When Healing Turns to Activism: Formers and Family Members' Motivation to Engage in P/CVE.[1]

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Abstract

The involvement of former extremists or family members of terrorists in measures aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) has recently gained more attention in research and practice. However, little is yet known about the motivations of these individuals as to why they chose to engage in P/CVE activities. Understanding what drives such engagement could provide a better appreciation of the potential impact of such deployment, whether beneficial or detrimental to both the individuals involved and their respective P/CVE-target audience – and contribute to the evolving discourse regarding the effectiveness and potential risks of such P/CVE interventions. This article draws on eight biographical-narrative interviews with four former right-wing extremists and with four relatives of jihadist foreign fighters, all of whom are currently engaged in P/CVE work. Through qualitative reconstructive methods, a combination of narrative and thematic approaches was used to reconstruct the action-relevant orientations for the interviewees' activism. Results indicate that family members are motivated by coping mechanisms for traumatic stress, by social relatedness derived from a 'positive marginality', and in response to situational demands. Motivations of former extremists include finding their way back into society, having their new identity mirrored back to them, or maintaining a sense of self-continuity through 'role residuals'. The results show that, in the case of family members, motivation is affected by exposure to traumatic stress. They also suggest that a locus of control among former extremists can signify different stages of deradicalisation in some forms of exit pathways and thus help to identify different risks depending on a former's P/CVE role.

Introduction

In recent years, a number of initiatives that aim to prevent and counter violent extremism (P/CVE)[3] have increasingly utilised family members of radicalised or radicalising individuals,

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as well as former extremists or terrorists who have disengaged and/or deradicalised. While these are distinct groups of individuals, they share the experience of having been affected by violent extremism directly or indirectly. Likewise, their involvement in P/CVE-related measures may vary greatly, ranging from participating in prevention workshops or involvement in counter-narrative campaigns to providing exit assistance from extremist groups. The logic behind drawing on the experience of such individuals in P/CVE is that they might carry a certain credibility for their audiences, which potentially helps to more effectively achieve sustained desistance from political violence or resilience against it (Argomaniz and Lynch, 2018: 498; Tapley and Clubb, 2019).

Certainly, the affected individuals' personal or collateral experiences with (de)radicalisation processes and their potential aptitude as community gatekeepers could play a significant role in wider efforts by societies to resist all manifestations of violent extremism. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise the limitations or even risks of the involvement of formers and family members in P/CVE. The literature on the role of former extremists in P/CVE, for example, is scant and mostly recommends good practices for P/CVE programmes based on personal accounts of former Islamists[4] or right-wing extremists.[5] Recent evaluations of P/CVE workshops with formers in Germany have not found a significant positive impact and identified numerous problems, such as the lack of facilitators' qualification and the absence of pedagogical concepts underpinning the interventions (Walsh and Gansewig, 2019).

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[3] Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) is usually understood to be 'an approach intended to preclude individuals from engaging in, or materially supporting, ideologically motivated violence' (Williams, 2017: 153) or simply as 'non-coercive attempts to reduce involvement in terrorism' (Harris-Hogan et al., 2015: 6). Even though there is not universal agreement about the specific activities included under the P/CVE frame, for the purpose of this study we include de-radicalisation, rehabilitation, and reintegration work (for further discussion, see: Koehler, 2020).

[4] For this study, we understand 'Islamism' to be an overlapping web of movements including but not limited to Salafi-Jihadists, legalist Islamists or Shiite militants. The unifying ideological goal in this category is the protection of Muslims from a perceived war on Islam and the establishment of a society based on religious creed and authority.

[5] For this study, we understand 'right-wing extremism' to be an overlapping web of movements (c.f., Simi, Windisch & Sporer, 2016: 6) whose members share the support for violence as a political strategy and the natural inequality between races, ethnicities, cultures, or other collective identities, such as for example white power skinheads, white nationalists, neo-Nazis, Christian Identity, or some parts of the anti-government militia movement.

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In addition, the (public) reception of such P/CVE deployments, at least in Germany, is not entirely positive, since possible deficits in the professional training of affected individuals coupled with a potential lack of conceptual underpinning in the implementation of interventions may (have) lead to counterproductive results (Gansewig and Walsh, 2019). For the affected family members in particular, there are also risks if traumatic experiences resurface in P/CVE-settings without adequate professional support. In short, there is currently an insufficient evidence base to guide the inclusion of former extremists and family members in P/CVE measures. Hence, some authors have warned that 'the field needs to do better in developing a critical self-awareness about the risks and limits associated with formers' (Koehler, 2020: 16; cf. Tapley and Clubb, 2019).

