

**Formers' Understandings of Why They Engaged With and Disengaged from Violent
Social Movements in Settler-Colonial North America and Europe**

by

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Abstract

Violent social movements, in the form of violent extremism and terrorism continue to impact millions around the world, and harm communities in Canada and the USA (Southern Poverty Law Centre, 2022; Counter Extremism Project, 2022). This qualitative research studied how former violent extremists understand the drivers that led them into and out of violent social, extremist, and terrorist movements in Canada and the USA and Europe, which are continents that are also affected by settler-colonialism (Daschuk, 2019; Woolford, 2009, 2019; Byrne et al., 2017, 2018). The thesis research is shaped by Critical Emancipatory, Intersectional Feminist, and Social Movement theories, and since the author is also a former extremist (a former is deradicalized and/or disengaged individual from violent extremism), I use multiple methodologies that include critical autoethnography, Indigenous and Intersectional Feminist methodologies. Methods included gathering three sets of data from interviews with formers, their family members, and interviews with non- governmental organizations (NGO) staff. Data also included a talking circle/focus group with formers. The significance of this research is that it increases knowledge about how to better prevent and intervene into violent extremist and terrorist social movements with more effective peacebuilding effort at micro, meso and macro levels of society. This research contributes to Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS) theories and practice about how to bring positive peace to violent social movements, including colonial and patriarchal movements that harm Inuit, Metis and First Nations communities, women, youth, and gender diverse people. Research results demonstrated complex and intersecting drivers of entry

and exit from Violent Social Movements (VSM), and the importance in systemic policies and peacebuilding praxis to better prevent and intervene into VSM, and to help people to successfully exit VSMS. Key findings also provide recommendations for peacebuilding praxis supported at micro, meso and macro levels of society, such as improved mental health and educational resources, innovative policy changes, and deradicalization programming to teach effective critical thinking training, cross cultural conflict resolution and dialogue skills. Also, more effective bullying intervention programs are needed at schools, in collaboration with home and mental health systems. Political will for more resources would also help to build gender equity, critical thinking and PVE efforts youth in both rural and urban areas, and to train and resource more parents/caregivers and faith leaders such as Christian, Muslim and Jewish leaders to better prevent and intervene into violent radicalization and violent social movements that may be evolving in their groups, congregations and online spaces. Key findings also suggest that mental health and faith systems assist communities and families affected by intergenerational effects of colonialism/occupation, war, racism, and patriarchy to heal and build identities, cultural and gender relationships where there is equity, powersharing, and space for multiple identity groups to peacefully live alongside each other. Recommendations discuss knowledge transfer to governments to develop more effective sociopolitical, human rights-based approaches policies and programs, and to facilitative rights based constructive policies to prevent and intervene into VSMS (Bosi & della Porta, 2013) and patriarchal, settler colonial violence in North America and Europe.

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I also dedicate this thesis to my family. My patient wife and son, Mani-Sheppard-Luangkhot and Joshua Hubbard, both inspired me to do a Ph.D. to help the world be safer and more peaceful for them, and for Inuit, Metis and First Nations peoples, racialized people, women, newcomers, and 2SLGBTQI+ people. I give thanks to my mother, Genie Sheppard, who bravely exited violent extremism with me. I also am grateful for my European grandparents, who, through their intergenerational lessons showed me both where I need to grow as a human being, and as a pracademic.

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Glossary

2SLGBTQI+...	Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, HIV+ community
AFC	Action for Canada
AI.....	Anti-Islamic
AIM.....	American Indian Movement
BK.....	Babbar Khalsa
B and H	Blood and Honour
BIPOC.....	Black, Inuit, Metis and First Nations and People of Colour
CEP.....	Critical Emancipatory Peacebuilding
CHP	Christian Heritage Party..Christian nationalist, far-right violent social movement
CSIS.....	Canadian Security Intelligence Services
CVE.....	Countering Violent Extremism
CWP.....	Canadian White Pride violent social movements
EU.....	European union
FBI.....	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FLQ.....	Front Liberation de Quebec

FOTL.....	Freedom- On -The- Land far-right, anti-government violent social movement
FRVE.....	Far Right Violent Extremism
FTF.....	Foreign Terrorist Fighters
GFA.....	Good Friday Agreement
GWOT.....	Global War On Terror
Incel.....	Involuntary Celibate anti-gender violent social movement
IPV.....	Intimate Partner Violence
IRA.....	Irish Republican Army
IMVE.....	Ideologically Motivated Violent Extremism
ISIS.....	Islamic State, also known as ISIL or Da'esh, Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
KKK.....	Klu Klux Klan
MAGA.....	Make America Great Again violent social movement
MENA.....	Middle East North Africa region
MMIWG2S+.....	Missing and Murdered Inuit, Metis and First Nations Women, girls and 2S+ peoples
MI5.....	British Military Intelligence, section 5
NATS.....	Far-right national corp political party in Ukraine

NIRA.....	New Irish Republican Army
NGO.....	Non-Governmental Organization
OLD.....	Oka Land Defenders
PACS.....	Peace and Conflict Studies
PF.....	Patriot Front, white supremacist far-right violent social movement
PIRA.....	Provisional Irish Republican Army
PVE.....	Preventing Violent Extremism
QAnon.....	QAnon conspiracy theory and violent social movement
REMVE	Religiously Motivated Violent Extremism
RIM.....	Russian Imperial Movement
RMVE.....	Racially motivated violent extremism
SMT.....	Social Movement Theory
TFC.....	Truckers Freedom Convoy
UDA.....	Ulster Defence Association
UVF.....	Ulster Volunteer Force
VE.....	Violent extremism
VR.....	Violent Radicalization
VSM.....	Violent Social Movement

VSMO..... Violent Social Movement Organization

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Chapter One

Prologue

As a former extremist, or “former,” this thesis research helps me to better understand my own road moving from extremism to peace. From 1989 to 1992 when I was an adolescent, my immediate family and I were radicalized and engaged with a small, religiously extremist Apocalyptic cult, in British Columbia, Canada (Sheppard-Luangkhot, 2020). Like some of the former participants in this study, what drove me to engage in violent, religious extremism with far-right, white supremacist ideology were several push factors like financial stress and my parent’s marital strain and pull factors like lack of spirituality in our family. I also had a deep need for belonging, and power that we, as a white, settler-colonial, patriarchal family, felt entitled to, given our privilege and status. I remember the day I finally disengaged from the cult, in September 1992. I was eating cereal for breakfast before work when the cult leader “Sven” came over to the table. My blue eyes stayed down, and I watched the soggy cereal slowly sink into the bowl. Soon, Sven started his diatribe of verbal abuse, questioning why I would want to go to my job at a computer store, in rural British Columbia. He was psychologically abusing me and telling me that I would soon be fired. Then Sven uttered the fateful words that helped me to disengage from violent extremism: “You should have shot yourself a long time ago.” The horror of what he was telling me I should do to myself caused me to freeze, quietly. But then a calm

voice inside me said, “No one should tell you to kill yourself...just go!” I credit that voice as my soul telling me it was time to run, or I would soon die from Sven’s hands or my own, at his behest. This defining moment began my journey of disengagement and deradicalization from violent religious extremism. It was also the beginning of moving toward understanding the relationship of settler-colonialism, patriarchy, and white supremacy that framed the Apocalyptic ideology I had been brainwashed into for three years of my adolescent life, from ages 16 to 19.

Introduction

Since early human history, violent social movements in the form of violent extremism (VE), and terrorism have harmed and killed tens of thousands of people in the Global North and South (Berger, 2010; Institute for Economics and Peace, 2020). In Canada, the USA, and in Europe, violent extremist and terrorist social movements have harmed thousands of communities, manifesting as hate crimes (U.S. Department of Justice, 2020) and violent attacks and killings (Institutes for Economics and Peace, 2022). Throughout the Global North and South, many governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and academics, including Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS) scholars and practitioners are trying to stop violent extremist and terrorist conflicts that arise out of violent social movements (VSM), particularly following the terrorist attacks carried out by al-Qaeda on September 11, 2001 (Tellidis & Toros, 2015).

It is important to clarify that the word extremism itself does not equate to violent extremism and terrorism. Multiple nonviolent radical social movements have created important sociopolitical change such as the Idle No More movement in Canada, Black Lives Matter in the

USA, and the LGBTQI+ liberation movement in the Republic of Ireland. Moreover, many nonviolent political activists and racial or ethnic minorities, like Muslims are racially profiled and unfairly labelled as “terrorists” to serve a political and racist government agenda, resulting in the hyper surveillance of Muslims in the USA since 9/11 (Selod, 2018).

Hundreds of thousands of youths and adults are recruited into violent extremist social movements (Counter Extremist Project, 2022) by recruiters who are online and/or in person. Many recruits kill or hurt others, while others are killed or remain engaged in their violent social movement organization (VSMOs) for years. Some of my family members are still engaged in violent extremism. I count myself as fortunate, as though I was trained to shoot a gun, the extremist leader had not yet commanded me to use it on anyone in his plan to overthrow the government, and I left before I committed any violence.

This thesis is my quest to gain a deeper perspective on why I, my family, and countless others engaged with and then disengaged from violent social movements. I want to discover what “formers” (former violent extremists who are disengaged and/or deradicalized) think that societies should do to build non-violence and sustainable peace in Canada, the USA, and Europe, lands affected by settler colonialism and patriarchy (Jennings, 2010; Byrne et al, 2018; Daschuk, 2019; Woolford, 2009, 2019).

Framing Violent Social Movements as Conflicts

PACS is a discipline dedicated to understanding the etiology of conflict, and PACS trains scholars and peacebuilders to better prevent, intervene into, and transform violent conflicts. The transdisciplinary nature of PACS research (Galtung, 2010, as cited in Byrne & Thiessen, 2020,

p.1) can help stakeholders to comprehensively understand the complex causes of conflicts relating to violent social movements, including those which involve racist ideologies and power structures like colonialism (Rice, 2013; Byrne et al, 2018).

Violent conflict occurs when an individual, group or organization violates someone's rights, dignity, freedom, justice, life, needs and existence (Abuelaish & Arya, 2017). Byrne and Senehi (2012) suggest that violent conflict is caused by social divisions and intersecting identities with competing ideologies and needs, and that violence can be used at the macro, meso and micro levels of society. Framing violent social movements (VSM) as violent conflicts can build policy and praxis that effectively prevents and transforms violent social movements into movements of peace, as seen in Northern Ireland after the 1998 Good Friday Agreement (GFA) (Tellidis & Toros, 2015).

With a strong commitment to social justice, PACS scholars and practitioners are well positioned to analyze, prevent, and transform violent social movements, and contribute to social justice or positive peace (Galtung, 1990) in societies where violent social movements are occurring. Johan Galtung writes about the distinction between negative peace (the absence of war) and positive peace or social justice (Galtung & Ikeda, 2020). He suggests that positive peace is a joint project of legitimate goals, that includes social justice and the interests of all, not just the power elite (Galtung & Ikeda 2020; Byrne & Thiessen, 2020). Positive peace is a state in which all conflict parties' interests are met such as liberation, healthy, and security (Galtung & Ikeda 2020), and positive peace is disrupted by violent extremist conflicts. When discussing

terrorism after the 9/11 attacks, Galtung (2017) asked scholars to question why the violent 9/11 conflict happened. This is because the US government must learn from the conflict so that terrorist atrocities like 9/11 do not happen again (Galtung, 2017), and so secure peace can be constructed in the USA and other societies.

What are Violent Social Movements?

Social movements are comprised of people with beliefs that reflect their desire for reward distribution in society and/or a need for change of a social structure (Zald & McCarthy, as cited in Borum, 2012). An example of a violent social movement is Blood and Honour (B & H), a Neo-Nazi skinhead group that originated in England and was founded by Ian Stuart Donaldson. Having since spread throughout Europe into Canada and the USA, B & H's violent arm is the Combat 18 white supremacist group (Counter Extremism Project, 2021). B & H members consider themselves freedom fighters for the supremacy of white power, a reward that they want to protect and fear losing as social structures change. B & H's goal is to gain influence through their movement, mainly by using racist music festivals as part of their collective gathering, to spread propaganda and discontentment with non-white immigrants and homosexuals, whom they perceive as endangering white racial and heterosexual purity (Countering Extremism Project, 2021). An example of their ideology and propaganda points out the ethnocentric, homophobic, racism embodied in the movement:

Sadly, our founder and leader Ian Stuart Donaldson was taken from us in 1993. But his

legacy has remained and flourished, his dream of a movement run by and for skinheads, behind a musical front remains, and has grown into a confederation of like-minded people, stronger than ever. A movement, offering people an alternative lifestyle to the drug infested, pro-homosexual, race mixing scene fanatically pushed by today's powers to be, is giving hope to thousands around the world. (B & H as cited in Counter Extremism Project, 2021).

Social movements are a helpful concept in this thesis research, as SMT frames violent extremism and terrorist groups within a broader context of specific movements. VSMOs like B & H are trying to gain rewards, and push change upon systems and structures to align with their ideological goals of keeping Black, Inuit, Metis and First Nations and People of Colour (BIPOC) and 2SLGBTQ+ subjugated within white supremacist systems that, in their minds, should only reward white, heterosexual people.

What is Engagement, Disengagement and Deradicalization?

Engagement in violent social movement means an individual and group has become behaviorally connected to through online conversations, in person meetings or violent actions. John Horgan (2008) defines disengagement as a behavioral shift and differs from deradicalization, which involves a change in thinking (Horgan, 2008). Horgan (2008) notes that disengagement, in contrast with deradicalization, is action-oriented, for example, when someone stops visiting violent extremist social media pages, online forums or in person meetings (as cited in Kaya, 2016). There are two types of disengagement, voluntary and involuntary (Bjorgo &

Horgan, 2008, as cited in Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2013). Voluntary disengagement occurs when people decide, of their own accord, to leave violent social movements, while involuntary disengagement pertains to an exit caused by incarceration or death by terrorism such as when ISIS fighters were killed in Syria (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2013).

Disengagement is an important behavioral step to deradicalization; however, deradicalization is more about attitudinal change (Bjorgo & Horgan, 2008, as cited in Kaya, 2016). Disengagement is like the disarmament phase of the interdependent continuum of DDR, or Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (Steeken & Langholtz, 2017), which has been prominent in liberal peacebuilding efforts. For example, the former paramilitary Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) movement were successfully deradicalized, disengaged and disarmed after the political powersharing process developed by the GFA, and the recidivism rate is less than 4 percent (Altier et al., 2021).

Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration are interconnected, much like disengagement and deradicalization. The psychological and social processes of deradicalization is a form of demobilization and reintegration. The latter and former processes create the social, political, and psychological changes necessary to achieve sustainable peace (Steeken & Langholtz, 2017). A former, or former extremist may be disengaged, but not fully rehabilitated or reintegrated into society. This research involved interviewing formers who had disengaged and

deradicalized through exit counselling from an NGO, therapist, or prison staff member, along with their families and NGO staff who have worked with formers.

What is Violent Radicalization?

In Canada, the National Strategy to Countering Radicalization to Violence (Public Safety, 2022) focusses on building individual and group resilience while also preventing intolerant and hateful religious, political, racial, cultural expressions that lead to violence. The National Strategy (2022) report defines violent radicalization as a gradual process during which “a person or group takes on extreme ideas and begins to think they should use violence to support or advance their ideas or beliefs” (p.11). During the violent radicalization process, an ideology may be fed to an individual by an in-person or online recruiter, or through written or oral propaganda, with the motive of assuming control of the recruit to fulfill an agenda.

Norwegian researchers Tore Bjorgo and John Horgan (2009) discusses violent radicalization as a psychological and ideological process in which people express their ideological beliefs through violent acts, and people who become violently radicalized frequently feel pulled or pushed into VR. Push factors for VR may include political events, life stressors, racism, or trauma. Under such circumstances, VR ideology or an extremist group can feel like the solution to people’s personal conflicts and life problems (Sheppard-Luangkhot, 2020).

People may gravitate toward VR through the influence of online and face-to-face recruiters and family members who have already become radicalized. Pull factors may include a desire to

have needs met such as through belonging, feeling powerful and protected, religiously and politically validated, employment, money, or economic incentives that the recruiter promised (Sheppard-Luangkhot, 2020). Violent radicalization can be framed as a conflict, as the person who becomes radicalized may have an intrapersonal and interpersonal conflict in their life that renders them vulnerable to the process of violent radicalization (Sheppard-Luangkhot, 2020).

What are Violent Extremism and Terrorism?

The World Health Organization defines typologies of violence that include interpersonal and collective violence that involve "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation" (WHO, 2024). When it comes to collective and interpersonal violence in the form of extremism and terrorist VSMs, there is no universal definition of violent extremism, and each state defines it differently. The government of Canada attempts precision in its definitions to avoid racial profiling communities with unfair scrutiny (CSIS, 2023). The Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) has tried to align its definitions of VE with the Canadian Criminal Code and CSIS Act, to effectively prosecute people that engage in VE (CSIS, 2023). Many types of violent extremism exist, including racially and ethnically motivated terrorism (REMVE) in addition to ideologically motivated violent extremism (IMVE). Far-left violent extremist (Bosi & della Porta, 2013) and far-right conspiracy movements are also important phenomena to study, particularly given the growing interest in conspiracy ideologies during the COVID-19 era of 2020 to the present day (Southern Poverty Law Centre, 2024).

Terrorism also has many forms and definitions but is usually classified as a massive,

violent attack against targets, as witnessed in domestic and international terrorism, lone wolf terrorism, political terrorism, state-sponsored terrorism, transnational terrorism, and religiously motivated violent extremism (RMVE) (Europol, 2021). Ionnis Tellidis and Harmonie Toros (2015) assert that PACS can inform terrorist studies, not just with causal analysis and understanding terrorism, but also in how to engage and help to resolve terrorist conflicts (Toros & Tellidis, 2015).

Filling the Gaps in Research

Ryan Scrivens and Amarnath Amarasingam's (2020) study of far-right, white extremist groups in Canada, reveals that anti-Islamic (AI) and Canadian White Pride (CWP) groups are very active on social media platforms, and their user engagement reflects ideologies that contain Islamophobic (AI) and anti-government, white Canadian Pride (WCP) content. The current trends in the far-right social media landscape are an important reminder to scholars and other stakeholders to be careful to not overfocus on political, violent Islamism, that far right violent extremism is a threat that needs attention in Canada (Scrivens & Amarasingam, 2020) and throughout the Global North.

To broaden this research focus, this study explores participants' experiences and understandings of what drives violent extremists to enter and then exit various violent extremist groups and/or social movements in settler-colonial, patriarchal North America and Europe. The

study also aims to consider participants' views on approaches to building positive, sustainable peace, and reducing violent extremist conflicts that harm communities in Canada, the USA and in Europe, since formers have been critiqued as having little to offer meso and macro solutions to peacebuilding and PVE/CVE (Tapley & Clubb, 2013; Papatheodorou 2023). There is also a paucity of research that explores the impact of colonialism and patriarchy, and what mixed member participants (from different movements) say about the best ways to build peace and to ameliorate violent extremism in settler-colonial societies. This qualitative study aims to fill some of the gaps in research. The significance of this thesis research is that it could increase knowledge about how to prevent and intervene in violent extremist and terrorist social movements with more effective peacebuilding efforts in settler-colonial North America and Europe. This research could also strengthen PACS theory and practice about how to bring positive peace to violent social movements, including colonial movements that harm Inuit, Metis and First Nations communities, women, youth, and sexually and gender diverse people. Research results could provide knowledge transfer to governments to develop more effective sociopolitical approaches and facilitative constructive policies to address violent social movements (Bosi & della Porta, 2013) in Canada, the USA and Europe.

Objectives of the Research

The objectives of this research are 1) to study former's experiences in order to build sustainable micro, meso and macro peace for races, genders, sexual orientations, classes and ethnicities/nations in settler-colonial North America and Europe so that violence is not needed in groups and social movements, and 2) to generate ideas and solutions for intersectional policies

and peacebuilding programs that settler-colonial communities (families, education, faith systems), NGOs and governments (local, provincial/state, federal) can use to better their preventative, interventional, and rehabilitative practices in supporting people who have been involved in violent extremism.

Research Questions

The study's main research questions are: 1) What causes formers to engage with, change, and disengage from violent social movements and/or groups? 2) What are micro, meso, and macro systemic influences (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, as cited in Guy-Evans, 2020) that cause adults to engage and disengage with violent social movements and/or groups? 3) Does colonial patriarchy trigger some violent social movements and groups? And 4) How could racial, class and gender equity and decolonization assist in deradicalization and disengagement peacebuilding efforts and non-violent social movements?

Purpose and Rationale of the Study

The purpose of the research is to listen to former extremists' stories individually and collectively in a mixed member talking circle/focus group to understand why they engaged with and then disengaged from violent groups and social movements. The research also includes important stakeholders like family and NGO staff/volunteers for a multi-stakeholder understanding of what drives people in and out of violent social movements. By including formers, their family members and staff who work with disengaged and deradicalized

individuals, this research upholds the rationale that their collective stories will assist in building non-violent, positive peace together at the micro, meso and macro levels of society in Canada, the USA and Europe.

Overview of the Chapters

Chapter one is an introduction to the study that frames violent social movements as conflicts, defines terms, objectives, purpose, and the rationale for the research.

Chapter two explores the research context for the study. Chapter three encompasses a review of the literature related to the study.

Chapter four discusses the research methods and my positionality.

Chapter five is the first empirical chapter that investigates, code one, territorial conflicts of colonial patriarchy and occupation with a critical autoethnographic reflection.

Chapter six is the second empirical chapter that explores code two, intergenerational conflicts and unmet needs, with a critical autoethnographic reflection.

Chapter seven is third empirical chapter that outlines code three, the impact of war, bullying and identity conflicts on violent social movements, with a critical autoethnographic reflection.

Chapter eight describes the importance of including formers, their family members and faith leaders in PVE and CVE efforts, with a critical autoethnographic reflection.

Chapter nine describes general conclusions and overall key findings as well as recommendations for policy and praxis, significance of the research and implications for future research and practice.

Conclusion

Violent conflicts can be analyzed through the prism of research, to better understand what drives stakeholders, in this case, former violent extremists, to engage with and then disengage from violent social movements in Canada, the USA and Europe. Understanding the definitions of various violent social movements and examining gaps in research, has propelled the objectives, rationale and purpose of the research questions set forth in this study. Through the research, and using critical autoethnographic reflections, I share my story alongside participants stories, to deeply understand the micro (family, individual, friends), meso (schools, mental health systems, NGOs, faith systems), and macro (government) drivers of what got us in and out of our respective violent social movements, with ideas of how sustainable peace can be generated in Canada, the USA and Europe. Stories have power because storytelling is inclusive and empowering, shares knowledge, and connects people in meaningful ways (Senehi, 2002, 2020).

Chapter Two

The Research Context

Introduction

In 2024, violent social movements continue to harm communities through violent extremist terrorist networks (Diani & Mische, 2017, as cited in Velasco, 2022) throughout the Global North and Global South (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2022). Since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, terrorism studies have largely focused on political, violent Islamist terrorism (Haus, 2010; Tellides & Toros, 2013). Although bringing peace to political, Islamist violent social movements are important, the narrow focus denies the violence of right-wing and gender-based terrorist movements, while supporting Conservative political rhetoric that liberal immigration policies are to blame for terrorism in Canada and the USA (Gunaratna, 2007, as cited in Bell, 2007).

Chapter two outlines four key areas in VSMS to provide a framework of understanding the complexity of conflict and peacebuilding regarding violent social movements. First, I discuss past and present VSM and threat landscapes in Canada and the USA, second, VSM and threat landscapes in Europe are outlined. Third, colonialism and VSM are reviewed, and fourth, patriarchy and VSM are discussed in this chapter.

Past and Present Violent Social Movements in North America

In North America, past violent social movements like the Ku Klux Klan, Babbar Khalsa, Combat 18, American Indian Movement (AIM), Oka Land Defenders (OLD), al-Qaeda, the Front Liberation de Quebec (FLQ), and the Tamil Tigers have taken up violent action to achieve their ideological goals (Public Safety Canada, 2024; Department of Homeland Security, 2024).

Canadians and Americans have even travelled across borders as foreign terrorist fighters for ISIS and al-Shabab (Counter Extremism Project, 2024).

In present day, the Russian Imperial Movement (RIM), the Base, Neo Nazis, Atomwaffen Division, Truckers Freedom Convoy (TFC), Action for Canada (AFC) (anti-2SLGBTQI+), Proud Boys, Neo Nazis, Make American Great Again (MAGA), QAnon, the Base, Daesh/ISIS and ISIL, and Incel are violent social movement organizations (VSMs) that continue to use homegrown, often lone wolf or collective terrorist violence, to achieve their ideological goals, identity needs, and interests in Canada and the USA (Counter Extremism Project 2024; CSIS, 2023).

The Local and Global Threat Landscapes.

A threat landscape is defined as a pattern of threats in a region affected by violent social movements in the form of violent extremism and terrorism (Gunaratna, 2018; Ramakrishna, 2021). Understanding a threat landscape is key to effective PVE and CVE assessments and efforts by security sectors (Ramakrishna, 2021), but also for other systems like the NGOs,

education, mental health, family, and governmental systems who are also trying to prevent and intervene into violent social movements. Kumar Ramakrishna (2021) also suggests that through online propaganda and recruitment, and ease of cross border travel, there is a rapid propagation of both local and global threat landscapes, such as ISIS's call for a global jihad, and not just its call to establish a caliphate in Iraq and Syria.

However, sociologist Yamuna Sangarasivam (2022) also asks scholars to consider the white supremacist, settler colonial logic of people in power defining what constitutes legitimate violence versus terrorist violence. Therefore, it is important to think critically about what state actors like CSIS, M15 and the CIA are describing as a threat (Sangarasivam, 2022), given that Inuit, Metis and First Nations and racialized actors are subject to oversurveillance by white led security agencies.

The American Threat Landscape

In the USA, far right and anti-gender-based movements like Hammerskins, and Incels, respectively, use the internet and ease of travel to build local and global VSM that increase the threat landscape locally and internationally. Some examples of this internet fueled threat is QAnon, which started in 4Chan a social media platform (Barkun, 2021). QAnon is an American, far-right conspiracy theory that positions believers in an adversarial relationship and conflict with the enemy other (Barkun, 2015). For adherents of QAnon, the enemy other is 2SLGBTQI+ Democrats who are stereotyped as Satanic pedophiles in a deep state governmental ring who must be stopped by Donald Trump (Barkun, 2021).

Andrew Tate is an anti-gender violent extremist, who also uses the internet to spread violent, sexist, extremist narratives that target women and 2SLGBTQI+ people, which is then

consumed by millions of local and international male users, many of whom are Americans who follow Andrew Tate on X, a social media platform owned by far-right businessman and Trump donor, billionaire Elon Musk.

In the USA, the MAGA social movement is composed of Conservative, far-right violent activists, who, propelled by the Trump presidential far-right propaganda throughout his tenure in office, led to death and destruction of property during the Capitol Riot in Washington, D.C. on January 6, 2021 (Lucas, 2021). Figure 1 reveals the increase in terrorist threats in the USA related to demonstrations after USA President Trump came into office in 2017 and left office in 2021.

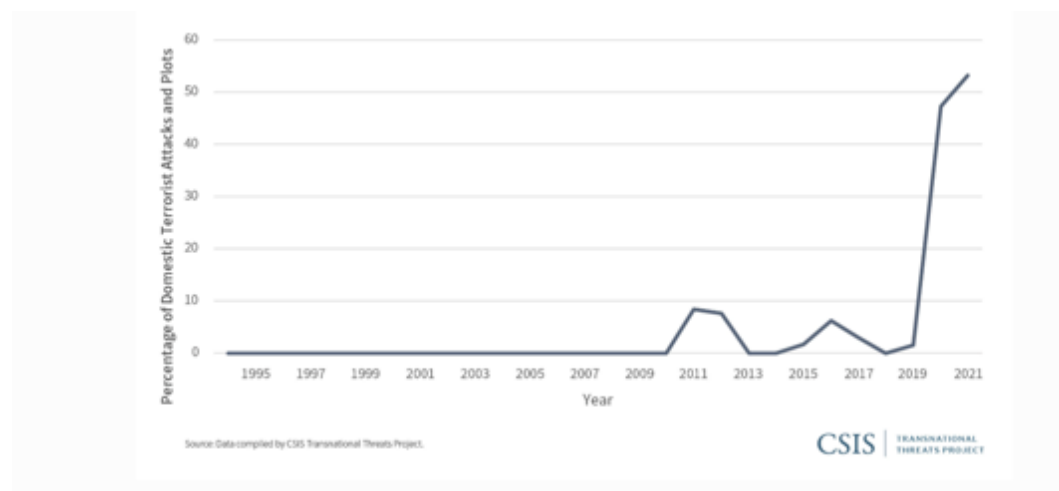


Figure 1 Percentage of U.S. Terrorist Attacks and Plots Related to Demonstrations (CSIS, 2024)

For example, during a presidential debate, President Trump praised the Proud Boys and told them to “stand back and stand by” as part of Trump’s mobilization Make American Great Again (MAGA) far-right political movement (Murphy, 2020). By understanding history of how

the Proud Boys and MAGA formed, means investigating how the misuse of Christianity is used to persecute non-Christian immigrants. It is also important to consider how globalization economics and outsourcing of jobs from white working-class people caused them to scapegoat immigrants for “stealing” their jobs. American Christian nationalism is, a mix of nationalist, classist, religious, and far-right political ideology and classism. We have seen what German Christian nationalism did to Europe: before and during WWII, as Christian Nationalism a theologically based VSM was used by Adolf Hitler to add power to his Nazi VSM (Heschel, 2008) in Austria, Germany and Europe.

In June 2024, Trump’s close ally and mastermind behind the MAGA movement, Steve Bannon, said in his final interview before imprisonment that the “MAGA army is ready” (Smith, 2024), ready to ensure that Trump wins re-election in the November 2024 presidential election. Bannon was charged for refusing a congressional subpoena to testify about the attacks at the January 6, 2021, Capitol Riot in Washington, D.C. Bannon seems to suggest that Christian Nationalist, far right MAGA extremists were ready to vote, and rise up if Joe Biden was re-elected for a second presidential term (Bannon, as cited in Smith, 2024).

Now that President Trump has been re-elected, the implementation of the far-right MAGA and Project 2025 agenda will likely increase the American threat landscape, with the implementation of Trump’s policies based on Project 2025. Project 2025 has particularly increased the threat landscape for Americans who will be harmed by its proposed policies and practices. Project 2025 was created by the Heritage Foundation, which is led by three cisgender,

heterosexual and white, male American men who worked for the Trump administration (The Heritage Foundation, 2024). The Heritage Foundation is a far-right conservative think tank that has built a VSM through recruiting far right organizations to help shift presidential policy and praxis to align with their political and religious agendas (The Heritage Foundation, 2024), starting in the Ronald Reagan presidential era. On their website, their slogan reads that they are “building now for a conservative victory through policy, personnel, and training,” (The Heritage Foundation, 2024) indicating they want conservative policy, and people trained to implement their agenda at the highest level of political office. For example, President Trump relied closely on the Heritage Foundation’s mandate and implemented two thirds of that mandate within his first year of office (The Heritage Foundation, 2024), in 2017.

Project 2025 is organized by the Heritage Foundation thinktank that is focused on ensuring that President Trump implements the Project 2025 agenda, and is subtitled the “presidential transition project” as the coalition of far-right conservative groups like Defense of Freedom Institute who strive to protect K-12 and post-secondary education from radical “leftist” policies that support “civil rights” (Defense of Freedom Institute, 2024), who are members of the Heritage Foundation, want their political agenda followed within the first 180 days of Trump returning to the presidential office. The outgroup that Project 2025 is targeting is the generalized term of “Leftist” government such as President Biden and his government and suggests that Americans are “suffering” under current leftist policies (The Heritage Foundation, 2024). Project 2025 also has a training academy to train Conservative politicians and appointees to implement “conservative ideas” to get more detail people must buy their book or take their academy.

Some of these ideas include harms against women such as rolling back further access to abortion care for women, increase deportation of immigrants through stricter border policy and

praxis, and Christianized anti-2SLGBTQI+ policy that returns the USA family to a biblically based definition of family (The Heritage Foundation, 2024). Structural violence would increase for women, immigrants, and non-Christians, and for 2SLGBTQI+ people, which adds to threat landscape in the USA.

The Patriot Front (PF), is a white supremacist, far-right VSMO of white youth, whose ideology points more specifically to protecting the USA as a settler-colonial ethno-state from immigrants. On July 8, 2024, extremists marched in Tennessee, shouting “sieg heil” and “deportation saves the nation,” referencing Nazi slogans, and also the movement’s nationalistic and xenophobic goals to increase deportation of immigrants (Yan et al., 2024) and protect America as a white “pan-European” ethno state. PF has also been present in other parts of the USA, like Boston and was a break off group from the neo-Nazi Vanguard Nation, which demonstrated at the white supremacist rally “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017 that led to the killing of Heather Heyer (Yan et al, 2024).

Violent, political Islamism is still closely monitored by US security systems since 9/11. However, there is shift of Salafist fighters more into parts of Africa, Southeast Asia, and South Asia (Jones et al, 2018). White supremacist terrorism has surged past threats by the far-left or violent, political Islamist movements on US soil (Jones et al, 2020).

The Canadian Threat Landscape

Far-Right, White Supremacist VSMs.

In Canada, the Base group that was infiltrated by a Winnipeg reporter discovered that

Manitoban Patrick Mathews was radicalized from across American ideologies into the neo-Nazi ideology, white terrorist training camps modeled after al-Qaeda (Pauls & Johnson, 2020). This has increased due to fears of the Great Replacement. Great Replacement theory is a white supremacist conspiracy theory driven by xenophobic fears of immigrants, and Jewish people experiencing more rights and power in North America (Southern Poverty Law Centre, 2021). The Base is an example of an active neo-Nazi, white supremacist VSM that recruits Canadians into transnational white terrorist VSMs.

That said, in February 2022, the Truckers Freedom Convoy formed in Canada as a largely Conservative, working class, and far-right violent social movement throughout several provinces (McLaren, 2022). This movement was driven by mostly working-class truckers protesting the vaccine requirement to drive across the border to the USA (McLaren, 2022). The class struggle is often ignored (Liu, 2017) in terrorism studies, and PACS scholars should consider socioeconomic factors driving violent radicalization, violent extremism, and terrorism (Byrne & Carter, 2002). There were many peaceful Convoy protesters; however, some violent extremists threatened death to officials and police officers (Dube, 2022), flashed neo-Nazi symbols, and spread the rhetoric of the far-right and conspiracy theories like QAnon, COVID-19 pandemic denialism, and anti-immigrant propaganda. One of the leaders of the Trucker Freedom Convoy, Dave Steenburg, showed a logo of anti-immigrant hate group Soldiers of Odin when calling for

nonviolence at the Truckers Freedom Convoy protests (LaFleche, 2022). Another Truckers Freedom Convoy leader called the Western provinces of Canada a “third world” (LaFleche, 2022), indicating that anti-immigrant racism, along with class and socioeconomic concerns, drove the Truckers Freedom Convoy as a violent social movement. Far-right, white supremacist violent social movements continue to exercise hegemonic, patriarchal, heterosexual, cisgender, political, social, and racial power to disrupt peace and security in North America (Scrivens et al., 2019; Southern Poverty Law Centre, 2024).

Anti-Authority VSMS

Barbara Perry and her team discuss the rise of far-right, anti-authority movements that have a potential for serious violence and intimidation in Canada (Perry et al., 2018). Ideologies are not singular ideas, they are heterogenous (Perry et al., 2018) and can include propaganda with far-right racist ideas, along with anti-government ideas.

In their interviews with adherents of Sovereign Citizen and Freedom-on-the-Land (FOTL) movements, as well as their interviews with criminal justice stakeholders, they found that anti-authority VSMS include three types of violence to commit against the Canadian state and government actors. The first type is the harassment intimidation of state actors, through “paper terrorism” (Perry et al., 2018, p. 11) such as when FOTL extremist Andre Boisjoli harassed a peace officer who gave him a speeding ticket, through court processes (Perry et al., 2018). The second, and more rare type of anti-authority violence is planned, offensive extremist violence like lone wolf, anti-authority extremist Justin Bourque’s murder of three police officers

in 2014 (Perry et al, 2018). Most anti-authority extremists view themselves as peaceful and think planned violence detracts from their movement (Perry et al., 2018) such as many members of the Freedom Convoy and Action for Canada. The third type of violence is reactionary and defensive extremist violence (that reacts to government policy and actions, like a police confrontation), that is a defensive action that is frequently seen after police stop an anti-authority extremist like Boisjoli for a traffic violation, like pushing and shoving matches with police, or attempts to seize police officer's gun's during a scuffle (Perry et al., 2018).

Perry et al's (2018) research is helpful as CSIS has flagged anti-authority movements as a risk in the Canadian (as well as American) threat landscapes. As someone who has experienced intimidation and harassment by a transphobic member of the Freedom Convoy, I know firsthand how frightening far-right anti-authority movements are to not just my safety as a trans person, but any outgroup like the government, and other members of 2SLGBTQI+ communities in Canada.

Religiously Motivated VSM

The term "jihadist" is problematic in terms of its overgeneralization and Islamophobic connotations, as jihad itself is an intrapersonal and interpersonal struggle against sin, not a violent social movement. Therefore, I will instead use the term chosen by one of the formers who participated in this study, who was a part of a political violent Islamist VSMO. ISIS or Daesh, and al-Qaeda are examples of politically violent Islamist VSMOs. The words political and violent are important, as it illustrates the intersection of politics with an extremist and violent

misuse of Islam within the ideology Canadian extremist traveler's (CET) that still contribute to the threat in Canada when extremists subscribe to this ideology, and they leave Canada to join al-Qaeda or Daesh VSMOs.

CSIS frequently monitors CETs return to Canada for fear they may cause further violence on Canadian (CSIS, 2023) or American soil. An example of this is the September 2024 arrest of ISIS affiliated Canadian, Muhammad Shahzeb Khan, who was allegedly planning to exit Canada, and travel to New York city, to participate in a large-scale ISIS attack on a Jewish centre in New York City in October 2024, an anniversary of Hamas's deadly attacks on Israeli civilians on October 7, 2023 (Attorney's Office, 2024).

Religiously motivated extremism (RMVE) is still an ongoing concern in Canada, but not just by people who choose the path of political, violent Islamism. Canadian Christian nationalists (Macdonald, 2010), inspired by the MAGA movement in the USA, have formed and joined the Christian Heritage Party, the Trucker's Freedom Convoy, and Action for Canada, all whose movements convey an intersection of anti-government, xenophobic, queerphobic, religiously motivated, pro-life, far-right ideologies. Below is an example of a post on the public Facebook page of the Christian Heritage Party, in Figure 2.



Figure 2 Christian Heritage Party Post, June 30, 2024

As illustrated in Figure 2, commenters in support of CHP showed a “sad” reaction, to the visual of the post and the comment by CHP Canada that it is “happening in schools across Canada.” This was posted on June 30, 2024, the last day of Pride Month in Canada, and this VSMO uses online propaganda and hate speech towards 2SLGBTQI+ individual’s for expressing pride in their identities, including within school systems. This demonstrates how Canadian Christian nationalists spread their religiously motivated, queerphobic ideology to their social media followers, as evidence of “Armageddon” coming (McDonald, 2010) if 2SLGBTQI+ persons are allowed to exist. CSIS calls this an example of the anti-gender movement (CSIS, 2024) that promotes hate and violence towards transgender and 2SLGTQI+ identities in Canada. Therefore, it is important to understand that RMVE as a large VSM has ideological connection points to anti-gender, including towards reproductive rights for women.

In North America, Inuit, Metis and First Nations, feminist, racial, sexual, and gender minority rights have achieved progress. For example, during the governance of former U.S. President Barack Obama he legislated gay marriage and worked for systemic equality for all racial and gender minorities. In Canada, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's support of immigration, women's equality, an apology by the Pope to Inuit, Metis and First Nations communities, and his support of 2SLGBTQI+ rights. Some people view white supremacist violent social movements as a "whitelash" (Jones, 2016) or a backlash of "white fragility" (Di'Angelo, 2018) by Conservative white voters who do not want to share power and space with racial, sexual, and gender minorities. Is this a longing for a return of the powerful days of colonialism, where white people, particularly white, cisgender, Christian patriarchies, invaded Inuit, Metis and First Nations lands and set up systems that privilege white, Christian, settler colonizers over the "other" (Memmi, 2013; LaRocque, 2010)? This study explores that question.

