission processes can take hold in extremist families. As already discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, seemingly mundane everyday interactions can impact children's emotional and social development, which in turn could affect the 'effectiveness' of parental socialization efforts. Providing a nurturing, supportive, and secure environment can foster healthy identity formation in children, potentially reducing the attractiveness of extremist messaging. In contrast, children with insecure attachment styles might be more prone to adopting extremist views, because of the misplaced loyalty and solidarity that children may develop towards their parents (following Merz, Schuengela & Schulze, 2007), as well as the anxiety and low self-confidence that are often associated with insecure attachment styles (e.g., Foster, Kernis & Goldman, 2007; Passanisi et al., 2015).

The findings of the current study suggest that extremist parents can indeed be loving and warm in raising their children, regardless of their violent beliefs. Both right-wing extremist and jihadist parents may be caring and emotionally involved in their children's lives – where healthy relations between parents and children were observed in both fathers and mothers. In these instances, it is indeed possible that likelihood of successful extremist transmission is mitigated by children's healthy attachment styles. At the same time, however, healthy family relations may pose a risk factor for intergenerational transmission – considering (securely attached) children may be more susceptible of the worldviews of caregivers that they love and trust (see Grusec & Davidov, 2007; Van IJzendoorn, 1992). Nonetheless, it should be noted that instances of emotional and physical abuse were also observed – and in other households, parenting practices seem to be rather ambivalent, with parental expressions of love or appreciation quickly turning into anger. Following the theories outlined in Chapter 2, is probable that these parenting practices result in insecure attachment styles among children (see Bowlby, 1959; Ainsworth, 1967), which potentially give rise to misplaced feelings of loyalty and intergenerational solidarity (see Merz, Schuengela & Schulze, 2007), and thus aid the intergenerational transmission of these ideas. In future studies, potential associations between children's attachment styles and extremist transmission processes will need to be examined more in-depth.

In Chapter 8 it was additionally observed that implicit narratives about parenthood play a pivotal role in the parents' approaches to their childrearing practices. These narratives reveal the norms and values that parents employ in their parenting, and as such, they give insight to their preferred parenting styles. As discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, parenting styles – like attachment styles – may affect the ways in and extent to which intergenerational transmission takes place. Authoritarian extremist parents may be able to transmit their hateful worldviews by emphasizing obedience and conformity. Authoritative parents, on the other hand, can promote a more open and inclusive attitude by providing space for discussion and dialogue. This strengthens their emotional stability, which could in turn make them less susceptible to extremist messaging.

Not just parents' individual narratives about parenthood play a role, however. Extremist ideologies often also contain strong assumptions about what it means to be a parent, which may in turn inform parenting styles in individual families. As observed in Chapter 8, within extremist communities, motherhood is of particular symbolic value. In both right-wing extremist and jihadist circles, women are perceived as the physical source of all future generations of extremist fighters, which makes bearing children their main ideological task. Children are similarly placed on a pedestal within these narratives, through their perceived purity and malleability. The multigenerational emphasis and apparently deterministic worldviews reflected in these narratives – where (grand) parents tell children about the "warrior blood" that is running through their veins – demonstrate parents' implicit expectations of their offspring, as described in the section 'Multigenerational socialization mechanisms' in Chapter 6 of this dissertation. This could cause children to feel that

they are 'chosen' or destined to become extremist fighters – appealing on both generational duties and the perceived desirability of this heroic status. Moreover, this idea of being part of an extensive tradition of extremist violence may provide children with a sense of identity and *belonging* – specifically when combined with narratives of victimhood embedded within (collective) trauma (see Chapter 2 of this dissertation). This may similarly stimulate transmission processes and children's subsequent adoption of these ideas.

3. *To what extent and how can various factors and dynamics (within and beyond the family) stimulate or inhibit extremist transmission processes?*

As described in this study, the intergenerational transmission of extremism certainly does not always take place. Within extremist families, various factors and dynamics can be identified that may obstruct extremist transmission processes. Generally, a lack of ideological transmission can have two different reasons: either the socialization mechanisms employed are not successful, or transmission is not attempted at all. Regarding the first aspect, parents could have the ambition to pass their ideology on to their children, yet fail in doing so. After all, extremist socialization is not just dependent on parental intentions: while direct socialization mechanisms are certainly important, indirect mechanisms also play a role, as observed in Chapter 6. Indirect socialization mechanisms refer to the different ways in which children deal with the ideas presented by their parents, and the extent to which they ultimately adopt these ideas or not. This dimension reflects the dynamic and multi-directional nature of intergenerational transmission processes – as both parents and children directly or indirectly influence each other in their beliefs, norms and values (Bernardi, 2013; Roest, 2007, see also the socialization theories discussed in Chapter 2). For example, in this study it was observed that some children from extremist families show a profound degree of loyalty and trust towards their parents. Despite – or because of – their difficult childhood and isolated upbringing, some continue to express an unconditional love for their extremist parents. Some also appear to put their parents on a pedestal and romanticize their ideas. The fact that extremist narratives rely heavily on black-and-white thinking, which mirrors children's natural way of perceiving the world, with a tendency to categorize people and events into binaries such as 'good' and 'bad' (see Staub, 2003; Tsao, 2020; Obiols-Suari & Marco-Pallarés, 2021), could play an important role here, and may ultimately stimulate intergenerational transmission.

Nevertheless, children also seem to be able to resist their parents' ideas. Several of the research participants indicated that they had they personally never felt drawn to their caregivers' extremist worldviews. This can be interpreted in different ways. For example, age may play a role here: older children are probably less susceptible to parents' ideological influences, because they have already formed an identity of their own, distinct from the family ideology (see also Worthman, Tomlinson, & Rotheram-Borus, 2016). Moreover, older children may be able to understand that

morality is subjective, and that rules and norms are not fixed, but rather, negotiable (see cognitive psychologist Jean Piaget's foundational work *The Morality of the Child,* 1932). In addition, other factors that were observed in the empirical literature review in Chapter 3 could play a role, such as critical thinking skills and (emotional) intelligence. These cognitive skills can increase resilience against radical or extremist messaging, existing literature suggests (Macaluso, 2016; Sas et al., 2020; Stephens & Sieckelinck, 2021). Finally, as discussed in the section above, transmission mechanisms need to be considered against the backdrop of the parenting practices and narratives of parenthood that extremist families adhere to. Children who were raised in ambivalent or unsafe situations, or in households where extremist parents utilize authoritarian, permissive or neglectful parenting styles (see Baumrind, 1966; Maccoby & Martin, 1983), may develop insecure attachment styles, which could inhibit them from adopting a constructive-critical attitude towards their parents' views. This can stimulate the intergenerational transmission of extremist ideas in the long run.

At the same time, this study also demonstrated that some extremist parents are indeed capable of providing their children with a safe, warm, and loving upbringing. The effect this has on transmission processes is not clear from this study. Children who were raised in emotionally supportive environments, are more likely to develop secure attachment styles and tend to have a more positive self-image and more self-confidence (Kohnstamm & Wenneker, 2016; Sandoval 2008). This is particularly the case for children who grow up with parents with authoritative parenting styles (Deshpande & Chhabriya, 2013; Neal & Frick-Horbury, 2001). It is therefore conceivable that this group is better equipped to break away from their parents' extremist ideas. On the other hand, an ideology that is transmitted in a non-coercive manner may be easier to adopt (consider the work by Dollahite et al., (2019) discussed in Chapter 2, on balancing firmness and flexibility to enhance the "successfulness" of transmission), considering the trusting and loving bond that exists between parents and children in healthy family systems. These potential dynamics deserve more attention in future research on the transmission of extremist ideologies.