In view of the increasing use of formers and family members in P/CVE measures, it is useful to gain a better understanding of why those individuals decide to become involved in P/CVE in order to more adequately assess their potential contribution and roles, as well as limitations and risks. However, motivational processes that could underpin P/CVE activism have thus far been overlooked by research on (former) extremists and/or their family members respectively. As a result, this study focuses on the various motivation that may drive or sustain the involvement of affected individuals in P/CVE work. The concept of motivation captures underlying processes that are critical to goal-directed behaviour (Bargh and Morsella, 2010), suggesting that motivations can be understood as the mediator between an individual's past experience and his or her intentions for future behaviour. Therefore, analysing motivations can yield new insights, where prior research is scarce, and is arguably an important but overlooked first step in adequately assessing the potential contribution and desirable roles that different types of affected individuals may or may not bring to P/CVE settings.

This study aims to contribute to a nuanced understanding of the motivations of affected individuals in influencing their role and potential effectiveness in P/CVE work by addressing the question: *What motivates people who were involved in, or affected by, (violent)*

extremism[6] to engage in measures aimed at preventing and countering (violent) extremism? Our findings have the potential to inform decisions on appropriate P/CVE contexts or (therapeutic) settings to which an affected individual may best contribute.

This study understands motivation in terms of the intrinsic desire for a course of action (or goal-setting), that is closely related to volition and emotion, i.e. the cognitive process by which an individual decides on, and commits to, a particular course of action. Volition is defined here as a process that leads from intention to actual behaviour. Hence, motivation and volition refer to goal setting and goal pursuit, respectively. In this sense, emotions are linked to motivation in several ways, despite referring to a different psychological concept; both influence human behaviour and can lead to action, as a certain emotion itself can be a motivator (Patrick, Hisley and Kempler, 2000).

Theoretical Framework: Involving Affected Individuals in P/CVE

Family Members and P/CVE

P/CVE practitioners and researchers agree that working with the families of radicalising or radicalised individuals can be effective because familial ties have a great potential in reaching the target group. The relationships that radicalising or radicalised individuals have with family members (as well as other emotional relationships) are known to potentially play an important role for radicalisation and deradicalisation (Scremin, 2020; El-Amraoui and Ducol, 2019; Sikkens, van San, Sieckelinck et al., 2017; Koehler, 2017: 157). In the context of P/CVE, family members have been described as vital 'associate gatekeepers' for prevention and intervention (Williams, Horgan and Evans, 2015) or as the 'first line of defence' against radicalisation into violent extremism (Koehler and Ehrt, 2018). As a consequence, an increasing number of Western countries have introduced family counselling programmes to their repertoire of P/CVE measures. These programmes mostly aim to help

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[6] In this article, we look at both, violent and non-violent forms of extremism. The term 'extremism' here refers to 'the belief that an in-group's success or survival can never be separated from the need for hostile action against an out-group' (Berger, 2018: 44).

families identify threats of radicalising relatives and to connect them with intervention programmes (Koehler and Ehrt, 2018: 2; cf. Gielen, 2015). In addition, family members of extremists and terrorists (alongside victims of terrorism) might be especially 'credible messengers' for counter narrative campaigns. Their own involvement in activities such as speaking publicly about their experiences, for example in workshops or to the press, might be seen as a form of quasi-therapeutical activism.

Individuals affected by violent extremism are likely to be exposed to a (potentially) traumatic event, that is, 'the actual or threatened death or serious injury' (Yule, Smith and Perin, 2004) of a member of the immediate family. Especially when such traumatic events are intentionally inflicted, i.e. caused by other humans (e.g. in conflict zones), this will likely cause a significant level of traumatic stress as such adverse experiences 'can impact the whole being of a person' (Simmen-Janevska, 2014: 13). Given the aim of this study, the question arises how adverse life experiences may have influenced motivations to participate in activities aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism. In this context, one framework that draws on empirical evidence from psychology offers useful guidance, namely, the 'altruism born of suffering' model proposed by Vollhardt (2009). In this model, prior individual sufferings such as traumatic events are conceived as strong drivers for pro-social behaviour because they are presumed to activate coping mechanisms in order to prevent future forms of similar sufferings. That is, the harm experienced by individuals, be it individual or collective suffering and intentional or unintended, motivates them to avert trauma for others. As such, the activism that an individual takes on after experiences of suffering can help the person to cope with negative affect, gain a sense of self-efficacy, and a more satisfactory perspective on his or her environment. Beyond these coping mechanisms, the motivational processes that underpin 'altruism born of suffering' also comprise an increased 'positive affect' as well as 'situational factors'. According to Vollhardt, 'positive affect' refers to personal empathy for others and the ability to take another perspective, ideally the one of the counterparts. One potential effect of this might be the creation of positive emotions which could increase the inclusiveness of pro-social activism. Similarly, through

their involvement in P/CVE, affected family members may cope with negative affect and satisfy their need to connect to other people who give them a positive feeling (Vollhardt, 2009; Vollhardt and Staub, 2011). As for the situational factors, the person may either feel morally obliged to help in order to prevent others from experiencing the same harm or they may be motivated to help in order to gain social approval when they expect to benefit from their behaviour (Vollhardt, 2009: 58).