European Violent Social Movements

European VSMS that have operated are paramilitary arms of the PIRA, Daesh, Combat 18, Neo Nazis, Ku Klux Klan and far-right soccer hooliganism. Approximately 4200 Europeans became foreign fighters for Daesh in Syria, particularly from Belgium, and the UK, France, and Germany (ICCT, 2024). In present day, Daesh, Neo Nazis, far-right nationalists and militia, most known for relying on homegrown, lone wolf terrorism, continue to impact countries like Belgium, the U.K., Norway, Denmark, Poland, and the Netherlands (Counter Extremism Project, 2024) as illustrated in Figure 3. There is also a problem of overfocus on political, violent Islamist terrorism that can racially profile Muslim and Irish people, made apparent, for example,

when Irish or Muslim conflict actors are othered by settler-colonizers as “terrorist,” while minimizing right-wing white supremacist terrorists (Smyth, 2020 as cited in Dixit, 2022).

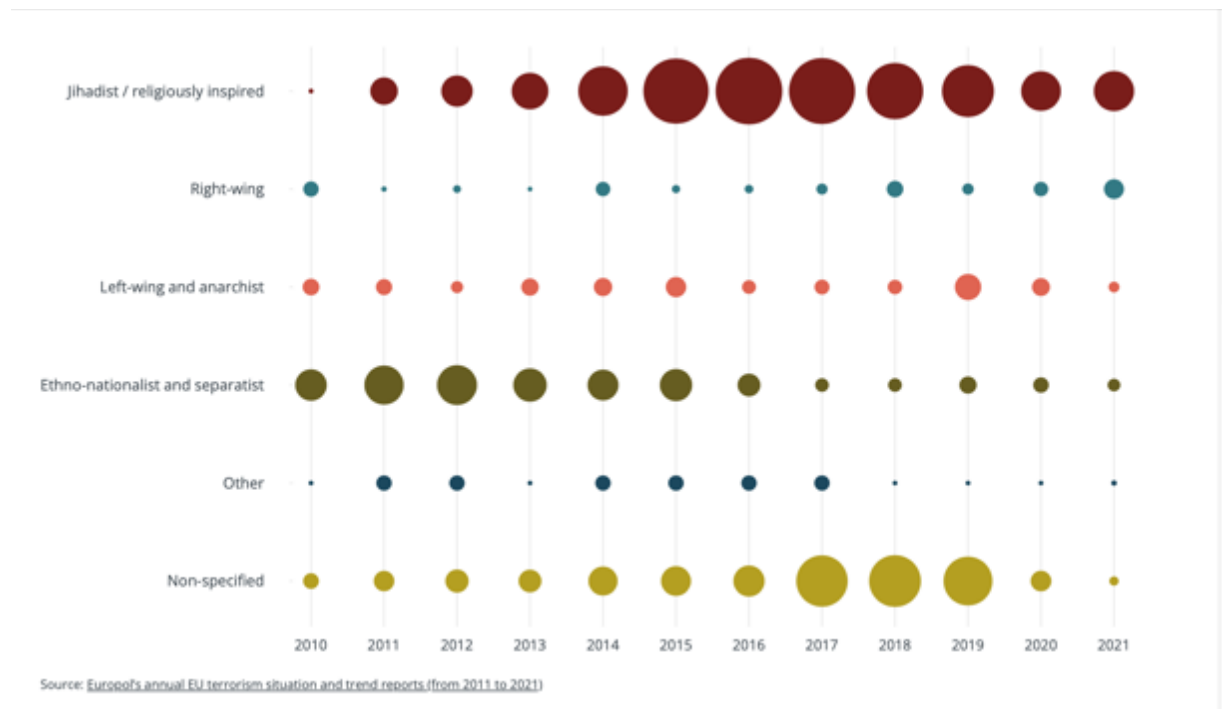


Figure 3 EU member states trend report from 2011 to 2021 (Europol, 2021)

Northern European Threat Landscapes

Northern Europe includes three regions, the Baltic States, Scandinavia, and the British Isles (World Atlas, 2024). Lukasz Jurczyszyn (2023) suggests that the research findings from the E.U. Commission funded a dialogue about radicalization and equality (DARE) research program that involved 13 European countries, including the Northern European countries of U.K and Norway. Jurczyszyn discusses how the large DARE survey yielded qualitative and quantitative results that point to a “power state rivalry” between the USA and the E.U., and Russia and

China, as an important driver to political, violent Islamist and far-right radicalization and ideologies behind what he terms “hybrid warfare” (p.67).

Moreover, Jurcazyszyn suggests that European policies should consider more than far-right and Islamist ideologies and radicalization behind the conflicts of violent extremist hybrid warfare. For example, in Norway far-right VSMs demonstrate a power state rivalry between Aryan, whites and immigrants and Jews, that has trickled down through the impact of World War II and Hitler’s Nazi ideology, which will be discussed in later chapters.

Anatolijs Krivins et al. (2021) also discussed an increase of religiously motivated terrorism in the E.U. between 2008 and 2019, yet terrorist incidents remain low as long as policies of religious neutrality that include pluralism stay in place in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. Anti-Russia and Euroskeptical far right ideologies are present in Estonia (Auers & Kasekamp, 2015) but have not been voted into political power. Lithuania has both far left and far right politicians and extreme political ideologies among and ethnically polarized society. In Latvia, the far-right populist party All for Latvia made a coalition with Nationalist parties, which came into political power in 2011 (Auers & Kasekamp, 2015). Reducing power state rivalries, through tolerance of different religious and ethnicities is not easily achieved in the Baltic States and other parts of Northern Europe, however, the Baltic States do not come up in any of the Counter Extremism Project (CEP) countries that experience active violent extremist threats (Counter Extremism Project, 2024).

Other parts of Scandinavia, like Denmark and Sweden are featured in Counter Extremism Project threat assessment, and indicate that Swedish, politically violent Islamism is seeping into Denmark, as evidence by terrorism related arrests of Swedish Syrians who attacked a government tax centre in 2019 (Counter Extremism Project, 2024) and a teenager who planned an attack against a Jewish school in 2017. ISIS has used recruitment tactics to engage refugees in Sweden, and one Uzbek refugee did attack and kill people with a truck in Sweden when he was denied settlement in Sweden in 2017 and was seeking revenge. Denmark did participate in the coalition against ISIS, and they consider “militant Islamism” to be a serious threat, and 159 Danish citizens were foreign fighters that sympathized with ISIS (CEP, 2024). Policies to reduce terrorist foreign fighters have been introduced such as restricting travel or revoking immigration status of people deemed “a risk to the country” (CEP, 2024). Denmark has also caused anger to some Danish nationals and immigrants who felt the Prophet Mohammed was disrespected by a Danish cartoonist in 2015, along with frustration and Danish cooperation in the coalition against ISIS. Consequently, several Danish embassies in Syria, Pakistan, Lebanon and Iran, were besieged as protestors engaged in violent protests against Islamophobia and for desecrating the image of the Prophet Mohammed (Counter Extremism Project, 2024).

Far-right extremism in the form of lone wolf or small group violence is a general threat, given the larger European far-right VSM against Islamists, leftists, and immigration in Denmark, including in private settings and the martial arts scene. A larger focus on violent, political Islamism is evidenced in the Danish, “Aarhus model” that works on early prevention of

radicalization, facilitating exit strategies and rehabilitation for extremists and returning foreign terrorist fighters in the community, and that are in prison (FTFs) (Counter Extremism Project, 2024).

In the United Kingdom and Ireland, there are still echoes of the Troubles and sectarian polarization and violence in Northern Ireland (Byrne et al., 2024), particularly on the border of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Violent and cyber-attacks by the New Irish Republican Army (NIRA) towards police officers, raised the threat level to severe in 2023 in Northern Ireland (Counter Extremism Project, 2024). The stress of Brexit has also caused political polarization (Byrne et al., 2024) and given the NIRA an opportunity to recruit more youth into their VSMO (Counter Extremism Project, 2024) as spoilers of peace brought about the GFA (Mac Ginty, 2019).

Moreover, in August of 2024, there have been multiple far right violent attacks and riots against immigrant housing and services in England. This occurred after a 17-year-old teenager killed 3 girls, and 10 people were seriously injured, at a birthday party in Southport, England. Misinformation spread through far-right communities like the English Defence League, that the accused is a Muslim immigrant although he is not. Unfortunately, mosques were also attacked by far right protestors, throughout the U.K. and Northern Ireland due to this misinformation.



Riot police hold back protesters after disorder broke out on Tuesday in Southport, England. (Getty Images)

Figure 4 Photo of far-right rioters in England (CBC, 2024)

In addition to the English Defence League, other far right VSMOs in the U.K. are facilitated by an a neofascist, accelerationist called “Terrorgram” that includes members of the far right in the U.K and other parts of Europe, who encourage terrorism on platforms like Telegram, such as the Southport England riots, and also the murder of two people outside a LGBTQ club in Bratislava (Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2024). This transnational terrorist ecosystem has been banned in the U.K.; however, it is difficult to arrest anyone due to constantly evolving leadership and the ability to spread terrorist propaganda easily through private, online channels (Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2024).

Political, violent Islamist attacks have also occurred in England, particularly homegrown terrorists, motivated by the U.K.’s participation in Iraq, and Afghanistan efforts in the GWOT, such as the 7/7 attacks on July 7, 2005. On 7/7, multiple political, violent Islamists set off bombs

in London's subway system, killing 39 people, the 3 attackers, and injuring hundreds of people (Hoffman, 2014). This terrorist attack is one of the largest in London's history, and is compared to 9/11 for Americans. While the attack was terrifying for Londoners, it has also created suspect communities of Muslim Londoners, along with an increase in hate crimes directed towards Muslims in the U.K. (Hanes & Machin, 2015). The xenophobic overfocus on Muslim communities have created a loss of focus of the threats by the far right ecosystems in the U.K. and supports a colonial approach of unfairly surveilling the other, and uplifting colonial white privilege (Breen-Smyth, 2020). A sad example of racist overfocus and misinformation about Muslim people is exemplified by the Southport, England attacks by the far right, on mosques and immigrant services and housing.

Political, violent Islamism has also occurred in Northern Ireland as well as in the Republic of Ireland, such as the creation in 2016 of the National Party in Eire as well as the conviction of convert Lisa Smith, a former Irish defence force member, for membership in the ISIS terrorist organization (Counter Extremism Project, 2024). Some left wing and right wing extremism, include far right attacks of migrant people on the island of Ireland (Counter Extremism Project, 2024), like the situation in England.

In the Balkan States, including Kosovo, they had approximately 314 of FTFs who went to fight for ISIS in Syria and Iraq (Shtuni, 2016). Impacted by the wars in the Balkans in the 1990s, Kosovar FTF's and their brides travelled to the ISIS caliphate and participated in the sectarian

wars in 2011 (Shtuni, 2016). For returnees in the period of 2018-2022, FTFs and their families who returned to Kosovo from Syria and Iraq, significant success was achieved in disengagement, deradicalization and rehabilitation through housing, mentoring, counselling, monitoring, coaching and capacity building to find work and reintegrate families safely into Kosovar society (Mujku & Ferre, 2023).

Western European Threat Landscapes

There are nine countries in Western Europe, including Switzerland, Luxembourg, Liechtenstein, Germany, Austria, Belgium, Monaco and the Netherlands (World Atlas, 2024). Germany has a long history of violent social movements, the most infamous was Hitler's Nazi movement. In present day Germany, far-right VSMS and Neo Nazism continue to exist in spite of laws and policies banning Nazi symbols and weapons control, especially for extremists. Q Anon inspired movements like the Reichsbürger Citizen Rights Movement has been linked to terror plots to conduct a coup d'état against the German government. Political, violent Islamists involved in ISIS, Hamas, and Hebozollah have also been arrested in Germany for attacks against Jewish institutions and public markets (Counter Extremism Project, 2024).

In the Netherlands, some Dutch nationals were FTFs in Syria that went there to fight and live in the caliphate. Their repatriation efforts have led to Dutch government charges of women who joined ISIS and married in Syria, and some former FTF's who have sought asylum in the

Netherlands that have also been punished for joining ISIS (Counter Extremism Project, 2024).

Far-right extremists who burnt the Qu'ran, are a part of the far-right Pegida movement in the Netherlands. Unfortunately, these burnings are not yet considered illegal, which has upset members of the Muslim community at home and outside of the Netherlands (Counter Extremism Project, 2024). In the Northern Netherlands, local VSMs are more anti-government in nature, as in the form of protests against asylum seekers, of conflicts over wind farms and gas extraction was implicated in local earthquakes (Valk et al., 2023).

Belgium's threat landscape includes the deadly attacks by ISIS affiliated extremists on transportation lines in 2016 (Counter Extremism Project, 2024). High unemployment in Belgium, especially in the Molenbeek area, and ISIS's use of financial rewards for recruiting FTFs led to approximately 500 Belgium nationals going to fight for ISIS in Syria in 2015-2016. In present day, Belgium deems that the greatest threat is lone wolf actors from the far-right and political, violent Islamism, such as the shooting of soccer fans in Brussels by an active member of ISIS. Far-right, nationalist political parties are also popular in Belgium, particularly in Flanders, helped along by some members of the Flemish independence movement. Interestingly in southern Belgium, far right populist parties are less mainstreamed and given space in the media, creating a "cordon sanitaire" compared to Walloon Northern Belgium (De Jonge, 2021). Austria is also impacted by mostly far right and political, violent Islamism in its current

threat landscape. Adolf Hitler was born in Austria, and the scapegoating, attacks and exiling of Jews was widespread there in the 1930s, including during the Kristallnacht program (Kirby, 2024). The aryanization by Germany was based upon the Viennese Wiener Modell, and this ideology was used to rid the country of Jewish people (Kirby, 2024). In present day Austria, Muslims experience multiple incidents of Islamophobia, as do other immigrants and Jews (Counter Extremism Project, 2024) by far-right political parties and by extremists, a modern day Aryanization that contributes to the threat landscape in Austria. Salafist mosques preaching radical versions of Islam have been banned in Austria, along with government efforts to reduce FTFs who left to fight in Iraq and Syria for ISIS such as two Bosnian-Austrian teen girls who eventually were sexually trafficked and killed in Syria (Counter Extremism Project, 2024). Far right political parties like Freedom Party Austria have discriminated against multiple mosques in Austria, and the Austrian government has banned the wearing of niqabs and burqas, and ISIS and al-Qaeda symbols (Counter Extremism Project, 2024). These parties have been supported by members of the Islamophobic Identitarian movement in Austria (Counter Extremism Project, 2024) who mainstream their Islamophobic ideology through use of social media like Youtube and X.

Eastern European Threat Landscapes

There are ten countries in Eastern Europe, all of which were in the USSR until the end of the Soviet Union (World Atlas, 2024). The countries are Belarus, Ukraine, Poland, Romania, Moldova, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Russia, with Russia being the

farthest and most populous Eastern European state. Russian violent social movements threatening landscapes in Eastern European countries are significant, which will be discussed in the empirical chapters with participants from Poland, and in the next section on Russian threat landscapes.

Russian Threat Landscapes

When the Soviet Union collapsed, the Russian state lost massive amounts of land, power and control. This loss continues to influence Russian dictator President Putin to use state terrorism (Krupenya & Podriez, 2023), violent colonialism and occupation, misinformation, propaganda, democratic suppression, and extrajudicial killings to try to claw back power and land into Russian possession. Krupenway and Podriez (2023) assert while Putin is heavily influenced by Stalin and Lenin, he models his violent regime after Tsar Peter I (Krupenya & Podriez, 2023), and uses war and crimes against humanity against neighbouring countries, like the invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Putin framed his invasion as a “special military operation” designed to control far right Nazism in Ukraine. While the far right does have a presence in Ukraine, its Jewish president Volodymyr Zelensky rightfully calls out Putin for what it is: genocide and a neocolonial land grab, like what Europeans did to Inuit, Metis and First Nations peoples in Canada and the USA (Daschuk, 2019). The following is an excerpt from Putin’s speech about the justification of the invasion of Ukraine:

Everything is clear and obvious. In the late 1980s, the Soviet Union grew weaker and

subsequently broke apart. That experience should serve as a good lesson for us, because it has shown us that the paralysis of power and will is the first step towards complete degradation and oblivion. We lost confidence for only one moment, but it was enough to disrupt the balance of forces in the world. As a result, the old treaties and agreements are no longer effective. Entreaties and requests do not help. Anything that does not suit the dominant state, the powers that be, is denounced as archaic, obsolete and useless.

At the same time, everything it regards as useful is presented as the ultimate truth and forced on others regardless of the cost, abusively and by any means available. Those who refuse to comply are subjected to strong-arm tactics... in this context I would like to address the citizens of Ukraine. In 2014, Russia was obliged to protect the people of Crimea and Sevastopol from those who you yourself call “nats.” [the far right National Corp Party]. The people of Crimea and Sevastopol made their choice in favour of being with their historical homeland, Russia, and we supported their choice. As I said, we could not act otherwise...I would also like to address the military personnel of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Comrade officers, your fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers did not fight the Nazi occupiers and did not defend our common Motherland to allow today’s neo-Nazis to seize power in Ukraine. You swore the oath of allegiance to the Ukrainian people and not to the junta, the people’s adversary which is plundering Ukraine and humiliating the Ukrainian people. I urge you to refuse to carry out their criminal orders. I urge you to immediately lay down arms and go home. I will explain what this means: the

military personnel of the Ukrainian army who do this will be able to freely leave the zone of hostilities and return to their families. I want to emphasise again that all responsibility for the possible bloodshed will lie fully and wholly with the ruling Ukrainian regime (Vladimir Putin, as cited in Kadim, 2023, p. 433).

The hegemonic, violent language is clear in Putin's war propaganda that Russia was weakened when the Soviet Union collapsed, and Putin wants to use any means necessary to retrieve land and power to balance the forces again, in his and Russia's favour. Putin later shares misinformation about Neo Nazism seizing power in Ukraine, which is not the case, with a non Neo Nazi and Jewish leader who is still in power in Ukraine. Putin should look more closely in the mirror at the increasing violent far right VSM behaviours in Russia, particularly after increasing immigration and the economic turbulence of the 1990s when the USSR collapsed and ended (Krupenya & Podriez, 2023), and the popular far-right, xenophobic, queerphobic, misogynist violent attitudes in Russian society that have been modelled by its leader, President Putin. In psychology, it is called a projection, to criticize someone for something that lies within you, and Putin's projection of a far-right problem in Ukraine, is thinly veiled propaganda to justify genocide and violent colonialism and a retaking of Ukraine.

Far right, soccer hooliganism is also rampant in Russia, and Russian officials have praised Hooligans for their attacks on non-Russians at soccer games (Counter Extremism Project, 2024). Some soccer hooligans use Neo Nazi symbols such as "to each his own" or "Jedem das Seine," a Nazi slogan that was inscribed over the entrance to Buchenwald concentration camp (Counter Extremism Project, 2024). A Neo Nazi VSMO called BORN has

also tried to establish Russia as a fourth Reich, and anti-immigrant groups have also violently attacked Asians, even though Russians are Northern Asians (Counter Extremist Project, 2024).

Southern European/Mediterranean Threat Landscapes

Southern Europe, or the Mediterranean region, included 16 countries which are Portugal, North Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece, Andorra, Croatia, Malta, Italy, Serbia, Montenegro, San Marino, Spain and the Vatican, and Slovenia (World Atlas, 2024). Montenegro, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Albania and Serbia had thousands of FTFs who became radicalized into political, violent Islamism, and left their countries to fight for ISIS in Syria and Iraq (Shtuni, 2016). The Nusra Front, an al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria, also recruited Balkan FTFs, however countries like Albania have worked with religious leaders to counteract in person and online recruitment efforts, particularly along the border with Kosovo (Counter Extremism Project, 2024).

Many Serbians have also joined the growing transnational far right movement through VSMs like the Leviathan movement, which has many members who were Neo Nazis, who promote nationalist, racist, anti-immigrant ideology, particularly targeting ethnic Albanians and Roma people in Serbia (Dzihic, 2023). Serbians come from a genocidal culture of violent Orthodox Christian patriarchy, as evidenced by Serbian Orthodox ethnic cleansing and rape of Bosnian Muslims during the Yugoslav war of the early 1990s (Hansen, 2000; Hoare, 2014) by the Serbian state and violent extremists who acted out state sanctioned violence towards Bosnian

Muslims.

Settler Colonialism and Violent Social Movements

It is important to research formers' perspectives about whether settler colonialism is a potential driver to violent social movements in North America and Europe. The common thread between all the geographical regions in this study (Canada, the USA and Europe) is that they have all been impacted by colonialism, occupation and patriarchy in various ways.

The global war on terror (GWOT) in the Middle East is an example of militaristic, neoliberal peacebuilding (Thiessen, 2011) rescue missions by the USA and U.K. that have failed to ameliorate violent social movement conflicts. This is because neoliberal peacebuilding is more like neocolonial governance (Thiessen, 2010) that keeps terrorists mobilized to resist further colonialism. Unfortunately, the GWOT further violently radicalized multiple youths from Canada, the USA, and the U.K. to become foreign fighters against neoliberal militaristic and security forces in Syria (Wilner & Yar, 2019), Iraq and Afghanistan. Security forces from the global North that started military action in regions historically colonized and occupied in the Middle East and the North Africa (MENA) region can catalyze further violent conflict by those who were colonized. An example is the painful legacy of the British occupation of Syria, and the French occupation of Algeria (Haugbelle & Mazza, 2021). Consequently, well-intentioned neoliberal peacekeeping strategies by historical global Northern colonizers can open old wounds, heightened by fresh ones gained by the persistent colonial racism and Islamophobia many

minority and marginalized youth experience at the hands of white, non-Muslims in Canada, the USA and in Western Europe. Therefore, neoliberal military peacekeeping in historically colonized regions can act as push factors into VSM, rendering the GWOT not only ineffective, but also creating a violent cycle of racism and Islamophobia and violent resistance to racism (Sheppard-Luangkhot, 2020).

Canada and Settler Colonialism.

Canada's violent social movements are very influenced by its closest geographical neighbour, the USA, as seen with the active VSMs, Truckers Freedom Convoy and Action for Canada, both of which are politically and religiously influenced by Donald Trump's Make America Great Again Movement. The settler-colonial relationship persists in North America: Canada remains part of the British Commonwealth, and Canada was built upon land stolen from Inuit, Metis and First Nations peoples with treaties that have not been fully honored (Daschuk, 2019). European colonists used their political, economic, and armed power, as they made peace treaties that were frequently broken. Under the yoke of colonial oppression, resource theft occurred, and violent and systemic attempts at assimilation of Inuit, Metis and First Nations peoples were imposed through the Doctrine of Discovery, Royal Proclamation, the Indian Act, residential schools, the 60's scoop, and the displacement onto reserves (Daschuk, 2019; Rice, 2013; Woolford, 2009, 2019).

In Canada, the Oka resistance movement occurred in 1990, and was a 78-day stand-off in

Quebec during which Inuit, Metis and First Nations Mohawk warriors defended their sacred burial sites and lands, upon which a golf course was being built (York & Pindera, 1991). One of the Mohawk land defenders, Denise David-Tolley, who was inspired by Ana Mae Aquash to engage in Inuit, Metis and First Nations resistance to colonial invasion and to seek to elevate Inuit, Metis and First Nations civil rights (York & Pindera, 1991). Mohawk women are the keepers of the lands, and they took the lead in confronting the police and military attempts to stop Oka warriors (York & Pindera, 1991).

Another Mohawk woman, Eba Beauvais, was also motivated to be a part of the Oka social movement due to her obligation to family, land and to her people (York & Pindera, 1991). When the Surete du Quebec (SQ) police raid occurred at Oka, the sexism of the officers was evident when a line of Mohawk women came to negotiate with them. The police kept calling for the Mohawk leader, not believing their answer that Mohawk women were the leaders (York & Pindera, 1991) with the male warriors backing them up. Racism was a driver to the settler colonial police response, as one official later admitted that there was no desire for a peaceful solution at Oka, only a need to show that police were in control of Native resistance (York & Pindera, 1991). This study explores how settler-colonialism continues to influence VSMs and their violent extremist conflicts today, including what role sexism and racism have in the ideologies and actions of VSMs.

The USA and Settler Colonialism

The United States was also invaded by European colonists, and land was cleared and violently taken from Native Americans (Daschuk, 2019; Ostler, 2019) through direct violence.

Structural violence was also used, such as in how the U.S. Constitution supported the military's efforts to oppress Inuit, Metis and First Nations peoples (Ostler, 2019) through broken treaties, the reservation and the boarding school systems. Although Americans liberated themselves from British colonial rule in the American Revolutionary War of Independence (Daschuk, 2019), the settler occupation relationship with Inuit, Metis and First Nations peoples continues to position non-Inuit, Metis and First Nations people, especially white people, in hegemonic macro, meso, and micro (Coleman, 2012) relationships with Inuit, Metis and First Nations peoples.

In the USA, the American Indian Movement, (Brand, 1993; Matthiessen, 1983) are examples of social movements who at times have used violence as an expression of legitimate native dissent (Brand, 1993). Inuit, Metis and First Nations movements like AIM are a collective resistance to colonial, systemic relationships, and injustices as well as spaces for Inuit, Metis and First Nations peoples to reconnect to spiritual and cultural power, pride, and identity (Matthiessen, 1983). AIM leader, Ana Mae Aquash, joined the movement to elevate Inuit, Metis and First Nations civil rights and empowerment (Brand, 1993). Sadly, Aquash was brutally murdered, and her death was inadequately investigated by the FBI who then spread the word that Aquash was murdered by AIM members, claiming they were suspicious of Aquash becoming an FBI informant (Brand, 1993). The lack of a full FBI investigation into her murder, and the lack of attendance by AIM leaders at Aquash's funeral (Brand, 1993), suggests that her life was devalued by patriarchal and racist leadership in the FBI, and patriarchal leadership within AIM itself. This is another rationale for an intersectional feminist methodology and Inuit, Metis and First Nations feminist theory to be incorporated in this thesis research, as gender equity and systemic nonviolence towards women, including Inuit, Metis and First Nations women (National

Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Report, 2019), is integral to sustainable peace.

In the USA, the Battle of Wounded Knee was colonial, state-sponsored violence (Brand, 1993) that arose from treaty violations by the state and had a massive influence on the formation of the American Indian Movement. In 1868, a treaty was signed between Sioux and Arapaho peoples and the U.S. government (Brand, 1993). With the discovery of gold in the Black Hills, Scots-Irish descendant General George Armstrong Custer and armed U.S. soldiers contravened the treaty for personal gain (Brand, 1993). This led to a forced sale of the land in 1876, so capitalist colonizers could benefit, and as a result, Sioux and Arapaho peoples lost the land of the sacred Black Hills, and their treaty rights. Tragically, almost 350 Sioux people died, during a mass killing by Custer's 7th cavalry (Brand, 1993). The Battle of Wounded Knee marked an important historical event sparking the evolution of AIM as a violent social movement in the USA and Canada. AIM formed as Inuit, Metis and First Nations activists wanted to protest the violation of the treaties by the US government and to achieve Inuit, Metis and First Nations civil rights (Brand, 1993).

In 1973, one of the largest protests by AIM was the 71-day occupation of Wounded Knee (Brand, 1993). Wounded Knee is significant to North American Inuit, Metis and First Nations social movements in Canada and the USA, as it was a spiritual and political uprising of multiple Inuit, Metis and First Nations tribes resisting racist, systemic government corruption, ineffectual oversight, and land theft (Brand, 1993). After fighting with the FBI, the battle resulted in the

deaths of two warriors and a woman who died due to a diabetic coma (Brand, 1993). AIM negotiated with the FBI, allowing some grievances to be heard and land leases by non-Inuit, Metis and First Nations peoples to be reviewed (Brand, 1993).

Most importantly, AIM provided a reconnection to traditional spirituality and cultural self-governance (Brand, 1993) as 90 Inuit, Metis and First Nations came together to reignite cultural pride and assert their demands for equitable treatment and treaty rights (Brand, 1993). Several AIM activists like Leonard Peltier and Leonard Crow Dog were imprisoned.

Despite gaining independence from British rule, the USA was nevertheless formed through European violent settler colonialism and land theft from Native Americans (Daschuk, 2019). The USA still has many active VSMs on the far right, like the Proud Boys and Ku Klux Klan, and homegrown political violent Islamists, who act individually or within a group (Davies, 2018) or in cooperation or support of transnational movements like ISIS. Far-right, violent social movements in the form of protests are currently posing a threat in the USA, particularly since the election of President Donald Trump in 2016 and his failed bid for a second term in 2020. This study explores if colonialism still shapes VSMs and their violent conflicts in the USA.

Europe and Colonialism

As part of the Global North, Europe, particularly Britain, France, Netherlands, Russia, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Italy, Germany and Scandinavia have colonized other European countries, Africa, the Americas and countries throughout the Global South, using hegemonic colonial practices like the transatlantic slave trade (Bulhan, 2015) and genocide. As there are 50

countries in Europe, and not all could be a site of the study for brevity purposes, in later chapters, I explore the history and contemporary impacts of settler colonialism on violent social movements in Poland, Germany, Kosovo, Denmark and Norway, as participants from these countries agreed to participate in the study and shared their stories in the qualitative data.

There is a glacier of international conflict that can shape the causes and patterns of conflict within VSMs. By understanding the glacier, one has a better understanding of the etiology of the iceberg and can then better prevent and intervene into the violent conflict at the macro, meso and micro levels. For example, Hauss (2010) writes about the Northern Ireland conflict, the Troubles, and the evolution of the GFA in 1998. The glacier and macro violence in this case is British expansionism, capitalism, and colonialism, and the dominating (Hauss, 2010) structures that led to the cultural and direct violence (Galtung, 1990) of sectarian violence between Protestant Loyalists and Catholic Republicans. Radicalized by colonial oppression, and the lack of power in political relationship due to Loyalist political tactics that limited Nationalist and Republican political representation and power as the Northern Ireland state used police violence to target Catholics (Hauss, 2010) and in a rejuvenated Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) fought against the British government, and used bombings, shootings in England and on Northern Irish soil (Hauss, 2010). Several suspected terrorists were interned in the 1970s in the H-Blocks (Hauss, 2010), like modern day Guantanamo Bay detentions, without legal representation.

Protestants were also radicalized and used violence against Catholics. In the decades before the GFA it was in Unionist politician's interests to protect violent colonial structures and power asymmetries, and centre British, Protestant identities. An example of this anti-Catholic

propagandic violence is the annual Twelfth of July Orange parades, and popular songs like Home on the Range that devalued Catholic identities “No, no pope of Rome/ no chapels to sadden my eyes” (Haus, 2010, p. 84).

When British troops came to Northern Ireland in 1968, they did not address Catholic concerns over the burning of houses. Political protest by Catholics led to the disastrous Bloody Sunday killings of civil rights marchers in 1972, that mobilized the PIRA (Haus, 2010) and ensured that the British government instituted direct rule against its own citizens via military force, installing the Peace Line, a wall to separate Catholic and Protestant neighbourhoods in West Belfast (Haus, 2010) like the Berlin wall in Germany, the wall that President Trump attempted to build between Mexico and the U.S. to prevent immigration, the Israeli west bank barrier, and the reserve system in Canada and the USA.

Third-party intervention was required to negotiate a peace process that led to the 1998 GFA and to assist the conflict parties to begin to de-radicalize and let go of the hate and pathologies of war (Lloyd, 1999, as cited in Haus, 2010). The GFA, mediated by a U.S. team led by former Senator George Mitchell assisted in eventual decommissioning of paramilitary weapons and a power sharing government and political relationships that respect distinct identities, and intended to promote cross community collaboration (Hoge 1999 as cited in Haus, 2010) as an alternative to violent conflict (Haus, 2010). This peacebuilding example is crucial to the transformation of REMVE: How to dewater and instead share power and resources,

respect identities, and collaborate on political systems that bring peace, equity, and justice, so that VR, VE and terrorism are no longer needed as “iceberg” expressions of radical groups’ unmet identity, power, political and justice needs. Hauss also makes the point that thirteen years later, the 9/11 terrorist attacks by al-Qaeda on the USA influenced the Unionist and Nationalist leaders as well as Republican and Loyalist paramilitary groups like the PIRA and the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) and the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) to now work more diligently together for peace and bridge the sectarian divide (Hauss, 2010). This is not always the case as the contagion of violence can spread in a negative direction, such as how far-right white supremacists like the Base have been inspired by Daesh terrorist training camps.

Hauss (2010) writes extensively about the GWOT and advocates, similar to the ending of the Troubles and continuing efforts to build peace in Northern Ireland, that a third party is needed to talk to the conflict parties like Al-Qaeda, to build peace agreements that bring security, peace, and justice, using non-violent methods of conflict resolution. This is particularly timely given the fall of the U.S. trained Afghan government and its defense force in August 2021. The Taliban wants to be recognized as a legitimate government in the international arena. Ongoing talks that began in November 2021 to negotiate the safety of workers who assisted the U.S. backed Afghan government, and refugees to get them out of Afghanistan. Human rights in the form of women’s rights, LGBTQ+ rights and ethnic Shia rights are also a part of negotiations.

For the Taliban to deradicalize and stop using violence against its own citizens third parties such as Tariq Ramadan (Hauss, 2010), Pakistan, and Qatar may be needed to ensure safety and justice for vulnerable groups within the Taliban's implementation Sunni interpretations of Sharia law. In the U.K., Canada, and the USA where some youths have radicalized to join jihadist groups, its necessary to inquire about why: what drove them to radicalize, politically and violently mobilize?

Patriarchy and Violent Social Movements

This study also explores the role of gender relationships in VSMs in Canada, the USA and Europe, to determine what impact gender relationships may have in building sustainable peace. In Canada, the USA and in Europe, systems are largely patriarchal, and the genders in power positions in families, political systems, social systems, faith systems and governments are dominated by male genders. Consequently, violent social movements tend to reflect that gender relationship, with most VSMs led by men. Given the hegemonic and patriarchal nature of VSMs, it is no surprise that they target their outgroups who violate the movement's rules of toxic masculinity.

Manosphere VSMs

Misogynist VSMs like Incel (Involuntary Celibates) and Andrew Tateism promote patriarchal, misogynist, queerphobic, and hegemonic ideologies on social media (Haslop et al., 2024) which are a hotbed of toxic masculinity. For example, the "Manosphere" is an umbrella of

“men’s rights” VSMs like Incel and Andrew “Taters” that position feminist women and queer men as the outgroup, and heterosexual, powerful men as the ingroup. Andrew Tate is infamous for his charges of rape and sexual trafficking of women. Tate also mixes far-right, religious extremism into his misogyny, when his posts to his 9.5 million followers on X and other social media platforms.

Robert Mizzi and Sean Byrne (2015) discuss the importance of “queering peace” and examining the strict gender rules underpinning violent conflict, as seen in the Manosphere’s promotion of toxic masculinity and strict gender rules for men, women and 2SLGBTQI+ people. Violation of these rules include being a woman who wants consent and equal rights, being a man who treats women with respect, and being queer: punishment for these rule violations include online hate and direct violence towards women like intimate partner violence (IPV) and rape, as evidenced by the charge against Andrew Tate.

Checking Gender Assumptions about VSMs

There is frequently an assumption that women and gender diverse people are only ever victims of terrorism and violent extremism (Cook, 2019). On the contrary, women and gender diverse people like me have been victimized by VSMs, but also have played supportive roles in their respective movements. Moreover, women have played instrumental roles in violent social movements as noted by Tamara Lich, a Metis leader of the Truckers Freedom Convoy (Balgord,

2022) and Roshonara Choudhry, a political, violent lone wolf Islamist, who attacked MP Stephen Timms in the UK for his support of the Iraq War. In later chapters, I deconstruct common assumptions about women, gender diverse people, patriarchy, and VSMs.

Conclusion

To foster sustainable peace, further research is needed into what causes and transforms these violent social movements (Lederach, 1995, 2003) into peaceful, nonviolent movements including when examining current threat landscapes, and potential drivers like patriarchy and colonialism. By speaking to former violent extremists, their family members, and the NGO staff who work with them, understanding as to their complex push and pull factors into and out of those violent movements may be deepened, and societies may be able to build more sustainable peace, justice, and equity in North America and Europe.

Chapter Three

A Review of the Literature

Introduction

Chapter three reviews the literature related to Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS) and Violent Social Movements (VSM) in the form of terrorism and violent extremism that includes the literature on formers, colonial patriarchy and conflict, and hate and violent social movements like far-right, political, violent Islamism, anti-government, and Incel groups. The literature review concludes with a discussion of how this study might add to social science scholarship. This chapter also discusses the value of using a conflict frame when studying VSMs and explores some of the salient theories when reviewing the literature about terrorism, settler colonialism, patriarchy and formers.

Colonialism, Patriarchy and Conflict

Colonialism and patriarchy are intertwined and can influence the radicalization of adults and youth in VSMs, creating violent conflict, and disruption in families and communities. This section of the literature examines PACS, terrorism and settler colonialism, and patriarchy, gender and hate.

Peace and Conflict Studies, Terrorism and Settler Colonialism.

Tellidis and Toros (2015) assert that PACS can inform terrorist studies (TS), not just with causal analysis and understanding of terrorism, but also how to better engage and help to resolve terrorist conflicts. As explored in the previous chapter, around the world different terrorist

conflicts have occurred and shaped the threatened landscapes. However, at the policy and programs level, terrorism is viewed more as a fetishized or exceptionalized phenomenon of violence (Toros & Tellidis, 2013), instead of complex conflicts in which violence or the threat of violence is used because statist take the position that terrorists are the enemy of the state (Booth, 2007; Torros & Gunning, 2009, as cited in Toros & Tellidis, 2013) who want to destroy the state. This can result in state policies that rationalize military actions and massive surveillance of citizenry such as during the Global War on Terror (GWOT).

Although it is understandable that the U.S. government wanted to respond to the thousands of deaths that occurred on 9/11, President George Bush and his government took the statist and military position that lacked conflict analysis into the interests, identities and sociopolitical context underlying the terrorist conflict, like the terrorist's rage at the U.S. neocolonialist policies in the Middle East and the need for self-governance and Muslim identity expression in those regions (Al-Kassimi, 2021).

Audrey Kurth Cronin (2006) points out that international conflict resolution theory has neglected the subject of terrorism (as cited in Hauss, 2010). International conflict and peace and conflict studies theorists are well-placed to contribute to terrorism theories, given their interdisciplinary nature and their ability to deeply understand the causes of conflict. This is why Toros and Tellidis (2013) critique terrorism studies and governments who spurn the academic and praxis strengths of the PACS discipline. One of the critiques of PACS and terrorism is the

assumption that it is contrary to the policy of refusal to negotiate with terrorists, and the refusal to view terrorism as a conflict (Richmond, 2003 as cited in Toros & Tellidis, 2013).

PACS academics and practitioners take a different approach, and instead analyze conflicts for the structures, interests, identities, and resource disputes beneath polarized conflict positions. PACS is a discipline that seeks to use dialogue to transform relationships and systems to sustainable peace and justice (Taylor & Lederach, 2014). Ignoring PACS theoretical and practical rigour in conflict management, conflict resolution and conflict transformation, poses the risk of losing lives to ineffective security and conflict management policies that do not keep the public safe (Toros & Tellidis, 2013).

Critiques of PACS and international relations by terrorism scholars is that negotiation and mediation is not possible with terrorists due to massive power asymmetries which may involve often secret actors who are actively committing crimes and are therefore viewed as illegitimate conflict actors who are not worthy of negotiating with (Toros & Tellidis, 2013). However, negotiation and talking with terrorists are possible as evidenced by recent peace agreements in Northern Ireland, Philippines, Spain, and Columbia (Toros & Tellidis, 2013). People are afraid of and traumatized by violence, and want to control it as quickly as possible, which is understandable in a short-term crisis. However, more sustainable transformation of VSMs requires a deeper analysis of the relationships, and what measures could be mediated and negotiated to meet people's needs without their resorting to violence.