Yet, while some parents fail to pass on their ideas to their children, others do not even try in the first place. In the section 'Absence of Socialization Efforts' in Chapter 6, it was observed that not all parents feel the need to raise their children to follow their ideas. This is often a deliberate choice: extremist parents generally want to keep their children away from the danger and violence they are frequently exposed to and/or engaging in. Hence, parents sometimes choose to keep their lives as extremists completely separate from their roles as parents – and, in their own words, decide to live "double lives". In other cases, the lack of ideological transmission stems from an ideological conflict between parents, where a more moderate parent is able to counterbalance the extremist socialization efforts of a more extreme parent. Practical restrictions, such as parents residing in a correctional facility, can also prevent them from being able to socialize children into their ideologies – although this does not rule out the possibility of indirect mechanisms emerging,

such as parental romanticization and idealization by children. Finally, it was observed that having a child can change extremists' worldviews and self-image, reducing or even completely eliminating the desire for ideological transmission. For some, becoming a parent is ultimately the turning point kickstarting a deradicalization process.

The ideology itself may also be a relevant factor in transmission processes, as some dynamics appear to differ among jihadist and right-wing extremist families. Firstly, multigenerational socialization plays a significant role in the transmission of right-wing extremist ideologies, often rooted in familial histories dating back to World War II. It was observed in Chapter 6 that within right-wing extremist households, the pride associated with an extremist family lineage seems to contribute to the perpetuation of these ideas. This observation reflects the importance of collective experiences (and shared stories to understand these experiences) in processes of transmission, as outlined in Chapter 2. In contrast, jihadist families in the West lack such a strong ideological history (and thus, the collective narratives to make meaning of this history), as jihadist ideologies gained prominence only in the late 20th century (see De Graaf, 2010; Klausen, 2021; NCTV, 2018). Nonetheless, it is plausible that multigenerational aspects may become more prominent in jihadist families in the future, particularly for those who have been involved with Islamic State (IS) and romanticize the 'caliphate'. Here too, heroic narratives of Islamic State's glory days (as well as stories of collective victimhood/trauma following the decline of IS, also see the theories of victimology discussed in Chapter 2) may change the outlook of transmission processes within jihadist milieus.

Finally, this study suggests that jihadist families strive for a greater degree of social isolation in comparison to right-wing extremist parents. Although isolation plays an important role in both ideological contexts, and intergenerational transmission processes are largely dependent on keeping dissenters at bay (see section 'Social isolation' in Chapter 6), jihadist parents seem to have an even stronger desire to withdraw completely from mainstream society. Security awareness on the one hand, and experiences of social exclusion and stigmatization on the other, appear to be driving factors here. In their search for like-minded people, jihadist parents do not limit their social isolation efforts to the rejection of conflicting worldviews: The (former) jihadist interviewees I spoke to, often described being disappointed in the Netherlands and Western societies at large. Some expressed the wish to eventually move to an Islamic country with their families, and their decision to travel to IS territory is often founded in this sentiment. As such, social isolation can potentially be understood as a more prominent factor in jihadist families, than in right-wing extremist households.

Altogether this suggests that there are several factors that can stimulate or inhibit the intergenerational transmission of extremism. Nevertheless, it appears that most (former) extremist parents – both those who try to socialize their children into their ideologies, and those who refrain from doing so – use similar considerations in their decision-making. For both groups, the (perceived) protection of children is of crucial concern. Parents who consciously choose *not*

to raise their children as extremists want to shield them from the (physical) violence, hatred, misogyny and pessimism that characterize extremist movements. They often also see potential risks in *doxing* (the illegitimate online distribution of personal data), revenge attacks by rival groups (particularly among neo-Nazi movements), or stigmatization and exclusion by their social surroundings. At the same time, parents who do try to socialize their children into their extremist worldviews are similarly motivated by the goal of protecting their children. To them, however, the perceived danger is not so much in the extremist ideology itself, but in a treacherous outside world characterized by evil forces, powerful elites, disinformation, temptations, sinful behavior and other existential threats. These observations support the hypothesis that this group of parents, too, has the best interests of their children at heart, and does not necessarily act out of bad intentions. Although their parenting choices likely cannot be separated from extremist narratives that call for parents to produce a 'new generation' of fighters, the current study shows that these parents are doing what they believe is necessary to make their children resilient to the dangers of outside world. This is an observation that goes against the prevailing image of extremist parents solely being motivated by hatred and anger in socializing their children into their ideologies.

4. *To what extent does the intergenerational transmission of extremism have long-term consequences for the families involved?*

As observed in Chapter 9, (growing up in) extremist family contexts can have long-lasting effects on individuals. Both (adult) children raised in such environments, as well as parents who engaged in extremist socialization practices themselves, seem to struggle with the aftermath of their family history. When it comes to children from extremist milieus, they often appear to struggle with mental health problems and trauma due to their upbringing. Issues range from difficulty trusting others, poor communication skills, psychosomatic pains, anxiety, attachment issues, chronic stress and problematic behaviour. At a later age, some of these children even struggle with their own parenthood, and fear that their family history makes them unfit to raise children themselves, inspiring some to opt for adoption or remaining childfree instead.

Traumas appear to be particularly prevalent among children who were raised in Islamic State territory, which fits with previous studies on this group (Barricman, 2019; Speckhard, 2017; Weine et al., 2020). Years of exposure to war and violence, combined with the scarce facilities in Syria and Iraq, often left their marks on those born and/or raised in the 'caliphate'. Interestingly, however, not all (former) jihadist parents that I interviewed appear to believe that their children suffer from trauma following their experiences in Syria and Iraq. Some interviewees even suggest that while residing in Islamic State territory, their children were happier than ever. The truthfulness of these statements cannot be verified, and in the end, truth-seeking is not an objective of this study. Nonetheless, such claims should be taken with caution. Interviewees may be overly optimistic

about their children's mental health and reintegration, ignoring any negative effects that their stay in Islamic State territory may have caused – either because of a lack of awareness, or in an attempt to escape feelings of responsibility and guilt (see Sykes & Matza's (1957) neutralization techniques).

Nonetheless, the observations in case files and court rulings analyzed in this study give cause for hope. It is frequently noted that children of jihadist parents are indeed doing well in adapting to their foster families, or that they are mentally developing at great speed. In several cases it is mentioned that children exhibit no attachment issues, or that they are doing well at school. Regardless, negative effects of children's experiences (either in the warzone, or following their physical separation from their parents upon return in the Netherlands) may take longer to manifest. Research on the delayed onset of post-traumatic stress disorder shows that it can take up to years for mental health issues develop following a stressful event (see Andrews et al., 2007). Specific studies on delayed onset of (war) trauma in children, however, appear sparse and it is therefore difficult to predict the trajectories of these children. It ultimately remains to be seen how these children develop in the long term and to what extent they are able to cope with their family history in healthy manners.