In approaching possible explanations as to why family members may engage in P/CVE, it is also important to consider volition or the motivational strength that may sustain or deepen P/CVE involvement. Researchers have pointed out that traumatic stress negatively influences the motivation to engage in activities necessary for post-traumatic growth and that different types of trauma can underpin different types of motivations (Kent, Rivers and Wrenn, 2015; Simmen-Janevska, 2014). Moreover, an increasing scope of activism depends on the strengthening effect of volition, according to Kuhl (1987), such as an individual's capacity for controlling negative emotions or competing motivations. Thus, volitional factors act as mediators that help explain the strength of motivational tendencies to participate in P/CVE programming by either enhancing or inhibiting motivations. In other words, a motivation for P/CVE activism could be prevented by the volitional constraints of competing efforts and goals, such as, for instance, an affected individual's own recovery from trauma. Conversely, the volitional factors that Kuhl (1987) describes as (a) emotional control and (b) environmental control could strengthen motivation, if affected family members are (a) able to regulate the negative affect that P/CVE work may trigger in relation to their own losses, and (b) can find the right environment that reinforces their motivation for sustaining P/CVE work (cf. Vollhardt, 2009: 71).

Former Extremists and Terrorists

The involvement of former extremists as P/CVE practitioners has a long track record but only recently become the focus of research looking at the effects and potential risks, as well as their own perspectives on this field (e.g. Scrivens et al., 2019; Tapley and Clubb,

2019; Walsh and Gansewig, 2019; Gansewig and Walsh, 2021; Koehler 2020). Their experience and time spent inside extremist movements can produce credibility, e.g. by knowing the movement's organisational structure or being familiar with the ideology (Tapley and Clubb, 2019: 10). Though naturally some formers will be more beneficial to P/CVE than others, the individual qualities they bring to P/CVE activities 'do not necessarily derive from being a former' (Ibid.: 2). Tapley and Clubb (2019) propose a distinction between two main archetypes of formers in P/CVE. The first ideal type of former extremists has disengaged and deradicalised as far as possible by abandoning extremist beliefs, which makes them more desirable for P/CVE because they pose less political and professional risks. However, they are also likely to possess less credibility to the remaining insiders. The second ideal type has just disengaged from the movement without having deradicalised (yet), which makes them less suitable for P/CVE work as they carry more risks (Ibid.: 10) but they are more credible to potential target groups.

In the primary prevention field, formers typically deliver counter or alternative narratives by sharing their stories to a wider audience in educational settings, outreach activities, or prevention workshops (cf. Koehler, 2017). Formers who are still fairly committed to their old beliefs can have adverse effects for P/CVE (Tapley and Clubb, 2019: 12). Although deradicalised formers are assumed to be more effective in primary prevention, there is a lack of empirical evidence in this domain. One of the few evaluation reports on long-term effects of primary prevention measures (delivered by a former right-wing extremist in Germany) found no positive impacts (Walsh and Gansewig, 2019). In the realm of secondary and tertiary prevention, formers can reach out to those on the brink of disengaging and assist them in that process. They can also try 'to talk people out of (joining) extremist groups' (Tapley and Clubb, 2019: 11). Some European exit programmes even predominantly rely on former extremist as their mentoring and case managing staff (Christensen, 2015). To a certain degree deradicalised formers pose lower risks of re-radicalisation or recidivism, however, if they are being perceived as traitors, they could lack the credibility necessary for 'interventions targeting the "hard to reach" constituencies' (Tapley and Clubb, 2019: 11). One

problem that is especially relevant in tertiary and secondary prevention stems from the widespread lack of professional training. Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that the issue of lacking training that reflects the available evidence base in this field is a more general problem within the P/CVE field globally (Koehler and Fiebig, 2019). Beyond the P/CVE field, criminological literature has discussed the role and influence of former criminals and family members in intervention programming against, for example, youth violence and gangs. Leaving youth gangs is often caused and supported through pro-social emotional ties with outsider peers, family or friends (Bartolomé-Gutiérrez & Rechea-Alberola, 2006; Vigil, 1988, 2010). Furthermore, many youth gang intervention programmes around the world have also used former gang members as their main approach to reach out and counsel potential defectors. This method also stretches to general rehabilitation programmes for criminal offenders beyond youth gangs and violence (e.g., LeBel, 2007; LeBel, Richie, & Maruna, 2015). One of the key motivations that has been found among former gang members to help intervene is the development of a so-called 'redemption-self' (Kazemian, 2007), in which former offenders develop a new positive identity based on their generative actions towards others (Radak, 2016). Moreover, empirical evidence from criminological research suggests that narratives of 'Desisters' are an essential means of explaining past behaviour and the successful identity transformation of a reformed person. (Giordano et al., 2002; Laub and Sampson, 2003; Maruna, 2001; Vaughan, 2007). In this sense, desistance narratives consist of internalised and reconstructed life events, which have the potential to shape future behaviour, because 'individuals will act in ways which are aligned to the narratives that they have constructed for themselves' (King, 2013: 151).