Toros and Tellidis (2013) suggest that John Paul Lederach (1996) and Dian Francis's (2002) conflict transformation theories and John Burton and Edward Azar's (1986) Basic Human Needs theories that focus on identity, safety, and acceptance are helpful to terrorism scholars. They also suggest that Johan Galtung's (1996) direct, structural, and cultural violence and peace triangles and theory contribute to understanding the root causes of and intervening in terrorism as a method for engaging in conflict resolution (Toros & Tellidis, 2013).

Tellidis and Toros (2013) also heavily critique the liberal peacebuilding framework, and top-down approaches that resist any challenges to liberal states, and their policies, and exclude the voices of the grassroots communities trying to decrease terrorist violence. Liberal peace frameworks that support only security approaches risk escalating conflicts with people resisting state and structural violence (Toros & Tellidis, 2013). For example, CSIS and Public Safety in Canada has a pluralistic liberal policy (Berlin, 1969 as cited in Toros & Tellidis, 2013) of not wanting to unfairly monitor any racial or religious communities. However, Muslim and Inuit, Metis and First Nations communities continue to be surveilled closely, especially when protesting Islamophobic policies like Bill 21 in Quebec that ban wearing religious symbols like the hijab (Montpeit, 2021) or anti-Inuit, Metis and First Nations legislation in Alberta and Manitoba that do not allow protests on sites of infrastructure by land defenders Bill 57 (Wilt, 2020; Toros & Tellidis, 2013).

Terrorism and Settler Colonialism

This thesis explores former's understandings of VSMs in Canada, the USA and Europe.

When examining the history of colonization in these sites of study, Canada is still a colony under the British commonwealth, while multiple countries of Europe have participated in violent settler-colonialism like Belgium, England, Germany, Portugal, France, Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. Other countries have also recently experienced violent settler colonialism, like Kosovo, Ukraine, and Poland. The USA won the 1775-1783 War of Independence against the British and it is no longer a colony of Britain. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the US government and non-Inuit, Metis and First Nations peoples are still settling upon the lands of Native Americans without adequate and full reconciliation with Inuit, Metis and First Nations peoples living in that territory (Daschuk, 2019). The U.S. system of government is based on the Iroquois governance system (Rice, 2013). Therefore, the USA is still impacted by settler colonialism.

When reviewing the European literature on colonialism and terrorism, a well-studied case is Northern Ireland (NI). Northern Ireland has been a well-researched site of politically motivated loyalist and republican terrorist, and extremist colonial conflict and state violence directed against civilians in shoot-to-kill murders. Shaped by British colonization and political systems, sectarian violence took place between armed British loyalists and Irish republicans wanting freedom and decolonization from the British state (Rahman et al., 2017). In his book *No War, No Peace* Mac Ginty (2008) discusses intergroup ethnopolitical conflict in post peace accord societies. Mac Ginty suggests that top down, liberal democratic peace accords and processes exclude grassroots voices from bottom up meaningful and inclusive reconciliation. Conflict transformation and meaningful reconciliation built into the peace accord and in the

implementation of the accord must be inclusive of identity groups and their interests, their perspectives, feelings, and ideas for sustainable peace (Mac Ginty, 2008) risks further violent social movement actors acting as spoilers of peace, due to their unmet interests and identity recognition at the micro, meso and macro levels. Following Mac Ginty's thinking, a way to conceptualize violent social movements is that they are a manifestation of intergroup and interstate conflict, and spoilers of the peacebuilding process in settler-colonial societies

For far-right, white supremacist VSMs in settler colonial societies, it may be that the causes of violent social movements lead to a breakdown of the social contract in developed countries like Canada and the U.S. This is because some whites feel left behind, fear the politics of the womb as immigrants have larger families than white families (Ekman, 2022) Whites may also vent their anger and lash out at those who are "different." As an example, immigrants to NI are treated with xenophobic policies that deport newly arrived immigrants to Rwanda, to keep NI as white as possible (Collyer & Shahani, 2023) and this is happening in a post war peacebuilding process in a society transitioning out of violence.

Moreover, conflict resolution practitioners who seek to meaningfully prevent and intervene into VSMs must deeply understand the deep structural causes of conflict in developed countries and the alienation and the marginalization of white men from working class backgrounds, if they are to prevent and intervene effectively in far-right conflicts, and to build a sustainable peace (Lulat, 2022). For example, Loyalist and Republican needs for economic opportunities for jobs, affordable food due to the new Brexit border and customs regulations are also important for them to also not become peace spoilers and re-enter VSMs (Byrne, 2023). As violent extremists are spoilers for peace (Mac Ginty, 2008), then providing

socioeconomic and political empowerment to the working class and marginalized groups in democratic societies are key to maintaining sustainable peace in societies affected by settler colonialism and VSMs in North America and Europe.

Using a conflict frame, PACS scholars Byrne and Carter (2002) conducted a social cubism and comparative analysis of the ethnoterritorial violent extremist conflicts in Quebec and Northern Ireland, societies both affected by British colonialism. By viewing ethnoterritorial conflicts as a multifaceted and integrative cubed puzzle, whose six dimensions are interlocked and influence each other, the social cubism model analyzes how these interactions over time and space contribute to intergroup conflict dynamics, and the regulation of conflict (Byrne & Carter, 2002). The social cubism model suggests that there are six interrelated dimensions of ethno-political conflicts that include 1) religion, 2) demographics, 3) political institutions and non-institutional behaviour, 4) history, 5) psychocultural factors, and 6) economics (Byrne & Carter, 2002).

When applied to the Northern Ireland and Quebec conflicts, Byrne and Carter (2002) found that the interplay of psychological and material mechanisms in both conflicts had some similarities and differences. While Northern Ireland had more conflicting national identities and rates of terrorism, both communities found it difficult to build a shared identity due to a mistrustful siege mentality (Byrne & Carter, 2002). In contrast, they suggested that Quebecois Francophones experiences benefit from federalism and the colonial myth that two races, English,

and French founded Canada (Inuit, Metis and First Nations peoples founded Canada). Ethnic minority groups in

Quebec and Northern Ireland struggle to feel included in the negotiation of power and constitutional issues (Byrne & Carter, 2002). By deeply examining both conflicts with all six interacting dimensions, and the interplay between them, there is more information gleaned that could assist in the regulation and transformation of the conflicts in settler colonial Northern Ireland and Quebec.

This thesis also used a decolonial (Deridder et al, 2022) conflict frame to understand the power relations and causes of conflicts embedded in VSMs that can help transform these conflicts into nonviolent, sustainable peace in European, Canadian and American societies affected by settler-colonial, patriarchal, intergroup, and extremist religious and political conflict. The founder of PACS, the late sociologist Johan Galtung (2005), viewed colonialism as a hegemonic ownership over people and their lands, such as through the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, and men's domination of women. Hegemonic, dominating power over relations are common relational patterns inherent in violent extremism and terrorism (Berger, 2018) and in colonization (Rice, 2013; Byrne et al., 2018; Daschuk, 2019). Violent, hegemonic colonialism, most significantly that which was enacted by the British government, created power asymmetries that disrupted harmony with the Inuit, Metis and First Nations peoples of North America as well as people in Ireland, Scotland and Wales in the U.K. (Byrne et al., 2018).

That said, Albert Memmi (1965), a Jewish Tunisian scholar, who experienced colonization, wrote the canonic book *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. Memmi framed the

colonial relationship as an oppressive mixed marriage between European colonizers and colonized people within the colony (p. v). Colonization denotes a process during which people from a home country travel to a host country, seeking to forcefully extract resources, and land from Inuit, Metis and First Nations peoples via systemic, structural, intergroup, and interpersonal power over relationships where Inuit, Metis and First Nations peoples are subjugated (Na'puti, 2020). Colonization is a process that has harmed Inuit, Metis and First Nations populations across the world (Memmi, 1965; Dashcuk, 2019; Na'puti, 2020).

Jennings (2010) also discusses how Europeans fleeing the oppressive feudal system were used by the power hierarchies to conquer new territories and suppress Inuit, Metis and First Nations populations. Tired of the poverty and exploitation that they experienced as farmers in their home countries, Europeans replicated this hegemonic relationship by forcing the hierarchical feudal system onto Inuit, Metis and First Nations peoples in the Americas (Jennings, 2010). However, European liberation in the Americas led to the “cold and opportunistic” (Daschuk, 2019, p. xi) exploitation of Inuit, Metis and First Nations peoples as well as land extraction, and the cultural and physical genocide of Inuit, Metis and First Nations peoples. Colonial violence killed, displaced, and exploited Cree, Sioux, Mohawk, and Saukteaux and cleared the plains people's territories belonging to the Nakota, Anishinaabe, Nehiyawa, Lakota and Niittapi Inuit, Metis and First Nations peoples (Daschuk, 2019). To assert further control, colonial governments set up legislative and political systems that clustered them into small reserves, with restrictions against moving and living freely (Daschuk, 2019). The colonial relationship and structures were governed by the colonizers, to uphold their economic privilege at the expense of the colonized (Memmi, 1965). Many Europeans, Americans and Canadians

incorrectly frame this act of colonization as progress, while most Inuit, Metis and First Nations peoples frame it as genocide (Daschuk, 2019).

Patriarchy, Gender, and Hate in Violent Social Movements

As this thesis research explored the role of patriarchy in VSMs, Haudenshonnee scholar Brian Rice (2011) also suggests that colonial, racist violence brought imbalance to gender relationships within Inuit, Metis and First Nations communities before colonial gender systems of patriarchy were imposed on Rotinonshonni peoples and other Inuit, Metis and First Nations peoples across Turtle Island, what is now called Canada. Pre-contact, Rotinonshonni women had an equal distribution of power, an important role in clan mothers selecting leaders and terminating them if they were not taking care of the needs of the people or honouring community consensus decision-making (Rice, 2011). A settler-colonial and racist patriarchy and hegemonic power relationship persists in Canada, the USA and Europe today with white, wealthy, Christian, heterosexual cisgender men on top, then white, wealthy Christian cisgender, heterosexual women, and Inuit, Metis and First Nations peoples, racialized peoples, immigrants, refugees, and non-Christian religions at the bottom.

Joana Cook (2019), a Canadian extremism expert now based in Europe, writes that U.S. counter terrorism efforts after the election of President Trump took an interesting patriarchal turn. Trump casts Islam as an enemy to women, as “women are treated horribly.” The irony of a state leader who is a convicted felon for mistreating his wife by cheating on her and then lying about paying off his mistress, has also been successfully sued by a past victim of rape. Cook (2019) writes that Trump’s leadership, and Islamophobic behaviour mobilized far-right violent

social movements to increase their attacks on Muslims, including Muslim women wearing the hijab.

Cook (2019) suggests that women are half the population, and they can meaningfully assist in counter terrorism efforts, and women's participation in violent social movements is also important to examine. Cook also writes that terrorist violence disproportionately impacts women's rights and their status in society (p. 425) and therefore women are crucial stakeholders in trying to build peace and positively transform violent terrorist conflicts and social movements.

That said, Alexandra Phelan (2020) writes that there are four main gendered approaches in terrorism studies: gender as a variable, gender as a motivation, gender-based analysis, and or feminist methodological approaches. Her essay is helpful and like most terrorist studies scholars, only two binaries of men and women are discussed. This study uses all four approaches integratively, as VSMs vary in gender composition and motivations, and analysis and methodologies should include all genders, not just two.

Moreover, hate crimes perpetrated by far-right violent extremists are rampant in Europe and North America (Southern Poverty Law Centre, 2024). Izzeldin Abuelaish and Neil Arya (2017) write about the complex and interdependent relationship of health, peace, conflict, and violence. Abuelaish and Arya (2017) proposes that we understand hate and violent social movements as community and socio-ecological health issues that affect minds, bodies,

relationships, societies, and ecologies. This is helpful when examining violent extremist and terrorist ideologies that are spread online and in person, and when trying to prevent and intervene into radical violent social movements.

How can a person move from a state of childhood peace into one that is increasingly psychologically radicalized to the point of hating and dehumanizing an outgroup? Abuelaish and Arya (2017) further define hate as chronic, judgmental, emotional, and objectifying of the other, resorting to interpersonal, intergroup, and systemic violence against that objectified othered outgroup, affecting the health of the disputants along with the communities, societies, and ecologies in which they reside.

Abuelaish and Arya (2017) state that it is critical to treat hate as an epidemiological issue to shift hateful states of mind and behaviour to peaceful states, that benefit communities and increase interpersonal, intergroup, and structural positive peace at the socio-ecological levels.

When a person or group attacks another person or group, they have dehumanized and devalued that conflict party enough to hate them and may express that hate through violence. Hate affects both perpetrators and the victim of the violence (Abuelaish & Arya, 2017). Teaching children and societies to not hate, to humanize and value each other, and resolve conflict and build peace without violence is key to reducing violent radicalization, violent extremism, and terrorist movements. Devaluing and dehumanizing Palestinians or Israelis does not resolve hateful conflict (Abuelaish & Arya, 2017).

Violent Social Movements

Violent social movements ranging from extreme left to extreme right paramilitary and terrorist groups use violence to create social change and to attempt to overthrow democracy. This section of the literature explores social movements, social psychological theories and violent social movements, and conversion theory and violent social movements.

Social Movements

Social movement theory (SMT) has influenced the design of this study. SMT began in the 1940s and is influenced by sociological strain theories that suggest VR, VE and terrorism are social movements that arise from discontented people under strain who then develop irrational beliefs and join a collective to express their discontent, and passively succumb to collective, irrational beliefs (Borum, 2012). This is useful to the study of VR, VE and terrorism, as frequently there is the suspension of critical thinking and entry into group think (Sheppard-Luangkhot, 2020) after which people adopt a new social and psychological identity that is based on the violently radicalized collective identity.

Modern SMT theorists suggest that there are rational and strategic processes used to ensure the survival of the group, namely recruitment, mobilization, and motivation strategies, and removing obstacles to recruitment through targeted strategies to lure people into the movement, and then motivate them to participate in the movement's activities (Klandermans & Oegema, 1987 as cited in Borum, 2021).

Another strength of SMT is a focus on understanding meso and macro processes. A newer SMT that analyzes contextual processes group dynamics, is called Resource Mobilization (RM) theory (Borum, 2012). Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen (2013) also proposed another SMT theory called Framing theory that is based on social constructionism and examines how social movements construct and disseminate meanings and communicate interests and beliefs to recursively strengthen the collective identity and behaviour within the movement (as cited in Borum, 2012). Recruiters suggest frames of reality that resonate with individuals who then move deeper into the radicalization process and collective thinking, interests, and values of the social movement (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2103 as cited in Borum, 2012).

Social movement scholar Quintan Wiktorowics (2004) studied religiously motivated Islamist group Al-Muhajiroun that is based in England (as cited in Borum, 2012). From this research, Wiktorowics developed a four-stage theoretical model for radicalization into religiously motivated violent extremism where 1) people become cognitively open to alternative views, 2) sought religious meaning, and 3) found the violent extremist or terrorist group's narrative aligned with their frame and meanings, which 4) allowed them to become fully socialized into the movement (as cited in Borum, 2012).

Like PACS theories, modern SMT theories value the analysis of macro, meso, and micro processes that contribute to social violence, as both PACS and SMT value and understand how conflict may have started at the international and national (macro), community (meso), and individual, group or family levels (micro). Some limitations of SMT are that it does not

specifically analyze conflict dynamics and processes or propose ways to prevent and intervene into violent extremist and terrorist conflicts (Beck & Schoon, 2018). In this thesis, VSMs are framed as a conflict. Theories can assist people to transform intrapersonal, interpersonal, and intergroup conflicts and achieve needs in a constructive way, to prevent VSM conflicts from escalating by integrating the strengths of SMT theories while also offering clear analysis that assists people and governments to transform VSM conflicts.

That said, extremism expert Amarnath Amarasingam (2015) discusses social movement mobilization as driven by both external and internal developments in Canada and in Sri Lanka. His social movement approach is helpful as it explores the influence of international relationships that mobilize people into engaging with VSM. Amarsingham's research highlights the importance of understanding complex drivers of mobilization into violent social movements in Canada but also how drivers are influenced by what is happening in the USA and Europe. Without full understanding of what mobilizes people into movements, building positive peace and transforming violent conflicts is inhibited.

Moreover, SMT has many strengths as it describes how social movements are comprised of people with beliefs that reflect their desire for reward distribution in society and/or a need for changing a social structure (Zald & McCarthy, (1987) as cited in Borum, 2012). Nonviolent social movements and grassroots activism have also contributed to positive social change,

including anti-racism work throughout the world, and in Canada, the USA, and the U.K., like the Black Lives Matter movement. Social movements still push for decolonization like the Idle No More and Land Back movements in Canada, and in dismantling racist patriarchies like the Women's March in North America. Though some security agencies may define these movements as radical movements, they are nonviolent and cannot be classified as violent extremism or terrorism (Mian, 2020).

As discussed in chapter two, an example of a violent far right, neofascist, populist social movement is the Make America Great Again (MAGA) led by President Trump. Trump radicalized his followers through propaganda online and face-to-face interactions in his political rallies, first through birtherism and questioning President Obama's US citizenship (Pease, 2023). When running for and then sitting as President, Trump used and continues to use social media and far-right media like Fox News to mobilize power for white, cisgender, heterosexual Christian elites. Donald Pease (2023) writes that MAGA is a transmogrified resurgence of European, fascist, and American settler colonial mindsets and behaviours that position liberal Democrats as the polarized "other."

How does this relate to violent extremism and terrorism? Trump galvanized the far white supremacist Ku Klux Klan who marched in in a "victory parade" in North Carolina. David Duke, the former leader of the Ku Klux Klan officially endorsed Trump, and when asked to disavow this support, Trump refused in 2016 during his Presidential campaign (Chan, 2016). After Trump

was elected more violent extremism erupted as part of the MAGA violent social movement, during the Charlottesville Unite the Right Rally where Heather Hyer was killed by Neo Nazi James Field in a car attack (Bodroghkozy, 2020).

QAnon is another far-right, apocalyptic, conspiratorial ideology and VSM led by an anonymous 4Chan online platform user named Q (Amarsingam & Argentino, 2020). QAnon ideology reveres President Trump as the leader of a movement whose focus is to resist a cabal of Satanic LGBTQ and Jewish pedophiles (Amarasingam & Argentino, 2020). QAnon positions heterosexual, non-Jewish, whites as the ingroup and the outgroup are Jewish people and 2SLGBTQI+ people, who are deemed as satanic pedophiles. Amarnath Amarasingam and Marc Argentino (2020) explore the QAnon security threat that has radicalized far-right adherents in the USA and contributed to ideological motivated violent extremists use of violence like Jessica Prim, who had a plan to kill President Joe Biden but was arrested. QAnon has also inspired Canadians to commit extremist violence (McChristall et al, 2023). Manitoban Corey Hurren became radicalized into QAnon before attacking the Prime Minister's residence in Ontario in 2020.

Social Psychology and Violent Social Movements

Social psychology theory has also influenced the design and analysis of research findings in this study. Social psychology theory is increasingly applied to the study of radicalization, with

its analysis of group dynamics, group conformity, and reward-based relationships within violent extremist and terrorist groups (Borum, 2012). Social psychologists have found that group members possess ingroup/outgroup irrational beliefs and biases (Borum, 2012). These biases position ingroup members as more positive than outgroup members, biases which are then reinforced in the conforming group relationships (Borum, 2012). Social psychologists McCauley and Moselenko (2017) found that during political group radicalization, group psychological mechanisms shift people into polarization and extreme beliefs when groups are likeminded, committed, trying to achieve consensus, and when experiencing state power response. Group splitting or factions occur when there are ideological differences, and less devoted members tend to exit the group when encountering state power, for e.g., arrest and imprisonment (McCauley & Moselenko, 2017).

Some limitations of this approach are that social psychology lacks a macro analysis of structural processes that may influence meso and micro processes of the group; it does not adequately explain lone wolf terrorism for individuals who are not affiliated with a group, and it does not adequately examine how racism influences individual's radicalization into violent extremist and terrorist movements.

Identity and Violent Social Movements

Identity theory is also valuable when analyzing the causes of Violent Social Movements (VSMs) in the form of terrorism and extremism (Berger, 2018). For example, Schwartz et al.

(2009) examined social, personal and cultural identity conflicts that drive ethnic and religiously based terrorism. Identity conflicts reveal community division, enemy images of the other and values conflicts. Cultural identity is based on cultural values, while social identity is based upon affiliation with groups, and personal identity is one's personal sense of who one is (Schwartz et al., 2009).

Identity theorists like Schwartz et al. (2009) argue that it is the interaction of cultural, personal and social identity processes that are the root cause of terrorism. This identity process interaction is evident when a suicide bomber values their group over their safety as an individual, and when their religious identity feels morally superior to the religious group they are attacking. Social identity and positioning the outgroup as the inferior enemy group was also exemplified during the Nazi's terrorism of Jews pre-WWII and during World War II. Therefore, when analyzing the causes of terrorism as an international conflict, theorists should consider personal, cultural and social identity conflicts as drivers to extremism and terrorism.

Conversion Theory and Violent Social Movements

Another social science theory used to understand micro processes of radicalization into violent extremism and terrorism is conversion theory (Borum, 2012). I personally have experienced conversion into religious extremism myself, and I have found that conversion theory assisted me in the data analysis of participants' stories of their conversion into their VSMs.

That said, Lofland and Skondov (1981) propose that people become vulnerable to religious conversion when they have a history of trauma and/or mental health conditions that can

create strain, vulnerability, and crisis (as cited in Borum, 2012). Situational factors can trigger conversion as when a convert develops strong affective bonds with a group, and may have a mystical, transformative and/or coercive experience, for e.g., brain washing while spending intensive periods within a group, while distancing themselves from their previous social groups like their family, friends, and former faith system (Azani and Koblenz-Stenzler, 2022).

Some of the strengths of conversion theory are that it has decades of religious conversion research behind it, and it is particularly helpful when understanding the drivers and conversion processes of religiously motivated violent extremism (Borum, 2012), as well as cults and new religious movements. One example is the extreme form of Judaism held by the Quasi Fascist Kach party that positions Palestinians and Muslims as a hated outgroup and led to the far-right radicalization of Dr. Baruch Goldstein who in 1994 shot at Muslims in prayer at the Tomb of the Patriarch (Keiser, 2019).

In her chapter about radicalization and conversion, Juliette Galonnier (2022) discusses how radicalization can be conceptualized as a risk factor for individual's radicalization into a VSM, as some evidence suggests converts to faiths like born again Christianity or politically violent Salafi Islamism puts people at risk for becoming entrapped in VSMs like Action for Canada, and ISIS among others. Galonnier (2022) defines conversion as follows.

For the sake of clarity, we can start by defining conversion with Mercedes Garc.a-Arenal (2001, p.7) as “the range of processes through which individuals or groups engage in

beliefs, rituals and social practices that are different from those into which they were born.” This simple definition has the merit of encompassing a broad range of religious and social transformations, from gradual to sudden, from dramatic to subtle. This chapter investigates the relationship between radicalization and conversion (p. 94).

As there is a large body of research on conversion (Galonnier, 2022), conversion research can assist peacebuilders to better intervene with converts who are at risk of radicalization into a VSM.

Some limitations of conversion theory are that it does not adequately analyze the intersection of racism and religion as part of people’s radicalization into VSMS, including violent colonialism. As the violent colonization of the USA and Canada involved many religious, Christian missionaries, nuns, and priests from Catholic and Protestant churches in Europe it is important to consider how that conversion interacted with racism to result in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Inuit, Metis and First Nations people through violence and disease (Daschuk, 2019).

Formers Assisting PVE and CVE Efforts to Disengage and Deradicalize from VSMS

This section of the literature discusses the disputes of whether formers can assist in PVE and CVE efforts to deradicalize those caught up in Violent Social Movements (VSMS). The following section explores how credible formers can be informative in PVE, and in in CVE programs that aim to disengage youth and adults from violent social movements.

As this study interviewed formers, their family members, and the NGO and CSO staff who work with them, reviewing the literature on formers has been instructive to this thesis. For example, Tapley and Clubb (2013) discuss how formers have been increasingly involved as actors in Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) efforts. They discuss that formers are not a panacea (p. 3) and are only valuable for community level peacebuilding where violent extremist groups have formed, or in providing intelligence information to security agencies that the state cannot provide (Tapley & Clubb, 2013). Formers have had success in Northern Ireland, such as the Prison to Peace program to help divert youth away from violent extremism, likely due to their respect in Northern Irish society; while formers in other societies like Burundi, have less social credibility (Tapley & Clubb, 2013).

Tapley and Clubb (2013) also suggest that formers are helpful in radicalization and deradicalization efforts, but they critique formers as having insight into the complex factors that assisted them in leaving. Formers also have helped to develop peace agreements and effective police work in El Salvador; however, some scholars critique the fact that formers should not be given power and influential positions, unless they are provided with close oversight and training (Tapley & Clubb, 2013). Ironically, they then note that formers cannot make broader changes and helpful meaningful conflict transformation due to the little power formers have in some societies (Tapley & Clubb, 2013). Their article is quite anti-former, polarized, and deficit oriented instead of asset based, and unfortunately promotes social exclusion that frequently drove individuals to VSMs in the first place. However, they do highlight the importance of deradicalization, not just disengagement of formers involved in CVE efforts. As disengaged people may still be

ideologically connected to VSMs, without full deradicalization, they are at risk of reengagement.

Similarly, Katerina Papatheodorou (2023) questions the ethics of using formers who claim expertise due to their prior experiences in extremism. In her policy paper, she takes the position that formers involved in PVE/CVE efforts, and exit work do not have the expertise that they claim (Papatheodorou, 2023). She also suggests that formers “often “are not adequately renouncing their violence (p. 211), citing Alonso and Bada (2016) who contend that such is the case of former members of the Spanish ETA or the Northern Irish PIRA who essentially blamed the “historical context” for their need to resort to violence (p. 211). Papatheodorou suggests that when formers refer to their VSM engagement in a historical context, it is evidence that formers are not adequately renouncing their violence. This is problematic as historical context, and the norms relationships, systems, laws, policies all may drive conflicts that attract dissidents and that evolve into a VSM. To simply dismiss history as mattering to engagement and disengagement from a VSM is reductive, given the violent colonialism and police violence that contributed to the formation of Northern Ireland’s PIRA in the first place (Byrne et al., 2023).

Papatheodorou (2023) also advocates for full deradicalization and adequate training of formers to be involved in PVE and CVE. She suggests that disengagement should not be the only criteria for involving formers and proposes that formers should be fully rehabilitated and remorseful for past actions in VSMs. Deradicalization is ideal for a former to be free of violent ideologies that led to their engagement in a VSM. She also suggests that there be more integration of victims’ voices in PVE and CVE efforts and empirically grounded research conducted to evaluate the efficacy of PVE and CVE interventions.

I also agree with Papatheodorou's (2023) suggestions that formers be deradicalized, not just disengaged, so that they can take responsibility for their actions and the violence they have committed. This would be a more constructive approach when engaging in peacebuilding and when asked to speak in schools to deter young people from radicalization and entering extremist violent movements. However, it begs the question of what are the objective markers for deradicalization? Moreover, Papatheodorou's lack of understanding and polarized interpretation of the historical context that motivated PIRA and ETA is short-sighted and does not adequately convey the multiplicity and complexity of drivers that push or pull someone into a VSM.

Additionally, Papatheodorou's (2023) suggestion for trauma informed, capacity building trainings is commendable, and backed up by a research participant in the thesis, Jason, a former Neo Nazi who discussed the importance of a training program for formers to do PVE and CVE and exit work, which will be explored further in chapter nine. I also agree with Papatheodorou when she suggests that there be more integration of victims' voices in PVE and CVE efforts and empirically grounded research conducted to evaluate the efficacy of PVE and CVE interventions

Papatheodorou (2023) advocates for empirically grounded research in a policy paper that is very important read for all terrorism and extremism studies scholars. However, her argument would have been strengthened if she had conducted the empirically grounded evaluation research she advocates for. Instead, she critiques qualitative description, while herself negatively evaluating formers with overly generalized descriptions, and minimizing the research and evaluation results that demonstrate positive learning about signs of radicalization and learning about the negative effects of right-wing extremism.

Ryan Scrivens et al. (2019) also discuss how Canadian formers can assist in addressing

violent extremism. Formers suggest that the best way to combat violent extremism in Canada is through a multistakeholder responses by credible formers, families, schools, and law enforcement agencies (Scrivens et al., 2019). Scrivens et al. (2020) also suggest that more research is needed to understand more specifically how formers can assist in terrorism and extremism prevention and intervention efforts. More PACS research is needed to comprehend how formers can best assist terrorist and violent extremist conflict transformation and peacebuilding efforts, along with how PACS can assist violent extremism and terrorism studies.

Clubb, Scrivens and Islam (2024) recently published a handbook about *Former Extremists and Preventing and Countering Violence*. In their book, authors Katerina Meredith and Robert Orell (2024) suggest that formers can especially contribute to the work of organizations that help people to exit violent extremist movements. Meredith and Orell recommend that a best practice is to ensure the formers want to work at the exit NGO, and that they have rehabilitated and “processed their involvement in violent extremism, acknowledged past wrongdoing, be able to work in a team, model good help-seeking and coping strategies, and build a life outside of the exit field (p. 264). This sets the stage for clear roles, responsibilities and tasks that help the formers to receive needed training and help other people to exit their respective VSMs.

Conclusion

This chapter critically reviewed salient SMT theories, conversion and social psychological theories, as well as reviewing literature about formers, terrorism, colonialism,

patriarchy, and hate that help to contextualize the study. Scholars have written extensively about social movements, but more specific research is needed to understand how social movement theory can be used to comprehend why formers entered then exited violent extremism and terrorism.

More research into colonial patriarchy is also needed to examine its relation to what drives people into VSMS and this study seeks to understand how colonial patriarchy influences VSMS in Canada, the USA and Europe. Researching how VSMS involve women, men and gender diverse people and how they may be victimized or engaged in VSMS is also needed, specifically through the historical context of colonial patriarchies of Canada, the USA and Europe. This study hopes to fill this gap in PACS and social science research and literature.

Chapter Four

Research Methods and Design

Introduction

In the previous chapter, Ryan Scrivens et al. (2020) discussed the importance of including the insider perspective of former extremists in one's research design. In contrast to Scrivens, while Tapley and Chubb (2013) critique the use of formers in CVE efforts beyond providing some specific information and intelligence about VSMOs. In contrast, this thesis research embodied Scrivens' suggestions, as it was designed by a former extremist, and it used the author's insider voice to conceptualize a design that included interviews and a talking circle focus group that integrated Inuit, Metis and First Nations, intersectional feminist, and critical autoethnographic methodologies.

A qualitative methodology was used for this thesis research, to generate rich stories from participants about what they perceived as the reasons why people engage with and disengage from violent social movements, and what they perceive as the best ways to build sustainable peace in Canada, the USA, and in Europe. A multi-method qualitative approach was used to explore the research question that included Intersectional Feminist, Inuit, Metis and First Nations and Critical Auto-ethnographic methodologies to design methods and to conduct inductive thematic analysis

of participants' data. These methodologies also informed discussions and recommendations for program and policy improvement at the micro, meso and macro levels of North American and European societies.

Chapter four explores the formers and deradicalization NGO staff members experiences and perceptions using a multi-method approach. Participants' locale and data sources are described, while also discussing data generation and data analysis methods. Finally, risks, benefits and ethical considerations are explored, as this was necessary in a study like that involved individuals exposed to violence and potentially further violence or stress if confidentiality was not adequately protected by the researcher.

Intersectional Feminist Method

Unfortunately, terrorism studies tend to be androcentric and focus largely on men as terrorist threats (Davis, 2006; Sutton, 2009). Researchers who are also frequently socialized and taught within patriarchies may minimize the fact that women can also be terrorist actors (Cook, 2019) in violent social movements, and are not just victimized by violent extremist and terrorist social movements. Terrorism and social movement studies also frequently minimize colonialism and gender relationships as potential drivers, as exemplified by Liguori and Spanierman (2021), Bosi and Della Porta (2015), and Dalgaard-Nielsen's (2013) research that do not sufficiently explore patriarchy or settler-colonialism as a potential driver of VSM. This reflects some

researcher's potential gender and racial bias (Davis, 2006) that erases women and gender diverse people as actors impacted by colonialism in violent social movements, particularly racialized women who can experience violent patriarchies both within and outside of their violent social movements, and by a larger society that is dominated by male elites (hooks, 1981).

The PACS discipline has been shaped by feminist scholars like Jessica Senehi, Peggy Chinn, Victoria Fontan, Thania Paffenholz, Anna Snyder, Janie Leatherman, and Maureen Flaherty. For PACS scholars, it is important to examine the role of violent terrorist actors who are men, but also those who are not men like women and gender diverse people like me. At times, even the feminist movement has turned violent, such as when, in 1913-1914, suffragettes in the U.K. also became violently radicalized and used mailbox bombings and arson attacks (Bearman, 2005; Monaghan, 2010). This demonstrates that women can be violent extremists too.

Unfortunately, Inuit, Metis and First Nations, and racialized women are frequently excluded from the centre of feminist leadership and organizing (Greene, 2008), prompting several BIPOC feminists to form their own social movements. For African American women like bell hooks, the racist and sexist socialization of white supremacy devalued her gender to focus solely on her race (hooks, 1981). The intersections of gender, class, and race can better assist in our understanding of violent social movement organizations. The intersectional feminist movement was started in the 1990s by African American scholar, Kimberle Crenshaw, who wanted all academic disciplines to recognize the intersectionality of multiple identities

experiencing various levels of oppression, such as both structural and interpersonal racist and sexist violence against women of colour (Crenshaw, 1993, 2012, 2017).

In addition, feminist PACS scholar-practitioner Peggy Chinn (2013) discusses peaceful intent and value-based actions that support constructive, harmonious, collaborative relationships, that solve problems together among and between genders and races. Peaceful intent can lead to peaceful outcomes if peace is valued and acted upon throughout the peacemaking process. Chinn (2013) believes peace is much more than the absence of war and writes that communities need methods to practice peace, to empower themselves to resolve conflicts that are based on values of mutual love and respect for each other. Chinn (2013) also encourages continual reflection upon values and actions, that evolve with ongoing awareness of the impact of one's actions and assist in facilitating a peace culture. Thus, Chinn's (2013) reflective and values-orientated peacebuilding proposes that collective and individual reflections and collaboration on value systems are needed in a nonviolent peace culture. This is because values-based conflicts are often a part of racism with the white race devaluing people of colour and some men devaluing women and gender diverse people. To bring peace to violent social movements, governments,

NGO's, mental health, educational and family systems could reflect on values and actions that reduce violence and cultivate mutually respectful values and actions that build peace, justice, and acceptance among all genders and races (Chinn, 2013). In addition, Nina Lykke (2014) writes that feminist epistemologies posit that knowledge production is shaped by one's situation

and overlapping identities. Intersectional feminist methods help to deconstruct the monolithic conceptualizations of identity, and instead explore “in between spaces” of overlapping identities (p. 3). Intersectional feminist methods were used when designing semi-structured interviews with participants of all genders (women, men, gender diverse people) to explore their socially constructed, gendered experience of VSM. An intersectional feminist methodology also informed the construction of the talking circle/ focus group/sharing circle questions that incorporates the intersections and different levels of power depending on gender, race, class, disability, culture, sexual orientation, faith, and ethnic identities (Crenshaw, 1993).

Intersectional feminism also encourages a trauma informed approach (Strega & Brown, 2015) to ensure that the research participants and the researcher have a safe space, consent, transparency, and opportunity to connect so that the participants are not re-traumatized by the research process. Extra care was taken before, during and after data generation to ensure participants had professional and natural supports to access should the data generation process have brought up any traumatic memories or feelings.

Indigenous Methodology

There are many reasons to use an Inuit, Metis and First Nations methodology for researching violent social movements. Inuit, Metis and First Nations peoples speak and write most powerfully about the violent colonial relationship and the harms that the violent colonial social movement has done to their communities. For example, Shawn Wilson (2008) writes that Inuit, Metis and First Nations methodology is local, relational, spiritual, holistic, and both intellectual and intuitive (Cordero, 1995, as cited in Wilson, 2008).

Inuit, Metis and First Nations methodologies are ideally led by Inuit, Metis and First Nations scholars. However, non-Inuit, Metis and First Nations researchers can also use Inuit, Metis and First Nations methodologies when they value Inuit, Metis and First Nations peoples being heard and value Inuit, Metis and First Nations peoples benefitting from research (Wilson, 2008), which is true of this author. In contrast, emancipatory methodologies are often designed from a Western perspective, and Inuit, Metis and First Nations methodologies are designed from Inuit, Metis and First Nations perspectives (Kovach, 2015). An Inuit, Metis and First Nations methodology assisted in the decolonization of the research process and the relationship between the researcher and participants (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999 as cited in Strega & Brown, 2015). An Inuit, Metis and First Nations methodology also supported the exploration of how formers understood how, for some, colonization may have been a factor in drivers of radicalization and deradicalization from their violent social movements.

The ontology of an Indigenous methodology is a holistic and interdependent view of reality (Wilson, 2008) wherein humans and non-humans are all connected (Rice, 2011). This is another reason to use an Inuit, Metis and First Nations methodology, as it includes an axiology of an ethical, respectful researcher-participant relationship through sharing and listening to stories (Wilson, 2008) with Inuit, Metis and First Nations and non-Inuit, Metis and First Nations participants. During the recruitment process, this included asking permission of Inuit, Metis and First Nations leaders and following cultural protocols (Strega & Brown, 2015) in the geographical sites of research in the USA and Canada. Inuit, Metis and First Nations communities are relevant stakeholders and they and all participants should be given the opportunities to make recommendations for policy, practice and future research that could

benefit their communities (Strega & Brown, 2015) and protect them from further extremist violence due to colonially driven violent social movements.

An Inuit, Metis and First Nations research paradigm views axiologies, methodologies, ontologies and epistemologies as interconnected in a circle (Wilson, 2008; Senehi, 2020), and “the ontology and epistemology are based on a process of relationships that form a mutual reality...the axiology and methodology are based on maintaining accountability to these relationships” (Wilson, 2008, p.71). Indigenous methods may entail designing a sharing circle of former violent extremists to generate data through storytelling to include a mutual and holistic epistemological understanding (Wilson, 2008). Talking circles, like focus groups, can cultivate empathy that continues the process of deradicalization (Liguori & Spanierman, 2021). These circles can also build reconciliation processes (Byrne, 2017) between colonizer and colonized participants during the research process itself. In this thesis study, questions were designed in the talking circle to be non-intrusive and take a trauma-informed approach to explore the formers’ understanding of the impact of colonialism, patriarchy, and systemic racism shaping violent social movements.

An Indigenous methodology views knowledge as relational, and research should benefit all (Steinhauer, 2002 as cited in Wilson, 2008). Data generation included the researcher sharing their story of what brings them into the ceremony of research (Wilson, 2008) and listening to participants’ stories, what brings them to the research process, and valuing their subjective experiences, thoughts, and feelings as part of the ceremony of research (Hampton, 1995, as cited in Wilson, 2008).

The risk of not including an Indigenous methodology and methods is that of further colonial exploitation and erasure of Inuit, Metis and First Nations worldviews, axiologies,

epistemologies, cosmologies, voices, experiences, and knowledge (Wilson, 2008; Strega & Brown, 2015). Values underpinning an Indigenous methodology include the four R's of working with Inuit, Metis and First Nations communities: respect, relevance, responsibility, and reciprocity that can support a decolonized process (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991, as cited in Strega & Brown, 2015). Using an Indigenous methodology with deradicalized former violent extremists can also contribute to allyship for the Inuit, Metis and First Nations resistance movement (LaRocque, 2010). Accountability for the harms of colonization can contribute to the global decolonization process as well as in Canada and the USA and Europe, which this thesis explores later in the empirical chapter's findings.

Critical Autoethnography

Autoethnography uses self-narrative, and the story of self that is a foundation upon which culture is analyzed (Chang, 2016; Boylon & Orbe, 2014). Influenced by anthropology, autoethnography is also a research method to increase an understanding of self-narratives and participant narratives in the research process (Chang, 2016; Boylon & Orbe, 2014). As the author of this paper is a deradicalized former, gathering self-reflective and memory data on past and present lived experience, coupled with external data (Chang, 2016) of other research participants such as formers and civil society workers, lends further understanding to how to bring peace to violent social movements in North America and Europe.