Regardless of these negative mental health effects, children are generally able to leave their parents' ideologies behind, this dissertation suggest. Most commonly, children's deradicalization processes are not so much a rational choice, but rather a gradual process inspired by trigger events (Feddes, Nickolson & Doosje, 2015) and exposure to people with other worldviews and lifestyles. While some decide to cut off all contact (either in order to focus on their deradicalization process and emotional recovery, or out of spite and disappointment), others continue to support their extremist parents even into adulthood. For the latter group, some level of moral disengagement (Bandura, 2002) appears to be necessary, as to separate their parents from their hateful ideologies. In order to come to terms with their caregivers' hateful ideas and behaviors, children may mentally downplay or soften parents' supposed involvement in the extremist movement. This allows them to accept the facts of their family history, without having to think of their parents as 'bad' people. It is possible that these moral disengagement mechanisms inhibit children's ability to recognize the harmful effects of their upbringing. Although empirical studies on the relation between childhood maltreatment and moral disengagement is sparse, there is some literature indeed suggesting that the ability to perceive oneself as a 'victim' is dependent on one's levels of moral disengagement (e.g., Cuadrado-Gordillo, Fernández-Antelo, & Martín-Mora Parra, 2020). This supports the hypothesis that these mechanisms may also play a role in the self-perception of children raised in extremist households.

Parents, too, seem to struggle with their ideological past. Specifically in conversations with former right-wing extremist parents, it was observed that many of them find it difficult to come to terms with their life choices. Interviewees frequently expressed feeling regret and shame about the way they raised their children back when they were still in the extremist movement. Several of

them therefore decided at some point to openly discuss their right-wing extremist family history with their offspring. Often, this appears to be related to parents' desire to keep control of the family narrative: it is feared that children will otherwise find out about their violent family history via the internet, where the parents may be portrayed in a less positive light. Admittedly, such self-reflections are less prominent among (former) jihadist parents. Most of the (former) jihadist interviewees included in this study appear to be somewhat reluctant to having an open discussion with their children regarding their past. This can be understood in various ways. To those who returned from Syria and Iraq, their experiences may be too recent for this kind of transparency, or parents may deem their children still too young for these types of 'adult' conversations. Additionally, incarcerated parents sometimes describe feelings of 'regret' as unhelpful or undesirable, thus subconsciously or actively pushing these sentiments aside. From their perspective, maintaining good family relations while in prison is complicated enough as it is (see the section 'Parenting in Detention' in Chapter 7). Here too, psychological self-protection through the use of neutralization techniques (see Sykes & Matza, 1957), might play a role. Denying that their children have suffered due to their life choices, allows parents to mitigate feelings of accountability and thus, guilt. It is unclear to what extent these perceptions may change upon release from prison. If jihadist parents refrain from opening up the conversation, deciding to hide their original intentions and motivations for traveling to IS territory from their children, they may eventually promote indirect socialization mechanisms. Children can romanticize the views of parents and justify their choices at the time. It can also help children become more resilient to possible stigmatization by the outside world, as described in 'Aftermath' (Chapter 9), if they are provided with openness about their parents' past.

Finally, the fact that both parents and children seem to experience negative responses from the outside world can be considered worrisome. As this dissertation has demonstrated, both parents and children seem to regularly experience stigmatization and discrimination by mainstream society. Both in jihadist and in right-wing extremist families, children are often bullied or socially excluded due to their parents' ideologies. This type of 'labelling' is not just harmful for children's social development, but may also contribute to the transmission of extremist ideas within these households in two ways. On the one hand, it may strengthen extremist families' social isolation, limiting contact with dissenting opinions or worldviews, and thus enhancing the family ideology. On the other hand, it could fuel the sense of victimization that extremist ideologies often tap into. As discussed in this dissertation, perceptions of (collective) victimhood can play an important role in the narratives of these families, possibly contributing to the intergenerational transmission of these ideas (see also Pemberton & Aarten, 2018). From this perspective, countering and preventing social stigmatization vis-a-vis extremist families should take central stage – which will be discussed more in depth in the section 'Implications for policy and practice' of this Chapter.

THEORETICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE FINDINGS

The findings presented in this dissertation profoundly advance our understanding of intergenerational transmission within extremist families. They demonstrated the value of the concepts and theories introduced in Chapter 2, and show how a multidisciplinary approach, which combines various theoretical perspectives, can help us map transmission processes. Elements from different schools of thinking, including pedagogy and developmental psychology, criminology, sociology, and victimology were observed in the analysis. In this section, I reflect on the most important theories within these disciplines as discussed in Chapter 2, and discuss how they can help to better understand the transmission of extremist ideas within a family context.

First of all, this dissertation suggests that existing theories from fields such as pedagogy and developmental psychology are particularly relevant in the study of the intergenerational transmission of extremism. Most notably, theories of attachment and parenting styles may hold untapped value. As discussed in Chapter 2 of this study, parenting style theory considers the ways in which parents raise their children, while attachment style theory describes the emotional bonds and relations that develop between children and their caregivers, especially in early childhood. Although both approaches differ in their focal point (parent versus child perspective), these theories do overlap to some degree, both allowing us to understand the dynamics between parents and children. The current study suggests that processes of intergenerational transmission are largely resulting from these parent-child interactions: insecure attachment styles and dysfunctional parenting might stimulate the intergenerational transmission of extremism, which could in turn influence parent-child dynamics. Previous studies from developmental psychology on children growing up in cultlike environments, contain similar observations (see Furnari, 2005; Kern, & Jungbauer, 2022; Markowitz & Halperin, 1984). For example, Furnari (2005) reports that conflicting group narratives about raising children within cultic communities can lead to unstable parenting and ultimately insecure attachment patterns among children. Kern and Jungbauer (2022) make similar observations based on in-depth interviews with former cult members. The authors observed that children's social isolation often causes them to develop anxious attachment styles, and that parents in sectarian movements have predominantly neglectful parenting styles (Kern & Jungbauer, 2022). In line with the current study, however, the authors furthermore note that a large proportion of their research participants look back positively on their childhood. In future research, these possible similarities between intergenerational transmission processes in sectarian and extremist families should receive more attention.

Second, in understanding processes of intergenerational transmission within extremist families, we may also draw from psychological and criminological research. For example, the current study suggests that moral disengagement (Bandura, 2002) plays a central role in extremist households. Moral disengagement refers to the psychological process by which individuals temporarily separate their moral norms and values from their behavior (Bandura, 2002, see

also Sykes and Matza's (1957) 'neutralization techniques'). In other words, people may act in ways that contradict their own moral beliefs, by invoking mental justifications that make them feel less guilty about their behavior. In criminology, moral disengagement is used to understand how people can rationalize criminal behavior (Maruna & Copes, 2005). As seen in the current study, children growing up in extremist families may use moral disengagement to bridge the moral gap between their parent's extremist violence and the norms and values of the outside world. Moreover, they may seek to reconcile their parents' (at times) inconsistent actions with the extremist family ideology (see the section 'Double standards in parenthood') – in an attempt to alleviate the cognitive dissonance created by these inconsistencies. Finally, both parents and children who look back on their family history, seem to use moral disengagement in their accounts. Children raised in extremist households frequently continue to support (the choices made by) their parents, despite the fact that they no longer adhere to their parents' extremist worldviews. This is evident, for example, from the euphemistic labelling adult children use when recalling childhood memories, with which they seem to soften the violent nature of their parents' beliefs. Similarly, former extremist parents use moral disengagement to downplay the consequences of their actions. (Former) jihadist parents in particular seem to use neutralization techniques (see Sykes & Matza, 1957). They often appear to take little responsibility for their parenting decisions, and make light of the adverse impacts their actions could have had on their children.