Considering the explanatory potential of desistance narratives, there are three key lessons from criminology that may be relevant for explaining the motivations of formers. First, the function of desistance narratives 'provide[s] some subjective distancing from past events, which may include recognition of the harms caused by particular behaviours' (King, 2013: 152). In explaining their past (politically motivated) offences, the self-stories of former extremists may be 'riddled with victimization narratives' (Pemberton and Aarten, 2018: 543)

used to justify past violence due to external constraints and thus signify cognitive transformation. The narrative identity can also contain redemptive scripts about 'making good' that can guide action in 'a process of freeing one's "real me" from these external constraints' (Maruna, 2001: 95). But this does not exclude the possibility of role residuals, which consist of 'leftovers from a previous identity that cloud and impact on one's current role' (Ebaugh, 1988: 174). The second lesson concerns the role of emotions in autobiographical accounts of specific episodes or turning points (Sampson and Laub, 2005), which are important for desistance narratives because the language and emotions surrounding such episodes can shed light on the biographical relevance of certain events that may or may not be explicitly linked with P/CVE activism. Specifically, such episodes can 'trigger (strong) emotion(s) and thus emotions form the nucleus of a narrative' and a 'narrator can draw on the emotions of the reader/listener to get the story across' (Pemberton and Aarten, 2018: 546). Former extremists may elicit meaning from their turning points to explain why they engage in P/CVE activism, which may also function as a public demonstration of their personal reform. Maruna, Immarigeon, and LeBel (2004: 279) describe this destigmatising tendency as 'delabelling rituals' that 'certify' the personal reform, since formers need some recognition 'to be able to maintain the difficult process of 'recovery' and 'desistance'.

Third, and finally, the construction of new identities can be facilitated through existing collective narratives. Pemberton and Aarten (2018: 549) highlight that 'culture provides a menu of stories to which the person's autobiographical narrative can relate'. Formers can draw on such master narratives because it can provide a sense of continuity with oneself and with others in one's community (ibid.). Morash et al. (2019: 2) point out that the master narrative of redemption (especially in Western societies) can 'affect both the life story structure and the episodes and events included'. In redemption narratives, 'the story moves from a negative to a positive state in such a way that the negative state is deemed worth it for the positive outcome' (ibid.). Hence, culture can play a role in the lost connection between an individual's life story and the master narrative in society. The master narrative of redemption may offer to reconcile the two, suggesting what is referred to as 'earned redemption'

(Bazemore, 1999). The 'earned redemption' narrative can signify a sustained stage of desistance (King, 2013), because it 'allows offenders to 'make amends' to those they have harmed in order to earn their way back into the trust of the community' (Bazemore, 1999: 4). Overall, criminological research on identity narratives suggests that the personal accounts of formers can be influenced by storytelling in the sense that autobiographical control can be re-achieved (Aarten et al., 2018; Pemberton and Aarten, 2018).

Data and Methodology: Combining Thematic and Narrative Analysis

The data underlying this study consists of eight biographical-narrative interviews, which were conducted within the framework of the European Union Horizon 2020 funded project Dialogue About Radicalisation and Equality (DARE). Two international dialogue workshops were held in Warsaw (February 2018 and June 2018), one focused on family members of jihadist foreign fighters[7] (participants came from the United Kingdom, Tunisia, Belgium, and Germany), and the other focused on former members of extreme-right groups (participants came from the United Kingdom, Germany, The Netherlands, Finland, Canada, and Poland). The narrative and semi-structured interviews were conducted and video recorded (with the exception of one interviewee who requested audio recording only) in the course of these workshops and lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. All interviewees gave informed written consent prior to the interview in line with the ethical guidelines of the project. A total of 13 interviews were recorded at the international dialogue workshops: six with family members of people who had been radicalised by Islamist ideologies; and seven with 'formers' who had been involved with extreme right groups/ideologies. Of the 13 interviews, eight were selected for analysis for this report because those persons from the overall sample were also involved

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[7] For this study, we understand a 'foreign fighter' to be an 'an agent who (1) has joined, and operates within the confines of an insurgency, (2) lacks citizenship of the conflict state or kinship links to its warring factions, (3) lacks affiliation to an official military organisation, and (4) is unpaid' (Hegghammer, 2010, pp. 57-58). 'Jihadist' refers to a foreign fighter who joins and fights with a group that follows a Salafi-jihadist ideology.

in various P/CVE activities; four from the 'families' and four from the 'formers' group. The sample of interviewees is briefly described in Table 1.