The autoethnographic method can also include secondary data documents and textual artifacts (Chang, 2016; Boylon & Orbe, 2014), including violent extremist manifestos, public videos, photos and social media posts of active and former violent extremists and victims of terrorism, and colonial violence. Autoethnographic data analysis searches for comparison cases,

cultural patterns, and themes; connects the past with the present contexts; looks for exceptional occurrences, inclusion, and omissions among the data; and analyzes relationships between self and other in the primary and secondary data from self and research participants (Chang, 2016). Further, autoethnography uses theories from PACS, feminism, or critical race to guide the data generation, analysis, and interpretation of data (Chang, 2016; Boylon & Orbe, 2014).

Critical autoethnography applies critical theory to the self-reflective storytelling process of autoethnography (Jones, 2016). This is important for the researcher to think critically about their personal and research stories during the entire research process, assisting in critical subjectivity and objectivity. Critical theory aims to expand knowledge, yet it also is intended to liberate oppressed people (Mullaly, 2007, as cited in Strega and Brown, 2015). Critical autoethnography facilitates an understanding of how broader social micro, meso and macro social patterns intersect with both the researcher's and participant stories and identities.

Research Participants, Data Sources and Locale

Data was generated from participants living in Canada, USA, and Europe. At first, the research locales were only Canada and the USA to keep the research design simple, only intending to interview formers themselves. Initially, there were low participant recruitment numbers as some formers responded with being too busy, or from research fatigue. An ethics amendment was made and approved to include adult family members of formers and the NGO staff who worked with them. Another ethics amendment was also created and approved to conduct interviews through Zoom and to widen the research local to Europe to obtain more

stories but also to explore how European colonialism and patriarchal stories may compare with North American participants' colonialism and patriarchal stories, with respect to entry and exit from violent social movements. Participants demographics were also generated regarding age, disability/mental health, class, race, culture, and spirituality to explore their standpoints and how they may have impacted their understandings of colonialism, patriarchy, violent social movements, and violent extremism.

There was a total of 17 participants in the study, a total of eight Canadians, one American, and eight Europeans. A specific description of participants is discussed in Table 1

Below:

Pseudonym	Country	Participant Type	Gender	Race	Culture	Age	Disability	Spirituality	Class	Ethnicity/Nationality
Interviews										
Jonathan	Canada	Former anti government/police	Man	White	Scottish	62	Anxiety	Christian	Middle	Canadian
Jason	Canada	Former Racist Skinhead (Christian Identity, Neo Nazi)	Man	White	Irish	35	ADHD	Atheist	Upper Middle	Canadian
Lauren	Canada	Former Neo Nazi	Woman	White	Scottish	32	ADHD, PTSD	Atheist	Middle	Canadian
Mike	Canada	NGO Staff	Man	White	English	43	None	Atheist	Middle	Canadian
Mimi	Canada	NGO Staff	Woman	White	French	57	ADHD	Muslim	Middle	Canadian
Royar	Canada	NGO Staff	Man	Kurdish	Kurdish	25	PTSD	Atheist	Poor	Canadian
Pascale	Canada	Family/parent of former neo Nazi	Woman	White	English	67	None	Christian	Middle	Canadian
Frank	Canada	Former Incel and sibling of former Neo Nazi	Man	White	English	28	Depression	Agnostic	Middle	Canadian
Patrick	USA	NGO Staff	Man	Hispanic	American	50	None	Catholic	Upper Middle	American
Max	Germany	NGO Staff	Man	White	German	43	None	Atheist	Middle	German
Staszek	Poland	Skinhead, anti-Russia, neo Pagan, football hooligan	Man	White	Polish	42	Past drug addict	Catholic	Middle	Polish

Jan	Poland	NGO Staff	Man	White	Polish	42	None	Didn't want to say	Working Class	Polish
Ewa	Poland	Family of former Soccer Hooligan/Neo Nazi	Woman	White	Polish	42	None	Catholic	Middle	Polish
Tom	Norway	Former Neo Nazi and KKK	Man	White	Norwegian	47	None	Christian	Middle	Norwegian
Tore	Norway	NGO Designer/Researcher/Professor	Man	White	Norwegian	65	None	Did not say	Upper Middle	Norwegian
Siri	Denmark	Former supporter of political, violent Islamism	Woman	White	Danish	33	Neurodiverse	Atheist	Middle	Danish
Vebi	Kosovo	NGO Staff	Man	White	Kosovar	52	None	Muslim	Middle	Kosovar

Table 1: Interview Participants Demographics and Intersectional Identities

Difficulties with Recruitment

The one American participant, “Pat,” who works at a prominent U.S. deradicalization NGO remarked that difficulty with recruitment may be due to research fatigue and formers feeling their stories have been misused or exploited by researchers. A Canadian former participant, “Jason,” who also works with U.S. and Canadian formers, further confirmed this hypothesis that people are tired, and fear being exploited by researchers.

The language of the poster used for recruitment also mattered, as the word “extremist” is a controversial term. One NGO in Northern Ireland emailed back to say that their participants were not “extremists” but instead “activists.”

Canadian and American Inuit, Metis and First Nations activists I tried to recruit either did not respond, or they told me that they are still active in their movements given the systemic oppression they continue to experience in Canada. Therefore, sadly there are no Inuit, Metis and First Nations participants included in the thesis.

One interview was booked with a former Black Panther who then did not show up for the interview and did not explain why he changed his mind. The language in the social media poster was also flagged by Facebook as “too political” and I was not able to share it, likely due to the term violent extremists. It is possible that the COVID-19 pandemic also did not make it easy to recruit participants for this research as people feared continued health risks due to the global pandemic.

Formers

This study included participants who are adult former extremists (n=7) that were from Canada (n=4), Denmark (n=1), Norway (n=1), and Poland (n=1). The high representation of Canadian participants suggest that since I am Canadian, participants from this region were easier to access, and may not have yet reached a level of research fatigue and saturation as seen among American formers. However, one Canadian participant commented that research fatigue is prevalent among former Neo Nazis from the 1980s.

Participants had disengaged for at least one year from violent social movements or groups. The types of movements they were involved in were Skinhead/Neo Nazis (n=3), Neo Nazi/Soccer Hooliganism, (n=1), Neo Nazi and Ku Klux Klan (n=1) and Incel (n=1), violent Islamism (n=1), and anti-police/anti-government (n=1). Such involvement suggests that all study participants had affiliation with patriarchal, male-led movements, while five (71 percent) had affiliation with Neo Nazi movements.

Most formers in this study are cisgender men (n=6), and two are cisgender women (n=2). One former talked about working with gender diverse people in VSM but noted that, while inside Neo Nazi movements, it was not safe to be anything but to have a gender identity of cisgender. Most formers were heterosexual men (n=5) with two bisexual women (n=2). The two bisexual women talked about how their sexuality was at odds when they were engaged with their Neo Nazi and violent political Islamist VSM. The two women's observations from Canada and

Denmark stated that they are more comfortable in expressing their identities now that they have disengaged from their VSM, which they further indicated in their data.

The formers were all racially white (n=5), with the distinction, however, of two identifying both racially/culturally as Polish, and another describing himself as racially Norwegian (n=2). The representation of participants suggests formers in this study were predominantly racially white. Several attempts were made by the researcher to include formers who are racialized, albeit most political violent Islamists were in the middle of criminal justice issues (court, prison) and were told not to speak to researchers.

Two former Black Panthers from the USA were approached by email, then declined for unknown reasons to participate in the study. Former participants who are Inuit, Metis and First Nations and who participated in the Oka Crisis in Quebec were approached by email and social media, while Inuit, Metis and First Nations participants from the American Indian Movement were contacted via email, but there was no response from either group. This suggests that criminal justice issues were resolved for the five racially white/European formers with more years out of their VSM. As the researcher is racially white, this may also have influenced the comfort level of white, European participants to be more open to sharing data, while racialized participants may have had less comfort, potentially having extensive historical experience of exploitation by researchers. One white Canadian participant also discussed the fear many former Neo Nazis have of their trauma being misused or exploited by researchers.

The cultural identities of formers include two Scottish Canadians (n=2), an Irish

Canadian (n=1), one English Canadian (n=1), one Pole (n=1), one Dane (n=1), and one Norwegian, (n=1). This suggests that all the formers' identities included European ancestry. One former was from Atlantic Canada (n=1), while three were from Ontario (n=3).

The spiritual beliefs of formers were Christians (n=3), agnostic (n=1), and atheist (n=3).

One former who supported political violent Islamism discussed coming from a fundamental Christian background but was now identifying as an atheist. This suggests that where formers are at in their adulthood, approximately half (47 percent) are less connected to a faith-based belief system currently. For the three formers who identify as Christian, one of whom is Catholic, their spiritual identity would suggest that a faith-based belief system is of value to them now.

Two formers have ADHD (n=2), one of whom also has PTSD (n=1), three are recovered from substance use disorder (n=3), and another had adolescent depression (n=1). Further, one has anxiety (n=1), one has neurodiversity (n=1), and one identified as having no mental health or neurodiversity issues (n=1). From this demographic information, it can be observed that half of the formers have neurodiversity issues (n=3) and three formers (n=3) have mental health issues that have been or are currently being treated by medical professionals. Also, almost half of the formers were recovered from substance misuse issues which suggests comorbidity with active mental health and/or neurodiversity issues, along with their active engagement in VSMS.

Four formers also work at NGOs or organizations that help formers and formers' family members to exit VSMS and to rehabilitate themselves. The latter demonstrates that over half (57

percent) have chosen professions to help others to exit and rehabilitate from the impact of VSM.

For class, or socioeconomic status, six formers (n=1) are middle class, and come from middle class backgrounds, while one identifies as upper middle class (n=1), as the majority of participants are from middle class backgrounds (86 percent).

NGO Staff (Non- Formers) Who Work with Formers

The third data source was semi-structured interviews with NGO staff who work with active or former violent extremists. The NGO participants (n=8) work with formers and family members in Canada (n=3), the USA (n=1), and the European countries of Germany (n=1), Kosovo (n=1), Poland (n=1), and Norway (n=1).

Two of the former participants also work in NGOs that help formers to exit from violent extremism, but they were counted as formers as they completed the former interview protocol, not the NGO staff interview protocol. One family member also works in an NGO that engages with formers, but she completed the family member protocol so is counted as a family member.

Adult Family Members of Formers

The fourth data source was semi-structured interviews with adult family members of formers, living in Canada, the USA, and Europe (n=3). One participant was from Canada, a mother of a former neo-Nazi, and another was a sibling of the same former Neo Nazi (all within one family).

The last family member was a spouse of a former Neo-Nazi/soccer hooligan. This offered some unique perspectives from the standpoint of parent, sibling, and spouse. No American family participants were successfully recruited for this study despite recruitment efforts through direct email recruitment and snowball methods.

Semi structured interviews were about 60 minutes on average in duration with 18 participants on Zoom, or in person in quiet cafes or private office spaces. One former was interviewed by telephone, while three were interviewed by Zoom video. Two family members and four NGO staff participated in Zoom video interviews. In-person interviews occurred at participants' NGO workplaces in Manitoba, Canada, in Berlin, Germany, in the cities of Gorzow and Warsaw in Poland, and in Oslo, Norway.

Talking Circle/Focus Group for Formers

A talking circle/focus group of two formers from Denmark and Norway was conducted for two hours on Zoom audio. This was the second data source (Inuit, Metis and First Nations method), a mixed member, 90-minute online Zoom talking circle with focus group discussion questions (see Table 2). This talking circle created a space wherein formers from different ideologies were able to speak and listen to each other's experience of violent social movements and what drives people into and out of these movements, and what would bring peace to violent social movements in settler-colonial North America and Europe.

Tom	Siri
Norway	Denmark
Former Neo Nazi and KKK	Former supporter of violent, political Islamism
Man	Woman
White	White
Norwegian	Danish
Age 47	Age 33
No disability	Neurodiverse
Christian	Atheist
Middle class	Middle class
Heterosexual	Bisexual

Table 2 Talking Circle Participant Demographics

Four formers agreed to the talking circle/focus group; however, by the time it was booked, only two attended. The two participants who cancelled did not give reasons why. Two formers participated in the talking circle/focus group (n=2), and both were from Europe. The first was a woman who was a former violent political Islamist from Denmark (n=1), racially white, and has neurodiversity. The second was a man (n=1) from Norway who was a former Neo-Nazi and KKK member, and racially white/Norwegian and heterosexual.

Research Materials/Equipment

During the Zoom interviews and talking circle/focus group, a digital recorder was used to record audio. For in-person interviews, the digital audio recorder was also used, if the participants agreed to it, which was true of all participants except for two who preferred that I take notes instead in a field note journal. After the data generation, participant data was

immediately converted into MP3 files, and then uploaded into Otter transcription software. After transcription, I edited each transcript while listening to the recording to improve accuracy. A final check for accuracy occurred when offering each participant two weeks to check the transcript for accuracy, to be provided the opportunity to offer any edits to assist them to feel confident that their raw data was accurate. Once approved by the participants, the raw data was manually coded and analyzed. Then, the raw data was uploaded into NVIVO 14 data analysis software for further analysis.

Standpoint of the Researcher

It is important to locate one's standpoint in the context of the research and have critical reflexivity during the research process (Strega & Brown, 2015). This is also integral to the research as a critical autoethnographic methodology was also used in this study. Since I am a former extremist who was in a religiously motivated violent extremist group as an adolescent in British Columbia, Canada, I am close to the participants' experience, which can help me with having compassion and empathy for all participants, but it also is important to distinguish my stories from their stories. I am also a middle aged, racially white, Ukrainian British Canadian, genderqueer person, (assigned female at birth), middle class, who has PTSD in terms of disability/mental health.

Positionality

From 1989 to 1992, I, the author, and my immediate family were radicalized into an

extremist Apocalyptic cult, in British Columbia, Canada (Sheppard-Luangkhot, 2020). What drove us into religious extremism, which embodied some far-right, white supremacist ideology, were various push factors, like financial stress and my parents' marital strain, and pull factors, like lack of spirituality in our family, a need for belonging, and power that we, as a white, settler-colonial, patriarchal family felt entitled to, given our privilege and status. It is integral for me to use critical autoethnography to determine how my position shapes me at every stage of the research process to remain objective and make space for both similarities and differences from participants' experiences. I am both a former but also a family member of active members: two of my siblings are in religiously motivated and far right white supremacist violent social movements.

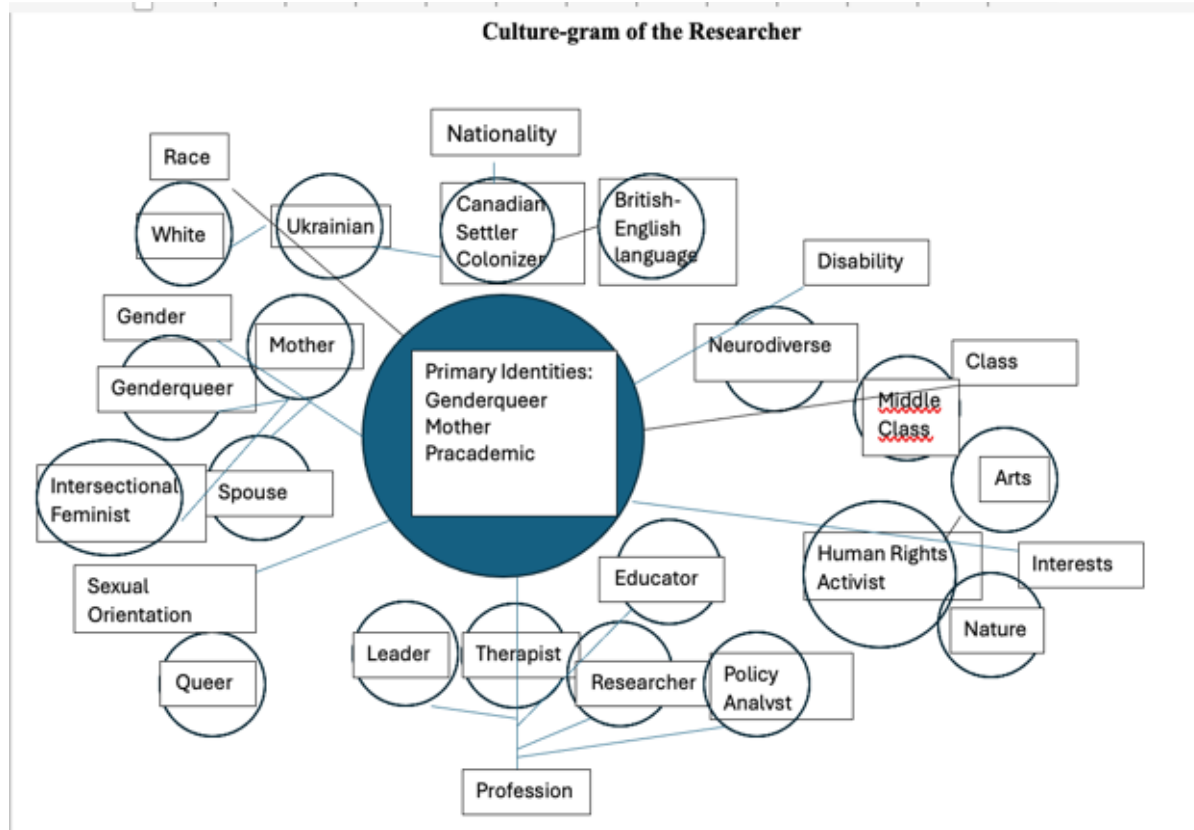


Figure 5. The Researcher's Culture-gram of the Researcher

Heewon Chang (2008) discusses the importance of using a “culture-gram” in autoethnography, to subjectively map and reflect how one’s multiple identities may influence their positionality in the research process (p. 98). As illustrated in Figure 5, in my culture-gram, I can reflect upon how, as a white person, I am a part of a race that has exploited many, including through research. This reflection causes me to examine carefully how my race and other identities affect the thesis research, especially the researcher-participant relationship in interviews and the talking circle/focus group. The culture-gram is a helpful exercise in discovering one’s positionality to be able to better guide ethical and trauma-informed research as

the principal investigator.

Research Risks and Benefits

Risks

Through the research design and delivery process, it became evident that special care needed to be taken to be trauma-informed and to protect the safety, well-being and confidentiality of all research stakeholders, including formers, their family members, NGO staff, and the researcher to help mitigate any risks.

Choosing adult participants who were at least two years disengaged from their violent social movement was important to give them time for recovery and rehabilitation. This is also the case for family members, whose loved ones had to be at least two years disengaged. As it is discussed in Chapter five, family members were very impacted by their loved one's involvement in the violent social movement, and they also needed time for their own process of disengagement and rehabilitation.

It was crucial for the researcher to protect confidentiality as it could pose serious risks to the safety of participants vis-a-vis people still active in violent social movements. For example, one participant, Siri, was very concerned about the significant damage that could be caused to her career if she was not anonymized as much as possible in her stories. Another participant, Staszek, experienced active members of the Neo Nazi movement assaulting him after he left their movement in Warsaw. Therefore, respecting Staszek's need to not be recorded was

necessary.

Benefits

Participants had no direct benefits to participating in the study, other than to contribute to knowledge that could help others through improved policy, training, and praxis. The participants who agreed to participate seemed to also appreciate the space to tell their stories of their lives, their work, and their ideas for peace.

Ethical Considerations

As formers have been researched extensively, and at times, exploitatively, it was essential to assure them that their stories would not be exploited, and instead, be used for peacebuilding purposes. Their stories would be for people who read the reports and any published articles, who may wish to integrate study findings into their policies, programs, teaching, training and further research.

As recommended by the University of Manitoba's Research Ethics Board, extra diligence was taken during the talking circle/focus group for formers to not use video and to use audio only to help protect participants' identities. One participant, Tom, was very open about his identity and details of his involvement in Neo Nazism. The other talking circle participant, Siri, was more reserved due to fear of a negative impact on her career if her identity was revealed. It was important for the researcher to accommodate these different levels of openness and risk, including for how women experience punishment differently from men, due to the gender rules

of niceness and obedience in Scandinavian patriarchies, particularly for Inuit, Metis and First Nations, Sami women (Kuokkanen, 2007, as cited in Green, 2007).

Reliability and Credibility

The researcher's reliability and credibility are important in working with a sample of participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2020) to capture an accurate picture of what the formers think are drivers to entry and exit into violent social movements and how to bring about sustainable peace within violent social movements in North America. Once data saturation has occurred, it is likely that the author has an adequate amount of qualitative data (Creswell & Creswell, 2020).

As a former, I lend some credibility and inside knowledge to the process. However, it is integral to watch for researcher bias and use the Ph.D. thesis committee to check any biases and to debrief the process. It is important for researchers to remember that people and their experiences are heterogenous, one Inuit, Metis and First Nations voice or former white supremacist voice does not speak for all voices.

Methods of Data Analysis and Interpretations

First, qualitative, thematic data analysis occurred through manual inductive coding in the transcript as part of first-cycle thematic coding (Saldana, 2018). I continually tracked codes that were expected, surprises, learnings, and those that had patterns throughout the data. As part of autoethnographic intentional reflexivity (Chang, 2008), I also continually and reflexively asked the question, "What is the story this data is telling?" and "How does this story compare and

influences their patterns of violence against groups. The word cloud also suggests that what they think, know, and need in relationships with themselves and people is influenced by systems like family, police, groups, kids (peers), school, guys (men and boys), community, and racial systems. Moreover, Inuit, Metis and First Nations, Intersectional Feminist and Critical Autoethnographic methodologies were applied to interpreting key findings that are discussed in Chapter 5.

Conclusion

Chapter four explored the three research methodologies: Intersectional Feminist Method, Inuit, Metis and First Nations Method, and Critical Autoethnographic method used in this study. Participants' locale and data sources were discussed while also illustrating the data collection and data analysis methods utilized in the research. Finally, risks, benefits and ethical considerations were explored as well as the protection of participants to avoid further trauma and violence in their lives.

Chapter Five

Code 1: Territorial Conflicts of Colonial Patriarchy and Occupation

Introduction

Chapter five introduces the findings and explores the first of four main codes derived from data analysis relating to colonial patriarchy and occupation. The first code illustrates the complex territorial conflicts of colonial patriarchy and occupation in Canada, the USA, and Europe. Three themes within these colonial, patriarchal conflicts are explored. The first theme delves into the intersections of xenophobic and sexist othering, specifically how patriarchal colonialism fuels systemic push and pull factors to engagement in violent social movements in Canada, the USA, and Europe. The second theme discusses macro, meso and micro systemic drivers to disengagement from violent social movements. A third theme examines systemic interventions that could build sustainable peace through local, national and international cooperation.

I conclude with a discussion of critical autoethnography, how pre-existing systemic conditions make radicalization into violent thinking and behaviour possible, and what key findings suggest for multi-systemic communication and cooperation among many social sectors. Overall, according to all 17 study participants, the push and pull factors that caused people to enter and exit their violent social movement organizations (VSMO) were varied and

complex. The overall findings from this study can be conceptualized as intersecting (Crenshaw 1993, 2012), and nested within micro, meso and macro systemic influences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979 as cited in Guy-Evans, 2024). There were many complex and intersecting push and pull factors that influenced the study participants into and out of violent extremist groups (Caiani & della Porta, 2011 cited in Rydgren, 2018).

In response to the study's research question of whether colonial patriarchy triggers some violent social movements and groups, several participants responded how colonial patriarchies affected their engagement and experience within their respective violent social movement organizations (VSMO). Particularly Canadian and European participants discussed the effects of colonial occupation and territorial conflicts on their thinking and their white privilege. Women participants in those countries also discussed the effects of racism and sexism on them that facilitated their entry into their VSMO. All the men participants also discussed the intense violent masculinities in extreme patriarchies, apart from Tom, who said women had more balanced gender equity in his VSMO.

All the participants, who are formers of Incel, Racist Skinheads and Neo Nazis, Anti-Russia Soccer Hooliganism, Ku Klux Klan, anti-police/anti-government, and politically violent Islamism, discussed several macro push and pull factors that caused them to first engage and then disengage from their respective VSM. Multiple colonial and occupation power conflicts

influenced macro, meso and micro systems within these regions.

Theme 1: Colonialism/Occupation Influences on Systemic Push and Pull Factors to

Engagement in Violent Social Movements in Canada, the USA and Europe

Jason, an Irish Canadian man, and former racist skinhead, talked about the Christian identity and Nazi elements of the VSMO he belonged to. This is what he had to say on the issue:

There're various ones, so that the one in Toronto was more like, not organized, but it was.

There were various ideologies too. There was like the creativity movement, and there was like Christian identity folks and Neo Nazis, and it was sort of a mixed bag, but it was all under the sort of sub cultural lens of like skinheads, racist skinhead.

An interpretation of the above finding is that Jason is descended from Irish settler colonizers, and he was involved in movements with Christian identity and Nazism. Adolf Hitler was a huge force of colonial expansionism in Europe and the great replacement theory (Counter Extremism Project, 2024) embedded in Skinhead and Neo Nazi movements, polarizing group members into thinking they are engaged in a race war wherein the white race is the master, and superior race.

The Skinhead movement was a white, British working class violent social movement that began in the late 1960s in the United Kingdom and eventually emerged in Canada and the USA in the 1980s (Pollard, 2016) through the Neo Nazi music scene. Racist ideologies of white, racial, and religious superiority are also embedded in the settler colonial policies and practices like the Indian Act and the construction of residential school to assimilate Inuit, Metis and First Nations children into white, European Christian systems (Daschuk, 2019; Woolford, 2019; Byrne

et al., 2017). These depict historical influences on Neo Nazi ideology and Neo Nazi power struggles for identity, territory, and hegemony. Systemic influences, in the form of macro colonial/occupational power conflicts and push and pull factors, intersected with systemic meso and micro push factors, created a state of vulnerability to recruitment into violent social movements. The socially powerful pull factors such as friendship that they found in their violent social movement organization (VSMO), in the beginning of their time there.

Siri, a Danish woman, also discussed the impact of colonization on Denmark, and Danish Islamophobic racism, that pushed her to join a women's group that supported political violent Islamism:

It's very big structure, a huge pattern of just, like, because this is the Scandinavian welfare state, its perfect. We got gender equality, and we got, you know, we got no racism, and you know, you can do whatever you want, you can do whatever you want, as long as you tick the box. But if you don't fit the box, or... if you're a person of color, if you, those are not the same issues at all. But it's just saying, every time you jump out of the box, there is nothing to catch you, absolutely nothing.

Siri's story can be interpreted through the lens of the colonial "box" (Derrick, 1990 cited in Wieling et al., 2020), in which Jann Derrick, an Inuit, Metis and First Nations scholar, talks about the importance of the decolonization process for people and the systems around them. As Siri states, if you don't fit the "box," or if you live in Denmark as a person of colour, this leaves you with less racial and social power within the Scandinavian state. Siri also described the Islamophobia and racism in Denmark, combined with her own experience of sexism, to be push factors to joining her group.

In contrast, Staszek, a Polish man with a German father, discussed how he was raised in anti-communist, anti-system thinking, growing up when Poland was still part of the communist Soviet Union:

The goals of the movement were anti-system thinking and to use violence to change the system, with a nationalist, neo-Pagan ideology. My family were anti-fascist, anticommunist, and I had read philosophy, poetry, and [was] exposed to anti-systemic thinking.

Staszek's experiences allude to the macro influence of Poland's occupation by Germany and then Russia, creating an anti-authoritarian youth counterculture in Poland and other Eastern Bloc countries (Fidelis, 2022). Past communization, and the Stalinization and russification of Poland intersected with micro push factors of high family conflict, childhood sexual abuse, and feeling like an outsider at school when Staszek joined the Neo Nazi, anti-Russia, Skinhead soccer hooligan VSM in the 1990s as the Cold War came to an end. Micro pull factors for Staszek were finding drugs, a sense of identity and security, and adrenalin-charged conflicts, particularly against punk counter cultural groups in Poland.

Like Staszek, Frank grew up in a society affected by colonization. Frank is a former Incel, male Canadian who talked about how schools "left out" learning about colonization. However, but Frank is self-aware of the colonial white privilege he experienced growing up:

That's kind of a tough one to answer because its kind of that ever-present structure that

you don't think about it. It's kind of like having kind of like having invisible support beams around you. Yeah, because I mean, I guess, in well, in school, it wasn't really touched on too much. I think the most we had was the French and English showed up, allied with some of the native tribes, got into some fights. The Americans tried to invade. We repelled them, rah, rah Canada. And then we just kind of skipped right into World War One and World War Two. And, you know, kind of left out that whole western expansion, the Laurier's administration, specifically within the western expansion. We definitely left out all the stuff that led up to the War of 1812. And we definitely left out all the stuff that happened right after the War of 1812. Other than that, I think the most I remember about colonization that really got talked about was just that it happened.

Frank's views suggest that colonial privilege was an invisible support beam of power and structure around him, including colonial erasure of history of structural, cultural, and direct violence (Galtung, 1996, 2018) against Inuit, Metis and First Nations people living in Canada.

In contrast, there were some participants who did not think colonialism had any direct bearing on push factors for people joining far right violent extremism (FRVE). For example, Pat, a Hispanic American and NGO leader from the southern United States, noted the following in his story:

I think the issue is a significant issue. I think it has zero bearing on extremist movements in the United States. You're assuming that such issues are taught and learn from. They're not. It's you know, it's... simply isn't we don't, we don't, we don't teach that in most

states, we don't teach that in most school districts. You know, the closest you'll get to colonialism is that Columbus came over from Spain to find the new world, he found the United States. You know, despite everything you've probably read north of the border, we are not teaching critical race theory in K-12 schools. Its just not happening. We're not teaching those sorts of things. Even the big brouhaha over the role of African American history that the AP teaches.

Those are not courses that are taught...or taken by many of the students that you would say would be most susceptible [to FVRE]. Its—I think it becomes a false piece. I think it's, you see, far more, instead of the historical is, you see, far more in terms of the urban legends, you see the just the general fear that, and I think all of this is based on a fear that somehow you are not getting what you deserve, because somebody else didn't earn it and is getting it. So, you have you have this constant belief that you have low income, people of color on welfare, who are taking your money. You have this belief that there are illegals who are coming in and taking your jobs. That tends to be , what is said and what is exploited.

Pat's and Tom's stories are similar, as they both do not think colonialism holds a direct relationship to FRVE, However, both Tom and Pat did emphasize the lack of learning in schools about violent, European settler colonialism. Further, Pat and Tom did not grow up hearing how the colonial history of racist, white privilege may be influencing people to scapegoat others for their economic problems, As Pat described “people of colour on welfare,” he did explain well

how VFRE adherents fear the great replacement by the “other” which is a colonizer fearing that new colonizers (immigrants) will replace the original colonizer (Europeans), and fear losing power by the new “other.” Settler-colonizers who radicalize into racist Replacement ideology are trying to protect their territory and power in what Frank described as the “invisible support beams” of privilege taken by original European settler colonizers.

Theme 2: Gender and Patriarchy and Violent Social Movements

Gender and patriarchy were frequently discussed among most participants, as they described gender relationships prior to engagement with VSMOs, during their time in the groups, and post-disengagement.

Lauren, a Scottish Canadian, spoke about the gender relationships in the far-right, white supremacist, Neo Nazi and Vinland Hammerskins groups she formerly belonged to:

Ah, yeah, so it was definitely that... like patriarchy kind of system. So, and it kind of depends on, like, how that showed up for different people in their lives. So, for me, I actually was involved in the music scene as a bass player. But at the same time, I also kind of know that whole, like, fetish behind female bass players, and that being the reason why they let me be up on stage, because it added some sexual appeal. And, you know, I just rolled my eyes at that one, because I'm also, like, you know what, I'm

probably the only person on stage who actually ever had any formal lessons in their life on an instrument.

So yeah, there is that too... Yeah, so they didn't necessarily mind me being on stage, just because again, sexual appeal. And like, I was also good at what I did. But at the same time, at the end of every single show, I got reminded that, "oh, you need to start a family someday, blah, blah, blah, 14 words." Yeah, and yeah, that never happened.

Like, I just never wanted kids. And definitely, I'm not going to change my mind for these fools.

What Lauren shares of her experiences draws attention to how, in many patriarchies, women and girls, particularly feminine bisexual and lesbian girls, experience fetishization and sexual objectification by men. Lauren discusses how she was actually talented and trained in music, but instead of being valued for that in the Neo Nazi music scene, she was valued predominantly for her sexual appeal, which is common in violent extremist and terrorist groups where sexual and gender based violence are used against victims and their recruits as a "weapon" of the ideological war extremists are engaged in, including political violent Islamists like Boko Haram and ISIS (Cook, 2019, p. 282).

Additionally, Lauren describes her objectification as a chattel for breeding more Neo-Nazis through starting a family to uphold the supremacy of the white race. Lauren references the "14 words," spoken by white supremacist David Lane's that, as white supremacists, "we must

secure the existence of our people and a future for white children" (Anti-Defamation League, 2024). This finding is also evidence that colonial patriarchies have intersections of white supremacy and sexism, that pressure men to be hypermasculine and women to be hyperfeminine to be sexually appealing and to breed and raise children in traditional gender roles that support men to retain the power in the family and VSMO systems.

Siri also felt the pressure of patriarchy on her decision to support political, violent Islamism. Siri is a bisexual, Danish former, discussed her experience of misogyny and sexism that pushed her into joining politically violent Islamism where she hopes to be treated with respect as a woman:

I started going to these groups for women, so its a gender segregated mosque. And they're extremely nice people. And we talk about everything from kids to society to very mundane to real conversations, but also very deeply. And when I say religious, I don't necessarily mean like in the classic Quranic exegesis way but their interpretation of Islamic ideology, and I slowly, really got caught up with that.

And I think as a teenager and a young [woman], like, I am in the late teens or early 20s, you also really start feeling society's view on women in Denmark, I was really struggling with this like feminine identity, you could say. I've been called, you know, a "slot" and "a hole" whatever, for if you were, you know, scantily clad. And then I think I

saw like, it's like that interpretation of like... all this as the solution to that to be a respectable woman.

From Siri's retellings, it may be understood that she felt frustrated with Danish patriarchy, and the misogynistic fetishization of being viewed as a "hole" by mainstream Danish men. She sought refuge in a place where she felt women were more respected but also gender segregated, where she could get space from men, and to belong in a community of women where they were not discussed as sexual objects. Scholar and activist bell hooks (1981) talks about sexism by both racialized and white men as dual oppression of women, especially black women. However, for Siri, the gender segregation and traditional roles in Muslim spaces felt preferable to the violent misogyny by white Danish men. Byrne and Senehi (2012) also discuss the violence towards women, including queer women like Siri, who are harmed by heterosexist, violent patriarchies who often use sexual objectification as part of violent conflicts in their wars.

In contrast, Vebi, a Muslim, Kosovar NGO staff member who has worked to repatriate ISIS brides in Kosovo, discusses the extreme sexism of Muslim, Kosovar men, especially in rural, border areas of the country. Many uninformed, uneducated rural Kosovar women went to join the ISIS caliphate in Syria at the suggestion of their husbands who were getting radicalized into political, violent Islam through ISIS:

I think that we as a country, we neglect it, especially we have left it to rural areas.

Because you know, all organization, all meetings, all these workshops, seminars,

everything, you know, is organized in urban area, and rural areas they remain quite neglected. And now, everybody you know, start to think, “oh, we did a big mistake, because we are all focusing on earlier start to work also with rural area, but the rural area always was very difficult”...

These women, we forget that most of them, you know, no access to the telephone, no access to Internet... or to go to schools..to be informed. And really, they just copied information that are served from their husband or the people who have impact to this woman. And now really, people, organizations, institutions really are much more focused on working also in with those women, especially into three zones, because we have good results, which are known for this participation.

An interpretation of these narratives in finding two indicate that, at the macro, meso and micro levels of society, women and girls should have access to meso level education, training, the internet and sources of information that help them have autonomy and accurate information to make decisions over the lives. In the cases of Kosovar ISIS brides, political decisionmakers neglected particularly rural Kosovar women’s rights to education and accurate information about ISIS. Like Siri, Lauren, Mimi, Pascale, and Ewa’s stories, it is crucial that political (macro) and meso educational systems help all women and girls, not just urban women and girls, to make informed decisions over their lives. Policy and resources that support both rural and urban women’s education could help to protect them from VSMO propaganda at the micro level. An

example is when Kosovar ISIS brides were expected by their husbands to buy into ISIS propaganda. As Mimi shared in her story, ISIS brides had very little education as to their right to decision-making power within their male dominated relationship.

Theme 3: Macro, Meso and Micro Systemic Causes of Disengagement from Violent Social

Movements

When formers begin to exit violent social movements, some begin to question and critically think about their patterns of internalized racism, sexism, colonialism, and occupation. For example, Jason, an Irish Canadian, and former skinhead, shared the following about the role of decolonization processes in his own deradicalization, along with his work to help others disengage and deradicalize from FRVE:

But anyways, so the, one of the most offensive parts of colonialism comes into mind here, where its not just the North American colonialism, its British treatment of the Irish, so these guys would have the red hand of Ulster flag up, and then they'd have the red Ensign flag. And so, they're celebrating white establishment or British establishment in other countries, which, as an Irish person, isn't, it was great for, like, deradicalization because looking at it going "these people want to kill Irish people. So why am I friends with these people?"

So that's good. And, and other types of the non-English, you know, U.K. people. And then it also started me to start thinking about, like, what have we done to the Inuit,

Metis and First Nations peoples in Canada? So, again, deradicalization mechanism, start researching this stuff that you say you hate, but you don't even know anything about. So I started during my criminology degree looking at colonialism and, and much unknown to my profs or whatever, I'm looking at it from a very different lens. Then they were having us read different things.

I read this book, *The Inconvenient Indian*, and coming from a former extremist perspective of sitting there reading that going. I mean, its a hilarious book, though. There's a lot of, like, humor in it. But when you really think about what's happening, and what happened over the years, Canadian history with the Inuit, Metis and First Nations peoples is, it's horrifying. So, you start learning of the genocide, you started learning about, you know, all these different things that we're now seeing the evidence of, and then going while I was in the movement, I was celebrating like, British genocide of people. And I'm like, but it's still going on. And it's literally still happening right now.

And I, I'm just it, just the association with it, all of it. And then when you see these people standing on bridges now waving the red ensign around and I'm like, "okay, yeah, I get it, but like, it's not World War Two. So, we're not that flag is, is its a piec'e of history." But what it means is its, that's the white man's flag. That's the British colonial flag that, you know, its oppressive. It symbolizes, its symbology is that its oppression. And, you know, and that's to Irish people, that's to Inuit, Metis and First Nations people, that's to a lot of different people, when they, when that's there is what that what does that symbolize?

Right? So, I, you know, when you dig deep, you see this, the ideologies that come along with that movement, whether it `be Neo Nazism, or, you know, British fascist stuff.

Like it's sickening to see and to think back on, that we all were running around believing this and wearing this stuff and waving these flags around. And, and what actual Canadians, Inuit, Metis and First Nations peoples, what they how do they feel with and that not it, not only there's instant, institutionalized hatred towards them that's happening on a daily basis. But now you have these groups, hate groups of people that are just making them relive this stuff. Time and time again.

And yeah, so anyways, there are points when I'm working with people, is I often have them read different books about Inuit, Metis and First Nations peoples. And you want to, because they always talk about white genocide and all this stuff? And I'm like, you gotta, you gotta know that you're not.

An interpretation of Jason's story, which relates to the broader theme of disengagement, is that he started to research and read more about the targets of hate, in this case, Inuit, Metis and First Nations peoples living in Canada, and could connect to his own Irish history of British colonialism and have empathy for their experience. This empathy and humanization of the racialized, Inuit, Metis and First Nations "other" (LaRocque, 2010) helped to depolarize, deradicalize and disengage him from the deep roots of colonialism in the Neo Nazi fascist ideology in far-right violent social movements. This is important to societies like Canada, the USA and Europe, who continue to be impacted by settler colonialism, because if micro, meso and macro systems work at decolonization, and educating about settler-colonial violence, this can help people disengage from VSMs, as Jason discovered in his process of deradicalization and disengagement.