Third, labeling theory seems to hold value when examining the intergenerational transmission of extremism. Labeling theory is a sociological perspective which aims to understand how individuals or groups are labeled and categorized by society, specifically by institutions such as the criminal justice system, educational institutions, or the media. This theory suggests that once an individual or group is labeled with a particular identity or status (such as 'criminal' or 'deviant'), it can shape their self-perception and behavior. Ultimately, the internalization of societal labels can lead to a *self-fulfilling prophecy,* where the labeled individual starts behaving in a way that matches others' expectations. The current study suggests that children raised in extremist households may experience labelling because of their parents' beliefs or behaviors. The outside world may regard them as "terrorists in the making", which in the long term could stimulate the intergenerational transmission of extremism. Previous literature suggests that labeling may influence radicalization processes (Fadil et al., 2022; Lösel & Bliesener, 2021; Peeters et al., 2022) – and the current study indicates that this probably also applies to children from extremist families.

Fourth, the findings of this study fit with previous insights from victimological studies. In Chapter 2 of this dissertation, it was already suggested that victimhood – as in: the experience of suffering intentional harm, see Pemberton & Aarten, (2018, p. 541) – plays an important role in the intergenerational transmission of extremism. Narratives of victimhood are reflective of the ways extremist ideologies create a sense of urgency: by emphasizing that the extremist *in-group* faces existential threats, the use of violence is deemed legitimized. Within extremist ideologies,

particular emphasis is placed on experiences of collective victimhood, for example in the form of social exclusion, marginalization and discrimination (see Lynch & Joyce, 2018; Pemberton & Aarten, 2018; Van den Bos, 2019). These shared stories about perceived injustice can in turn fuel processes of radicalization (Van den Bos, 2019). The current study demonstrates that extremist parents can covey such victim narratives to children. As seen in Chapter 6, collective stories of social exclusion may particularly play a role in families where extremism has been passed on for generations. Here, family members' loyalty towards their ancestors and their perceived suffering, can foster the internalization of this respective victimhood status, creating a fertile ground for extremist transmission.

Other concepts rooted in victimological studies may be of relevance, too. Langone (1993) previously coined the term *spiritual abuse* to understand how victims of coercive ideologies look back on their experiences. According to Purcell (1998), spiritual abuse refers to "the act of making people believe – whether by stating or merely implying – that they are going to be punished in this life and/or tormented in hell-fire forever for failure to live life well enough" (Purcell, 1998, p. 227). In recent decades, the concept of spiritual abuse has become more embedded within victimological studies, and it is increasingly recognized as a form of (domestic) violence (see for example Khan, 2021; Xavier, Petherick & Sinnamon, 2017). Based on the findings of the current study, spiritual abuse as a concept may be valuable in understanding processes of intergenerational transmission. As observed, extremist parents can engage in fearmongering, for example through the use of fearful imagery or psychological pressure, in an attempt to socialize their children into their hateful ideologies. This can, according to Purcell's (1988) definition, be considered a form of spiritual abuse. As such, insights from studies into this concept may help us better understand the childhood experiences of those raised in extremist households.

Additionally, victimological studies can help to understand processes of disengagement in cases of extremist transmission. In line with previous comments on the concept of spiritual abuse, children who grow up in extremist families may be best understood as victims of a violent family ideology. In Chapter 6, it was observed that extremist parents are in fact able to raise their children with love and warmth, and that not all of these children look back negatively on their youth. Nonetheless, in discussing the aftermath of intergenerational transmission, Chapter 9 showed that many of them do experience negative consequences from their childhood later in life. In this respect, children from extremist families resemble children who suffered from domestic abuse or parental neglect (see, for example, Avdibegović & Brkić, 2020; Jackson & Deye, 2015; Lev-Wiesel, 1999). This suggest that in developing interventions for (children from) extremist families, existing insights on trauma treatment may be a useful source.

Fifth and finally, the findings of this study can be interpreted through the lens of terrorism studies. Previous research into radicalization processes can help us understand how parents indirectly create the conditions that could allow for extremist worldviews to take hold. Theories about push and

pull factors, for example, point to the importance of belonging as a stimulating factor in processes of radicalization (see Dawson, Amarasingam, & Bain, 2016; Doosje et al., 2016; Vergani et al., 2020). Belonging refers to the inherent human need to be part of a group of like-minded people. If this need is not sufficiently met in daily life, individuals may feel drawn to the fellowship that extremist movements can provide (Dawson, Amarasingam, & Bain, 2016; Doosje et al., 2016). For children who grow up with extremist ideas, the family system may be an important source of belonging – especially when the exclusion and stigmatization discussed in Chapter 9 inhibits them from forming meaningful bonds outside of the family sphere. Additionally, previous research suggests that social isolation can play an important role in radicalization processes, because it hinders the development of prosocial relations and identity formation (see Hug, 2013; Mitts, 2019). As discussed in Chapter 6, social isolation is an important socialization mechanism that extremist parents may employ in raising their children. Considering the lack of exposure to alternative worldviews that results from this, it can make children more susceptible to their parents' extremist ideology.

Here, the two-pyramids model of radicalization (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017) can help us understand the transmission of extremism within families. In this model, McCauley and Moskalenko (2017) suggest that are two distinct but interconnected pathways (or 'pyramids') that individuals may follow towards radicalization: ideological radicalization and behavioral radicalization. According to the authors, beliefs and behavior therefore need to be studied as separate entities within processes of radicalization: on the one hand, someone can become radicalized in their beliefs without wanting to take violent action; and on the other hand, one may (want to) use violence without a strong ideological motivation (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017; see also McCauley, 2022; Moskalenko, 2021). This theory may be applicable to the intergenerational transmission of extremism. It is conceivable that parents are able to pass on elements of the extremist ideology (such as underlying narratives) without transferring a behavioral component. At the same time, the systematic literature in Chapter 4 suggests that some children imitate their extremist parents in behavior or language, without internalizing the associated ideology – and in the current study, 'parroting' by children was similarly observed. This may be especially the case for small children, who are too young to understand the underlying rationale for parental actions, and for whom parents are the primary socialization actors (Whitbeck 1999, as discussed in Chapter 3). In future research, the relationship between ideological transmission and behavioral transmission in extremist families, deserves more attention.

REFLECTION ON THE IGT MODEL

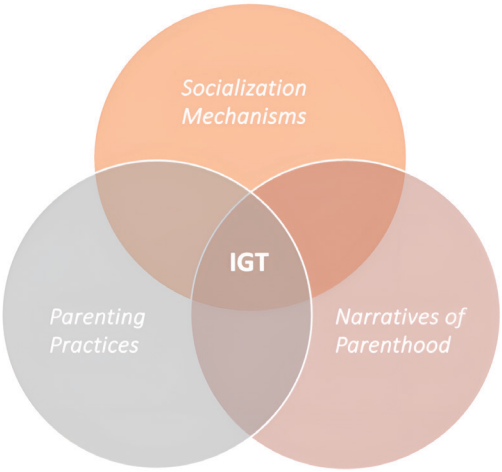
Ultimately, the insights described in this dissertation do not merely support the relevance of existing approaches – they also aid in theory-building when it comes to understanding processes of intergenerational transmission. Overall, this project shows that the theories outlined above (and in Chapter 2 of this dissertation) may all hold a piece of the puzzle. This is not just true for classic

developmental psychological approaches such as social learning and socialization theory, but also for approaches that are less frequently applied to intergenerational transmission processes, such as attachment style and parenting style theory. Taken together, these approaches allow us to understand not just *how* the intergenerational transmission of extremism occurs, but more generally, *why* it does occur in some instances, but not in others. They demonstrate that in order to fully capture the dynamics at play in transmission processes, we need to look beyond parental efforts at children's socialization, and include the broader family interactions and underlying parental assumptions in which transmission processes are embedded.