Table 1 Summary of interviewees

Interviewee Group	Country	Background	Involvement in P/CVE
Interviewee 1 *Sibling male*	MENA Region	The interviewee's brother was recruited by an Al-Qaida affiliate and left for Syria in 2013. He managed to get his brother back after a few days.	The interviewee founded a NGO in 2013 to advocate for the safe return of family members caught in conflicts abroad and to rehabilitate returnees.
Interviewee 2 *Sibling male*	MENA Region	The interviewee's sister was taken by her husband to join ISIS in 2012, she is currently in a Libyan prison with her son.	The interviewee is a vocal public activist and engages in media advocacy in the same NGO as Interviewee 1.
Interviewee 3 *Mother female*	Europe	The interviewee's eldest son left for Syria. She lost contact with him and, at the point of interview, did not know if he was alive or what had happened to him.	The interviewee initially participated in family self-help groups before she co-founded a mothers' group herself. She now hosts parenting workshops and gives talks to a wider audience in primary prevention settings.
Interviewee 4 *Mother female*	Europe	The interviewee's only son converted to Islam and subsequently radicalised before leaving for Syria where he was killed.	The interviewee participates in family self-help groups.
Interviewee 5 *Former Extremist male*	Europe	The interviewee became involved in anti-Muslim activism and organised demonstrations. He left the movement gradually after demonstrations turned violent.	The interviewee engages in P/CVE-like dialogue settings aimed at community cohesion by facilitating conversations with the Muslim community.
Interviewee 6 *Former Extremist male*	Europe	The interviewee was involved in the neo-Nazi environment before he disengaged and deradicalised with the help of an exit-programme.	The interviewee engages in an intelligence sharing role for the exit-programme that helped him disengage.
Interviewee 7	North	The interviewee was a street-level activist and later became the public face of a white nationalist	The interviewee founded several P/CVE initiatives ranging from online prevention work to providing

Former Violent Extremist Male	America	movement. He disengaged and deradicalised without assistance.	exit assistance for people who try to leave far-right movements.
Interviewee 8 *Former Violent Extremist male*	Europe	The interviewee was part of a violent group within the neo-Nazi environment. After one of his victims died, he was imprisoned.	The interviewee gives primary prevention talks and is involved in secondary prevention settings with young people at risk of radicalisation.

Analytical Framework

Understanding the psychological functions behind motivational tendencies is beyond the scope of this study. In this article we seek, rather, to reconstruct *what* issues were most important to respondents (in determining their own conversational structures) and *how* these issues might relate to their P/CVE activism. Thus, this study follows a qualitative-reconstructive approach 'to generate in a still largely unclear and unexplored research territory useful hypotheses' (Scheunpflug, Krogull and Franz, 2016: 7). In contrast to qualitative content analysis approaches that investigate subjective attitudes of individuals or groups, the reconstructive approach focuses on the reconstruction of action-guiding orientations (Bohnsack, 2013). Within this approach, however, the two groups of interviews were analysed separately and by using different analytical frameworks; thematic analysis was used for family members (Kuckartz, 2005; Kelle and Kluge, 1999) while narrative analysis was employed for former extremists (Treichel and Schwelling, 2003; Schütze, 1987). This decision was based on fundamental differences in how family members and former extremists personally related to the process of radicalisation, which meant a consistent comparison of motivations between the two groups did not promise meaningful results. However, the thematic analysis used for family member interviews and the narrative analysis used for former extremists can be seen as congruent in as much as they both allow the identification of new levels of (tentative) meaning structures (Fischer-Rosenthal and Rosenthal, 1997: 149).

As for the analytical steps applied to the interviews with family members, four primary steps were carried out that followed the thematic coding approach: (1) developing the

(initial) category scheme; (2) coding; (3) case description; and (4) case comparison (Kuckartz, 2005: 87; Kelle and Kluge, 1999: 58). The initial categories were defined very broadly in order to capture aspects ranging from how family members framed their brother's, sister's or son's pathway that led them to conflict zones, to how they described their personal hardship. After comparing cases through 'simultaneous maximization or minimization of both the differences and the similarities' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 55), multiple themes emerged for each interviewed family member that suggested different motivational and volitional factors in relation to their P/CVE engagement.

The interviews with formers called for narrative analysis because it was important to examine the narrative construction around turning points because their self-stories included three possible types of turning points: (1) their initial radicalisation, (2) their disengagement or deradicalisation (with or without a programme), and (3) their own (initial) engagement in P/CVE settings. In other words, we placed a high analytical value on such turning points because they can underscore events or interactions that may have the narrative function of linking together radicalisation, deradicalisation, and P/CVE engagement. Regardless of whether the narratives of formers are true or false, they allow for an understanding of the interviewees' motivational processes. Hence, the narrative construction itself is loaded with motivations and thus significant for apprehending why a former acted as he did. Thus, the narrative approach allowed for the identification of biographical process structures. Following Glinka (1998: 25), the coding scheme that was applied to the interviews with formers broadly consisted of the following categories: (1) Biographical Action Schemes, i.e. intention and agentic control; (2) biographical trajectories, i.e. limited action capacities; (3) life planning, i.e. socially or collectively performed narratives; and (4) biographical transformation, i.e. specific episodes that lead to change.