Like Jason, Frank, a former Incel in Canada, could see both the conscious and

unconscious influence of what he called the “colonial mentality” in his violent social movement and in his sibling’s Neo Nazi violent social movement. He reported on this issue as follows:

That whole “we're entitled to this and this and this,” because we're, this is, like, it’s a straight line from colonial mentality right to, “I'm white, thus, I deserve this land. Thus, the guy who's not white doesn't deserve this land.” Yeah. And I mean, that's kind of it. Its not even a straight line. It’s one step, right, between the two....[In Incel] I mean, in the sense of, “I'm this, so I'm entitled to this. So, kind of that like, I guess, in some ways, because its, its that kind of, I mean, its that kind of Klan mentality of, “I'm a white man, I'm supreme, thus, I deserve this, this and this.” And the, I guess, the female or the relationship, or the sexual intimacy is the prize to be won.

Frank’s experience reveals that disengagement required being aware of the power over, hegemonic position which is embedded in the colonial mentality (Lodigiani, 2020). A power over stance is where someone felt deserving and supreme over non-White people like racialized immigrants, owning the land as their territory, and entitled to sexual intimacy with women. A growing cultural and gender humility (Sandusky & Yarhouse, 2020) and willingness to share power was evident in the male formers, and was a shift to a more inclusive, human and “power with” (Pansardi & Bindi, 2021) mentality and behaviour with Inuit, Metis and First Nations peoples, newcomers, youth, women, and 2SLGBTQI+ people.

Like Frank and Jason, Ewa, wife of Staszek, who is a former, anti-Russia, skinhead soccer hooligan, discussed the importance of healing from intergenerational trauma that happened due to the German and Soviet colonial occupations of Poland during WWII, as part of disengagement and rehabilitation:

Poland has a crisis of faith. I think it is also because money and consumption is a new “god” now. People use Instagram now for self-improvement. Because of Stalinist communism and totalitarianism, religion became an asylum for people, as the government was against religion. But nowadays the religion is not, popular. It is considered old-fashioned.

But still, it can be a very powerful tool in rehabilitation as priests have a big platform to use in that area and in general for good.... We need to deal with intergenerational trauma and Poles need to be concerned as Eastern Europeans, we are not Russian. I am proud to be Polish of the history, the bravery of my nation in the past and have no shame. For 125 years we were divided by three countries, endured German invasion and communism till 1989.

For Ewa, it is important to elevate a Polish identity, and to understand the process of “derussification” and healing from the trauma of xenophobic Russian and German colonial occupations. Ewa also was decolonizing and developing a relationship with the Catholic religion that was once banned through Stalinist communism and totalitarianism. These are empowering

processes that assist disengagement from violent social movements.

That said, Siri, a former supporter of political violent Islamism discussed the importance of acknowledging and educating about systemic racism and colonialism in school systems, and addressing colonial, systemic racism on a political systemic level, similar to Ewa's points about systemic derussification:

I think is as you know, whoever does the education system, whoever is responsible for the nation's narrative, if they would acknowledge colonialism, they also have to acknowledge the systemic racism, and all of these other issues that came and comes with it, if they're willing to address that, on a political level. It would be more difficult, I think, for my particular group to have these arguments and their survival like their reason for, I mean, the reason for existing would go away, maybe even, or at least be on very thin ice.

Siri appears to undergird the belief that to disengage from political violent Islamist movements, Denmark needs to meaningfully examine and educate the public about colonial, systemic racism both in schools and in political systems. Politicians, specifically, can create policies and laws that create conflicts or arguments for people who are targeted by those policies like the “Burqa ban” that was passed in 2018 to prevent Danish Muslim women from wearing burqas or niqabs (Nanwani, 2011). A positive example of peaceful, political, and legal intervention in Denmark is the recent passing of a law that bans the burning of the Quran, by anti-Islam extremists in

Denmark (al-Jazeera, 2023).

Therefore, the above findings point to individual and systemic awareness, decolonization, healing, as well as appropriate constructive policies like the Truth and Reconciliation Canadian Calls to Action and MMIWG2S+ Calls for Justice and education to help prevent people from engaging in, and helping them to disengage from VSMs whose roots lie in violent colonial occupations.

Theme 4: Systemic Sustainable Peace Through Local, National and International Cooperation

When discussing building sustainable peace to reduce violence by extremism, study participants shared many ideas to forge and support systemic sustainable peace at the micro, meso, and macro levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, as cited in Cook & Schneider, 2020) of societies that involved local, national, and international cooperation.

For example, during the talking circle/focus group, Tom, a former, Norwegian Neo Nazi and KKK member, discussed how meso and macro systems can come together to better prevent and intervene in VSM, as evidenced in the systemic response after the bombing and gun violence attack by anti-Muslim ethno-nationalist Anders Breivik in 2011 in Norway:

I hate to even mention his name, that Anders Breivik, but it did help the whole of Norway to wake up. And the crime prevention coordinators all over the country like myself, you know...national Police, most of the municipalities, and then we work together all over

the country, with American help from the US Embassy, because the Norwegian government was very slow.... They want to know, but they will be traveling all over Norway, getting all the resource people like myself and many other people. We didn't even know each other we knew each other by reputation but we have traveled around. We hadn't met together. But the US Embassy, they went in and bought plane tickets. They made study groups.

They paid for hotels, and they made sure that we all could come together and hammer out something to help the various municipalities that have problems with right wing extremists. Today, what we see, and what I also see, is that its good old fashioned prevention work for any kind of negative groups, you know, maybe drugs or alcohol or gangs or extreme. You need to see all the people locally and that's where everybody has the responsibility me, the social worker, everybody needs to work together and I think we have come through there now. In every municipality far away. They had people who have education [on] this matter. I think today, the groups that grew up around me.

I think that would have been much harder today, even though you have the online resources, where it's so easy for people to get in touch with extremist groups. But still, you need the face-to-face thing. You know, you have some online radicalization, but most people need social interaction. And that's where we come in, you know, we need to see the ones who are being left out. And include them. And that goes for, you know, that's what you got to do to prevent any kind of negative development in younger adults' lives.

So, we are far from perfect, but I think we know a lot more today than we did 30 years ago.

Tom's story indicates that international cooperation can support national political will and resources, towards stakeholders who want to study, discuss and problem-solve together to better prevent and confront radicalization into VSM. Tom discusses many ways to build peace, particularly through efforts of inclusion among youth and the social systems around them in every municipality of the country. The transnational nature of terrorism is often discussed by scholars, made easier by the internet and for people to cross borders. It is also imperative to not be urban centric in peacebuilding through prevention of violent extremism (PVE) and countering violent extremism (CVE). This means regular multistakeholder systemic communication and inclusive collaboration at the rural, urban, national, and international systems levels is key to building sustainable peace and PVE and CVE intervention design and delivery.

Additionally, Tore, a Norwegian researcher of FRVE and NGO founder of the international Exit Program model (e.g., Exit USA, Exit Finland, etc.), talked about nine mechanisms of both hard and soft mechanisms, that are holistic and integrate several models to support sustainable peace and prevent violent extremist crimes:

Yeah, well, I said I was pacifist, I have turned a bit more realistic. So, [I] realize that sometimes you need to use force in order to stop things from happening. There were people that will tell you, I will try to speak to Breivik and said, "You have to stop" and

they were [going to] get the bullet in their face. So, it doesn't only work. I realize there are times when we need to use force, but we need to see all the other alternatives and how we can use less restrictive forms of preventive measures....The first one is building normative barriers, which is what we do through socialization, building empathy, building, letting people understand that it's wrong to harm other people [and] to use violence. Building democratic human rights values, that's kind of a vaccine against [the] extremism thing that is most effective we have. The second one is to reduce recruitment into [radical groups]. So, the first one is in a way to reduce radicalization in that sense building normative barriers and [the] second is to reduce recruitment, engagement, trying to detect and stop young people who are at risk, using what we call secondary prevention measures, trying to find better alternatives to deal with their needs. This kind of [means] using non repressive means.

The third one is deterrence, that people abstain from carrying out extremist violence, whatever, because they fear the consequences, whether that is foreign punishment, or it could be social stigmatization. And following that is disruption that you stop, if someone is actually planning to, or preparing to carry out an act of terrorism or violence. It's detected in advance and stopped by some kind of intervention that could be to arrest them or to take away the weapons. In the case of, for example, Philip Mansell who shot his sister, he took the weapons from his father's locked in [cabinet], he knew where the key was. If the police had gotten notice a few days in advance, they could have

confiscated the weapon, that would be disruption, then you have incapacitation, that you could take away someone's capacity, putting them behind bars, or you could also take away the weapons, that's also incapacitation way you could take away their funding.

But if you take away their capacity, that's so important. Then you can protect vulnerable people towards making it more difficult to carry out bad things like access control, like keeping some kind of protection or against around mosques and synagogues. You can have, I mean, all kinds of when you go to an airport, you will make it difficult to hijack or bomb [a] plane because of the office. This is a big industry, all these kinds of securities measures, but that's, that's crime prevention. You can also reduce harm by doing something in advance in order to reduce the consequences of [a] terrorist attack, or some kind of attack, making sure that you have response units, that you have good medical care that you take care of people who have become victimized to take care of the traumas.

This is something you need to prepare in advance so its prevention then you can also reduce benefits or profits that you make less you don't give terrorists the kind of attention they want. You don't advertise on top news if some kind of new extremist hangs a swastika flag, which a television does all the time, just a little thing. But someone burn a Koran, you publish it on the [news and] make the president of Turkey, who stops Sweden from getting access to NATO. This kind of you give them all the goodies they want. And the last one thing is rehabilitation, getting people who have been involved in violent extremism way out and exit either through an exit project or amnesty or rehabilitation in prison or mentoring or whatever is. This is what I call the holistic approach to preventing violent extremism or any other kind of crime.

The approach outline by Tore highlights how societies can use soft and hard measures to build holistic capacities for peace. This includes teaching people to meet their needs without violence and to improve social and political conditions (Bjorgo, 2016) to avoid propagation of violent social movements. Further, it suggests that at the micro and macro levels, families and community systems should cultivate empathy and understandings of why violence is not a solution to conflicts and needs, in addition to building strong rehabilitation programs to help people who have become involved in violent social movements. As examples of soft measures, Tore notes that societies should focus on recruitment prevention and intervention. Tore's findings focus as well on harder measures such as intervention by police, which could entail seizure of weapons, tracking and freezing extremist fundings, and incapacitating opportunities for violence by tracking and intervening before violence happens or before it escalates. By regularly cooperating between security, educational, family and political systems, designing and delivering soft and hard measures, PVE and CVE efforts could vastly improve and build more sustainable peace among communities in Canada, the USA and Europe.

Mimi, a Muslim staff member of a Canadian NGO that supports families who have exited ISIS, talks about the importance of the NGO and its psychosocial support for women and their children being repatriated to Canada. Mimi works to create more peace and safety for families harmed by VSMOs like ISIS. According to Mimi, peace can be cultivated through adequate and

non-securitized soft measures like housing, rehabilitation with therapists and social workers that help the women and children feel inclusion. Mimi emphasizes that staff and other systems should take the time to build trust and safety to help people to communicate their needs, and to help families to be heard. Mimi also speaks of the “holes” to be filled in their lives:

So, there are holes in these people's lives. There is a cognitive dissonance, always, between what they thought Canada was, and I'm speaking of Canadians here, and you know what they hoped Canada was. And then what they are, they either observe it, or they are taught it, that they're convinced that their own society is against them. Canada has just done an absolutely miserable job. And it's very spotty across the country, as to which organizations are dealing with this, you know, from the perspective of their clients, as opposed to, I suppose, to keep Canada safe.

Jihadi Twitter... they spread the group through relationships that were developed online. And they attracted a whole lot of people. Most of the foreign fighters came from Middle Eastern countries that weren't far away, but also North Africa. Indonesia, Chechnya... Kazakhstan brought all of its jihadists back and put them into, you know, sort of working homes and yeah. So it was very effective, attractive. “Us and them, you can join, you know... your true brothers and sisters who love you and, you know, we'll make everything right you can live in a holy Islamic State.”

Mimi observes that hard approaches do not help families meet housing and rehabilitative needs, rather creating more systemic discrimination and feeling like they do not belong in Canadian

society. When Jihadi Twitter promoted the Caliphate, it was a very attractive strategy to help people feel a sense of social and religious belonging (Badawy & Ferrara, 2018). An interpretation of this finding is that to build sustainable peace, countries like Canada should work at soft measures like social inclusion, belonging, support and relationships that meets people's needs, to fill the "holes" in their lives" so VSMs like ISIS are not needed.

Conclusion

Therefore, the chapter's findings include what drives people in and out of violent social movement. The findings specifically explore how micro, meso and macro rural and urban family, social, political, and educational systems that promote epistemological thinking and behaviour that elevates polarized, hegemonic, xenophobic and sexist power relationships in their lives, and in the systems that they belong to. Findings further suggest that polarized, scapegoating power relationships that position men on top particularly white, European men in a power over position that scapegoats and uses systemic violence to control women, youth, Inuit, Metis and First Nations peoples, racialized people, and non-Christian religions like Islam and Judaism. With these pre-existing conditions, Canadian, American and European youth and adults become vulnerable to propaganda and end up liking Incel, Neo-Nazis or politically violent Islam that create a solution that feels like fulfillment of the holes in people's lives. In other words, holes have emerged where micro, meso and macro systems that are not adequately caring for their needs in rural and urban areas, within schools (meso), families (micro), educational (meso), and social and political systems (macro).

Chapter five revealed the findings and explored the first of four main codes or findings

derived from data analysis. The first code finding suggests that territorial conflicts of colonial patriarchy and occupation in Canada, the USA, and Europe create systemically xenophobic, heterocentric, misogynist and cissexist conditions that position women, Inuit, Metis and First Nations, and non-Christian people as the scapegoated “other” and white, cisgender, Christian males in a power over position that is found in the extreme in VSMO. Four themes that emerged from data analysis were discussed including macro, meso and micro systemic drivers to disengagement from violent social movements, gender and patriarchy, systemic causes of disengagement from VSM, and systemic interventions that could build sustainable peace through local, national and international cooperation and systemic decolonization. A critical autoethnographic reflection affirms how pre-existing systemic conditions make radicalization into violent thinking and behaviour possible. Finally, the chapter suggest that multi-systemic communication and cooperation among many social sectors is needed to better prevent people’s entry into VSMs, and to help them to successfully exit VSMs in Canada, the USA and Europe.

Critical Autoethnographical Reflections

My critical autoethnographic reflection is as a settler-colonialist extremist who was socialized within white and male privilege systems in rural Canada. The leader of the cult I belonged to believed European, cisgender, and heterosexual white males were the leaders of the movement I was in and brainwashed us into thinking that was normal. This is also similar to the experience of ISIS brides in Mimi’s and Vebi’s narratives above. Like, Siri and Lauren, I and the other women and girls in the cult were objectified and controlled sexually, financially and

socially as there were restrictions on our seeing anyone outside the cult socially. As Mimi also in her story described, there were holes in my family life, trauma, marital stress, financial stress, inequitable power relations, and disillusionment with the Mormon religion that made us vulnerable to radicalization into a VSMO. Had my parents coped with their marital and financial stress with therapy, and found healthy, non-patriarchal and nonviolent ways to explore their spirituality this could have filled the needs or “holes” in our family in healthier ways, so we were not so easily recruited into a VSMO.

Moreover, had I not been exposed to violent settler-colonial white supremacist cissexist and heterocentric and misogynist thinking in my family, schools, and faith systems, I would likely have had more critical thinking and belief in pluralist, equitable, peaceful power relationships that would have helped me to exit violent religious extremism sooner. I grew up in a rural area of British Columbia, and like the Kosovar participant Vebi suggested our rural schools could have done more to educate me to think critically, including how to exit the extremist group as my family was getting radicalized. Unfortunately, as my immediate family was being radicalized, the school system knew of the violence that was happening within my biological family that made me vulnerable to thinking of the cult leaders as my surrogate and superior parents. Teachers and the school counsellor could have spoken to child protection services and the police to tell them about the violence that was happening to me both within my family and within the cult by the leader. An improved inter systemic communication could have assisted me in that I was apprehended and placed with nonviolent, non-radicalized family

members or in a foster family in the child welfare system. This multilateral, meso communication and cooperation are crucial to better prevent youth from joining VSMOs in both urban and rural areas.

Chapter Six

Code 2: Intergenerational Conflicts and Former's Unmet Needs

Introduction

Chapter six describes a second code derived from data analysis, namely the pattern of intergenerational conflicts and unmet needs among formers. This pattern of intergenerational conflict was also mentioned by formers, family members, and some NGO staff members. Conflict can be intrapersonal—within oneself— or between people— interpersonal and intragroup, such as within a family group (Wright et al., 2017). Conflict also can be volatile or avoidant within families and relationships (Gottman, 2017), which leads to lack of resolution and conflict transformation (Taylor & Lederach, 2014). Unresolved conflicts create stress and grievances for youths and adults, some of whom later express this turmoil through participation in violent extremist conflicts and VSMO.

Three themes of findings emerged within this code that suggest that intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup, and intergroup conflicts and unmet needs are drivers of violent extremist conflict. I explore each theme and provide participant evidence to support each theme, revealing different forms of conflict underlying each theme.

Code 2: The Intersection of Intergenerational Conflicts and Violent Social Movement

Organizations (VSMOs)

All participants but one discussed (94 percent) the pattern of intergenerational family conflicts. Staszek, a Polish former neo-Nazi, anti-Russian, neo pagan, soccer hooligan shared that: “my parents were high conflict, and my mother was too protective of me, and my dad was very critical. My father was born in Germany. Now I try to not be like my parents.” How Staszek describes his upbringing offers a glimpse into the way that unresolved and polarized high conflict can shape a youth to engage in polarized, high conflict within the family, and then out in the larger society. All families have conflict; however, unresolved and polarized conflict can facilitate family members developing a conflict style that then a youth member uses to interact with the family, peers, other identity groups, and the government. It is worth noting that examining intergenerational conflict is not about parent blaming. It is more about how systems can better support families to shift negative intergenerational cycles that otherwise lead to angry and hurt youth with multiple unresolved conflicts, who then act them out with the family and then within the community. Staszek discusses this, when he says, “I try not to be like my parents,” in his family of creation with Ewa and their children. Staszek developed new communication and conflict styles during his deradicalization and disengagement processes, after exiting from his VSMOs.

Theme 1: The Intersection of Intrapersonal and Intragroup Conflict as Drivers in and out of Violent Social Movements

It is important to highlight conflict as a driver of entry into and exit from violent social movements, as conflict is also a part of the triggers of disengagement. For example, Tom, a former neo-Nazi from Norway, described the intrapersonal conflict of seeing his family member partner with a racialized person:

One evening, you know, we had a fire in the fire pit, me and my dad, and then, you know, I went up to the room, and I had hidden away all this Nazi stuff, here and there. And he was quite surprised that I've managed to hide so much in the house that they didn't know of, you know, but we burned everything. And it was like, for me, it was like, you know, if you were a military grade backpack of 70 pounds or something, and you get that off your back, you've become quite light. Do you know you feel almost like, yeah, its a good feeling. And that's what it felt to me. You know? I can't say that. I don't know. Its I left all hate there and then. My cousin, she was married to this guy from Congo. So of course, he was very black.

And she called me one evening. And she said, "Tom, I'm pregnant." And I just went, "I am going be an uncle!" You know, of course, you don't become an uncle to your cousin's kids. But that's what I said, when I was very happy. And we decided to meet and go out for dinner and then a movie. And, you know, we spent the whole evening together. And then, you know, I came home, and I was lying in bed, and I was thinking,

you know... your cousin's husband is Black.

That means that their child will be, you know, not as blonde as my cousin. She is a blue-eyed, blonde girl, you know, and I didn't feel any hate about that. I didn't feel any discomfort about that. And then, you know, I felt quite good, actually, because I felt that I left, I didn't have any of this crap inside me anymore. Because if I had, I would have felt some kind of disgust or something toward my cousin.

An interpretation of this finding is that Tom's recollection of this interaction marks an example of his family member modeling to him the inclusion of racialized people, which helps him to transform the intrapersonal, interpersonal and intergroup conflict he had with Black people while engaged with neo-Nazis and the KKK. Tom's cousin may have chosen a partner out of love, but this love and inclusion of a Black man into the family helped Tom to depolarize and shift his racist views toward black people as the enemy outgroup. To facilitate disengagement from violent social movements, Anja Dagaard-Nielsen (2013) discusses the importance of humanization of the othered outgroup, and a benevolent dialogue assists the process of depolarization and deradicalization.

Another example of intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts that facilitated entry into VSMs is the story of Pascale, an English Canadian mother of a former neo-Nazi and Hammerskin (mother of Lauren, who also participated in this study). Pascale talked about the family losses and disconnections that created intrapersonal and interpersonal conflict in the family that drove Lauren to radicalization into violent far right extremism (FVRE):

So, Lauren's dad passed away when she was 16. He'd had cancer for almost 10 years. And she was very close to him. And I was closer to our son. So, Lauren and I had a, we had a relationship, but I wouldn't say it was the best relationship. There was a little bit of a disrespect, but she was pushing me more than she was pushing her dad. So, he passed away. And almost right away, she started being, you know, very angry, very upset. And you know, there was a couple of times where there were some words said, and it was difficult to live with how she was and towards her brother as well.

And so we went to the psychologist, obviously, at the time just to get some idea what was going on. And she was great and said, you know, everybody grieves differently and try this, try that and [it] helped for a little bit. But Lauren just was, I think, so filled with grief and anger and didn't know how to express it, didn't want to express it to me, didn't trust me with her feelings. And I didn't really know how to get her to open up any more than she was. Because that relationship had never really been there.

The parent-child disconnection described in Pascale's reflection, spurred through her partner's death and lack of secure attachment, created a multitude of feelings for Lauren that she had difficulty processing while trying to grieve her traumatic loss. Further, Lauren, Pascale's daughter, found far-right people in online spaces as a platform to express her emerging anger. Pascale explained it in the following way:

[Lauren] started being online a lot more and connecting with people that were dubious, you know, people I think I wanted her with. And I didn't know at the time she'd been drinking at high school, she started drinking, hanging out with some guys and so on. But

the anger started to bubble up that fall, in that winter. And I didn't really, I didn't really see—maybe way off your question here, I do that—I didn't really see kind of a second time, where there was a change from just ordinary teenage angst to radicalized.

It was a sort of a slow process, but the anger was there. And so, it was horrible. It was horrible trying to parent this girl who did not want to be parented by me, struggling to keep peace in the household and keep things going.

And you know, mourning my husband and dealing with his estate and my son at the same time, there was so much going on. And I tried, you know, but you know, you look back and think did you do enough? Did you do it right? Did you do it wrong? Try and maybe best to get her through. But she still, you know, she managed to get in[to] the hands of a recruiter and get radicalized. And this is when all this started coming out more of the ideologies and the 'us versus them'. And, you know, 'Blacks aren't superior to whites,' and hearing these things that I had, funnily enough, heard from my father.

In Pascale's words, she was doing her best as a single parent to manage her own grief and loss in addition to that of her children. However, Lauren's grief and anger started leading her down an addictive path to alcohol and far right radicalization (Sheppard-Luangkhot, 2020) that made it even harder for her mother to successfully divert Lauren from the climbing staircase to white supremacist terrorism (Moghaddam, 2005). Coupled with Lauren's exposure to far right racist and xenophobic rhetoric from her first-generation English Canadian maternal grandfather, which was intergenerationally transmitted to Lauren (Bowen, 1966, as cited in Calatrava et al, 2022), it was a perfect storm for her radicalization into FRVE as evidenced in Lauren's reflection below:

Oh, yeah, for my grandfather. So, we—the first one I ever remember from him, like, it was racism and homophobia that we heard from him. So pretty much anyone not like him was shit. So, we were doing a family trip to Niagara Falls one weekend. So, he called it ‘N- word’ Falls. And I’m like, alrighty. And you’re also the same person who tells us to clean up our language and sound proper. It’s like, okay, they’re old man. But the thing that struck me about that is my parents never actually, like, bothered to correct them or whatever. They grew up in that era where, like, you just did not talk back here. Stand up to your parents in any way, shape, or form.

An interpretation of Lauren’s findings is that her maternal grandfather came from England, which has a long history of racist, colonial and imperialist thinking and oppressive, violent conflict towards nations that England colonized around the globe (Byrne et al., 2018). British royalty still has the motto on their coat of arms that seeks to claim royal supremacy: *Dieu et mon droit*, or “God and my right” (Eppley, 2007). This hegemonic axiology (value system) and epistemology (knowledge system) and cosmology (spiritual belief system) have been intergenerationally transmitted to all socioeconomic classes in England, in a class and race-based value of power and superiority over the other, be they racialized, Inuit, Metis and First Nations, a woman, a trans person and so on. For settler-colonizers, a reproduction of class-based serfdom was imposed onto

Inuit, Metis and First Nations peoples when European colonizers landed in Canada in what Frances Jennings (2010) termed this British belief system to be a “can’t of conquest” (p. 3) that fueled colonial intergroup conflict. This white supremacist thinking, and behaviour was transmitted intergenerationally from Lauren’s grandfather to her, which laid the groundwork for her entry into the Hammerskins and Neo Nazis, which engaged in similar beliefs and behaviour, targeting non-Christians like Jewish and Muslim people, Black people, and homosexual people as the “other” to be dominated by both their right and their (Christian) God.

Therefore, it is key for practitioners to assess the family and cultural stories, and assess conflicts that happened in the family and culture, like violent colonialism by the British, that may be influencing a person’s radicalization into their VSMO. If white supremacist thinking was taught by not only the VSMO but by family and larger society due to European colonial white supremacy, it is important to disengagement to deconstruct these racist, colonial narratives so people can fully deradicalize and disengage from their VSMO.

Theme 2: The Intersection of Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, Intragroup, and Intergroup

Conflict as Drivers In and Out of Violent Social Movements

Mimi, a Muslim Canadian who works with repatriated women and children who were married to ISIS members also discussed the impact of conflicts affecting family and relationship systems pushing and pulling people into violent Salafism, ISIS supportive “jihadist” violent extremists from Canada (jihadist is Mimi’s term). She reported on this issue in the following manner:

I think when you're talking about working their way in, they have to feel that they're out first. And so, they're out in terms of their families. I don't mean, out as in identity, I mean, out as in they're not in the circle. Yeah. So, they're not in the circle of their families.

They don't have support systems. Often, they have lost a job or relationship. There was a young fellow who I had been interviewing for my jihadist research, and he want[ed] to be jihadist. But they took his passport. And he ended up killing himself. He was on a Peace Bond.

His story is, has been widely told [Adam Driver], tried to blow himself [up], tried to blow up the taxi driver... was on his way to a military recruitment centre (in Ontario). But, when you talk to his family, his girlfriend had just broken up with him. So, there are holes in these people's lives. There is a cognitive dissonance, always, between what they thought Canada was, and I'm speaking of Canadians here, and you know what they hoped Canada was. And then what they are, they either observe it, or they are taught it, that they're convinced that their own society is against them.

An interpretation of Mimi's story is that when people do not feel adequately "in" and connected to their family systems or partners, that are experiencing intrapersonal conflicts shaped by the interpersonal and intergroup conflicts of exclusion in their family. People also then adopt this conflict style to join a group where they feel "in" and engage in intergroup conflicts. In the case of Adam Driver, it renders them vulnerable to joining systems that not only help them feel like belonging or feeling "in," but they also express the rage they have about intergroup conflicts in

their society where they may feel “society” is against them as a Muslim may when they experience constant Islamophobia or an interpersonal conflict, like a breakup with a girlfriend. Social inclusion programs are a trend in attempting to prevent violent extremism (Dandurand, 2015), but they are also important to rehabilitation and exiting, as when people are still out of the circle, they are at risk of re-engaging in the same or a new VSMO.

Moreover, when considering other factors that help disengagement, Mimi finds the process of cognitive dissonance with one’s VSMO is important to the process of exiting and disengaging from the VSMO. This is what she had to say on the issue:

I think that getting into [the] process can sometimes take longer than the getting out, but that's maybe just what I've seen. And it again, starts with a cognitive dissonance of “wait a second, these people were supposed to be, you know, the true representatives of God on earth and righteous and, look how they're acting.” That's so...just disappointment in leadership, disappointment in the behavior of other groups, just having to live that way for, I mean, I think being in a camp (al-Hol refugee camp) for four years certainly put the kibosh on a lot of people remaining.

And the longer they were there, the crazier the women who did still support ISIS got, like, they're completely, they're mad as hatters in there. You would not want to find yourself [there] and these women had to put up with that. They had to put up with...either they wanted to take their Islamic garb off, or they sort of [wanted to take

the] over-the-top Islamic garb off. Or they knew that by doing that it would make them more palatable to Canadians in the government. But it was a very dangerous thing to do. Because it made you a target of all the crazy people.

As per Mimi's examination of the VSMO, ISIS, what once felt like the solution for these women had become problematic (Sheppard-Luangkhot, 2020). Seeing how ISIS fighters were violent in and outside their homes in Baghouz (the last stronghold of the ISIS caliphate) increased the cognitive dissonance for the women. This cognitive dissonance helped the women to build intrapersonal doubt (Daagard- Nielsen, 2013). Doubt is both an internal conflict and simultaneously an interpersonal conflict with ISIS that helped them to exit from group "think" into individuated critical thinking patterns. Critical thinking programs are a part of the canon of soft power programs that are designed for prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation with respect to violent extremism (Stephens et al., 2019).

Canada and other societies also need to be more socially inclusive of Muslim people, to avoid further Islamophobic, as well as white supremacist violent interpersonal and intergroup conflict. An example of this violent conflict is when far-right extremist Montrealer Alexandre Bissonette shot up a Quebec Mosque in 2017 (Nowrasteh, 2018). Had Montreal done more as a city to help Muslim people feel included instead of creating policies to ban their hijabs, Bissonette may have felt less pushed into this horrific act (Syed, 2013) if his city had modelled inclusion instead of oppression.

Tom, a Norwegian former KKK and Neo Nazi, also stated the importance of family

inclusion and systemic communication to assist in the process of disengagement from VSMS.

Tom came from an anti-Nazi family, yet his family did not know, nor did police systems communicate with them the concern that he had been radicalized into the Hammerskins:

And nobody told my parents. You know, for years, they were living in a blind, and I didn't say anything at home that would in any way, shape or form indicate what I was doing. And suddenly, I was put in jail. And that was a shock to them, you know, and they weren't allowed to visit me for a month. And when they came, you know, I spent two hours talking about designing this occupation government to them. And they were just like, in shock, they didn't understand anything, you know. And they tried to, they supported me, in every possible way a parent can do, for the years, I was a neo-Nazi. And, when the time came, and I left the movement, they were there, you know, and they always showed me love and respect.

They were quite vocal about that; they didn't share my ideology. But I was their son, and they loved me. Like, I had this other guy in the group, he...his mother said that he belonged in the gutter. You know, she didn't support him in any way. And he became a drug addict. And he also took an overdose later. No, no, he is actually alive. I mean, but he is HIV positive that he is a drug addict. Yeah. And so, many people in the movement came from homes with less resources, both financially and also human resources, you know, that they, they turned their back to them.

Drawing from Tom's radicalization, and later, his deradicalization process, families play a pivotal role, in which they need to keep dialoguing with their teenagers, listening and paying

close attention to who they are spending time with, along with watching for signs of radicalization (Budjeva, 2017), as Pascale tried to do with Lauren. Further to that, staying connected to youth, even when they have become radicalized, and not “turning their back” on them, as Tom says, is integral to social inclusion. Pascale did ask Lauren to leave the family home, and so she became homeless where she was at even further risk of intragroup and intergroup FRVE violence. Siri also said her parents did not know about her attendance to a radicalized group that was supportive of political violent Islamism, indicating that consistent parent-child communication, including about the risks of recruitment into and danger of violent extremism, is important. For parents like Mimi’s clients, who are brides of ISIS, the children had no choice but to follow their parents into violent extremist conflicts.

Theme 3: The Intersection of Unmet Needs and Violent Extremist Conflicts

Edward Azar (2003) postulates that unmet human needs underly protracted social conflicts. He also advocates for second track diplomacy, whereby non-state actors attempt to transform conflicts so that conflict parties’ needs and interests are met, and positive peace can be co-constructed. All participants in this study (100 percent) discussed micro, meso, and macro unmet needs among former violent extremists that pushed them into violent social movements. Table 3 below is a summary of what formers, their family members and NGO staff who work with them said about unmet needs. These unmet needs then drive individuals into a movement

that, through their propaganda, causes them to believe that the far right, Incel, political violent Islamist or anti-authority VSMO will fully meet their needs, whether it be belonging, becoming a father figure, or by being a surrogate family or community. Other needs provided by these violent organizations to new recruits are that they may become a source of drugs or alcohol, power, identity, social resistance, or relational support for their untreated mental health and neurodevelopmental conditions. Therefore, micro, meso and macro systems need to consider these needs when designing policy, programs, and systemic interventions like meso (police, prison, mental health, educational) and macro political systems.

Unmet Needs

Needs for safety from family and police violence

Needs for connection after girlfriend broke up, treatment for ADHD, addiction

Needs for expression of anger, connection, thrill seeking, gender power over biphobic or sexist bullies

Needs for expression of violent personality

Needs for being included, thrills, Muslim inclusivity, father

Needs for social justice for Muslims, Muslim resistance to colonialism/war

Needs for male connection after father's death

Needs for women, male identity, treatment of depression
Needs for trauma recovery, political expression
Needs for power, proud nationalist identity
Needs for safety from family and sexual violence, anti-Russian resistance, drugs
Needs for power over the outgroup Jews, Russians, punks
Needs for power after abuse, family conflict, Polish identity
Needs for power over the outgroup Jews, Blacks, bullies
Needs for power, belonging, identity
Needs for belonging, social inclusion, neurodiversity, and learning support, gender respect
Needs for family belonging, Muslim resistance to colonialism/war

Table 3. List of Unmet Needs That Were Push Factors into VSM

For example, Royar, a Kurdish Canadian NGO staff member discussed how his NGO partners with schools to serve newcomer youth of all genders, some of whom are supportive of ISIS ideology, and who have various unmet needs. This is what he had to say on the issue:

So, I work in a leadership program, where we go to schools, and usually we work with ESL students like English as second languages, and most of our participants will be like new arrival youth so. And, like in our program, we talk about a lot of different issues, like

we talked about leadership, we talk about human rights, discrimination, all the issues that's happening in the community, because there will be a lot of questions coming toward us. And there's a need for our users to like, learn about it and have some tools to be able to talk about it. And because they will be like, in other spaces that it will not be 100 percent safe for them.

Absolutely. So yeah, and we go to multiple schools here, and it's like, junior high and high school. I think there's a lot of places where they are being marginalized at some points. That's why there is like, the point, there is fact that that pushes us to believe that this could be a place we belong to, this is gonna be a place that understand who we are. Because they are in a lot of places. They are being confused. They're facing factors that they feel like they're a stranger, they're not welcome. They're different.

Royar's experiences illustrate how youth are feeling unsafe in Canada due to discrimination and human rights problems in their new country. These youth need programs like those provided by Royar's NGO to safely talk through their issues, and to develop non-violent tools to resist discrimination and elevate their knowledge about their human rights. If they don't have safe places to talk, to belong and deal with their marginalization, they are at risk of being pushed and recruited into ISIS, who propagandizes the caliphate as a place of belonging and Muslim safe space.

The same is true of Right-Wing Extremism (RWE) where social media spaces like

Facebook create and propagandize their ideology to their followers. Social media provides a forum for like-minded far right community members to meet their needs, but also to plan collective or individual extremist violent conflict, either in person or through online violence, like doxing. Doxing is using online spaces to harass, reveal identities, and intimidate a person, such as a 2SLGBTQI+ person who is targeted by the VSMO (Scrivens & Amarasingam, 2020).

Contributing to the theme of unmet needs, Frank, an English Canadian is a former Incel who felt insecure about achieving a sexual relationship with a woman, and had unmet needs about male guidance, since his father had died when he was 14. As a high school student living in Ontario, he was frequently bullied by other male students. In Frank's words, his family was conflict avoidant, and he struggled to resolve his intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts without male guidance.

Oh, I never got any dating or relationship advice from my dad. So, I, if you really wanted to stretch it, you could say the lack of advice, maybe? Because there's kind of that element of going well. I don't really have a strong male role model to work with for this at the moment. But...I guess there was that element of looking to others as the authority of what a man is supposed to be... I wish at any level, like whether its familial, like extended community, schooling anything. I wish that the difficult topics were addressed in a constructive way and healthy ways.

Like I, because there's always that talk about “oh, don't you know, don't bully anybody because you make them feel bad, or, or whatever. How would you feel if somebody did that?” But there's never really that, there's never really that discussion about what, like, why people bully in the first place, why people feel the way they feel. Like, there's never really any definitive discussion about the more difficult parts of the human condition.

In the absence of, as Frank describes, a strong male role model, the ideologies of Jordan Peterson and Incel not only provided him with a sense of male authority, community, and advice but also a place to express his anger and frustration at his unmet needs for sex with women and to bully women as the cause of their involuntary celibacy. Frank was able to identify that what he really needed was a place to really talk about relationships, bullying and other hard parts of the human condition that was hard for him. Frank is now able to meet his needs through his relationship with his girlfriend, positive masculine role models, and he received therapy and guidance for his depression, after departing from the Incel.

Conclusion

Findings that emerged in this chapter are that study participants all discussed complex and multiple needs and conflicts that propel people into VSM in Canada, the USA, and Europe. Therefore, when developing policy, prevention and intervention programs and micro, meso and macro systemic responses, it is crucial to find out what individuals, families, schools, mental health systems, and communities need to transform their intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup

and intergroup conflicts. When a conflict and needs analysis approach, is implemented then people's needs may be better met so they don't seek out violent social movement ideologies and groups to meet those needs and resolve their conflicts.

Chapter six explored a second code derived from data analysis, namely the pattern of intergenerational family conflicts among formers. Unresolved intrapersonal, interpersonal, intergroup, and intragroup conflicts within a family can cause youths and adults to act out their unmet needs and conflicts through participation in violent extremism. Three themes that emerged within this code that suggest that the intersections of intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup, and intergroup conflicts and unmet needs are drivers of violent extremist conflict. This chapter also discussed each theme and provided evidence and key findings that can help systems to better design policy and programs at the micro, meso, and macro levels of society to carefully analyse conflicts and meet formers and their family's needs, so they do not need VSMS. If societies can better address individual, family and community needs and protracted conflicts (Azar, 2003), they can transmit these nonviolent and peaceful capacities to present and future generations.

Critical Autoethnographical Reflections

I also came from a family that did not resolve conflicts in healthy ways, and instead, used violence or avoidance to address grievances. I relate to the participants who felt like an outsider, as I too felt like an outsider to my family. My father was not there for me, and so, the surrogate father of the cult leader helped me to feel that belonging, which seemed like a solution to my need to have a father figure, a sense of family and academic achievement, and to feel special.

That grooming and radicalization process was its own form of propaganda. My father's intergenerational transmission of violence towards me and in teaching me unhealthy ways to cope with conflict like scapegoating 2SLGBTQI or BIPOC people as the "other" made it easier for Sven to radicalize me into his far-right apocalyptic ideology.

I also remember starting to question the cult leader's ideology, and "tested" him by asking questions that made me doubt his "telepathic" powers he professed to have. When he would answer wrong to my test questions, it helped increase my doubt in his ideology. The more I questioned, the more his verbal and psychological abuse increased, which helped to me push further away from his orbit.

Now I have learned through therapy, and through my doctoral education to address intrapersonal, interpersonal, intergroup, and intragroup conflicts in healthy and nonviolent ways. I have continued examine my own internalized white supremacy with critical thinking, and to learn to be inclusive of multiple identities in ways that support decolonized equity, justice and human rights for all, which assists me and my biological family to emerge from the haze of far rightism.