Altogether, the insights outlined above support the validity of the model that was introduced in Chapter 3, based on previous empirical studies of the study. It shows that indeed, the intergenerational transmission of extremism can arise out of three overlapping spheres – those being socialization mechanisms, parenting practices and narratives of parenthood (see Figure 5).

Figure 5.

Three integrated dimensions of intergenerational transmission (IGT)

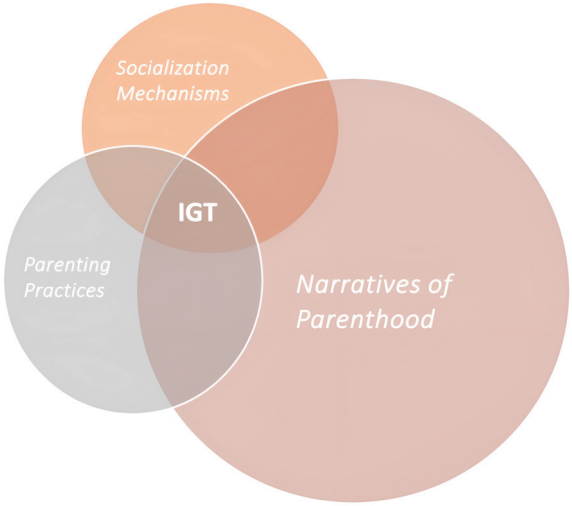


However, the empirical data presented in this dissertation adds to this model by showing that these dimensions can manifest themselves in various shapes and forms in individual families. It suggests that in some cases, one (or two) of the dimensions might be more prevalent than the other(s). To illustrate, it seems likely that the relation between the three spheres is different for extremist parents residing in correctional facilities. From my interviews with detained (former) jihadist individuals, I observed that even though these parents are physically much more limited in their ideological influence over their children, this might not hamper the possibility of intergenerational transmission taking place. Here, the respective stories that (former) jihadist parents may tell

their children (regarding the nature of their offences and their prison sentence), as well as their underlying assumptions of what 'good' parenthood should look like, could still potentially aid to the transmission of their beliefs onto their offspring (see Figure 6).

Figure 6.

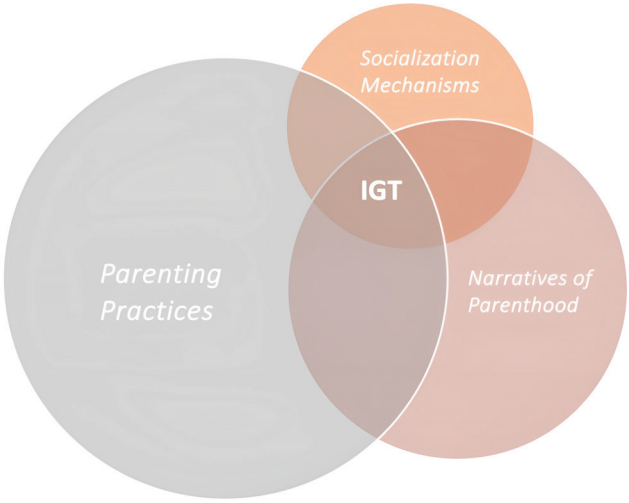
Potential variation on the IGT model (I)



In other instances, parents may not overtly socialize their children into their ideology, but still heavily rely on parenting practices that could stimulate the intergenerational transmission of extremism. For example, it was observed that several right-wing extremist participants declared living (or having lived) "double lives", trying to keep their extremist ways completely separate from their roles as parents. Here, explicit (direct) socialization mechanisms might be absent, yet parents may still engage in emotionally ambivalent or dysfunctional parenting practices that could in turn contribute to the intergenerational transmission of extremist ideologies. In various cases discussed in Chapter 7, physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse was observed, which might enhance children's susceptibility to their parents' worldviews through insecure attachment styles. Underlying these parenting practices may be implicit narratives of parenthood (such as an emphasis on discipline and/or a preference for authoritarian parenting styles, see Chapter 8), which could further feed into these dynamics. This suggests that even when (direct) parental socialization efforts are lacking, extremist parents might still indirectly contribute to the transmission of their ideologies onto their offspring (see Figure 7).

Figure 7.

Potential variation on the IGT model (II)



Theoretically, one could think of a third variation on the model, where classic socialization mechanisms (i.e., overt ideological training) takes central stage in extremist family dynamics. However, in analyzing the data I did not come across any families in which parents employed *direct* extremist socialization mechanisms without any parenting practices or narratives of parenthood to match. Therefore, in such hypothetical cases, it seems that the original model (Figure 5) captures potential processes of transmission best. Yet, an exception may be found in those families where all parental efforts at transmission are absent, and only *indirect* socialization mechanisms prevail (such as children's romanticization of (grand)parents involvement in extremist movements, as discussed in Chapter 6). These cases likely fall beyond the scope of the model, since in these instances, parental efforts at intergenerational transmission (including accompanying parental narratives and parenting practices) might be lacking entirely.

Finally, it is important to note that (the variations on) the model discussed here do not intend to suggest that all children raised in extremist families will naturally end up adopting the family ideology if parents indeed engage in all three dimensions of intergenerational transmission. Based on the (mostly qualitative) data employed in this project, I was not able to establish the correlative effects of the three spheres on children's adoption of the extremist family ideology. Moreover, 'succesful' extremist transmission is not a static outcome, since as we have seen in Chapter 9, children frequently manage to break away from their extremist upbringing sooner or later in life. The three dimensions presented here are thus to be understood as core elements underlying the intergenerational process, rather than as causal contributors to ideological outcomes.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

The current study did not consider (the effectiveness of) potential interventions in extremist families. Nevertheless, its findings contain some relevant lessons for both policymakers and practitioners working with extremist families. For example, this dissertation illustrates that in the Netherlands, still little is known about the extent to which extremist parents withdraw their children from the mainstream education system. Although extremist homeschooling does appear to occur in the Dutch context, and while in conversations with third parties, concerns relating to homeschooling were expressed, it is unclear to what extent this takes place. In the Netherlands, compulsory education officers do not have to report concerns about extremist homeschooling. As a result, both at a national and a local level, data on extremist homeschooling is lacking. In light of the isolating effects that extremist homeschooling can have, and the ways in which social isolation may in turn encourage the transmission of extremism, this can be considered problematic. Insights into potential extremist homeschooling practices could help to take timely preventative measures, should these be required. To this end, a clear framework for assessing individual cases is required, in order to determine whether homeschooling of an extremist nature is taking place. Here, recent concerns regarding (the limitations of) ideological assessments must be taken into account (see Stoeldraaijers et al., 2023). Naturally, at all times a balance should be struck between the possible (security) risks of extremist homeschooling and the invasion of privacy associated with such registrations.