Findings

Families - Siblings

The first two family members were MENA region nationals who each experienced the loss of siblings who joined Salafi-Jihadist groups in conflict zones. Both are middle-aged men who currently work in the same NGO that advocates for the safe return and rehabilitation of family members and children caught in Syria, Iraq, and Libya. Interviewee 1 managed to get his brother back from Syria after only a few days and subsequently founded the NGO to help the many families in his social environment suffering from the same experience. The sister of Interviewee 2, however, remains in custody in a Libyan prison (with her child). Both Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 2 exhibit a significant overlap of themes that constitute the main aspects of their narratives. First, and most importantly, both felt abandoned by state authorities, saying they had to fill the void left by the government because no one else would do what is necessary to prevent and counter violent extremism, i.e. to advocate for repatriation and to defend affected families against being labelled as terrorists. Secondly, they both make sense of what happened to their siblings through the collective suffering of fellow nationals, particularly the societal disenfranchisement of the young, framing them as vulnerable victims of malevolent recruiters who would misuse Islam.

Families - Mothers

Among the interviewed family members in this study were two mothers (Int. 3 and Int. 4) of deceased or missing foreign terrorist fighters who had left Europe to fight for Jihadist groups in Syria. There is a significant parallel between the two mothers as they describe the painful experience of living with uncertainty. While Interviewee 3 does not know if her son is alive and, if so, where he is, Interviewee 4 still struggles to make sense of how and why her son was (likely) killed. Thus, the experience of loss and the uncertainty of not knowing what had happened to their sons left each mother under a severe strain that traumatised them. Although they both have similar explanations for their initial motivation to connect with other

mothers and participate in P/CVE family self-help groups, it is important to point out sharply diverging volitional factors that may be a product of different (cultural) contexts influencing the social environments of each mother. Interviewee 3 immigrated to Europe from a Muslim-majority country and she raised her son and her two other children in a Muslim community. Interviewee 4 was born in Europe, and her only son – who was 'the product of a relationship with a non-European' (Int. 4) – converted to Islam and later radicalised. Since Interviewee 3 engages in a much more public role in P/CVE (e.g. by giving talks), while Interviewee 4 is reluctant to speak publicly, this suggests varying degrees of P/CVE involvement based on different motivational processes, as illustrated in the following thematic summary for each mother.

There are two salient themes that Interviewee 3 relates to her involvement in P/CVE activities. First, by working with families, she aims to destigmatise and help other parents. Second, by talking publicly about her suffering, she feels rewarded by the preventative impact on young people. Interviewee 3 emphasises how much she suffered by recalling the traumatic experience of the initial loss of her son, and the subsequent struggle of living with the uncertainty about whether her son is still alive. By reflecting on the source of her suffering, Interviewee 3 attributes the pain of losing her son as inflicted by other people and associates it with all the other suffering that she endured in her life. In view of her work in family self-help support groups, Interviewee 3 wants to help other parents avoid making a mistake that she regretted. After her son arrived in Syria, she was still able to communicate with him. But then they stopped talking, and Interviewee 3 blames herself for the break in communication.

Initially, Interviewee 3 felt ashamed for her son (e.g. 'you are seen as 'the mother of' aren't you?'; 'people look at us altogether'), however, she was able to overcome feelings of shame after she met another affected mother, and also because she and her other children received extensive social and psychological support. As a result of her dealing with shame while still disagreeing with her son's actions, she increasingly identifies with other affected parents and arrived at an alternative narrative:

I do not approve of his choices. I will never think it's ok. I will never approve of it. But he remains my child. I would go through fire for him. If he ever comes back, I want to help him as much as I can. The fact that he is doing something wrong, or is hurting other people, no father or mother wants that. But I will always continue to love my child.

After Interviewee 3 connected with a few mothers, she actively sought to set up a formal group of mothers in her city, but the municipality told her that it was a 'sensitive' endeavour and 'very difficult, to bring the mothers together'. Knowing how much it helped her, she and another mother decided to set up an organisation and went on television to speak up 'because that was all taboo' and she wanted 'to do something about these problems'. Through the organisation that she co-founded, most of her current activities are co-hosting workshops for which she was encouraged by her social environment (e.g. 'a lot of mothers were so happy that they could talk about it to others'). The way in which Interviewee 3 describes her P/CVE activism suggests at least some level of post-traumatic growth, possibly because she and her family received extensive psychological counselling, but mostly because she says that she is now able to find meaning in her suffering and life after trauma. Thus, she now sees her adverse life experiences as a unique opportunity to tell her story and feel rewarded for preventing more suffering as she takes the 'big impact' of her talks 'as a reward' for her suffering:

I have also done talks for young people and I have seen that it has a very big impact on them, if you come with a story by someone who has experienced it. Of course, experts are needed, but that is different. If you tell the story then it is 'Oh that is so and so's mother', and that suffering behind it has a bit of an effect, I hope, as a reward. I feel that way too, afterwards the young people come to you for a hug and in tears. Even the adults are perplexed. They say, 'Finally, I have

heard a true story. I always see everything on TV, but it's not the same. This is really heart-breaking'.