Chapter Seven

Code 3: The Impact of War, Bullying and Identity Conflicts on Violent Social Movements

Introduction

John Paul Lederach (2005,) writes that “all conflicts are identity conflicts” (p. 1) as every human has a sense of self, and one’s identity is always tethered to the needs and interests underlying a conflict. The previous chapter explored how intergenerational conflicts impact people. Conflicts are both shaped by identity and continually affect one’s identity, which then can inform one’s needs, values, beliefs and behaviour. Needs, values, beliefs and behaviour can then determine whether positive peace can be built, or whether protracted conflict may continue to ensue for a group or community. In the case of terrorist VSMOs, they will not shift into nonviolence and disengagement if underlying norms, needs, beliefs, and values and behaviours are not addressed (della Porta, 2012).

Chapter seven investigates the intersection of war, school-based bullying, and identity conflicts on social movements in Canada, the USA, and Europe. Three themes are explored, namely, transnational identity, political wars, and the importance of cross-cultural dialogue; war and far-right violent social movements; and war and violent, political Islamist violent social movements. I conclude with some findings and autoethnographic reflections.

Theme 1: Transnational Identity Wars, Political Wars, Cross Identity Dialogue and Violent Social Movements

Sociocultural psychologists Esteban-Guitart, Moiss, and Ignasi Vila (2015) discuss the fluid construction of transnational identity, a fluidity shaped by the increase in globalization and migration (Guitart et al, 2015). When individuals start becoming radicalized into a violent ideology, their identities also undergo a reconstruction of fluid identity. Existing members of VSMOs put their recruits through an online or in person conversion, reversion or brainwashing process (Dawson, 2024) to indoctrinate the recruits into their violent ideology. This indoctrination is a sociocultural, psychological, and relational process where the recruit fuses with the ingroup that has a homogenous identity and engages in “group think” (Tsintsadze-Maas & Maass, 2014). Group think is a social psychology phenomenon where critical thinking is suspended and individual identity merges with group identity (Tsintsadze-Maas & Maass, 2014). This group thinking among the violent social movement organization (VSMO) finds ways to engage in a power struggle and violent conflict with the outgroup or “other.” The VSMO uses the violent social movement and groupthink, and collective actions to uphold certain identities, norms and values that are destructive (della Porta, 2020) that then come into conflict with the targeted outgroup who, in their minds does not align with their identities, norms and values.

For example, Max is an NGO staff member living in Germany who works with people

exiting the far-right extremist scene in Germany. National identity is highly valued in Germany and, within current VSMOs it is observed as being expressed in roughly three ways. At present, the main trends of identity expression materialize through national socialism, violent extremist activism, and sovereign anti-government VSMOs. Max highlighted the following in his story:

We have these different groups in Germany. So, we have a really large, big right wing extremist scene in Germany, and different parts in it. So, we have these typical [group's] reoriented on the national socialism. We have some younger folks more on the activist side, we have these far-right groups in there. And we have something like the sovereign people. And there was a special group that called [itself the X group] and they believe that there's no German government, there's no legitimation, [the government] was not legitimized, so they don't pay tax at all. I think government, nothing that's not on the government. Its...I don't like the anti-government term at all.

Okay, because its so huge so everything could be undone, the government especially after COVID. Everything could be anti-government. But they, yeah, they don't pay tax, they don't speak with the police, and they don't follow the rules because they say, "Okay, I have my own state." And that's called...I don't know. Sometimes they have, also they are owners of banks. So, for money. Very strange, but this one is transgender person [that] was from these environments of sovereign citizens.

Max shared with me that while mostly men are involved in VSMs in Germany, women and also some LGBTQ+ people have also become members. In fact, one of the most famous Nazi violent

extremists was Ernst Rohm who was homosexual (Carr, 2020). In the past, LBTQI+ people in Germany were discriminated against by a law called Paragraph 175, but it was rarely enforced until Hitler became Chancellor of Germany (Carr, 2020).. Then Rohm was executed as he was no longer needed by Hitler after he became Chancellor, and Rohm was accused of being homosexual, and of conspiring against Hitler (Carr, 2020).

In modern day Germany, Germans of all genders may join different extremist collectives, in turn developing a collective and homogenous identity and group think that targets different outgroups like Jews and immigrants. Some examples of the latter are national socialists, and sovereign extremists who form a homogenous identity and group think that targets different outgroups, like the Reichsburgers or Reich Citizens movement in Germany (Berger, 2016). The Reichsburgers are a large VSM of 19,000 people who ignore the state laws of Germany, and instead create their own identities around the old Imperial and Nazi laws of Germany (Berger, 2018). This has contributed to the current state of German national identity expression and extremist group think and includes all genders. NGO staff members like Max are working hard to help people to exit these German far right movements that are very similar to the sovereign citizen/Freedom of the Land movement in Canada which has also erupted into intergroup political conflicts, paper terrorism campaigns and assaults on police (Perry et al., 2018).

Similarly, Siri, a Norwegian former supporter of violent political Islamism, talked about

identity politics and group think in both her interview and the talking circle transcript below, as Muslim people at the mosque she attended, felt legitimately harmed by post 9/11 Islamophobic behaviour by the Danish state and Danish society:

I come from, you know, the enemy side to that narrative. I should say, even though I'm white, most people there were not. And racism was definitely something we weaponized. Even myself, and that kind of sounds weird. But I remember this story about, and it's just one of many. But this one stands out to me as a very young boy, 15, maybe by like, judging by the voice, but like, definitely a teenager who was talking about his racist encounter with the police, you know, and how they were chasing him around. By the end of the story, you figure out that they were chasing him around because he stole a car.

But he framed it as they were chasing him around because he was a brown guy. And there are definitely systemic issues with ethnic profiling in all police all over the world that I've come across science supports in everything, that's absolutely a problem. But that was perhaps not the problem that this young man had in this particular situation. It was very much framed, like in the book by him.

But also, you know, you would then think an older, more senior man would come in and be like, "well, young boy, you know, there's a slightly like, it's a different issue." But no, he was very much confirmed [by the group] in his narrative about this being about the Danish police being racist. And as I said.. but not what this perhaps was about. Or at least it was also about something else. So, I recognize this fear of talking about ethnicity in Denmark, and Sweden, in Norway, in Finland, everywhere I come across.

Siri's recollection of the young boy's confrontation with the police illustrates how and when identities clash in conflict, it can create individual and group polarization. This polarization can weaponize identities such as when white police band together in group think behind the "thin blue line" (Ricciardelli et al., 2021) when accused of legitimate acts of racial profiling against brown people, just as when Siri's VSMO polarized and experienced group think about the boy's story about the police. When identity groups polarize, then the opportunity for dialogue and conflict transformation is difficult to achieve (Lederach, 2005).

Following Siri's emphasis on interethnic dialogue, Max is the German NGO staff member who works to exit people from violent far right extremism (FRVE). He discussed radicalization, group think, and the importance of cross identity dialogue in the following story. Max also talked about the role of white power music in building cohesion and solidarity within the far-right movements in Germany:

So, it's an important issue. It's often described as something like an entry, I don't know the English term at "entry drug." So, to step inside, and to get addicted, I don't really like these to compare with drugs or whatever, its weird.... So, but music is, is important, because its, it opens something like a universe, a parallel universe, it opens something like very special, gives the feeling [of] being part of a group, which is not mainstream, which is special. That's one thing. And a lot of people I spoke to, they, they realized two things.

The one thing is that music and the lyrics are the baseline for the whole narrative of different enemies. So, if you hear every time, there are the enemies, these are the

enemies, and here, you don't think about this is just your daily bubble, your daily surrounding. And it's something like, layer on layer on layer on layer until you believe it at least, so that its important, the important use of music in the movement.

In the above story, Max indicated that music is being used as a vehicle for radicalization which means that young people become attracted and committed to the identity of the group and to its actions. In addition, Max suggested that educational and parent systems help youth engage in cross cultural dialogue without violence, as a method for assisting in their deradicalization from group think and enemy narratives, as well as the facilitation of cross-cultural dialogue, and depolarization between cross cultural identities. Max elaborates further on the need to institutionalize cross cultural dialogue training in schools:

If you, if you want to navigate in a multicultural environment, in schools, whatever, you need tools to address the problems to make the problems visible, but also to discuss questions of nationality, of nationalism, of identity. It doesn't work just bringing five different nationalities on one table and hope that they love each other because they sit on the table. And I think there's a lot of staff needed, or there's more moral, its...dialogue, you need the personnel, you need the staff to deliver educated values. Its the job of the parents, often. That's not true. They don't realize that they have both to do.

An interpretation of Max's findings indicates that due to globalization and migration, identities are shifting and clashing as people with different identities learn to live and be educated together.

Different cultures and identities need to learn to co-exist as they are impacted by globalization and migration (Ritzer & Dean, 2021). Max also shared in his interview that the German government leaves many public schools understaffed, and they need adequate staffing to help youth with identity conflicts and in building capacities for cross identity dialogue. Max also refers to the importance of parents teaching values that encourage nonviolent cross-cultural dialogue to youth, in combination with assistance from the school systems.

Unfortunately, Germany has a long history of persecuting the “other” through polarized race thinking in the Napoleonic Wars (Arendt, 1968) that predated Hitler’s violent extremist expansionism in Europe. Germany and other countries in Europe and North America need to develop the educational and capacity building of school staff, students, families, and NGO staff through access to politically allocated resources so that North America and Europe can develop inclusive and depolarized value systems and identity formation. Inclusive, depolarized cross identity dialogue and equitable needs negotiation is crucial to prevention and intervention into modern day xenophobia towards Muslims, Jews, LGBTQI+ and newcomers in Germany.

Moreover, Canada also needs more attention paid to teaching youth how to have cross cultural dialogue. Royar is the Kurdish Canadian NGO staff member who facilitates depolarized and inclusive dialogue through what he calls “perspective taking.” When leading his all-gender groups of newcomer youths who are at risk of falling into political, violent Islamism he suggests the need to build capacities for critical thinking skills among young people:

Critical thinking is one of our topics we focus on, and perspective taking in a way like, learning from each other, learning about each other. So, when I talk about a lot of Syrian kids, so Kurdish is not, our language is not allowed in Syria, so, and a lot of cultural practices are banned. So, there's some students who like they were 17. And they had no idea that I'm from a different group of people. So, when I asked [one student] like, "Do you understand when I speak this language?" He was like, "No, but like, you're Arab."

So, I was explaining, like, "if you don't understand my language, that's because I'm different, and we are from this group." And the city that kid is from, it's like an hour far from my own city. So, this is like up to this level. So, imagine, like, if you're just an hour away from my city, and you have no idea that's, there's people, that's the population of [the] Kurdish community, there's over 6, 7 million there. So, at that point, so I think its lack of education, I was like, a lack of education for certain topics.

Royar's perspective and experiences bring light to the important systemic role that NGOs have in teaching pluralistic values and capacities for cross identity dialogue. It helps the youth see the nuances or "gray area" of Arab identity, and supports depolarization, critical thinking and inclusion of interethnic identities. In conflict transformation, finding a common ground is essential to cross identity dialogue, and so is learning to understand and embrace each other's differences so people can better tolerate heterogeneity in communities (Lederach, 2005). This is not the case in some countries in the region. For example, the current Sunni Taliban government in Afghanistan is an example of intolerance of women's' identities and their need for gender

equity, but also for intolerance of Shia identities like the Hazara ethnic group (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2023).

In contrast, Pat, a director of an American NGO, believes that dialogic interventions to help people exit from FVRE is best directed at disengagement from, instead of deradicalizing peoples' thinking and value systems, such as adherents to Trump's violent and far-right MAGA social movement. Like Pat, Omar Ashour (2009) suggests that instead of expecting deradicalization, facilitating moderation of people's thinking and behaviour is preferred, in his work with political and violent Islamist VSMs. Ashour argues that for some political violent Islamists, moderation may be a more feasible goal than deradicalization, such as Hezbollah's shift from violent militia to political party (p. 25). Thus, Pat and Ashour have similar perspectives that disengagement and moderation of behaviour should take priority when helping people to exit VSMs.

Other ways to divert people from violence is to encourage their political expression. During the talking circle/focus group, both Tom and Siri commented on political processes and nonviolent methods that are necessary to help groups to feel heard. Tom, a former Neo Nazi and KKK member, affirmed his belief in having a political party to help reduce violent actions. He stated during the talking circle that extreme violent right wing political parties can therefore be nullified as people can feel that the extreme nonviolent political party represents their interests:

You have some of these more extreme right-wing parties that are not neo-Nazi at all. They are very nationalistic, but they do not promote violence in any way. And I think that we had this researcher, Tore Bjorgo. He said that the Progress Party in Norway has been like a buffer, if we didn't have the Progress Party. Many of the people who has been voting for them would have felt that they didn't have a voice, they didn't have anybody who would listen to them.

And if you go around having opinions, and you feel that nobody's listening to you, eventually you do something, so people hear you. And so, I think its a small minority of the right-wing scene who are really into violence. And I think that those groups have such a violent ideology, that the best way to stop them is to prevent people, you know, try to step in and prevent people or prevent recruitment to these groups.

Similarly, Siri, the former supporter of political violent Islamism agreed in the talking circle that ideally people could mobilize in a nonviolent peaceful manner, and agreed with Tom that political expression is important. Siri also contributed the important point noting that Danish society also needs to reduce the unfair oppression of Muslims:

So obviously, if these issues were handled differently, if there wasn't any marginalization of Muslims, like obviously that would help if they were better at organizing into more like the group itself, if they were better to organize themselves in a, you know, more

democratic, liberal political manner, that would also, you know, be the peaceful solution to it. But that just I don't see how [they] would consider that an option being that they don't necessarily believe in the democratic process.

The above narratives from the talking circle suggest that to prevent people from escalating their violence on the staircase to terrorism, as in Figure 7 (Mogghadam, 2005), systemic cross identity political, familial, and community diversion and prevention programs could be designed at the ground level. Grassroots, meso level community programs could be developed to build formers' capacities about how they can exercise nonviolent political expression. This could facilitate intragroup and intergroup dialogue and so people can meet their needs through dialogic and political processes, so that violence is not needed.



Figure 7: Staircase to Terrorism (Mogghadam, 2005)

An important caveat is that PACS scholar Johan Galtung (1996, 2013) discusses the

three sides of the violent triangle, namely structural, cultural and direct violence. Initially, allowing the political expression of dissent may temporarily curtail direct violence, but as seen in the MAGA violent social movement, political leaders and parties can mobilize cultural and direct violence, as witnessed in the January 6 Capitol Riot and the activities of the Golden Dawn Party in Greece (Petrou & Kandylis, 2016).

Democracy is not always preferred by an identity group, as Siri says, some of the mosque members she engaged with would not necessarily follow a democratic process, if they do not value democracy. The liberal democratic process does not suit all members of a democracy. As Roger Mac Ginty (2008) writes the IKEA model of liberal democracy does not fit all societies who are seeking justice and peace. Consequently, Cedric de Coning (2018) suggests that more adaptive peacebuilding models are needed that attend to grassroots ideas for peace and conflict transformation. Adaptive peacebuilding can assist in the deradicalization process as young formers are included in making decisions about politics and culture that can create social change as they negotiate with other groups in a cross-cultural milieu.

Theme 2: The Impact of Political Wars on Violent Social Movements

Haudenosaunee scholar and peacebuilder Brian Rice (2013) writes about traditional Iroquoian history. Rice (2013) shared the teachings of the Peacemaker who is important in Iroquoian history in bringing peace to the six nations, and who said that when men stopped listening to elders and women, they started making war with other nations. The Peacemaker was

sent by the spirit world to ask the warring nations to “stop the killing that is going on between the Creator’s children here on Turtle Island” (p. 185). Violent social movements tend to involve violent conflicts and wars between people, groups, and nations. These lessons from the Peacemaker could transform these conflicts with equitable relationships among the nations, between genders, between human and non-human species, to create harmony and bring empowerment to communities impacted by intergroup violence (Rice, 2013). What emerged from this study was a theme that the Cold War, World War I and World War II, and the Syrian War influenced people who became engaged in contemporary far-right, political, violent Islamist, and neo-Nazi/Anti Russia movements.

The Impact of the Cold War on Far-Right Violent Extremism (VFRE)

Max, a German NGO staff member, talked about how the far-right mixed martial arts scene has become mainstreamed in Germany, especially eastern Germany, which was dominated by Russia until the fall of the Berlin Wall:

Especially in the east part of Germany, former east part of Germany...I would say nearly 80 to 90 percent of the of the MMA [mixed martial arts] stuff going around there, like different fight clubs, official fight clubs are related connected to the right-wing extremist movement. And I think its yeah, up to 80-90 percent. So that's a big issue. Because if MMA is getting more popular into the mainstream, and there's no regulation, there's no

instant, there's no group, or there's no group who was looking for a value in sports, and especially in that area... And I think that's also a big issue too, for recruitment [into FRVE] over the last year, 10 years, because it was also difficult to organize festivals to organize concerts.

And then it's easier to organize something like an MMA event. So that is, and I would say, if you go into more of...the countryside of parts of Germany, in some parts, it's quite common to have far right ideas. And it's also quite common to know someone who is part of the far rights extremist movement. So, you don't have to search about this. It's just your neighbor...I think it's mostly also in the former East part. It...there's a history because of the fall of the wall. There's a history of how they, how they developed the changing political systems. So, from one political system into another.

There's, it's about jobs or about, it's about the feeling of being unheard. It's about fear, because they feel like okay, the foreigners take the jobs, the foreigners, whatever, even if they are no foreigners, so they have the feeling these foreigners get their jobs or a woman, whatever. So, it's quite mixed. Mixed reasons we see there in the countryside there. And also, political problems, really real political problems. So, then you have these far-right parties who address these problems, from the opposition, or these rightwing extremist parties who say, "Okay, yeah, there's a problem, and we want to solve it. And we are the only one." So, if nobody cares about real problems in common politics, they will do at least.

According to Max, the MMA scene in Germany depicts a breeding ground for recruitment

for disillusioned men who are struggling with the long-term impact of the Cold War on their difficulty finding jobs. Roger Mac Ginty (2008) writes that stalled peace processes can create a frozen or liminal peace. Peace economics and independent state building take time when changing political systems from communist to democratic systems. The shift from communist to free market economies is a slow process and can limit job creation in post-Soviet societies like the former East Germany. Patriarchal societies like the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) are hosting rising far-right MMA fighters who are scapegoating women and newcomers for job scarcity. Recent state elections in Turingia and Saxony On September 1, 2024 have witnessed the rise in the popular vote for the far right AfD political party. Peace economics are needed to build a vibrant and inclusive economy in East Germany to understand the relationship of violent extremism to the economy, and to determine how to manage economics to reduce the possibility of more violent conflict (Anderton & Carter, 2002).

Max's findings also suggest that the hypermasculinity in the MMA scene intersects with xenophobia, so then women and newcomers get blamed, or scapegoated, for wider meso and macro problems in the political and economic systems. Consequently, the state's security strategies need to consider forging peace economics within their countries. An example of how economics can shape VSMs is when Albrecht Ritschl (2005) discusses WWI as Germany's failed attempt at Imperialism, and that WWII was a second attempt at imperialist expansionism. Germany does have a violent extremist history of scapegoating, such as how Jews were scapegoated in post-World War I after Germany lost the war and the Germany economy struggled (Ritschl, 2005). Subsequently, Jews, liberals, homosexuals, Roma people, and

communists were scapegoated by the Nazi party in Germany during the 1930s especially after the 1929 Wall Street crash that caused a global recession. A learning from this economic scapegoating is to ask how peace economics could have been developed so that scapegoating was prevented by Hitler and the Nazi VSM?

War and the exit from the communist Soviet regime and economy also impacted Staszek, a Polish former anti-Russia, neo-Nazi neo pagan, soccer hooligan. Staszek was a disillusioned young man in post-Soviet Poland. The former colonial occupation of Poland by Russia during the Cold War era affected his father, who then raised Staszek to be an anti-Russia thinker as he joined the anti-Soviet movement:

The movement gave me a sense of identity, access to drugs, a sense of security, belonging and adrenalin. I engaged in football fights. The goals of the movement were anti-system thinking and to use violence to change the system, with a nationalist, neo-Pagan ideology. My family were anti-fascist, anti-communist, and I had read philosophy, poetry, and exposed to anti-systemic thinking...Before I was in the group, I did not use aggression, but while in the group, I used aggression to survive.

Violence was used at soccer games against Gypsies/Roma, hip hop people, and punks. To stop violence, it is important for the community, like the police, to recognize it, but they aren't focussing enough on ideology. For example, there is also far left extremism and instead people are focussed on the "Islamic threat." There are not enough people aware of this and people don't understand violent radicalization in Poland.

An interpretation of Staszek's story is that building a decolonized national identity that is inclusive of all citizens is important in peace processes. Staszek found a far-right violent social movement to express his anger at Russian communism that also scapegoated various identities as the outgroup. He also makes an important point that dealing with far right, far left and Islamic ideologies and movements are equally important, as the overfocus on political violent Islamism does not deal with other forms of violent extremism in Poland.

The Impact of the Syrian War on Political, Violent Islamism.

Vebi, a director of an NGO in Kosovo that works with former ISIS families who went to Syria as foreign fighters, talked about the impact of the Syrian war on women and children:

No, this woman, they are not powerful at all. Because whenever you spoke with them, you know what, when they show the history, how they ended up to Syria, really, you can start to cry, because those women really, they didn't have a clue what's happened. Most of them when they went to Turkey or for vacation. And they end up there, without knowing they don't have any, any professional background, any school, anything was really there. Most of them, they didn't know that Syria was in a border with Turkey. You know, they weren't there just for fun, because you have a lot of people who participate in a war, but they didn't travel from Kosovo...

I'm really focused on that to work with these children to not, whenever they become adults, to not continue thinking you know, to revenge [their parents who were killed in the Syrian war]. Because this is this is one of the highest risk or associated, in the Balkans, in Europe, in all the work, because whenever these children you know, they

grow up and they know that their father was killed or mother was killed, you know, in Syria. And after that, was those children easily can be victimized from somebody else, you know, to do the revenge.

An interpretation of Vebi's narrative is that when predominantly husbands and fathers made the active decision to go to Syria and became foreign fighters for ISIS in the Syrian war, the mothers and children were victimized by war through involuntary engagement in politically violent Islamism and were harmed by the traumatic losses of the war itself. However, women can be active agents or victims in these civil wars (Leatherman, 2011). As the previous chapter discussed, there can be an intergenerational transmission of beliefs, values and behaviours, and the impact of war can also be transmitted to the next generation. Vebi's plan to intervene with children of former ISIS parents is an attempt to stop this intergenerational transmission by building resilience to extremist recruiters who may take advantage of a child's grief at losing their parent in the Syrian war.

Mimi, a staff member of a Canadian NGO who works with repatriated women that were in the ISIS caliphate, also talked about the impact of the war on families:

So, they find themselves there [in Syria]. And most of the people I know who that's what happened to them, were pretty bloody horrified when they found out what it was like when they were they're leaving. Most of the people I'm speaking there, there are a couple who left ISIS early, which was a very dangerous thing to do. Because if you got caught,

they'd kill you. A number of these people have spent time in [an] ISIS prison because they had the audacity to say that maybe ISIS wasn't doing the best it could.

And they were, you know, it was their husbands who were using the system to get them thrown in jail. So, they didn't have to deal with them... And they're there you know, in earlier cases, it was a nationalist bent to the jihadism but now following, you know, some of Bin Laden and now its global jihad. Its transferable to anyone in the world. It's like a virus. But it's like a virus you can recover from. Most people I think, can recover. Critical thinking helps, you know, being surrounded by people who actually care about you, and are trying to help you and you know, who you can have conversations with.

An interpretation of Mimi's story is that the terrorist attack by Bin Laden's al Qaeda VSMO ignited a "global jihad." This radicalized some Salafi Muslims to engage in the war in Syria and try to form an ISIS caliphate in Syria and Iraq. This impacted Canadian ISIS foreign fighters who went to fight and live in the Caliphate with their wives, some of whom were later put in jail for challenging ISIS behaviour. Given the impact of the Arab Spring and Bashir Assad's crushing of non-democratic protests in Syria in March 2011 (Musarurwa & Kaye, 2016), it was a confluence of factors that drove people to fight for and live in the ISIS Caliphate. The intersection of patriarchy and war impacted women who were following their husbands to a promised land that was more dangerous than what ISIS had claimed it to be. Critically thinking and questioning a violent patriarchy like ISIS and questioning their husband's behaviour landed some women in jail. Mimi tries to provide a different and truly caring space for these families to

talk about their lives, critically think, and find a new path forward.

When violence occurs through war, bullying, and identity conflicts, a key finding is that systems need to do more to help people, particularly youth and adults, to be both educated and supported in developing nonviolent communication skills. Schools, families, NGOs, police, prison and faith systems can work together at micro and meso levels to design localized prevention and intervention programs to better deal with bullying and identity conflicts, but also how to better spot the signs of radicalization and entry into the ground and early levels of the staircase to terrorism. This then would require macro systems, like the government to develop policies and fund education, NGOs, family health, prison and police systems to have the capacities to deliver prevention, intervention and rehabilitative programs. Governments should also fund faith systems like mosques and churches to build education and conflict resolution communication and skills to families and individuals struggling with signs of radicalization and engagement in VSMs, anger, identity group oppression, and the impact of war.

Theme 3: School Based Bullying as a Push Factor Towards Engagement in VSM

Bully victims are at risk for radicalization into violent social movements (VSM), especially youth who have suffered from bullying (Knight et al., 2022). In this study, 87 percent of former violent extremists were bully victims who felt like outsiders in their communities or schools. For example, Staszek, a Polish former Skinhead, anti-Russia, neo-Pagan soccer hooligan

shared that even though he was educated he still felt alienated within his local community:

My family were anti-fascist, anti-communist, and I had read philosophy, poetry, and was exposed to anti-systemic thinking. My father was an educated man, so I was an outsider in my community. The genders in the movement were 95 percent male, as they were no respect for women.

An interpretation of this narrative is that Staszek felt different from his peers in his young adulthood, and he felt that he was also surrounded by a strong patriarchy in which he discerned that he was an outsider. In Staszek's patriarchal, neo-Nazi, neo-Pagan and soccer hooligan VSMOs, women and girls also experienced bullying through lack of respect from male members.

Similarly, Siri, a Danish former supporter of political violent Islamism, felt "different" and bullied in her later years in school in Scandinavia for being a bookworm, some of which may have been related to her neurodiverse traits. She highlighted the following in her narrative:

It was—there's a lot of silence in this, like it was never talked about as bullying. It was never talked about as stigmatization, was never talked about these ways. Just that was a pep talk. Like, "yeah, but you're better than you do this. You'll go into the world"...It was just trying to establish confidence in us. And that's a great intention. Absolutely. And it helped. Absolutely, I am way more arrogant today because of it. Thankfully, more, I feel more entitled to the world, because of that for sure...

I can [act] in the positive way, or whatever you want to call it. But this [school] system really failed; the system fails a lot. ...But this is truly what I believe is the failure in all of this...and I'm sure I wouldn't have ended up in that whole radicalization conundrum if it wasn't for like, if I had just not gone to...my school, if, like, if the system had just accepted that, "She's a nerd. Leave her be." It would have been fine.

A primary takeaway from Siri's experience in the school system is that the families and the school systems must do more than provide a "pep talk" to help kids who are bullied, similar to what Lauren and Frank also shared with me about the negative impact of the Canadian school system. This means that school staff, mental health systems and families need to work with bullying perpetrators to be more accepting of all youth, including neurodiverse youth with autism and ADHD. American bullying expert Barbara Coloroso (2007) frames hate crimes and genocide as extreme forms of what happens in school bullying. Coloroso (2007) argues that communities need clear prevention, and intervention plans to help divert people from bullying and find more prosocial forms of expression to help victims to heal and feel protected by self and other (Coloroso, 2007).

The theme of bullying in school was also prevalent for siblings Frank (former Incel) and Lauren (former Neo Nazi and Hammerskin), who went to high school in a predominantly white small town in Ontario. Lauren talks about their experience and how their mother tried to help them with bullying, but the school did not help them at all:

Yeah. I mean, because, and I say that, too, because my brother was bullied all throughout

elementary school. And I do remember him coming home, one lunch hour, my mom called over to the school, and they said, “Well, we can't do anything if we don't see it.” And my mom's like, “Well, according to my son, it was right in front of your face, and you didn't do anything”. And actually, I'm surprised I didn't get suspended for this. So, I actually got the bullying to stop for me in high school. So, what I may have done one day, like it didn't come from everybody, it came from a few specific people.

And the rest were just like, go along and laugh at it and stuff. So, I was able to pinpoint like, the main person who is doing it, it was another girl. So, I had enough of her one day, she made some comments at me in the hallway. So, I picked her up and threw her in the garbage can. And everyone's just looking at me like, “holy fuck, she's crazy.” And I'm like, “Yeah, you shouldn't mess with me anymore.”

An interpretation of Lauren's story is that if youth are not given appropriate school and family system support and protection, they may reach a limit that causes them to fight back with violence to protect themselves. When violence seems to be a working solution for a youth, who then is exposed to violent extremist propaganda online like Lauren was, this can facilitate entry into a VSMO that uses violence to protect their interests. Then the bullied youth may then transform into a Neo Nazi bully, which occurred in Lauren's case. Harpviken (2020) also found that being bullied creates a vulnerability for Western youth to become involved in violent extremism.

During his interview, Lauren's brother Frank also talked about the school and a familial lack of response was evident in his interview. Frank was bullied by a girl who professed to be liberal, so that set the stage for him to fight back with misogynistic, far-right violent ideologies like Incel that he joined as a teenager after high school. Frank's experience is similar to Lauren's journey:

Through high school and everything, everybody who was bullying me, to some extent, were all going, "Oh, I'm a, I'm a liberal, I'm a good person." So, my immediate reaction was, "Well, if you're a liberal, that means I need to do the opposite of you no matter what. Okay?" And that kind of pushed me to that hole: "No, I'm a conservative; conservatives are good." And then there's kind of that element of intentionally playing devil's advocate until you start believing the stuff I see....Its kind of self-indoctrinating through resentment towards others. Um, so my mom said this a few times, where she said, "I didn't know how to help you deal with it, other than to just tell you that you just got to make it through, and things will get better when you're as far away from that high school as possible."

Which was true to be fair, but when you're a teenager, that's not really what you want to hear....Ah I think what the way my mindset was, what I wanted to hear is, "Oh, just go over there with a chair and bash her skull in."Or something, really, because I definitely had some pent-up anger issues back then. Yeah...it was kind of that, I guess, for lack of a better term, blunt force. Borderline illegal solutions, that kind of thing where

you feel like you're like, in hindsight, the bullying was really nothing. Its stuff that I could laugh off so easily now. And, but that in the moment, it feels so horrible, and like, it's just consuming your entire world. And you can't escape it no matter what.

Frank noted that bullying was a peer conflict where he needed systemic support as he and his bully needed ways to express themselves without harming each other. After high school, the far-right ideas of Jordan Peterson and then Incel felt like a powerful force that helped Frank to express his rage and grievances (Wright et al., 2022) at women, and deal with the wound caused by his high school bullying experience and his difficulty in finding a girlfriend.

Like Frank, Tom feared being bullied when he moved to school with older children, and so, he was beginning to consume VSM ideologies, including the ideologies of the KKK and then Neo Nazism. These movements started to feel like providing Tom with a powerful sense of protection from bullying in the school:

So, when I went to youth school, as we call it here, that was like in seventh grade, you know, where we went from being the biggest and baddest at our local school. You know, we were the sixth graders. So, we weren't bullies or anything, but we were the oldest where we used to that, you know, and then when we came to the youth school, it was a different situation, because there you had people who were three, four years older than us.

And we were a bit you know, insecure about this, and but when I started, you had something called school election, which you have at Norwegian schools every year, second year, and all the political parties, they participate. And you had a lot of issues with massive immigration from Yugoslavia. And people didn't like that. And the anti-

immigration party became the big winner at our school. And everybody was wearing these buttons. That's the Norwegian buttons. So, I put on a button like that, then I, you know, I didn't have a clue about anything.

Tom describes a sense of insecurity about being a younger child around older students and how he felt a sense of belonging when joining a political ingroup of anti-immigrant students.

Mogghadam (2005) would call this the ground floor of the staircase to terrorism. Tom further exemplified a quick progression from the first to fifth levels of the staircase to terrorism when he shared the following with me in his story:

So, we were joined forces and then, you know, we got rid of these anarchists. And I guess they had to leave town. And they invited us to a party, and it was an old like a grocery store that was now turned into [and] converted into an apartment but big apartments and, and the main shopping area was now just a huge living room. And, they had a huge swastika flag on the wall. And I remember when I came there, I was quite uncomfortable with the swastika flag. But of course, we had shared experiences, and we were sitting there talking about these things, drinking beer, and having fun and listening to music. And I was, you know, going through a pile of magazines and I found this cross of fire or whatever it was called "The Fiery Cross." It was like a KKK magazine.

And that's, you know, when I thought KKK, that was this guy's you know, from the "Birth of a Nation" that I [saw] a few years earlier. So, I asked if I could borrow

some of these magazines. And they say, “yeah, yeah, sure,” you know, and, and I was looking into a lot of these things. And, you know, they were talking about ideology and how the Jews were not exterminated. And that it was all just fake news, you know, fake history. And I thought to myself, “Oh, guys, you guys are nutcases.” You know, of course, the Jews were killed during World War Two, you know, and things like that.

So, I didn't agree with that. But I was curious about this KKK thing. And, but then, of course, they invited us the next weekend, and next weekend, and slowly but surely, we started talking about ideology. And also, I got a response from the KKK, they sent me a huge box with the various magazines and information pamphlets and things like that. And I started to get connected, you know, with various right-wing groups and things like that, then, I think my mind was slowly changing for the worse, but I didn't notice it myself.

As for many adolescents, Tom's need to belong to a powerful ingroup increased (Sheppard-Luangkhot, 2020). He started bullying anarchists and joining forces with Neo-Nazis to do so, which progressed him all the way up the staircase from the ground floor to targeting an outgroup, joining a group with a polarized mindset, escalating to fifth level where he committed violence against marginalized outgroups (Mogghadam, 2005).

Therefore, when politicians fund educational departments, and schools design anti-bullying policies, workshops, and programs, it is necessary to consider how to divert people away from each level of the staircase of terrorism. They also should invite parents and caregivers to these capacity building workshops and programs. This is so both home and school can

collaborate together to divert bullies and assist victims when school bullying happens but also to help families build resilience for kids, so they do not later become bullies through violent extremism.

Several participants like Vebi, Pascale, Jan, Tom, Staszek, and Eva all spoke about the importance of education systems having governments fund schools, so people come into schools to inform teachers and students about the signs of violent radicalization and engagement in violent extremism, and ways to divert youth from radicalization and violent extremism. This also needs to involve parents and caregivers, police, prison staff, faith leaders' mental health practitioners. For example, Pascale struggled to help Lauren when there were obvious signs of her radicalization, substance abuse issues and ADHD. She recalls the following in her story:

Most of what I was seeing and hearing I again, blamed I'm mourning her father on grief.

And the psychologist sort of agreed with me at the time, we just saw the psychologist together the one time. So, she didn't want to go see the psychologist [nor] to talk to you about me. So, she didn't want to go see anybody? Nope, she was fine. Very much like my side of the family. "No, I'm fine. I don't need help. Its your problem. Let's not face anything." When she was in the movement, there was alcohol.

There were drugs, more prescription drugs, I think than anything else abusing those. What was the rest of his [Lauren and Pascale's psychologist] gonna say? Oh,

neurodiversity, and all that sort of thing. It's funny when she was a kid, she would say "Oh, I'm pretty sure I got ADHD you know?" I don't—she's never been tested for it.

An interpretation of Pascale and Lauren's narratives are that mental health systems could do more to help psychologists and other mental health providers support youth and parents in getting aid for substance abuse issues, and for assessment and treatment for neurodiversity like ADHD, and recognition of signs of engagement with violent radicalization and extremism. This also requires governments to develop state-wide policies and fund educational systems enough to provide mandated training on neurodiversity and ways to prevent and intervene when a young person exhibits signs of violent radicalization in rural and urban areas.

There is an intersection of mental health concerns and a young person's engagement in violent extremism. Among former participants, there is a high representation of participants who self-identify as having some kind of mental health diagnosis. Empirical evidence illustrates this corresponding link of untreated mental health and involvement with violent extremism, including substance use disorder so that it is important for schools, NGOs, mental health systems and governments to focus on creating individualized assessment and treatment plans for each person (Gill et al., 2024).

In addition, Pascale suggests more funding and training for partnerships with schools and parents. She points out that young people need more media literacy, less time on phones, and more quality time spent with their parents. Parents must provide a loving environment for their children so that when there is a problem, they will approach their parents for help. She had the

following to say on the issue:

So, number one, media literacy. Kids need to learn what they're looking at on the screen and need to understand that there's more than what they're just seeing with their eyes.

There's a lot of there. So, media literacy is a big one. Education, there needs to be people in the school saying, you know, here where we are, sex trafficking is the number one issue of kids. But I'm seeing this more and more often, and I'm sure that this is going to become, and you know, the radicalization in both groups is very similar. Right? The same ways of recruiting. It's very similar. So, educat[ors] let's make our kids smart with none of this crap [that] our kids aren't smart enough [to learn complex ideas].

Well, that's because you're not doing your part. To make our kids smarter, you're dumbing them down, you're feeding them things. That's education is a big one. And I think parents, when we do talks, I always put a little segment in for parents.

You need to deal with your kids. And you need to talk to your kids about issues, not just [focus on] how a school [deals with] Johnny, but are there people at school that are bothering you? Is there somebody in the family that you feel uncomfortable with? Who do you identify as? Tell me how you feel about yourself? Who do you identify as? Do you identify as Pascale? Or do you identify as this whacked out person who has no grip on reality, or what you know, whatever. So, spending the time and actively listening to our kids and asking the appropriate questions, not giving them screens all the time. Let's take the phones away.

And parents, let's put the phones down. It just frustrates me when I see parents walk through the park with their kids, and they're on their phones. This is your time to connect with your kid. So, let's get back to the basics and connect with our kids again, and let's ask them the questions that need to be asked. And let's not just assume that if we put them into eight different activities every Saturday, they're going to be fine. Those kids still need to have a foundation. And you need to keep your eyes open for those little changes. And so those are my biggies. Those are the things that, you know, I knew nothing about. Those are things that I wish people knew about now.

An interpretation of Pascale's story is that the partnership between schools and parents is crucial for effective education, media literacy, building inclusion and connection, and how to deal with 190 signs of radicalization and recruitment into violent extremism. School teachers and staff must be trained to recognize the signs of bullying and radicalization and have the necessary resources to assist young people as they struggle with life issues. Parents must also be connected and bonded with their children so that they can detect any changing behaviour that must be addressed to prevent the child from falling down the abyss of radicalization.

Other systemic improvements included criminal justice systems in the USA, Europe and Canada. Tom, Staszek, Lauren, and Jason all shared how the police and prisons could be improved in terms of prevention and intervention. For example, Staszek shared the following with me about what helped him while he was exiting FRVE:

What helped me to leave is I met a girl, fell in love, and wanted to be with her and not get into fights at soccer games anymore. To exit sooner, the community should cooperate

with the police, to create safety. It is important to change the mindset to help people deradicalize and disengage. It is important to meet with a wider spectrum of people and maybe become more open-minded towards others. It also important to help people with tattoo removal. I left my Celtic cross tattoo as a reminder to myself. Help people with practical needs, legal support and help with police.

I was still against the system when I left, and a retired police officer helped me with my issues, and now I [have] gotten past that. On social media, we need to be more open minded and non-judgmental. Ideally there could be a network of formers in Poland, but data protection, legal and police issues make that difficult. For rehabilitation, people need to understand the fears of people in the movement, they have many kinds. The word hate in Polish, “nienawidzic,” is used to get more power, to divide people, and make them afraid and isolated. That is never a good thing.

Staszek was able to exit FVRE with the assistance of support systems for developing new and meaningful belonging and attachments with partners/girlfriends. The literature supports this notion that formers are more likely to exit radical group's if they have a partner or partnership which gives them a sense of belonging (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2013). Non-judgmental, inclusive community cooperation of formers and non-formers, cooperation and help with legal and police support is key to people exiting their far-right VSMS. To aid someone to leave a polarized, hateful, violent community to a nonviolent, caring and depolarized community needs to be at the ready to welcome people in who want to exit. The police officer who helped Staszek to

overcome his own polarization with anti-systemic thinking and behaviour was key to building a mentorship and more positive male role model than Staszek's own father and the leaders he followed in his VSM.