Nonetheless, the finding that extremist parents may raise their children with love and care goes against the popular notion that extremist parents are inherently "bad" parents (Hamilton, 2018) or even "child abusers" (Palmer, 2014). Such argumentation has previously been used to justify far-reaching policies or interventions in extremist families (Bickerton, 2019). The current study shows that such repressive measures may indirectly facilitate the transmission of intergenerational transmission of extremism. For example, it was described that anger plays an important role in the stories that extremist parents convey to their children. Experiences of discrimination and stigmatization often inspire these narratives: extremist parents frequently appeal to feeling excluded or neglected by the outside world, as Chapter 8 showed. The interviews further suggest that (judicial) interventions and counter measures can fuel these extremist narratives, and that feelings of anger or hate may in turn be passed on to children. In particular, anger towards governmental institutions plays a pivotal role, especially among jihadist parents who traveled to IS territory. In the interviews, Dutch detained (former) jihadists whose nationality has been revoked frequently express their frustration. As of yet, it is unclear what long-term effects these narratives of anger will have on the intergenerational transmission of extremism. Nevertheless, experts, practitioners and policy makers dealing with these families should be are aware that repressive measures – although sometimes unavoidable – may unintentionally stimulate extremist transmission processes. A tailor-made and integrated approach, centered around the unique dynamics and experiences of each respective family, would thus be preferred.

In addition, the findings of this study show that children from extremist families are able to break away from their parents' ideas, but that in doing so, they can follow various paths. While some completely cut off contact with their parents when breaking away from the family ideology, others continue to support their extremist caregivers. In line with the findings of the systematic literature review in Chapter 3, findings also point to the protective power that non-extremist influences from outside the family sphere may have; the importance of alternative identity formation; and the role of positive trigger events and exposure to people with different lifestyles or ideologies. Research participants who grew up with extremist parents describe tapping into to new forms of meaning-making during their deradicalization process. To some, for example, mainstream religion may serve as an alternative, pro-social form of meaning-making that can replace the extremist family ideology. These observations could be used in the development of programs to combat the intergenerational transmission of extremism. Ultimately, breaking the isolated bubble in which children grow up is crucial in this regard.

All in all, this shows that for children of extremist parents, the process of breaking away is a long-term and unique process. Where some are able to close the chapter at some point, others fear that their ideological upbringing continues to haunt them for the rest of their lives – even after years of therapy. Yet, the current study suggests that the prevailing assumption that children who grow up in an extremist family will by definition become extremists themselves, is unjustified and most likely even harmful. For anyone who works with extremist families, it is pivotal not to reduce children to their parents' ideas – and to avoid at all times that a wedge is being driven between parents and their children. After all, despite their extremist family ideology, a healthy and loving relationship between parents and children may indeed exist, and children raised in extremist families can show themselves to be particularly loyal to their parents. The observation that extremist parents tend to convey their views to their children out of a desire to protect them against a supposedly 'dangerous' outside world, further underscores this hypothesis. Combating processes of intergenerational transmission should therefore not come at the expense of the relationship that may exist between extremist parents and their children.

The observations described in this dissertation provide a valuable starting point for anyone who is working on preventing the intergenerational transmission of extremism within a family context. The insights outlined in this study can help set up new interventions and prevention measures, or can contribute to existing programs. This dissertation may additionally help in the development of policies that better reflect the experiences of (children growing up in) extremist families. It should nevertheless be emphasized that the findings discussed in this dissertation do not necessarily translate to individual cases, and that their applicability to specific extremist families may be limited due to a variety of methodological considerations. In the next section I will address the most important ones.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Regarding the data selection

The qualitative methods applied in this study are not without limitations. As discussed, studying extremist families in the Netherlands (and beyond) has not proven easy. In an ideal scenario, I would have additionally included data from other relevant actors, such as the Child Protection Council, the Dutch Probation Service, youth care facilities, and Dutch municipalities. Due to the sensitivity of this type of data and the judicial constraints surrounding (research on) minors, this was not feasible, which in turn limited triangulation of data. As a result, my findings are naturally biased – but it is hard to determine the extent of this bias. For example, the Public Prosecution Service files only reflect those jihadist families that were subject to a criminal charge and subsequent prosecution. Data from cases that were discharged, or from families that remained under the radar of the criminal justice system, is therefore lacking. Similar limitations apply to the examined court rulings: this data only considers (families of) individuals who ended up in the criminal justice system, for whatever reason. I am therefore unable to comment on the ways in which these cases may differ from families that were never criminally charged. This limits the generalizability of the statements made based on this data (see also Schuurman & Eijkman, 2013).

It must also be emphasized that the nature of the Public Prosecutor's files that were analyzed, varies greatly. In some cases, criminal charges relate to a suspicion of (attempted) travel to a conflict area; in other cases, parents are suspected of plotting an attack on Dutch soil; and still other files are 'merely' concerned with parents' involvement in terrorist financing. The family contexts of the suspects are also rather divers (children born in a conflict area versus born in the Netherlands; parents deceased, divorced or still together; etc.). Furthermore, many of the female jihadist suspects in Public Prosecutor's files are converts, whereas this is not the case for male suspects. Any similarities or differences in ideological transmission processes must therefore be considered against these diverse backgrounds.

In addition, these files were generally drawn up in the context of a criminal prosecution, and not intended for academic research. As a result, details about suspects' family lives are often sparse. The non-scientific nature of the data also raises questions about the extent to which these files contain an accurate representation of suspects' family dynamics and interactions (see Schuurman & Eijkman, 2013). Furthermore, the files generally contain information provided by various parties with conflicting interests – such as the Public Prosecution Service, the police, the suspect itself, child protection services, and any potential witnesses or experts. It is not our job to weigh the facts and circumstances as stated by these parties. Nevertheless, during the case file analysis it was at all times considered that the provided information, most notably claims made by suspects, might not always be truthful – and may even conflict with other evidence in the file. Therefore, statements made by suspects were only included if they were supported (at least to a certain extent) by other

case file evidence (psychiatric evaluation reports, recordings of confidential communication, wire taps, witness statements, house search reports, etc.). Statements that lacked additional support were not taken into account.

Regarding the interviews

The interview data comes with several limitations of its own. This is partly because of the diverse backgrounds of interview participants, but also due to several constraints that are inherent to retrospective interviews and qualitative methods of analysis. Given the weight I attach to the interview data in this study, these limitations deserve explicit attention. I will discuss some of the most important comments regarding participant selection, retrospective interviews as a research method and the use of qualitative analysis techniques.

First of all, some comments on the participant selection. Although I managed to interview a decent pool of research participants, I do not claim that my interviewees are representative of the general extremist community in the Netherlands or abroad. In approaching interview participants, I primarily focused on individuals who have been deradicalized, or who are at least no longer active in extremist milieus. Feasibility was the core consideration in this decision, since people who are no longer extremist themselves prove to be generally more willing to cooperate in academic research (see Horgan, 2009). Secondly, primarily including deradicalized participants took preference from an ethical point of view. I wanted to limit the potential social and security risks (such as retaliation from the extremist community) as much as possible for those involved, which rendered deradicalized interviewees the most sensible choice. Thirdly, it was assumed that deradicalized individuals would be able to look back on their past with more distance, and perhaps therefore feel more comfortable talking openly about their lives. Extremists who are still fully committed to the ideology might want to convince me of the spotlessness of their family lives instead, and could potentially downplay any extremist socialization efforts on their part.