In contrast, for Interviewee 4 there is one theme that is crucial for her participation in family self-help groups, namely, that it helps her deal with trauma. At the same time, other factors contributing to her trauma also prevent her from getting further involved in P/CVE-related activities: the fear of repercussions if she were to 'go public'; regrets and self-blame; and the unfulfilled desire to understand how her son died and feel closure. Interviewee 4 remembers how painful it was to find out that her son had gone to Syria and she describes the burden of having to cope with this loss all by herself. What helped Interviewee 4 to cope with this trauma was meeting other affected mothers:

> I had support with therapy specializing in trauma. But despite that, what was vital for me, quite clearly, I think it was quite significant that there was a counselling centre for affected families […] it was very healing to meet, for the first time, another affected mother. Even though […] I had certain clichés such as that I thought they were dysfunctional families […] But it was in fact really good to [see] that I was not the only one.

Since Interviewee 4 is reluctant to speak publicly about her experience ('it would damage me even more'), her involvement in P/CVE remains limited to helping other parents in similar situations.

Formers

Two formers interviewed for this study were classified as 'non-violent' because violence did not play a role in their personal involvement in extremist movements. Interviewee 5 is in his mid-fifties and used to be an anti-Muslim activist and organised demonstrations for four years before disengaging and starting a dialogue with people from the

Muslim community in his city. His main P/CVE-related activism continues to revolve around cross-community contact in various formats. Interviewee 6 is in his mid-thirties and had become involved in the neo-Nazi movement as a teenager. He disengaged and subsequently deradicalised with the help of an 'exit' programme for which he works now by providing his insider-knowledge about the movement.

It should be noted that although neither Interviewee 5 nor Interviewee 6 pursued violent activism, they both experienced violence (or violent threats) in as much as it marked their move away from extremism. However, despite this commonality, the biographical accounts and narratives differ considerably between Interviewee 5 and Interviewee 6, especially regarding the role of ideological convictions.

Interviewee 5 was among the first to organise anti-Muslim demonstrations in his town. One salient feature in the narrative of Interviewee 5 is that he says he initiated and stayed involved in these demonstrations due to external circumstances that he could not control. Hence, he frames his reasons for demonstrating as being the product of his environment, partly because of widespread economic hardship, but the main impetus was the presence of Islamists ('a problem that should have been dealt with officially earlier').

This biographical trajectory leads Interviewee 5 to describe the key factor that limited his actions as being labelled; 'as soon as you get labelled', he says, 'your life gets out of control'. He refers to this limited control in the context of a 'chain of events' in which fellow demonstrators started to become violent. Although he was not comfortable with the violence happening at demonstrations, he says he could not leave the movement, even after he 'spiritually pulled away'.

Interviewee 5 first introduces agency into his narrative when he talks about his conscious decision to start speaking up after he had already left the group for some time. Though he first started talking to people from the Muslim community 'quietly', he thought he 'was able to contribute' more in order to 'keep the peace' by 'paving a way in conversation'. His new activism allowed him to rebuild the confidence he had lost from the lack of agency,

which in turn made him resilient enough to endure the violent threats that came with 'doing the right thing':

> It makes me feel better equipped to have my say to feel more engaged. It makes me feel I am part of things now. But I just think it's a shame that happened through that journey to get to here to – if I am honest – to have the personal confidence. Confidence gets knocked along the way. But you have to rebuild it. And every time you rebuild it you become a little bit more Teflon. My journey has made me a little bit more adaptable to take part in things and understand that 'don't look for others to do it, you've got to try and get up and do it yourself'. But the first thing that must be done is you must listen to someone, you can't just shout them down or label them, you have to listen.

While Interviewee 5 continues his peace-oriented dialogue in mosques, schools, and universities, he says he wants 'to stop people making the same errors I made' because it would not improve the community. He says he found better ways of dealing with problems in his town – by listening and allowing people to be wrong – and he wants to show this to others to stop a cycle of labelling. Thus, the key message that underpins the activism of Interviewee 5 in his cross-community dialogue is that everyone should not label or judge the other group because there is no alternative to dialogue since Muslims aren't going away 'and everyone has got to crack on with it'.

Interviewee 6 got involved with neo-Nazi ideas from a young age and spent a large part of his life inside the neo-Nazi movement. The distinct feature of how Interviewee 6 tells his story is that he frames it almost entirely in terms of agentic actions by taking full ownership for every decision throughout his involvement in the neo-Nazi movement.