Lauren, a Canadian former, had the opposite experience with police guidance, that further entrenched her into her far-right VSM. She also gave an example of a form of police intervention work that was more helpful to her in exiting the movement, compared to the first police officer who tried to prevent her from entering VRFE:

So, when I was 18, yeah, because I was only like a few months in in the movement at this time. My mom tried that whole thing of taking me over to the cop shop and get one of them to talk me out of my choices-[it] did not go well. Because there was a black guy with a big giant ego on him. So, it's pretty much my ego against his. And it was just a big dick swinging contest really in that room. But I remember him going, "you're young, and you're pretty blah, blah, blah," like all the condescending types of shit that nobody wants to hear. And I may have accused him of being a 'rapist in a suit.' So that just went south pretty quickly. And then so I had to answer to charges later on, I would have been about 19 or 20 at this time. So, the detective handling my case was great. Like, I can't really think of anything he did wrong or could have done better.

He was respectful towards my mom, did things ethically in a sensitive fashion, I remember. So, they picked me up at my mom's place one night like to bring me in just like it actually answered the charges [and to] get released the next day, so on and so forth,

that whole routine that they do. So, he so typically, they cuff you right away when they get you. But he waited until I was actually in the car, and my mom did not see me get handcuffed. Like she just didn't need to see it. And he knew that. Um, and as far as my interactions with him. Yeah, I don't remember any of them being bad. Like, he was a pretty decent guy generally.

When police take both an adversarial and sexist stance when trying to divert youths and young adults away from VSM, akin to the experience of Lauren, it builds more defensiveness, and a power struggle ensues that pushes the person further away. Understandably, a racialized police officer would have some feelings about a racist white violent extremist, and if that is difficult for the officer, another team member who can take a calmer and mentorship-oriented approach, like the second police officer in Lauren's story, would be a better match in trying to dialogue with someone about their choices to enter a VSM. Given Lauren's loss of her own father figure, males who guided her with a more patient and benevolent approach (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2013) resulted in a more ideal means of intervention.

Like Lauren's story, Tom, a former Neo Nazi and KKK member also spoke about the importance of the benevolence approach and interactions with prison staff member who helped to deradicalize and disengage him from FRVE. This is what he had to say on the issue:

And I was in jail there, you know, and for the first time in my life, I was in a jail with no other neo-Nazis. And I had a lot of thinking to do, you know, I got peace and quiet to

think about what happened in South Africa. And then, of course, the chef. He, he had seen this movie that came out at the time called American History X. I didn't know that movie at all. And he invited me to work in the kitchen. And he treated me with lots of respect. And there was this other person, a prison guard...[and he] is a dear friend of mine today. We became friends after I was released, and I was just in his wedding. Recently, me and my wife, and his husband, you know, he would come in my cell in the evenings. And he was very pro-Israel, you know, and he would be very, he gave me constructive criticism, you know, but not criticize me as a person in any way. And we would have long chats and talk about things. And he was a perfect social worker, actually, even though it was a prison guard. And then the chef, you know, came in one morning, and he looked at me, you know, while we were eating breakfast, and he asked me this one question.

And I saw American History X later, you know, after I was released, and then I knew where he got that question for, because, like that black principal in the movie, he asked (the main character) when he is in jail, you know, "When you think about your life, you became a Nazi? What good has that done for you and your family?" And I was thinking, you know, yeah, what good has that done for me and my family, and my grandfather's trucking company went bankrupt because nobody wanted to do business

with him because of me. And my parents, you know, it was hard for them. And my sister had a hard time because of this. And my aunt was on sick leave, because she was working in an old folk's home. And they were always asking her, "Are you a relative of this neo-Nazi who has the same surname as you?" And you know, and so she had a lot of different [and] negative consequences.

And of course, personally, for me, I was like, 24 years old, and I only knew the only thing I owned, was a couple of swastika T shirts, while childhood friends had homes and wives and children and university degrees and things like that, you know? So, I thought myself, you know, I was in jail and, and I just came to this realization one day, you know, that I can't do this anymore. I don't believe in this crap anymore. And so, I just phoned home to my mom, and I said, "Listen, I'm done with this." And, you know, she started crying. And I spoke to my dad a little bit. And I think somebody must have noticed that my attitude and personality may be changed a little bit in the [prison], because, you know, because the prison staff was keeping it up, and the chef, was keeping it up, and when I was finally released, the prison warden personally came down to take me out of the jail, to my parents, who were waiting outside, you know, and he gave me a big bear hug and said, "I'm happy to say that I don't think I'm gonna see you again."

In Tom's words, he needed to get away from other neo-Nazis and also, he desired that people saw his humanity, and talked with him in a way that helped him critique his behaviour

constructively, to reflect deeply about whether being a Neo-Nazi had done anything positive for him and his family. Tom had interactions with Black and Jewish people in his process of disengagement who could have rightfully verbally attacked him for his behaviour, but by people showing their benevolent humanity, he could rediscover his own benevolent humanity again. The experience of talking with different persons empowered Tom to critically evaluate his life and his connections with neo-Nazism. State-funded policies and programs are going to produce the most results in terms of the deradicalization of members that wish to leave when the state makes funding available for ongoing training of prison and jail staff, and post prison staff who are also employed in parole and probation. Continual trainings can help staff to build the communication and rehabilitation skills to help people descend and exit their staircases of violent extremism and terrorism.

Conclusion

Therefore, some findings for this chapter are that are that meso systems like police, educational, mental health and prison systems need to develop policies and praxis that is benevolent and skilled in their approach. By building positive relationships with skilled people in systems, it may help radicalized people to release their attachment to VSMOs and build new connections with partners, mental health, education, police and prison systems that help them to shift their identities away from the VSM and its radical ideologies.

Chapter seven explored the code of war, bullying and identity conflicts on violent social

movements. Exiting the staircase to terrorism and violent social movements requires multiple systemic supports that assist in capacity building that helps the person to change thinking, and build behaviour and identities that support constructive, nonviolent relationships.

Critical Autoethnographic Reflection

I related to the participants' stories who were bullied. They needed family, school and political systems to better educate and resource them and their families about how to critically think, to deal with bullies, and to build stronger relationships so VSMOs are not needed as a band aid to fulfill their needs. I was nearly killed by two high school bullies, who retaliated against me for breaking up with their friend, by rigging my bicycle wheel to fall off on my hilly ride home after school. Thankfully, I figured out the wheel was rigged and stopped to tighten it. I did not feel close to either of my parents, and I did not tell them about the bike incident. Our attachment was not strong, and it made me more vulnerable to the surrogate parenting offered by extremist leaders, who later became the most dangerous bullies in my life.

I also had great difficulty being taken seriously by police systems when I reported the sexual violence I experienced by the cult leader. It was finally a kind rural policeman who took my complaint seriously, which eventually led to the charges being brought against the cult leader. Understanding the gendered experience of violence in a person's family, school and police systems is critical to better preventing and intervening into that violence that can assist

that person to reduce their vulnerabilities.

As a result of this thesis research, my own NGO has been collaborating with NGOs like B'nai Brith, the local Christian teen drop-in centre, and with the local RCMP to find a way to discuss the legal and social implications of Nazi symbols with youth in our community. We will invite parents also to this meeting, should some of the Neo Nazi ideology be coming from parents. This is an example of how meso community stakeholders (NGOs, police, faith-based organizations) can work with micro stakeholders (family, individuals) to intervene into extremist based bullying.

Chapter 8

Code Four: The Value of Including Formers, Family Members and Faith Leaders in PVE,

CVE and Rehabilitation from VSMOs

Introduction

This chapter first explores the theme of how and why formers' insider voices contribute beyond VSMO specific and intelligence information, and how systemic social inclusion efforts are an integral part of successful PVE, CVE and ideas for effective rehabilitation efforts to help people disengage from get people out of VSMs in North America and Europe. The second theme illustrates how and why family members of formers are also important systemic voices to include in research, policy, and praxis design. The third theme considers the important online and face to face role of spiritual and faith leaders in PVE, CVE and rehabilitation from VSMs.

Theme One: The Value of Inclusion of Former's Insider Voices in PVE, CVE and

Rehabilitation Efforts

This thesis research has shared stories from participants as to how formers voices should be included in PVE, CVE and rehabilitation programs and policy designs efforts. During their exit work and rehabilitation, formers' stories were shared with NGO staff like Mimi, Patrick, Max, Vebi and Royar. These staff members provided excellent examples of how their clients became involved, and how they helped them to exit from VSMs. During this research, formers themselves shared rich data that can assist in PVE, CVE and rehabilitation efforts. Despite the

criticism brought forth by academics like Tapley and Clubb (2013) and Papatheodorou (2023), formers are here to stay in the fields of PVE, CVE and rehabilitation efforts, as reputable academics like Joana Cook and Lynn Schneider (2024), Amarnath Amarasingham (2024), Tore Bjorgo (2011), and Ryan Scrivens and Barbara Perry (2017) continue to work with and interview reformed formers to help shape PVE, CVE, and rehabilitation policy and praxis.

This supports the PACS approach that inclusion of multiple voices is more effective in building decolonized and emancipatory peace as opposed to the use of terrorism and violent conflict (Byrne & Thiessen, 2023). To condemn former extremists as invaluable and exploitative (Papatheodorou, 2023) results in pushing marginalized people away from the table who want to build sustainable peace by taking their VSMO experiences and using them for the betterment of their societies.

A strong example of the importance of including formers in peacebuilding is Jason, a former neo-Nazi, Christian identity skinhead from Canada, who also has an undergraduate degree. For example, Jason shared stories about how he mentors people with non-judgement in exit work, in their road to recovery. He reported on the issue in the following manner:

You know, folks are coming to us and say there's still actively involved in extremists.

And they really want to leave, right? And that is the case, a lot of the time we encounter people that are still involved, and we got to help them along the way. I tried to plant this mental picture in people's minds of like sitting on a bench holding the hand of this person

along this journey, right? It's going to be a long journey, though. Its not going to be easy.

At times, it's going to be hard. There are going to be easier parts, too, though, but there, its going to be hard there. There are times where you're gonna be sitting there going, "Man, I just want to give this up and go back to the group is things were much easier."

I mean, I draw on the similarities to somebody trying to quit drinking or trying to quit smoking or whatever. There are hard times, right, that come with it. Yeah, physical pain, emotional pain, lots of stuff going on. But being the mentor there, being able to help these people through that.

You know, I think the journey is like, a bit of teaching...but you like, it's having to just explain basic things to people that, you know, you don't have to be scared of your neighbor, if they're Black. No, and it sounds like ridiculous to say that, but like these people, they come to us with very [big] problems [as described below]. You know, and that's the thing, too, is, in this work. We can't undermine people and make them feel like they're not, you know, it's having to be [in a stance of] no judgment whatsoever. I mean, whether its a South Korean woman who hates black people and gay people, we deal with people like that, whether it's the leader of the KKK, in Georgia, we deal with people like that. So, you've got to take them at where they come into, you know, and its just, you know, listen, be there, hear, hear them out....

So, letting these folks know that we, they have resources, we can get them to a therapist, we can help them. Like, I've even sat there and said, and explained what a therapy session looked like, to a person, because they were so scared to go. We're not

providing therapy, but we're telling them about what it is and how it can help them. Right. And then, hopefully, getting them through the doors to get some mental health [counselling], if needed. And just exploring the different avenues of things to help them deradicalize, or first of all disengage from the group. That's often, you know, those first steps or, or just how to walk away from the group safely, yes, and treating them like a human being while they're doing it.

Jason's story demonstrates that if we exclude rehabilitated and reformed former extremists from the work of rehabilitative exit work, we deny their agency and ability in contributing to building sustainable peace in the societies in which VSMs are happening. Jason is using his mentoring skills and as a former extremist he is modelling how to be kind and non-judgmental to his clients, who then can be more open-minded, kinder and non-judgmental with others as they learn to live nonviolently with their neighbours. Jason is also bridging clients to more systems, like mental health systems that can further deepen their road to recovery, so they do not re-engage with their VSMOs. Imagine if Jason wasn't doing this important rehabilitative work with those exiting VSMOs, and the danger it poses to society when an active extremist does not have a space to learn how to be a more peaceful and safe human being.

Siri is another great example of the power of including formers' including women in PVE, CVE and rehabilitation efforts Siri is a former supporter of political, violent Islam who is from Scandinavia. She also pointed out the importance of academic and research work examining the role of women in teaching the next generation, and in working at all the different levels of the state:

And this is also part of my research. And this is what interested me as well is this, again, the elevation of women into, you know, at a state building level, you know. You cannot have ISIS. The production of the new generation, all these narratives [that] they very much shared. Like ISIS, and this group of women very much shared the same utopian ideology of a woman's role. How important she is in terms of bringing on the new generation as the teacher as the [mentor]. You know, its [a] very limited role in, you know, it's very domesticated. But it was so important.

Siri's story reports on the integral role of women in family building, as well as state building and in decentering radical violent ideologies that are a part of VSMs. Societies who value women and mothers more equitably can build families and states that are nonviolent and equitable for all, and not just for men. If women feel intersectionally persecuted for both their gender and their religious identities, it stands to reason they will be drawn to utopian ideologies wherein they are radicalized into believing they will be valued intersectionally as Muslim women. The promise of a safe utopia was, of course, not kept by ISIS, and instead, women and their children experienced terrible violence (Cook, 2019). Siri's academic voice is needed as she is considering both the state and the family structures behind the ISIS VSM that feel so ideologically attractive to girl and women recruits. To not include Siri's experience and perspective in deradicalization of Muslim girl and women, risks that they seek solace in spaces that not only harm them

but injure countless others locally and globally. More broadly, excluding former women who have participated in a variety of VSMS like far-right, far-left, religious, and anti-authority, also risks that they seek solace in those organizations that harm these women, and maltreat the outgroup that some women may illtreat.

Tom, a Norwegian former Neo Nazi and KKK member, works now in the field of crime prevention in Norway. Like Siri, he has a graduate degree and has applied the combination of his personal and educational experiences to contribute to PVE and CVE policy and praxis in Norway intended to divert people away from crime and FRVE. In his narrative, he spoke eloquently about the importance of systems not abandoning extremists, and instead helping them reintegrate with society:

I think what you do, towards especially in Norway, where what they do towards people who is about to become drug addicts, or are drug addicts, if you could get more or less the same system around them. Because they have very close [support], you know, everybody's paying attention to them. Everybody's having meetings with and talking to him trying to help them. While when you're an extremist, its like, nobody wants to touch you. It's like when I was released from jail, after I left the movement. I went to the social welfare office because I thought to myself, listen, I have to. I don't have a job right now. But I thought, I will get some money from there. So, I can help my parents because

it cost them money to have me living there when I'm an adult.

So, I went to the social welfare office, and I got an appointment. And then I was told to go to room seven or something like that, you know, and I went into room seven, and a social worker came in and she looked at me and she said, "I don't help people like you." And she just turned around and went out because she knew who I had been, you know. And that [behaviour] was waiting for somebody else coming, you know. Nobody came. And you know, eventually I just left, and I didn't get any help from the social services. And I went back to my dad, and I said, "Listen, I didn't work out sorry." But then he had to talk [with] his boss, and he offered me a job. So, you know, I could help out that way.

That a social worker dehumanized Tom with a judgmental statement like "I don't help people like you" suggests that continuing a process of judgmental, close-minded othering like this bears similarity to the pattern of judgmental, close-minded othering observed in the Neo Nazi and KKK movements. To other and not assist people needing help is dehumanizing. Tom could have left that office to return to a place [the neo-Nazi VSM] where he felt valued. Fortunately for Tom, he had his family to lend a hand, while many people like me, did not have family support to exit the organization that I was in. I had to rely on professional social services and mental health systems to deradicalize and disengage from that VSM.

Ultimately, a key finding is that the former's I interviewed in this study contradicts Tapley and Clubb's (2013) assertion that formers are not valued beyond VSMO specific intelligence. Former extremists, especially rehabilitated and trained former extremists like Jason,

Tom, Siri and I, can absolutely contribute to micro, meso and macro systemic research and praxis that can help deter people from joining VSMs and assist in other's deradicalization and rehabilitation.

Theme Two: The Value of Including Formers' Family Members in PVE, CVE and Rehabilitation Efforts

There has been some limited research on family members of former extremists, like Sikkens et al.'s (2015) qualitative study that examined parental influence on radicalization and deradicalization processes. Their results suggested no clear direct influence by parents on radicalization and deradicalization. In contrast, they found a more indirect influence of family dynamics that increase a person's vulnerability to radicalization. Indirect influences may include factors such as a parent's previous counter-narratives to violent extremism that aid people to exit when they are in the midst of deradicalization. Examples of a parent's unhelpfulness is when they provide advice on why the ideology is wrong or harmful. For example, Sikkens et al (2015) found that the type of advice only helped once their loved one had made the decision to disengage from their VSMO.

More impactful triggers to disengagement are linked to major life events like getting married or becoming more educated which, in turn, were of use to people to deradicalize (Sikkens et al. 2015). For example, Tom, Siri and Jason each received post-secondary education achievements after they exited their VSMO offering evidence that when a former begins to disengage, deradicalize and make space for important achievements like education, they can add

an academic voice to their lived experiences as formers which can benefit PVE, CVE and rehabilitation efforts.

The literature is already well documented on the power of a partner and child to help someone to exit from violent extremism (Bollin et al., 2009; Daagard-Nielsen, 2013). For example, Jason talked about the important influence of his wife when she asked him to choose between the Skinheads or her and their child. Although Jason's wife did not wish to participate in my thesis research, Ewa did. Ewa is the Polish spouse of a former Neo Nazi, anti-Russian soccer hooligan, Stanislaw. Ewa shared stories that demonstrated the power of a spouse in aiding someone to rehabilitate and renounce their membership in a VSMO. She also provided important policy and praxis ideas to prevent young people from joining and to better intervene to prevent youth from attaching to VSMs, as she illustrated below:

My conflict style is [to] talk about emotion, look for solutions and peace. It is important to not force others to be right and to be happy and safe. It is difficult to do presentations in schools as an NGO as parents need to give permission slips [to allow an NGO to present in a school]. There should be, at the micro level, more love and support at home, to let kids speak, give them a sense of belonging in the family, so they do not go out from home and look for [it] in some weird, dangerous places and groups. We need police, judges, and psychologists to take care of the person.

Like Siri, Ewa sees the power of parents, motherhood, love and belonging in a family as critical

to building individual, family and social peace, and to deter people from joining violent groups. Further, Ewa suggested that systemic micro, meso and macro solutions be implemented in police, judicial and mental health systems in Poland. At the micro, individual, level, Ewa is close to the former's story and she is also accompanying the former, Stanislaw, on a journey to recovery and peace through creating an inclusive place of nonviolent peaceful dialogue and belonging. Ewa's story suggests that family members can contribute to sustainable peacebuilding at the micro level, as they are a crucial part of the family system and the society in which VSMs are occurring.

Moreover, Pascale, the mother of Lauren, a former Hammerskin, discussed several times in her interview about the power of education in educating children and parents about the dangers of violent extremism. Her valuable input into peacebuilding ideas with respect to educational institutions, police and intelligence agencies, and mental health systems, are evident in her story below:

I think at that level, teachers need to learn to give kids voices, all kids. We need to teach kids as a whole community tolerance for other groups, other sexual orientations, other religions, other skin colors. We need to start working on tolerance. That needs to be a big thing. So mental health, yes, and people that we work with at Life After Hate. They are psychologists or social workers, and they are coming in with backgrounds in, you know,

maybe prison work, or maybe family work or something like this. This is a whole different thing for them to hear this kind of crap. From people, you know, they're talking to formers, and they're talking to families, and they're hearing this. So there definitely needs to be more education for mental health people [to develop specific knowledge and skills to better help formers and their families]. There needs to be education for frontline law enforcement.

Lauren and I've, you know, we've done that on a smaller scale. We said, here's a pamphlet that says when you're you know, you're in a uniform, you're going to the door, to pick up 18-year-old Johnny or talk to the parents, here's what you might see. And here's how to figure out, is this kid mentally ill? Or is this kid being indoctrinated? How do you tell the difference? So, law enforcement is a big one. And funnily enough, [at] the end of the month, Lauren and I are going to talk to the RCMP and CSIS about this. And their question [for us] was, you know, as law enforcement, what do you see our job [as being]?

Well, right now, unfortunately, their job is to come in after the fact and pick up the pieces, because all those other things aren't being done yet. So I see that, you know, pretty well, any level of government, any level of, of education system, anything. We all have to at least touch on this. Just even a paragraph that says, "here's the signs," because had I seen some of these signs back 16 years ago, I might have had a chance to sit Lauren down and say, "What are these beliefs doing for you? Why do you feel you need to get involved in this?" You know, and these are questions that I did for some resource guides.

Pascale and Lauren are doing important systemic work to educate stakeholders on how better to

note signs of young people's radicalization in the training of a macro security actor like CSIS.

Inclusion of family members provides important information on how to better prevent and intervene into VSM. Inclusion of family members to help train agencies and community systems to work together to more effectively divert people and get them the assistance they need to build youth's resilience to prevent them from engaging or reengaging with VSMOs.

This community and relational approach, with an emphasis on wholistic and inclusive teaching and peacemaking, is an important part of the Inuit, Metis and First Nations worldview (Rice, 2005, 2013). Working together for peace instead of ignoring formers and their family members is a more decolonized and Inuit, Metis and First Nations worldview of addressing VSMs in Canada, the USA and Europe. By being relational, inclusive, and community minded this could build sustainable peace in societies as people enjoy more freedom from violence.

Frank, a former Incel, realized the importance of relationships in his engagement in Incel. Frank describes the impact of relational rejection on him as a push factor into the Incel VSM in the following narrative:

I think the biggest contributing factor on that was probably just the fact that I kept getting rejected, and I don't think I actually had a girl agreed to go on a single date with me until I must have been 22 or 23. And then [I] couldn't get past the first date until, God, I don't know, like 2018. Because when I met my current girlfriend, so it was we hit about date three, it was the longest relationship, I've had my life.... I guess what the Incel stuff for

the most part, the goal, so I guess the goal was to not be celibate. I guess, technically [that was] the stated goal.

But the end game of it is to just build up further and further resentment with this kind of “its not my fault men are victims to women” kind of mentality. And ironically, the end game of it is you state that you want that physical relationship or any relationship, but ironically, the end game’s [is] to push you further and further into resentment and isolation.

For Frank, it was a struggle to cope with the rejection by women and his father had just died, and was not there to guide him as a role model. Frank’s story reminds us that youth like Frank need relationship systems in place (mentoring, therapy, youth groups) to respond to the situation nonviolently and constructively and also to build capacities about how to cultivate meaningful relationships with a loving partner. Now that Frank is disengaged and deradicalized from Incel, and has found a partner, he can see that Incel increased a sense of collective toxic masculinity in him that he blamed women for victimizing him, which ironically led to more isolation rather than relational success with women partners.

Consequently, Frank’s insights about the importance of family, school, and mental health systems shed light on how young men can learn to cope with rejection without violence, and it may further assist young men and boys to build positive, meaningful relationships with women. Weaving such a unique perspective as Frank’s into PVE, CVE, and rehabilitation efforts not only

dismantles patriarchy and toxic masculinity that harms women, but it also helps to divert young men away from VSMS like Incel. Pascale, Frank, and Ewa are also family members of formers whose stories highlight the need for family and social systems of support, belonging, healthy dialogue and the nonviolent management of conflict. By including family members' agency in deradicalization programs, we can better learn to build healthy relationships and systems so people like Frank do not seek out relationships with radical groups like Incel for mentoring and guidance.

Theme Three: Inclusion of Faith and Spiritual Leaders' Voices in PVE, CVE and

Rehabilitation Efforts

All the formers I interviewed had a spiritual community (n=7 all Christian) before entering their respective VSMSOs. Two of the seven formers I interviewed were now agnostic or atheist, but the majority had a spiritual belief and support community to aid them in their rehabilitation. Some literature has emerged to discuss the role of Christian leaders in helping ISIS supporters to deradicalize and convert to Christianity in Lebanon (Gustafson, 2021). This can be problematic as these Christian leaders have a clear agenda of conversion of the person they are "helping," even if the outcome to deradicalize from ISIS ideology is successful. More research is needed to discuss how Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, and other faith leaders could prevent and counter VSM ideologies and better assist in intervention and exit work.

Christian Leaders and PVE, CVE and Rehabilitation.

There is a paucity of research dedicated to understanding how Christian faith leaders can

prevent and counter VSM, while much more research has interrogated how they radicalize their followers into a VSM such as MAGA which is both political and a Christian Identity movement. This thesis fills the gap in research, as participants did comment on the power of religious leaders. For example, Stanislaw, a Polish former Neo Nazi, anti-Russia soccer hooligan talked about the importance of spiritual support when exiting his VSM in the following narrative:

Nothing could have prevented my involvement in the movement. There are not enough psychologists in Poland to work with vulnerable youngsters. I did eventually talk to a priest after exit and was a part of a Catholic group that was non-judgmental, and I felt safe. It was a bit too nationalistic, so I left that group. A practice I do now is pray to be non-judgmental to others....When communism fell in the 90s there was an empty space taken over by sports hooliganism while police focussed on organized crime and drugs.

There are not enough police in Poland. We got EU funding to train police, parole officers and border guards. There is no training for faith leaders, and in Poland, now young people are not into religion. Young people are trying to get answers.

An interpretation of Stanislaw's story is that it is important to train faith leaders, including Christian faith leaders, like priests and pastors in their seminaries but also as part of their ongoing professional development, to ensure that they are up to date on detecting signs of youth radicalization, how to dialogue without judgement, and to support their young people to build their identities, and to provide answers to the problems within their lives, without resorting to

VSM. Stanislaw makes a good point that young people may be less drawn into religion in Poland compared to other Catholic countries like Spain and Italy. That is why faith leaders are more relevant to youth who had a spiritual practice before their entry, or who converted as part of their involvement in their VSMO, like converts to Salafi Islam who joined ISIS from the Netherlands (Van San, 2015).

Similarly, Stanislaw's wife Ewa also acknowledged the importance of faith, including in the online space. In her story below, she discusses the power of online communities, and Poland's crisis of faith. She describes the large platform priests have in Poland to reach out to their congregations. She reported it as follows:

Poland has a crisis of faith. I think it is also because money and consumption is a new "god" now. People use Instagram now for self-improvement. Because of Stalinist communism and totalitarianism, religion became an asylum for people, as the government was against religion. But nowadays the religion is not "popular;" it is considered old-fashioned. But still, it can be a very powerful tool in rehabilitation as a priest has a big platform to use in that area and in general for good.

Ewa's narrative implies that when people, including youth, are exploring self-improvement, their spirituality and their online worlds, Catholic priests can help young people and adults to rehabilitate from VSM. Priests and other religious leaders may be able to offer both an in-person and online presence that helps young people find God and ways of being in the world, without becoming embroiled in violence in a far-right extremist group like the Neo Nazis or soccer

hooliganism, as Ewa's husband Stanislaw did when he was a youth.

Like Stanislaw and Ewa, Pat also noted the power of Christian leaders on VSMs. He is the director of an American NGO. Pat noted the intersection of religion and Christian or Catholic political nationalism in the following story:

I think they could I think, again, they'll choose not to, you know. We have, you know, particularly if you look up in Big Sky Country, you'd have a growing number of individuals largely based in churches who consider themselves white nationalists and consider their Christianity as part of their positionality. That's it, and those are the ones we know about, let alone those who are there that they don't necessarily identify. I think that religion, because of the role of anti-Semitism, obviously plays a very large role. But it can also be confusing. If you look just along religious lines, most Christians in the United States would say that "I am not a Christian, because I am a Catholic." I pray to false gods, because I will pray to the Virgin Mary, and I will pray to saints.

Yet, you can you see a very strong representation of Catholics and a lot of these groups, particularly groups like the Proud Boys, because there, you see, its missing. It becomes sacred, you know, the Italian background. And it becomes fascinating when these individuals don't necessarily recognize that the second coming of the Klan in the northeast New York City suburbs, was not in response to race; it was in response to Italians, Irish, and Jews leaving New York City and moving into the suburbs.

And so, I think religion is always going to be a part of that, you see, even more so now. You know, we've been training military personnel for the last 22 years to hunt and kill violent Islamists. We then bring back these individuals, we discharge them from military service. And the first thing that happens is these extremist groups try to recruit them, again, based on religion.

As Pat reports, in the USA, Christian faith leaders have the propensity to hold a massive influence on their congregations. This is why the intelligence and security services are monitoring mosques and Muslim charities funding sources in the U.K (Akram et al., 2021). If governments are going to monitor mosques, why not monitor Christian churches and their funding sources that may be linked to VSMS? If certain Christian and Catholic leaders' churches are funded by the government, and they are harming different outgroups with their far right extremist ideology and actions, their funding should be restricted and closely monitored. Moreover, Pat talks about both the violent far right and far left VSMS, and how religion, including synagogues, can assist in VSM-related prevention, intervention and rehabilitation of formers in the following narrative:

I think, and you're seeing now, the times get complicated. It's very easy for me to look at the violent far right. And even last year, I used to discount the violent far left because I would see their harm largely against buildings and institutions, not against other human beings. The last two months changed all of that, while you're seeing a rise in terms of far

right extremism in response to what's happening in Gaza. At the same time, I can tell you, we will see individuals that will come to us wanting to get out of the violent far right. And over time, they may become participants in the violent far left, particularly in Antifa. Or they may become participants in extreme religious [groups]. But it doesn't come as a surprise, because if you look culturally in these organizations as I said, you have these leaders who are responsible for making every decision about your life. They tell you when to wake up. They tell you when to go to bed. They tell you what to eat [and] because you went to work out what music to listen to, what jobs to have.

There are individuals that their personalities are beta personalities that respond to that sort of oversight. And as a result, extremists' religions will also play that same role. And individuals will justify that "as long as I'm not harming others, it's okay." But I think, you see, some religions will try to address this, you see. Many of the sort of Unitarian or non-denominational churches will particularly want to be involved in these sorts of discussions. You will see because of the direct threat to them, you will see a lot of synagogues that will try to [and] want to take on these issues, particularly with regard to violent anti-Semitism. But you're getting into very touchy ground when we're talking about politics and religion in the United States.

And the simple fact is, you know, we've, in the last decade in the United States, you know. We've gone from if you were if you held extremist ideology, you kept this

largely to yourself. You kept it in the closet, unless you were with your fellow man. As a result of activities over the last seven or eight years [Trumpism and MAGA] it is now perfectly acceptable to be “out” with your violent extremist ideology. And, you know, one can say that, you know, we probably have a third of this country that holds [a] political ideology that aligns with some of that extremist ideology and have a great overlap of those individuals with those who are active practicing Christians. So, you know, when you start having those institutions, they put themselves at risk.

An interpretation of Pat’s story is that training Christian and Jewish faith leaders to understand the role of anti-Semitism, and how to practice faith and political expression in non-harmful ways is crucial to building a sustainable peace that is inclusive.

A key finding here is that because Christian faith leaders often influence the day to day lives of people at risk of entering VSM, or those that are exiting their VSM (also see Lewis, 2014; Peter, 2013), they could be used to divert people away from VSMs. This could be done through their preaching, pastoral counselling, and online messaging that promotes peace, pluralism, and nonviolence. If Christian leaders want to preach violence like some Evangelical preachers who support the Trump and the MAGA movement in their sermons (Fitzgerald, 2017), their churches should be monitored and their funding restricted, such as removing their tax-free exemption status.

Muslim Faith Leaders and PVE, CVE and Rehabilitation.

The research literature has previously discussed the role of Imams in helping people to

divert and deradicalize from political, violent Islamist VSMS such as Britain's Radical Middle Way Project that trains British Imams and invites non-fundamentalist Muslim scholars to talk about the importance of British Muslims to everyday life in the U.K. (Lewis, 2014; Peter, 2013). The project endeavors to teach participants how to improve and depolarize the relationship between British Muslims and non-Muslims as part of reducing political, violent Islamism, and its accompanying partner, British Islamophobia (Lewis, 2014). The theme of including and training Muslim, Jewish, and Christian faith leaders emerged inductively from the data as part of PVE, CVE and rehabilitation efforts to move people away from violent interpretations of their faith, and to assist people find positive, non-extreme faith relationships.

As an example of the power of Muslim leaders to prevent VSMS, Siri describes different leaders in the Danish Mosque she attended in the story below. Siri describes leaders who could have a facilitative and teaching role in gender specific groups as well as outside the mosque setting. She reported on the issue in the following manner:

So, it would be almost like a story time in the mosque. So, the men would have a stage and everything....And then there's a microphone handed to someone, and he tells the story to the men in the room, and then by proxy in the back, because we [the women's group] hear it. And, again, as I said, I believe these are real stories because we know that the police are biased. We know like, what he says is supported by, you know, the

research we have. And what I do today is very much still a push back against the racialization of Muslims in Denmark, like my reason like that focus hasn't changed for me... I think its a good question. It was very much.... So, when people go there, to this group, it did feel like very depth conversations.

But it's also a performance. Because I wasn't Muslim. I'd never been, never converted. I was still accepted there. As long as I said the right things. Because deep down inside, what appealed to me kind of was the feminist. It was the elevation of women that appealed to me, that's always appealed to me. It still appeals to me, but not in the same way, obviously. So, I think we all could agree on these fundamental things. But of course, there was conflict between individual women, but that was never brought into this mosque room, ever.

Beyond the need for training non-extremist Imams and having Muslim scholars work with them, Siri's story illustrates that it is also important for government funded trainers and monitors to attend different programs inside the mosque like men's and women's groups, where stories that may lead to violence are shared among the participants that creates a real crucible of learning.

Conclusion

Chapter eight's findings suggest that leadership training may be provided to religious leaders so that they recognize signs of possible radicalization and extremism among the larger congregation as well as amid smaller groups so that they can deploy appropriate intervention methods, such as digital and in person fatwas [prohibitions] that cite Qur'anic verses that preach

against violent extremism and terrorism (Karimi, 2017). The findings in this chapter support the value of involving rehabilitated former extremists and their family members in designing and implementing prevention, intervention and rehabilitation efforts in response to violent extremist movements.

Additionally, these findings support the idea of educational institutions and governmental systems providing ongoing training, monitoring and funding to Christian, Muslim and Jewish faith leaders and their group leaders who support political and faith expressions that are nonviolent to people outside of their congregations. As many Inuit, Metis and First Nations communities already know, youth and adults who look to their faith leaders for guidance, beliefs, values and day to day actions are very influenced by the power of faith leaders to build nonviolent, sustainable peace in European and North American societies.

Contrary to what Tapley and Clubb (2013), and Papatheodorou (2023) state in their work, including formers and their families to share their nonviolence ideas plus their plans for facilitating sustainable peace not only helps to integrate them back into society, but it also helps to build a society that more deeply understands the systemic causes of and solutions to VSMs. For people and communities of faith, the training, monitoring and funding of faith leaders who seek peace and safety for all and not just for some is also integral to sustainable peacebuilding and to effective prevention, intervention and rehabilitation of people embedded in VSMs in North America and Europe.

Critical Autoethnographic Reflection

If the Mormon faith I was raised in preached equity for women, all genders, races and sexual orientations, I think my parents and I would still be involved today and would not have sought answers through religious extremism. Mormonism does not practice full equity and inclusion, and the leaders are predominantly white wealthy men who wield power over women and girls, racialized people, and any 2SLGBTQI+ people in their congregations. The intense patriarchy of Mormonism repelled my mother and made her vulnerable to recruitment into a New Age apocalyptic ideology and cult. The cult's leader, Sven promised her and my family that women and girls were special, like the promises Siri experienced with her group in the mosque.

However, like Siri, all the women and girls in our cult were oppressed by men holding extremist and misogynist attitudes while practicing behaviour that ended up being very violent and patriarchal, racist, and transphobic to others. Now, my mother and I seek spiritual comfort and community in a rural Christian church that is committed to social justice and peace, and is led by a Black pastor, who works to be an ally to women and queer people. This helps to keep me and my family accountable to building peace, equity and nonviolence in society for all.

Chapter Nine

Conclusion and Recommendations

Introduction

The most poignant moments of travel to Europe for data collection, were when I was walking through the streets of Berlin, which is so modern and full of interesting art, delicious smelling coffee shops, and a vibrant university culture. As I travelled throughout Germany, I thought about Adolf Hitler who once commanded those streets and large swathes of Europe. Why did he become so violent? How I wished I could have helped him before he harmed so many. I also reflected about all the hundreds of thousands of people who followed him, and who were recruited, radicalized and acted out his violent ideologies in Germany and Europe. I pondered how Hitler's ideologies persist long after his death, and why people still follow them now in Canada, and the USA. I thought about all the Jews, homosexuals, disabled people, Roma, liberals, socialists, and political prisoners who were massacred by violent extremism in the Holocaust, including around what is now Poland. As I rode the train from Germany to Poland, I thought of the millions who were traumatized and killed by violent extremist conflicts and exterminated in camps. I grieved for all the lost souls as I heard the Polish chatter echoing around me in the train car.

Violent social movements can have deadly, far-reaching and transnational consequences

when polarized group think takes over and violence is used to achieve a groups' goals and in protecting or changing a societal cultural norm. Chapter nine, the conclusion, discusses the overall key findings, and provides recommendations for peacebuilding policies and praxis at the micro, meso and macro levels of society in Canada, the USA, and Europe to better prevent and intervene into violent social movements in the form of terrorism and extremism. The conclusion reflects upon of the significance of the research and explores implications for future research.

Overall Key Findings

1. Complex and Intersecting Micro, Meso and Macro Drivers

The first key overall finding is that there are complex and intersecting micro, meso and macro drivers that cause people to enter and exit from violent social movements in Canada, the USA, and Europe. By taking a systemic and intersectional approach, systems can think about micro, meso and macro causes to one's engagement in VSM, and also micro, meso and macro factors that will facilitate disengagement from VSM.

Several participants said there are no "one size fits all" answers to the problem of violent extremism and terrorism. This aligns with Social Cubism (Byrne & Carter, 2002) theory that proposes that multiple and varying pieces of the puzzle are involved when violent extremism is surging in communities.

Intersections of identity are involved in the complexity of humans and their violent

conflicts embedded within Canadian, American and European VSMs. Religious extremism like political, violent Islamism and MAGA have an intersection of political nationalism, that together creates voting power and collective power, that risks “structural, direct and cultural violence” (Galtung, 1996). Clean categories are being replaced with what some participants called salad bar extremism. Using intersectionality is a more helpful way to conceptualize the dimensions of multiple identities, and how these intersecting identities enter into and out of VSMs. For example, Royar, who works with immigrant, Muslim Canadian youth, stated that some youth have supported ISIS because Da’esh represents an intersection of political and religious power. The power of ISIS is that it has represented a strong stance against Islamophobia, racism, and colonialism in the Middle East, a stance resonates with some youth experiencing continual racism and Islamophobia in Canada.

2. Unmet Needs as Unresolved Conflicts

A second key overall finding is the relationship of unmet needs to conflict (Azar, 2003). As discussed in Chapter 5, study data generated a word cloud (Figure 5) that illustrated themes about what people think and know that influences their patterns of violence against groups. The qualitative data suggests that intrapersonal struggles like untreated neurodiversity, mental health trauma, traumatic loss, and intergenerational transmission of trauma (McGoldrick & Walsh, 2011) increase the likelihood of interpersonal and intergroup struggles, and a tendency for people to polarize and seek an ingroup to meet one’s needs, as conflict is directed and discharged against the outgroup or othered scapegoat to alleviate their struggles and grievances.

3. VSM as A Systemic Group Think Conflict

The thesis findings also suggest that deradicalization NGOs need to understand the intersection of group think identity (Tsintsadze-Maas & Maass, 2014) that influences movement members consumption of ideology. Specifically, NGOs should address how group think is impacting a extremists' beliefs, values and conflict behaviour when they engage with VSMO ideology. In addition, fighting, and intergroup and intragroup identity conflict behaviours in families, schools, communities and war zones create polarized group beliefs and values. An example is how current neo-Nazi and Reichberger groups are influenced by Hitler, and Nazi law in their group beliefs and values in Germany.