Nevertheless, the inclusion of deradicalized respondents also has its limitations. Many of the participants I interviewed managed to make a living out of their experiences: they wrote an autobiography, regularly speak at conferences, or lead a support group for (relatives of) radicalized individuals. Particularly in Canada and the United States, it is not uncommon for deradicalized individuals to establish themselves as experts within the so-called 'deradicalization industry' (Perry, Gruenewald, & Scrivens, 2022). This observation fits into a broader trend in which experts on various topics (crime, addictions, etc.) are able to turn their own life stories into successful business models (Lindström & Toikko, 2022; Segal, 2017). In some instances, interviewees' double roles as 'professional formers' (Gansewig & Walsh, 2021 p. 1; see also Koehler, 2020) may have diminished the authenticity of the interviews. Interviewees' stories might no longer reflect their genuine experiences, but instead, they might serve as a marketing tool – where participants adapt their

narratives to accommodate societal expectations of what it means to be a 'former'. The question then remains to what extent these narratives can still be considered authentic or accurate, when they are simultaneously used for commercial purposes. In this light, concerns have previously been expressed about the conscious and subconscious biases of professional formers (Koehler, 2020; Walsh & Gansewig, 2021). Moreover, one may wonder to what extent the experiences of those who seek out media attention and monetize their stories after breaking away, differ from those who do not. The employed methods of participant selection therefore carry the risk of leading to interviewees with particular ('mediagenic') stories and/or personalities.

While generally speaking, the truthfulness of interviewees' statements is always difficult to verify, this is a particularly important limitation of the interviews conducted at the terrorist ward. A common saying among criminal justice professionals is that 'Everyone in prison is innocent' and in the interviews, too, participants would at times try to convince me of their clean hands. This justifies the suspicion that this group may give socially desirable answers when asked about their past. I tried to limit this risk in two ways. On the one hand, it was emphasized ahead of each conversation that the interviewees would at all times remain anonymous; that everything they shared would be treated as confidential; that their answers would have no effect on criminal proceedings; and that our academic research team operates independently of the criminal justice system. On the other hand, it was made explicit that the precise nature of interviewees' convictions would not be of concern to this study, but instead, that I was interested in hearing about their life stories and personal experiences. While these efforts do not completely eradicate the possibility of socially desirable responses by interviewees, it was attempted to minimize their potential drivers as much as possible.

Another limitation to consider is that only retrospective interviews were conducted – which carries the risk of hindsight bias. The events discussed by participants typically occurred a rather long time ago, especially when referring to incidents in early childhood. In recounting such memories, distortions may arise, where individuals recall certain aspects while overlooking others (see Bartlett's (1932) foundational work). Events can also become distorted over time, where subjects change the nature of events or attribute a different meaning to them (Kensinger & Schacter, 2005; Nash & Ost, 2017). Finally, false memories can develop based on the experiences of others, news articles, or even fictional stories (Conway, 1997; Frenda et al., 2013; Nash & Ost, 2017). Such memory effects are not uncommon when it comes to remembering traumatic events in childhood (Maughan & Rutter, 1997), which may also apply to the interviewees in the current study. Although it is not possible to check the truthfulness of respondents' stories, this does not necessarily hamper the findings of this study. Ultimately, truth-seeking was not the goal of this project – as instead, I aimed to understand and illuminate the experiences, perspectives, and subjective interpretations of those involved. Using a narrative analysis method, I attempted to unravel participants' stories and thus gain insight into how they retrospectively give meaning

to their own family relations, identity formation, and subsequent choices and actions (see also Copeland, 2019; Maruna & Liem, 2021; Presser & Sandberg, 2019). It is precisely these profound understandings of (highly subjective) personal experiences which constitute the core of this study.

Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that the historical, social and cultural context of the interviews differs greatly. While some individuals' experiences took place just a few years ago, other participants talked about events in the 1980s or 1990s. The political and social context of Western countries at the time was very different from those today (consider, for example, the role of the internet and social media). Additionally, authors have previously noted that right-wing extremist groups in the Netherlands during the 1990s differ greatly from those that are currently active (Peels, 2021; Sterkenburg, 2021). The experiences of older research participants are therefore difficult to compare with more recent stories – and the former may be less relevant in understanding intergenerational transmission processes today. In addition, the cultural context of interviewees differs at the micro level as well: while some interviews come from urban middle-class households, while others were raised in less affluent rural families. As a result, their stories are not necessarily comparable. Although these individual differences obstruct the generalizability of findings, the variety in backgrounds of interviewees allows for a layered understanding of intergenerational transmission mechanisms.

It is unclear to what extent the experiences of interviewees accurately reflect the Dutch context. A large portion of participants comes from the United States and Canada. Although I initially aimed to focus on extremist families the Netherlands and (Western) Europe, this turned out to yield too little interviewees. Considering I wanted to include as many first-hand experiences of (former) parents and adult children as possible, applying a broader scope was justified. While compromising on the specificity of findings, this decision allowed me to reach a larger group of potential research participants, subsequently allowing for the identification of more general patterns in transmission mechanisms. Nevertheless, cross-country differences in history, culture, politics and legal systems do not always make a direct translation to the Dutch context possible. This was taken into account in discussing the findings.

In addition, the interviewees included in this project come from different ideological backgrounds. Specifically, the study was focused around parents and children (formerly) holding right-wing extremist and jihadist worldviews. In defining these concepts, I relied on respondents' own identification with these ideologies (or a derivative thereof, such as neo-Nazism, white supremacy, or militant Islamism). In analyzing the case files, the ideological assessments made by the Public Prosecution Office were followed. It was not examined to what extent the ideologies discussed in these cases actually met the NCTV definition of violent extremism, considering the many misconceptions and definitional confusions surrounding these concepts. However, in all included cases the use of ideological violence was (at the very least) legitimized by the parents involved. In modern radicalization literature, the willingness to use violence in pursuing ideological

goals is considered a core characteristic of extremist ideologies, which sets them apart from 'mere' radicalism or activism (Berger, 2018; Bötticher, 2017; Striegher, 2015). Nevertheless, individual differences among interviewees in (their understanding of) the definitions of these ideologies cannot be ruled out – which may also hinder the generalizability of the findings.

In conducting this study, I was well-aware of the sensitivity of the research topic. Parenting practices in general are inherently personal, and so is the experience of being raised within an extremist milieu. For example, during the interviews, even participants who broke away from their parents' violent ideologies years ago, would still be emotional when recalling their childhood. Therefore, the do-no-harm principle (cf. Zimmerman & Watts, 2004) was applied at all times: the interview (and interviewees' participation in the study) should cause them as little psychological stress as possible. Participants were always provided with the option to terminate the interview at any time, either temporarily or permanently. While this was communicated to the interviewees ahead of each conversation, none of them chose to do so. On several occasions, they seemed compelled to justify their past decisions regarding their children's upbringing. Despite them no longer being engaged in extremist milieus, some visibly struggled with the realization that their choices may have had a significant impact on their children's lives. Consequently, it is possible that some interviewees may have downplayed the effects their extremist ideology could have had on their children, as to avoid being perceived as "bad parents". As a result, self-selection effects could have played a role in the selection of participants. Parents who heavily socialized their children into their extremist worldviews, may have opted out of participating in this project.

Regarding the analysis

Finally, a few comments on the analysis strategy. In examining the interview data and case files, I primarily employed thematic and narrative analysis techniques. While these qualitative methods are well-suited for analyzing deeply personal themes such as upbringing and family dynamics, they do have their limitations. Notably, in the interviews, I typically only spoke with one individual per household, thus gaining insight into the family system solely from this single perspective. The ways these individual experiences related to those of other family members thus remains unknown. Consequently, the factual accuracy of participants' statements cannot be verified, and therefore remains plausible that their interpretations or experiences do not align with those of other involved individuals. Furthermore, the methodologies applied in this study do not allow for the determination of any risk or protective factors influencing the transmission of extremism from parent to child, as causal relationships cannot be established solely on the basis of qualitative data. Nonetheless, the current study provides us with a unique initial understanding of the firsthand experiences of individuals who themselves experienced (or participated in) the intergenerational transmission of extremism. Their subjective interpretations of their family history are of pivotal

importance if we want to move towards an integrated approach to prevent extremist ideologies from being passed on.

Regarding the use of intelligence data

As described in Chapter 5 of this dissertation, intelligence data was used to gain insight into the scope of jihadist families in the Netherlands. The use of such data, as well as the collaboration with the General Intelligence and Security Service (Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst, AIVD) was unique - particularly because in the context of the Netherlands, this project was the first attempt at academic collaboration between an intelligence service and a university. As such, a large deal of trust was involved in our collaboration, where our unprecedented access to this unique type of data sometimes came at the cost of the principles of transparency and replicability. This is no surprise, as intelligence services in general serve a different purpose than academic institutions such as universities. While intelligence agencies prioritize national security, secrecy, and the protection of state interests, universities are committed to the open pursuit of knowledge, intellectual freedom, and transparency. These differing objectives required a lot of manouvering, as the closed, confidential nature of intelligence data inherently contradicts the academic principles of openness and public accountability. In practice, this meant that my co-authors and I did not have access to the raw data on which the dataset was based, due to its sensitive nature and its associated privacy concerns. Moreover, as already mentioned in Chapter 4, we had to sign non-disclosure agreements in working with the data, and several additional internal reviews had to take place prior to publication of the manuscript.

The use of intelligence data was further limited by the fact that the dataset was not created for academic purposes. For this reason, we were unable to establish (the reliability and validity of) the data collection method, nor were we able to check for intercoder reliability. Additionally, because the AIVD cannot share much about its rationale underlying its selection of jihadist 'targets' (as it cannot disclose details pertaining to its modus operandi), we were not fully informed about the exact inclusion criteria underlying such selection. It is therefore to be expected that there is some level of bias in the data, but it is difficult to establish the exact nature of this bias. Finally, there was, quite naturally, also no informed consent obtained prior to including these subjects in the dataset. These individuals in the dataset are likely unaware that their information had been collected by intelligence services in the first place, let alone that their data was being used for academic research purposes.

These limitations raise important questions about whether such restricted data should be used at all in academic research. Since I cannot independently verify the data's quality or origin, the intelligence data and results as a whole fail to adhere to the FAIR-principles that should generally guide academic research. While I believe that such data can indeed be of substantial

value – particularly in areas where no alternative datasets exist, as is often the case for research on extremism – it is crucial to acknowledge that its use requires a careful methodological rationale and transparent acknowledgment of its constraints. In this study, I do not claim transparancy or replicability in the conventional academic sense. Instead, the strength of the study lies in its contribution to a domain where empirical knowledge is scarce, and where access to such data can shed light on otherwise opaque phenomena. Nonetheless, future research efforts should preferably aim to develop clearer methodological frameworks for handling intelligence-derived data. These frameworks would ideally include oversight mechanisms to safeguard academic integrity.

In spite of these limitations, the fact that we were able to gain access to intelligence data did not only allow us to understand the broader context in which intergenerational transmission takes place, but also demonstrated that joint projects between universities and intelligence services are feasible. As mentioned, it is the first time that the AIVD allowed external (academic) researchers to work with their data, which is a promising result in itself. However, such collaborations should not obscure the ethical dilemmas they pose. The experience described here should serve as a starting point for further debate on how, and under what conditions, sensitive security data can be responsibly integrated into academic research. This hopefully inspires other researchers to undertake similar endeavours in the future, while also shedding light on the trade-offs such data access might entail.

CONCLUSION

Despite these caveats and limitations, this study constitutes an important first step in understanding the intergenerational transmission of extremist ideas. As seen in Chapter 3, this field of study is still underdeveloped. Nonetheless, the current study demonstrates the importance of academic research on the dynamics of extremist families, considering the ways in which these interactions may inspire intergenerational transmission mechanisms. Despite individual differences in family backgrounds and relations, general patterns can be discerned in the ways children are raised within extremist environments. As observed, intergenerational transmission occurs within a broader context of mutual interactions between parents, children and the outside world. These interactions are central to the ways extremist beliefs are passed from one generation to the next. This dissertation therefore demonstrates that transmission mechanisms can best be understood as arising out of three dimensions: socialization mechanisms, everyday parenting practices and narratives of extremist parenthood.

As discussed, extremist parents can actively contribute to processes of intergenerational transmission. However, in socializing their children into extremist ideologies, they are typically not driven by malicious intent, but rather by the perceived ‘dangerousness’ of the outside world, and a resulting desire to protect their children against existential threats. Moreover, children raised in

extremist households do not necessarily look back negatively on their upbringing, and many of the interviewees in this study do not harbor any resentment towards their extremist parents. In some cases, a healthy and loving relation between extremist parents and their children can even be observed. These insights are vital for shaping intervention and prevention strategies to counter extremist transmission within the family. In developing such programs, emphasis should be placed on systemic approaches that focuses on both parents and children and the dynamics between them. In cases where serious indications of developmental risks to children are absent, caution should be exercised in implementing drastic measures in extremist families. Interventions by authorities may exacerbate family members' distrust, potentially leading to further social isolation and, consequently, stimulating the intergenerational transmission of these ideas.

While this dissertation does not serve as a risk assessment tool in individual cases, its findings underscore the ongoing importance of addressing intergenerational extremism transmission in the foreseeable future. This appears to be particularly the case for the Dutch context. Interviews with experts and professionals suggest that the intergenerational transmission of extremism occurs in the Netherlands, too. The files from the Public Prosecution Service, court rulings, and interviews with Dutch (former) extremist parents further support this assumption. However, the current study yields limited definitive conclusions regarding the extent of intergenerational extremism transmission in the Netherlands. Some points of interest for the Dutch context can be distilled. For example, there is still little insight into the nature of right-wing extremist transmission in the Netherlands. The exact number of children who grow up with right-wing extremist views is unknown, and this group is particularly difficult to examine. This study also shows – in line with the systematic literature review in Chapter 3 – that extremist homeschooling practices probably occur in the Dutch context as well, but it is unclear to what extent and in which ways this takes place. A lack of awareness and willingness to report issues among compulsory education officers may play a role here, and this should also be addressed in the future.

Based on this study, I cannot make any predictions about the ways the intergenerational transmission of extremism will evolve in the near future. Considering recent trends and shifts in (new forms of) extremist ideologies, it is possible that more children will be at risk of being raised with violent worldviews. Increases in ideological polarization within society may exacerbate this trend, potentially inspiring extremist families to further isolate themselves from mainstream society. This is concerning, particularly because this dissertation has demonstrated that for children to break away from their parents' extremist beliefs, exposure to other worldviews and lifestyles is pivotal. Simultaneously, insufficient understanding of these families could impede the timely implementation of preventive and intervention strategies. In the end, stimulating diversity and dialogue, combating stigma, and alleviating the social isolation experienced by children, should therefore be prioritized in combatting the intergenerational transmission of extremism within the family.