Moreover, the axiologies, epistemologies, ontologies, and the cosmologies of violent social movements are perpetuated through online and in person propaganda by recruiters using online and offline strategies. Recruiters seek to appeal to the unmet needs of people who want those radical needs meet, and their needs for power appeased by the violent system formed through the VSM. Therefore, it is critical that micro systems like individuals, and families, and meso systems like faith, mental health, criminal justice, and political systems think about how to meet citizens needs in a meaningfully way, so that VSMS are not used to try and meet their needs. Several participants also noted that violent extremism and terrorism will always exist, because of individual's ongoing needs, and also due to the intelligence of recruiters who know

how to target vulnerable people and present themselves as the solution to addressing their needs.

In response to the main research questions of what drives people in and out of violent social movements is the finding that rural and urban faith, social, family, political, educational systems that promote epistemological thinking and behaviour that elevates polarized, hegemonic, xenophobic and sexist power relationships increase the likelihood of entry into VSMs. An example is Tom, Staszek, Siri, Jonathan, Frank, Lauren and Jason growing up in settler colonial white communities where hegemonic sexism, toxic masculinity, and violence are used to deal with bullying and identity conflicts.

Recommendations for Future Research and Practice

1. Peacebuilding Praxis-Recommendations for Programs Online and In Person

Multisystemic cooperation can be established through networks like the Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN). RAN is a transnational network specifically designed to engage police, NGOs, mental health providers, schools, policymakers, government, security agencies, and researchers in an online space to share best practices, including NGOs that are staffed with formers. It is important for an online forum to be focused on deradicalization expert's specialization in their region. However, it is also crucial to engage all stakeholders in brief online monthly meetings to review online face to face new trends in VSMs, develop best practices and collaboratively create solutions that can be informed to address VSMOs in their regions. A monthly meeting could also occur between those with specific specializations transnationally

like deradicalization NGOs from Europe, Canada, and the USA sharing ideas to build peace transnationally and cooperatively and through regular dialogue, as the evidence of this study suggests we do.

I am interested in proposing this idea to the Radicalisation Awareness Network, who could then engage with other systems and networks like the Canadian Practitioner's Network for the Prevention of Violent Extremism (CPN-PREV), which uses a multisectoral approach in its deradicalization work. As the evidence of this study suggests, regional networks are crucial, however, there are few regular calls for online stakeholder meetings by CPN-PREV or the Radicalisation Network that involves all multiple key stakeholders and sectors. The RAN and CPN-PREV organizing conferences are helpful, but are large scale events that are not frequent enough to communicate and create action plans more regularly. More regular online meetings and communication could be inclusive, and more frequent, to address important issues arising in rural and urban communities, where VSMs are flourishing.

The participants also discussed complex and multiple needs and conflicts that propel marginalized people into VSMs in Canada, the USA, and Europe. Therefore, when developing deradicalization policies, prevention and intervention programs as well as micro, meso and macro systemic responses, it is crucial to find out what individuals, families, schools, mental health systems, and communities need to transform their intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup and intergroup conflicts. People's needs may be better met using this type of integrative

approach so they don't seek out violent social movement's ideologies and groups to meet those needs and resolve their intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts.

The findings from Jason, Siri, Royar, Vebi and Tom, also suggest that training formers in programs such as an online certificate program, could increase skills at decolonization, dismantling toxic masculinity, racism, and building women's empowering, needs assessments and creating rehabilitation that helps clients to meet needs in constructive, non-violent ways, family interventions, bullying interventions, dialogue and conflict resolution skills,

2. Recommendations for Systemic Approaches to Interpersonal and Intergroup

Conflict Transformation and Intervening into Groupthink

Government, family, mental health, school, faith and NGO systems should better cooperate to determine VSM management policies, procedures and conflict resolution skills through respectful relationship building to assist in the depolarization and humanization of the "other," and inclusive powersharing dialogue, that makes space for multiple racial, cultural, gender, sexual, faith, and political identities.

Moreover, criminal justice systems are meso systems that can assist a person to leave VSMs hard power approaches like imprisonment to help a person get away from the group think and to experience negative consequences to their choice to remain in the movement. Police and prison staff do need specialized training to aid people in disengaging with both hard and soft approaches.

Family, school, faith, mental health, NGO and political systems can also build nonviolent relationships, dialogue and be of assistance to the person to critically think about their engagement in VSMs. The aforementioned stakeholders can intervene in group think by aiding youth and adults to critically evaluate their group think. By building doubt about the movement's ideology and leadership and deconstructing group think, a formerly radicalized person can begin to build an individuated identity, and develop nonviolent ways to rehabilitate themselves from trauma, the effects of war, and challenges related to untreated trauma, mental health, and neurodiversity, like ADHD and autism.

Communities, schools as well as mental health and faith systems can also assist people to build healthy, nonviolent relationships that provide a sense of love, intimacy and belonging, and find ways to seek an integrative power that includes cross identity dialogue so that individuals can learn to respect each other's humanity and needs.

3. Recommendations for Rights-Based Transforming Colonial Patriarchy

Decolonization and indigenization can only occur in macro systems like the government, and meso systems like schools, the police, as well as faith and mental health systems when they listen to local Inuit, Metis and First Nations communities and their distinct needs. In Canada, all the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action and MMIWG2S+ Calls to Justice that are human rights based must be implemented in full at every level of society. In the USA, each state in the union should make space for Native Americans' distinct needs for reconciliation, reparations, and justice. In Europe, each Inuit, Metis and First Nations nation that has been harmed by colonization and occupation should be heard by those states so that their needs for reparation and

justice are met. In addition, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Inuit, Metis and First Nations Peoples should be fully integrated into all member states policies throughout the Global North and South. This may reduce violent social movements that act as resistance to state oppression like, for example, Staszek's joining anti-Russian far right groups in Poland.

Women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ people also need states to complete reparations, and be heard on their need for reparations, equity and justice. This means that all states throughout the Global South and Global North must fully implement the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) into its policies. For 2SLGBTQI+ people, a convention protecting all queer identities should be implemented in every United Nations member state's constitutions. Leaving Inuit, Metis and First Nations people, women, and 2SLGBTQI+ people to the whims of whomever is in political power renders these individual's vulnerable to the loss of their human rights that is evidenced in the claw back of 2SLGBTQI+ and reproductive rights in the USA. For example, former President and Republican Party Presidential nominee Donald Trump supports the Heritage Foundation's Project 25's mandate to eliminate the rights of the LGBTQ+ community.

Implementing these laws and policies might assist women like Siri and Lauren to feel less oppressed as girls and young women because of their gender and their sexuality as oppression drove them into VSMOs where they felt valued as women. In addition, Mimi and Vebi discussed how their clients were drawn into ISIS by their husbands, so it would be important to ensure that

women and girls have full access to education and be fully aware of their human rights in order to build capacities that help divert other women like Mimi and Bebi away from VSMS.

4. Recommendation for Regional and Adaptive Micro, Meso, Macro and Transnational Systemic Approaches

This thesis echoes the importance of regional efforts that examines the factors that are causing violent social movements in specific communities (United Nations, 2020). This also aligns with PACS critical emancipatory peacebuilding theory (Thiessen, 2010) that rejects IKEA neoliberal peacebuilding models that ignore local people and their wisdom (Byrne, 2023; Mac Ginty, 2008) and instead looks to grassroots voices and local resources to analyze violent conflicts happening in violent social movements, and to collaborate on conflict transformation solutions that work for those individuals in these specific regions.

For example, VSMS like neo-Nazism, Incel, ISIS and Sovereign Citizens among others are transnational and have penetrated borders throughout the Global North, including Canada, the USA and Europe. Therefore, an international strategy is needed to address the contagion of violence across borders. Hybrid adaptive models like Cedric de Conings's (2020) idea of adaptive peace operations can be used to develop international PVE and CVE policies to address VSMS. De Coning proposes that this is done through dialogue and inductive iterative learning from people in the system to find out what is needed to build self-sustainable and long lasting peace (de Coning, 2020) in local and international relationships.

State governments must also use a multi-track peacebuilding system that resources permanent funding to the multiple stakeholders like rural and urban governments, NGOs, mental health, prison, police, faith and school systems to develop clear policy on violence prevention for extremism, sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) equity, as well as anti-bullying and cross identity conflict programs. Regular meetings between all these multiple stakeholders to communicate and share best practices, trends, and needs for resourcing are key to overall systemic cooperation to successfully address youth deradicalization.

Moreover, gun and weapons control policies could also limit people's access to violent extremist engagement. Access to guns coupled with untreated mental health and neurodiversity, is dangerous for urban and rural communities in Canada, the USA and Europe, as Tom and Jason discussed in their stories. Therefore, well managed mental health and neurodiversity treatment and rehabilitation programs that target people at risk of VSMSs would ensure that people are safer and less likely to use gun violence in their VSMSO actions.

Also, having clear policies for political parties to be disqualified from campaigning and being elected when they perpetuate hate speech, or the scapegoating of a faith, ethnic, cultural, gender, racial "other" or use language that opposes individual's human rights would ensure that the political process is fair and nonviolent as well as inclusive of multiple identities.

Limitations and Significance of the Research

Some limitations of this thesis research are the lack of Inuit, Metis and First Nations participants and having more American informants included in the study. Having more U.S. participants in the sample population would have added to a more robust data set to help us better understand what might better assist U.S. micro, meso, and macro systems to prevent and intervene in extremist and terrorist violent social movements.

Another limitation of the research is the struggle with language which is rife in extremist and terrorist studies with debates over “one man’s extremist is another man’s freedom fighter.” Especially given the impact of colonization on the patterns of VSM, it was difficult to find wording in recruitment posters and invitation letters that did not offend people, such as in the case of an NGO staff member in Northern Ireland that took issue with the word violent extremist. In hindsight, perhaps more participants affected by colonization like Northern Irish and Inuit, Metis and First Nations peoples may have participated in this study if I had used the word activist in the recruitment material. However, some marginalized communities are over researched and are dealing with research fatigue.

That said, the significance of this research is that by using mixed member participants who are formers from a plethora of far-right organizations, it strengthens the argument for viewing VSMs through a conflict frame because they have unresolved internal and external conflicts. Therefore, family, school, mental health, political, and faith systems can collaborate together and build their capacities to manage individual members’ internal (intrapersonal), and

external conflicts (intragroup and intergroup) to assist in conflict transformation. It is also important for these same systems to dismantle hegemonic colonized patriarchies and facilitate cross-identity relationships to build relationships wherein power is shared, and conflict is transformed without the abuse of power or violence.

Critical Autoethnographical Reflection

Had schools, mental health professionals and faith systems been more aware of the signs of radicalization, violent extremism, and had clear policies and procedures to help engage and dialogue with, and depolarize my family members and I, we may have been successfully diverted away from violent extremism when I was a teenager. Had my school engaged my siblings and I and my parents, along with child protection systems, we may have had a chance to be talked out of what was going on. People knew what was happening in our family, school and community, but likely no one knew what to do about it. I mourn regularly for my family members who are lost to violent extremism. I have tried repeatedly to engage them over the years, as have some of my extended family members. The shame of what they have engaged in that includes abandoning my mother and I and choosing violent extremism over us is so vast and painful that I think it is easier for them to avoid the conflict between us by staying away. The thesis research has provided me through the wisdom and knowledge of my research participants some ideas about trying to re-engage with one of my siblings, and to ensure I approach that person with humility, compassion, benevolence and an attitude of peace and humanity to help them step back from the

abyss of group think to critically explore what violent extremism has provided them with as well as to realize what was taken away from them.

I also must accept that assisting people to exit violent far right organizations is done best with people who really want to exit them. If my family members do not want to leave these groups then that is their choice, as peace is not built by unwilling participants who refuse to come to the table. I am so grateful that I got myself and my mother out of the organization that we were trapped within, as I know I would be dead by now, as the cult leader desired that I take my own life.

Conclusion

This study has been successful in discovering some of the drivers of entry into and out of violent social movements and in exploring more micro, meso and macro recommendations for peacebuilding and conflict management. More research on formers is needed in European, African, Asian, and Latin and North American countries so that intervention and prevention strategies are impactful, and for cooperative networks to be inclusive.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent



Research Project Title: *Former's Understandings of Why They Engaged with and Disengaged from Violent Social Movements in Settler-Colonial North America and Europe*

Research Project Purpose and Objectives:

This study will focus on adult former extremists who have disengaged for at least two years from violent social movements or groups in Canada, the US, and Europe. Violent extremism in the form of resistance groups and movements may have been used to uphold power relationships or resist power relationships in society. The researcher is a PhD Candidate and a former extremist who was in a religiously- motivated violent extremist group as an adolescent. The purpose of the research is hearing former extremists' stories individually and collectively in a mixed-member talking circle/focus group to understand why they engaged with and then disengaged from violent groups and social movements and what they think is needed to build peace together at the community, NGO, and governmental sectors of society. The purpose of the research is also to include adult family members of former violent extremists as well as staff and volunteers who work with formers to understand why formers engaged with and disengaged from violent social movements.

The objective of this research to 1) engage in respectful dialogue about how to build sustainable peace for races, genders, sexual orientations, classes and ethnicities/nations in settler-colonial North America and Europe so that violence is not needed in groups and social movements, and 2) generate ideas and solutions for intersectional policies and peacebuilding programs that settler-colonial communities (families, education, faith systems), NGOs and governments (local, provincial/state, federal) can use to better prevent, intervene and rehabilitate people who have been involved in violent extremism.

Researcher Name and Contact Information: Tara Sheppard-Luangkhot, PhD Candidate, University of Manitoba, and email sheppard@myumanitoba.ca. **The researcher's PhD advisor is Sean Byrne, Ph.D., Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Manitoba, 204-474-7979, sean.byrne@umanitoba.ca if you have any concerns.**

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Study Procedure:

I am inviting you to participate in an in-depth Zoom audio or video or in person interview and/or talking circle/focus group about your experience as a former extremist whose movement or group may have used violence in their goals and activities. **You are free to decline the invitation to this study.**

Zoom Interviews

For the Zoom audio talking circle/focus group it will be audio only, with no cameras on and pseudonyms will be used by all participants in their Zoom display names to help protect confidentiality.

Inperson Interviews

The individual interview will take 45-60 minutes of your time. The interview will consist of structured and unstructured questions to provide you the opportunity to share what you feel comfortable sharing about the topic. You will be asked questions about your identity, your experiences as they relate to your identity during your time in the violent extremist group or movement and supports that helped you to leave. You will choose a pseudonym to protect your identity. You will be asked your ideas about how to better prevent violent extremism and build peace in societies so that violence is not used.

There is a possibility that the type of information you share with the researcher could be subject to legal subpoena whether you live in the USA, Canada or Europe. A court or law enforcement officials may subpoena research records containing confidential information if they are viewed as material to court proceedings. The University of Manitoba and/or researcher may be required by law to disclose it. Therefore, please only share what you are comfortable to share with the researcher or those in the talking circle/focus group and be aware of not compromising your legal safety.

The interview will be recorded digitally on the researcher's password-protected device and stored in secure ways to ensure your privacy is upheld. The interview and talking circle/focus

group will then be transcribed. You will have the opportunity via email to review and confirm or change any of the individual interview information contained therein, to protect confidentiality of talking circle/focus group, transcript review will not be available

Identifiable data will be destroyed or rendered coded as soon as it is no longer necessary to link data with individual participants, which will approximately be 12/31/2023. The digital file will be deleted in a secure way and the transcript will be kept for up to 5 years after the completion of this research project, which will be 08/2028 No one will be permitted access to the transcript without your expressed and written consent. Your real name and any identifiable information will be masked in the final research report, including the name of the group or movement you were previously engaged in, to further ensure anonymity. If desired, this final report can be emailed to you at the completion of the study by 12/31/2023.

Talking Circle/Focus Group

The Zoom audio talking circle/focus group will take 120 minutes of your time. You will use the pseudonym that you chose for the individual interview. During talking circle/focus group, I will keep everything that is shared confidential, and I will not share it with anyone. However, I cannot guarantee that other participants will not share what is said during the talking circle. There is a possibility that the type of information you share with the researcher and talking circle/focus group members could be subject to legal subpoena whether you live in the USA, Canada or Europe. A court or law enforcement officials may subpoena research records containing confidential information if they are viewed as material to court proceedings. The University of Manitoba and/or researcher may be required by law to disclose it. Therefore, please only share what you are comfortable to share and be aware of not compromising your legal safety.

The talking circle/focus group will be recorded digitally on the researcher's password-protected device and stored in secure ways to ensure your privacy is upheld The interview or talking circle/focus group will then be transcribed. Identifiable data will be destroyed as soon as it is no longer necessary to link data with individual participants, which will approximately be 08/2028 The digital file will be deleted in a secure way and the transcript will be kept in a university drive for up to 5 years after the completion of this research project, which will be 08/2028. No one will be permitted access to the transcript without your expressed and written consent.

Risks:

The potential harms of the study could include remembering traumatic events from your past or describing a difficult situation. Although no questions are intended to make you feel uncomfortable in any way, should you find yourself uncomfortable with a question that is asked, you do not need to answer the question and you can also withdraw from the interview or talking

circle/focus group at any time. **You will be encouraged to use community supports to help you, if you need further support after the interview or talking circle/focus group.** If a violent crime is disclosed to me such as homicide or child abuse, the researcher has a duty to report the disclosure to local authorities. As mentioned above, there is a possibility that the type of information you share with the researcher could be subject to legal subpoena whether you live in the USA, Canada or Europe. A court or law enforcement officials may subpoena research records containing confidential information if they are viewed as material to court proceedings. The University of Manitoba and/or researcher may be required by law to disclose it. Therefore, please only share what you are comfortable to share and be aware of not compromising your legal safety.

Though pseudonyms and only audio will be used in the talking circle/focus group, it is a mixed member group of former violent extremists, so there may be conflict in individual's ideas and beliefs. The researcher will stop the conversation if there is conflict to encourage participants to be respectful, to take breaks or leave the circle, if necessary.

Benefits:

There are no direct benefits to participating in this study. However, many people enjoy participating in social science research of this type. You will learn about the process of conducting research. You may benefit by knowing that you are contributing to an understanding of why people engage in and then disengage from violent extremism in settler-colonial societies, as well as how to build long lasting peace in societies so that violence is not used. As well, your contribution may inform recommendations for communities, NGOs, and governments to help build policies and programs that better help to prevent, intervene in, and rehabilitate people who have been engaged in violent extremism.

Questions:

The focus of the questions is for you to share your experience as a former member of a violent extremist group and/or movement, or as a family member of a former or NGO staff or volunteer who works with formers. Questions will be based on understanding what caused formers to engage with and disengage from violent extremist groups and/or movements and what society could do better to build peace among races, genders, classes, sexual orientations, and ethnicities/nations so that violence can decrease. You are welcome to request the questions in advance to help you decide if you are comfortable answering them.

Confidentiality:

Your confidentiality will be carefully protected throughout the study and no identifying names or markers will be used in the final research report. The interview will be recorded through a

digital, password protected audio recording tool, which will generate a digital audio file that will be stored on the researcher's password-protected device then transferred to a secure university drive. The interview file will be transcribed, at which point you will have the opportunity to review and confirm or change any of the information contained therein. You will be contacted within 5 weeks of the interview and/or talking circle/focus group, via email to review the transcript and you will have two weeks to review it. If the researcher does not hear back after two weeks' time, I will assume that you have approved the transcript. Once approved, identifiable data will be destroyed or coded as soon as it is no longer necessary to link data with individual participants, which will approximately be 12/31/2023. **The transcripts will be stored on a secure, university drive and coded with code names.** No one other than the researcher and my advisor will have access to the data. All files, digital and otherwise, will be destroyed five years after the research study has been completed (08/2028). The University of Manitoba may look at the research records to ensure it has been done in a safe and proper way. Only in cases where Canadian or US Law requires us to break confidentiality, such as in cases of child abuse or neglect and imminent harm to yourself and others, or if the researcher's records are subpoenaed for legal proceedings, will your confidentiality be broken.

Dissemination

Research results will be codenamed and will be used in the researcher's dissertation for the purposes of completion of the Ph.D and available to read in MSpace after the dissertation is completed. Research results will also be anonymized and may also be published in a journal or book, with the purpose of providing knowledge on how to build non-violent, sustainable peace in the USA and Canada.

Individual participants will be referred to by the pseudonym they chose; this will be done to emphasize a point the PI is making in the publication. For example, Sheila said that the best way to build sustainable peace is "for families, schools, and governments to include girls and women's needs." Direct quotes will be used in order to reflect the participant's actual wording. As the researcher does not want to impose a culturally inappropriate name, the researcher will check with the participant about using a pseudonym that will in no way identify them. If the researcher is concerned when reviewing data that the pseudonym could lead to identification, the researcher will attempt to choose a culturally appropriate new pseudonym.

Feedback:

Your real name and any identifiable information will be masked in the final research report, including the name of the group or movement you were previously engaged in, to further ensure anonymity. If desired, this final report can be emailed to you at the completion of the study by 12/31/20.

Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation is voluntary. You can choose whether to be in this study or not, and you are not required to accept the invitation to participate. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind by telling the researcher verbally or by Zoom chat, during the interview or talking circle/focus group. If the participant does not fit the inclusion criteria (an adult former violent extremist who disengaged at least two years ago from the movement) and this is discovered during data collection, the interview and their participation in the talking circle/focus group would be stopped by the researcher and their data will not be used. Any transcript or recording will be shredded, deleted and destroyed.

You may exercise the option of removing your data from the study no later than 12/31/23 in which case any data you provided will be erased and eliminated from future analysis. You may also refuse to answer questions you don't want to answer and remain in the study. If you decide you would like to have your data removed from this study, you can email the primary researcher (sheppart@myumanitoba.ca) and state that you are withdrawing from the study and to remove your data from the study **no later than 12/31/2023**. Transcripts will be sent to interview participants electronically for their approval. Withdrawing from the study is no longer possible **after 12/31/2023**. All the transcripts that will be used in the research will be coded with code names.

Rights of Research Participants:

You may withdraw your consent at any time and refuse the invitation or discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. This study has been reviewed and received ethics approval through the Human Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry campus. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator at 204-474-7122, or e-mail humanethics@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you via email to keep for your records and reference.

Possible Resources:

There are support services available to you if you experience distress as a result of completing the interview or talking circle/focus group.

Canada

Families Affected by Violent Extremism Canada. Fave.director@gmail.com

Residential School Support Line 1-866-925-4419

Native Women's Association of Canada Elder's Support 1-613-722-3033

Black Line 1-800-604-5841 Canadian Mental Health Crisis Line 1-833-456-4566 or text 45645

Quebec Crisis Line 1-866-277-3533

USA

Exit USA. 1-312-248-3455

National Alliance on Mental Illness 1-800-950-6264 or text Helpline

Europe

Finland

Emergency 112 Suicide Hotline 010 195 202

Germany

Emergency 112 Suicide Hotline 0800 111 0 111

Hungary

Emergency 112 Suicide Hotline 116123

Ireland Emergency 116123 Suicide Hotline +4408457909090

Netherlands Emergency 112 Suicide Hotline 900 0113

Norway Emergency 112 Suicide Hotline +4781533300

Radicalisation Awareness Network +31 (0)20 463 5050.

Switzerland Emergency 112 Suicide Hotline 143

United Kingdom Emergency 112 Suicide Hotline 0800 689 5652

Consent Signatures

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you

prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation. The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry campus. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Officer at 204-474-7122 or HumanEthics@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

By signing below you agree to participate in this study and you affirm that you are aware that you could be directly quoted but a pseudonym will be used and your name, location and group involvement will be kept confidential.

Date:

Name:

Signature:

Would you like to participate in the interview and/or focus group or both? Circle all that apply.

Zoom Interview

Zoom Talking circle/Focus Group

In person Interview

Do you agree to swear an oath of confidentiality to keep all participants information confidential due to the risk it may pose to you or other participants if you breach their confidentiality?

a) Yes

b) No

Do you agree to be audio recorded? If you do not wish to have the interview recorded I would like to make some notes of our conversation.

a) Yes

b) No

If you do not wish to have the interview audio recorded, I would like to make some notes of our conversation. Are you comfortable with me doing that?

a) Yes

b) No

Would you like a copy of the final research report?

a) Yes

b) No

If yes, how would you like to receive the report? Please provide your email addresses so that I can send you the report.

A summary of the research report will be sent to all participants by **12/31/23**.

Appendix B

Recruitment Poster



Former's Understandings of Why They Engaged with and Disengaged from Violent Social Movements in Settler-Colonial North America and Europe.

An Invitation to Participate in a Research Study

Do you identify as an adult (19+) who was formerly involved in violent extremism and has left for at least two years? Are you a staff member or volunteer who works with formers? Are you an adult family member of an adult former violent extremist who has disengaged for at least two years?

Would you like to be able to share your experiences in a research project that helps to build peace in North America and Europe?

I would like to invite you to be a part of a PhD dissertation research study that I am conducting to better understand what causes people to engage with and then disengage from violent extremism. Participants will also discuss how to build peace in North America. **Your information will be anonymized and kept confidential for your safety**, and your experiences and responses could identify professional, personal, and social strategies that may be useful to prevent violent extremism and encourage people to have their needs met in nonviolent, peaceful ways.

You will need to complete a **45-minute Zoom or in person interview and/or 160-minute Zoom focus** group/talking circle that is facilitated by a former extremist and will consist of open-ended questions. The focus of the questions is for study participants to share their understandings of why they got into and out of violent extremism, and how communities can build peace in North America and Europe. If you have questions or would like participate, please contact Tara Sheppard-Luangkhot, PhD Candidate calling/texting +1-204-880-3285 or by email at sheppard@myumanitoba.ca to learn of additional details and ask questions.

Confidentiality will be strictly maintained in this research study. This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry campus. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, you may contact 204-474-7122, or e-mail humanethics@umanitoba.ca.

I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you for your consideration.

Tara Sheppard-Luangkhot, PhD Candidate

Peace and Conflict Studies Program, University of Manitoba

PhD Advisor Dr. Sean Byrne at +1-204-474-7979 Sean.Byrne@umanitoba.ca

Appendix C

Recruitment Letter



Welcome to the Former's Understandings of Why They Engaged with and Disengaged from Violent Social Movements in Settler-Colonial North America and Europe research project!

I would like to invite you to be a part of a PhD dissertation research study that I am conducting to better understand what causes people to engage with and then disengage from violent extremism. Participants will also discuss how to build peace in North America and Europe. Your information will be anonymized, and your experiences and responses could identify professional, personal, and social strategies that may be useful to prevent violent extremism and encourage people to have their needs met in nonviolent, peaceful ways. The Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry campus has approved this research.

This project aims to shed light on how to build peace in North American by understanding what causes people to engage with and then disengage from violent activist groups and/or social movements. Due to a scarcity of research that explores the impact of colonialism, patriarchy, and what mixed group former violent extremists say about the best ways to prevent and intervene into violent social movements in North American and European settler colonial societies, this research study will explore the understand what drives Canadian, American and European former violent extremist and to enter and then exit violent groups and/or social movements and what they collectively think is the best way to build peace and nonviolent social movements in North America and Europe. This is significant to find ways that governments, NGOs, and communities could better reduce the violence caused by violent extremism but also to explore if former violent extremists think racial, class, sexual orientation and gender equity, and decolonization and other peace processes could facilitate sustainable peace in North America and Europe.

The researcher invites you to participate in an individual Zoom audio or audiovisual interview consisting of open questions that focus on your background and life experiences in Canada or the US. You are also invited to participate in a mixed focus group/talking circle of former violent extremists. **Your information will be anonymized and kept confidential to prioritize your safety.** It is expected that the individual interview will take 45 minutes of your time. We invite participation from individuals who are adults at least 19 years old, who have disengaged at least

two years from violent extremism, and who were a part of violent extremist groups and/or social movements based in Canada, the USA or Europe. We also invite adult family members whose loved ones disengaged for at least two years from violent extremism, and staff and volunteers who work with formers. The interview will be conducted in English.

Confidentiality will be strictly maintained in this research study. When using your information for the study, your name, address/location, or associates will be anonymized. The participants will remain anonymous in the report and all public presentations of the data. At no point will your name, location, or email address be shared publicly. All of the transcripts that will be used in the research will be anonymized.

Any person who is invited to participate in this study can decline at any time and is not required to participate. Any person who is a part of this study can withdraw at any time from the study after initially providing consent to participate by telling me, the researcher. All participants may choose not to answer any questions and continue to be a part of the study.

There is no financial compensation provided to you for completion of the interview. A one-page final report will be available to all study participants who will complete the interview by 12/31/2023.

This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry campus. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Officer at 204-474-7122, or e-mail humanethics@umanitoba.ca.

Thank you for your consideration. Please contact me if you have any questions or direct any concerns to my PhD advisor to Dr. Sean Byrne at sean.byrne@umanitoba.ca.

Sincerely,

Tara Sheppard-Luangkhot, PhD Candidate

Peace and Conflict Studies Program

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

R3T 2N2

Appendix D

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR FORMERS

Date: _____

Age: _____ Gender: _____ Race: _____ Spirituality: _____ Class: _____

Ethnicity/Nation _____ Sexual

Orientation _____ Pseudonym: _____

Disability/Mental Health/Neurodiversity _____

Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me today. I know it took me a while to open up to people about being a former of the group I was involved with. This is safe place where you will not be judged, and many people will learn from what you share today. Please remember that this is voluntary, and at any point you need a break or do not want to answer all or part of my question, you can decline. You can also withdraw from this interview at any time, just let me know verbally. Please do not share anything that would make you uncomfortable or that could pose any legal risk to yourself.

Q1. Tell me about yourself? What gender, race, ethnicity, faith, sexual orientation, class, ability do you identify with?

- a. What was it like growing up living in Canada or the USA and Europe?
- b. Can you provide examples of that?
- c. How is it for you now, living in the Canada or the US and Europe?

Q2. What movement did you belong to? What was it like for you?

- a. What were the movements goals when you were involved?
- b. Can you give examples? Have those goals changed that you know of?

- c. What was the structure of the movement? Who was allowed to lead or was it a collective?
- d. What were the genders and gender relationships in the movement?
- e. What did you like or not like about the leadership or the structure?
- f. What was your role(s) in the movement?
- g. Were there any conflicts within the movement?
- h. Can you give examples?

Q3. What do you think caused you to become interested in the movement? What led to your decision to join?

- a. Were there any conflicts or issues happening in your life and/or in your community that prompted you to join the movement?
- b. Can you provide examples?
- c. What were the conflicts about that led to you joining the movement?
- d. How could the local and larger communities have better helped to manage conflict?

Q.4 What could have prevented your involvement in the movement?

- a. Can you provide examples?
- b. What are ways conflicts could have been resolved to prevent you joining the movement?
- c. What could the local and larger community have done to prevent your involvement in the movement?
- d. What could the local and larger community have done better to prevent the movement from being formed in the first place?

Q5. What do you know about the past and recent history of race, gender, faith, ethnic, class and political relationships in your community where you got involved in the movement?

- a. Did your community experience colonization by Europeans?
- b. How was that for you?
- c. Does any of these relationships create conflict in the community?
- d. Can you provide examples?
- e. What were the conflicts about?
- f. When did you first notice these conflicts?
- g. Did these conflicts have affected your choice to join the movement?
- h. Can you provide examples?

Q6. What kinds of violence were used in the movement to try to achieve their goals?

- a. Did you witness violence? If so, why did violence seem like the best means to achieve the movement's goals?
- b. Were there any other non-violent ways to achieve goals? Can you provide examples?
- c. Were you affected by violence in the movement?
- d. How did that impact you and did it affect your decision to stay in the movement?
How did you get through it?
- e. What was the local and larger community response to the violence?
- f. What are ways the movement could have stopped the violence?
- g. How could the local and larger community have helped to stop the violence?

Q 7. What were the needs that you met by being involved in the movement?

- a. Can you give examples?
- b. What are nonviolent ways you meet those needs now?

- c. If your local or larger community could have helped you to meet your needs without the need for a violent social movement, what could they have done better?
- d. How could the local or larger community better meet yours and others' needs now?

Q. 8 What led to your decision to exit the movement?

- a. Can you give examples?
- b. Who or what helped you to leave?
- c. If the local or larger community could have done anything to help you or others to exit sooner, what would that be?
- d. Can you give examples?
- e. What are the best rehabilitation methods and supports to help people exit?
- f. Can you give examples?
- g. If the local or larger community could better support rehabilitation, what could they do?

Q.9 Have your views on the movement changed?

- a. Can you give examples?
- b. What are your views on local and larger conflicts and the best ways to resolve them now?
- c. Can you give examples?
- d. What are the best ways your local and larger community could help to prevent you or others from rejoining the movement?
- e. Can you give examples?

Q.10 What are the best ways to build local and larger peace in your community?

- a. Can you give examples?
- b. What are the resources, policies and people needed to build long lasting peace?
- c. Do you have any stories of how you try to build peace in your life now?
- d. How do you think people experience your peacemaking approach now?

Thank you for taking the time to share your story with me. If this interview has brought up any uncomfortable feelings, I encourage you to talk with your support systems. I have information for you on the following help organizations if you need them:

Possible Resources:

There are support services available to you if you experience distress as a result of completing the interview or talking circle/focus group.

Canada

Families Affected by Violent Extremism Canada. Fave.director@gmail.com

Residential School Support Line 1-866-925-4419

Native Women's Association of Canada Elder's Support 1-613-722-3033

Black Line 1-800-604-5841

Canadian Mental Health Crisis Line 1-833-456-4566 or text 45645

Quebec Crisis Line 1-866-277-3533

USA

Exit USA. 1-312-248-3455

National Alliance on Mental Illness 1-800-950-6264 or text Helpline

Appendix E

TALKING CIRCLE/FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL FOR FORMERS

Date: _____

Participants Demographics (please only share what you are comfortable sharing in this group).

1. Pseudonym _____
2. Pseudonym _____
3. Pseudonym _____
4. Pseudonym _____
5. Pseudonym _____
6. Pseudonym _____
7. Pseudonym _____
8. Pseudonym _____
9. Pseudonym _____

Introduction.

Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with us today. I know it took me a while to open up to people about being a former of the group I was involved with. This is safe place where you will not be judged, and many people will learn from what you share today. Please remember that at any point you need a break or do not want to answer all or part of my question, you can decline. For safety and privacy reasons, please keep the confidentiality of all people here and remember the oath of confidentiality that you signed, however, your confidentiality cannot be guaranteed . Please keep your screen on audio only and use a pseudonym. All information will be anonymized and kept confidential by me, and any names, and locations will be changed to protect your safety and privacy when writing up the research report. There will be diverse opinions that are shared here, and we will accord each other with the respect of listening without interrupting. I will ask people to take a break or leave if they continue to be disrespectful.

Please remember that this is voluntary, and at any point you need a break or do not want to answer all or part of my question, you can decline. You can also withdraw from this group at any time, just let me know verbally. Please do not share anything that would make you uncomfortable or that could pose any legal risk to yourself.

The talking circle/focus group works in the following way, everyone is muted when it is not their turn to talk: (1) the person who starts can raise their hand, and ensure they are unmuted, (2) when the person finishes talking, another participant raises their hand on zoom to speak, and will be unmuted, (2) the talking circle members listen while others speak and do not interrupt. If you wish to not be recorded, please let me know, and I will turn the recorder off when you speak and instead I will take notes. Please remember to share space with everyone in the circle, as every voice matters to this circle.

I will first share about myself. My name is Tara, and I am an assigned female at birth, white, Ukrainian-British Canadian. I live in Manitoba Canada. I am the PhD candidate researcher facilitating this circle and creating safety and mutual respect will be something we build together as we share stories. My story is that I was recruited into violent extremism as a youth at age 16, and then exited when I was 19. It was an Apocalyptic, New Age religiously motivated extremist cult. Some of my family members are still active, while I helped my mother and I to exit. This was a life changing experience that involved a lot of trauma and loss, but I have worked to heal and help others as a healer. Now I want to do research and gather stories from former violent activists and extremists to help to build peace in North America and Europe, and gain understanding of what you think drives people in and out of violent social movements like violent extremism and terrorism.

Q1. Tell us about yourself. Share what you are comfortable to share. What gender, race, ethnicity/nation, faith, sexual orientation, class, ability do you identify with?

- a. What do you hope to achieve by sharing part of your story today?
- b. Is there anything you need to feel respected as your share part of your story today?

Q2. What movement or group did you belong to? What was it like for you being in the movement or group?

- i. Why did you think this movement or group started?
- j. Is this movement or group still active?
- k. If so, why is it still active?
- l. If not, why is the movement or group inactive?

Q3. What do you think caused you to become interested in the movement or group? Please provide some examples.

- e. What did the movement or group give you?

- f. What, if anything, did the movement or group take away from you?
- g. What would bring peace and nonviolence to the actors involved in the movement so that the movement is not needed?
- h. How did group members try to keep the peace and nonviolence within the movement?
- i. What drew you to the leaders of the movement?
- j. Was there anything about the leadership that made you decide to leave?
- k. What do you think would bring peace to leaders so that violence is not needed?
- l. Did group members use violence against each other? Why or why not?

Q.4 Who taught you about gender growing up? Please give examples.

- a. Were there any gender relationships that influenced you to join the movement?
- b. What were gender relationships like in the movement?
- c. What would bring peace between the genders?
- d. Was there peace between genders in the movement? Why or why not? What would have kept the peace between genders?

Q 5 What could have prevented your being involved in the movement? Please give examples.

- e. What should people know about recruiters and the attractive ideologies of your former movement to help prevent violence?
- f. What are ways family, social, ethnic, racial, class, and economic conflicts could have been peacefully resolved to prevent you joining the movement?
- g. What could the local and larger community have done better to build peace and prevent the movement from being formed in the first place?

Q6. What do you know about the past and recent history of race, gender, faith, ethnic, class and political relationships in your community where you got involved in the movement or group? Please give examples.

- i. Did your community experience colonization by Europeans?
- j. How did that make you feel?
- k. Do any of these colonial, ethnic, faith, class, and racial relationships continue to create conflict in the community?
- l. Did these conflicts affect your choice to join the movement?
- m. What could bring peace between all groups of people living in Canada and the US who are historically affected by colonization?

Q7. What kinds of violence were used in the movement or group to try to achieve their goals? Please give examples.

- h. Why did violence seem like the best means to achieve your goals and the movements goals in the movement?
- i. Were there any other peaceful and nonviolent ways to achieve the movement's goals?
- j. What would it take to stop the violence in the movement? Or the movement's use of violence against others?

Q 8. What were the needs met by being in the movement? Please give examples

- e. What are peaceful and nonviolent ways you try to meet those needs now?
- f. Who helps you meet these needs now?
- g. How could society better meet your needs so violent social movements are not needed?

Q. 9 What led to your decision to exit the movement or group?

- h. Who or what helped you to leave? Please provide examples.
- i. How could programs and policies improve to bring peace and nonviolence to these movements or groups?
- j. What kinds of programs and policies are needed to assist others to prevent them from joining violent social movements or groups or help people to exit them?

Q.10 Have your views on the movement changed over time? Please give examples.

- f. What gives you peace now so that you no longer engage in the movement?
- g. What are the best ways your local and larger community could help to prevent you or others from rejoining the movement?
- e. What are the resources, policies and people needed to build long lasting peace and nonviolence in society?

Q.11 Is there anything else you want to share to help build peace within violent social movements in Canada or the US? Anything else you can think of to help build peace in Canada and the US so violent social movements are not needed?

Thank you for taking the time to share your story with us. If this talking circle/focus group has brought up any uncomfortable feelings, I encourage you to talk with your support systems.

There are support services if you need them after this talking circle/focus group:

Canada

Families Affected by Violent Extremism Canada. Fave.director@gmail.com

Residential School Support Line 1-866-925-4419

Native Women's Association of Canada Elder's Support 1-613-722-3033

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Germany

Emergency 112 Suicide Hotline 0800 111 0 111

Hungary

Emergency 112 Suicide Hotline 116123

Ireland Emergency 116123 Suicide Hotline +4408457909090

Netherlands Emergency 112 Suicide Hotline 900 0113

Norway Emergency 112 Suicide Hotline +4781533300

Radicalisation Awareness Network +31 (0)20 463 5050.

Switzerland Emergency 112 Suicide Hotline 143

United Kingdom Emergency 112 Suicide Hotline 0800 689 5652

Consent Signatures