After he found neo-Nazis and joined a group of racist skinheads, Interviewee 6 again made a conscious decision to leave the skinhead scene because he did not like the drinking, the music and the violence against foreigners as it did not satisfy his interest in Nazism and he

cared more about the propaganda. Through finding connections to Nazi terrorists, Interviewee 6 was able to network with the types of people he had been looking for. Then, by getting people from his hometown involved, he was able to spearhead a neo-Nazi movement where he could exercise what he 'always wanted to do like being some kind of ideological teacher'. Thus, Interviewee 6 tells a story in which he takes full responsibility not only for choosing an ideology but also for creating a movement and position for himself that he always wanted ('it did feed my ego').

The disengagement process of interviewee 6 started when he began questioning the movement after a few of his close friends had left and were deemed traitors, which left interviewee 6 with open questions although he still believed in Nazi ideology. He also mentions the birth of his child playing a role in this process and was his official explanation for resigning from his position in the movement.

Interviewee 6 says that this started the reversal of his ideological convictions leading to his gradual deradicalisation four years later. He was assisted in this process by an exit programme, as he also received threats when he began speaking about his past publicly. In reflecting on his past and when faced with feelings of shame, he owns his past beliefs and does not expect to be welcomed back by society.

Interviewee 6 frames the shame that he experiences as an inevitable process he cannot escape and while this underpins his motivation for P/CVE ('I want to be able to help'), he accommodates anyone that would mistrust him ('Even if I was thinking in bad ways, maybe the bad thinking can be turned into good ways'). Thus, Interviewee 6 understands that due to his public role in the movement, that if he would be involved in exit work 'some clients perhaps might feel a little bit uncomfortable', which is why he does not 'do client work' but provides consultancy to the Exit-programme using his insider-knowledge to inform presentations ('I am there to share my experience and knowledge').

For the last two interviewees in the sample, physical violence was an important factor when they were teenagers in neo-Nazi groups. Interviewee 7 is a North American in his mid-fifties who first got involved in street-violence, and, later, in racist activism. During his 16

years inside the movement his roles shifted from street-level to public face and propagandist. During the last six years he gradually disengaged from the movement, though it took him six additional years of counselling before he can say that he deradicalised. After another five years he started to become involved in P/CVE by co-founding several programmes, while retaining a mainstream job outside P/CVE. Interviewee 8 is a European in his mid-thirties who committed several violent acts as part of a neo-Nazi group. When one of his victims died following one of these attacks, he was imprisoned at the age of 17, which led to his disengagement from the movement. After five years in prison, he immediately transitioned to giving PVE talks all over his country. In their narratives, Interviewee 7 and Interviewee 8 use sharply diverging autobiographical anchors to point to different ways in how each of them constructed or preserved a sense of self. While Interviewee 7 stresses the agency he had throughout his life, Interviewee 8 attributes the course of his biographical trajectory to fate. As the following summary for each interviewee shows, these two identity narratives accounted for opposing expectations of society and ultimately for different motivations to engage in P/CVE.

Interviewee 7 begins telling his story with traumatic childhood experiences from when he was 10 years old: family turmoil, an absent father, bullying at school and a teacher who regularly beat him left him 'angry and powerless'. He says when he was bullied by racist skinheads, he wanted to 'befriend the bully, become the bully', because he admired them for being tough ('Toughness [was] what I wanted most'). In trying to gain their respect, Interviewee 7 says he 'had to commit all the same acts of violence that they committed'. At the age of 16 he started to get involved in street-violence as he 'took the rebellion from the school to the streets.' After being a skinhead for two years, he switched 'from the skinhead identity to the ideology identity', and he became the leader of a white supremacist group.

The birth of his first child began a 'thawing process' which allowed him to 'reconnect with humanity' ('everything I did up until then was for me'). While it wasn't a rapid transformation, he started to get attention and acceptance in healthy ways from his children. He realised that the movement was not only dysfunctional but that it would also affect the

quality of his children's lives. After he disengaged, he says the ego part of his identity wanted to hold onto the ideology. But to keep his identity alive he had to rationalise his distancing from the movement. Then the 'psychic bonds to the ideology started to weaken' when his deradicalisation began through psychological counselling.

Because of the loneliness he felt during his own exit process, Interviewee 7 now helps others leaving the far-right to 'transition through the void'. He points out that he became involved in P/CVE only after he finished his own healing process (i.e. 'deradicalisation'), while also separating his professional life from his P/CVE activism.

> Once I healed […] and came to terms with the things I had said and the things I had done and who I was, then I felt I could share that same experience with others and I had a desire to do so and it was scary because when I decided to start talking publicly about my past, I had a [successful] career […] so I had quite a career risk when I chose to make that move. But I felt it was so necessary as part of my life's journey to make up for the damage that I had done to humanity by inspiring people not just to follow my footsteps out but to inspire people in general to have more compassion and forgiveness for themselves and everyone else. I have two lives. What I do for career and money and there's what I do to be of service for humanity and I try to find a good balance between those two.

Interviewee 8 describes his past largely through victimisation experiences that determined his biographical trajectory by a convolution of factors: being in an unjust system that produces 'winners and losers'; coming from a small town where many people shared right-wing extremist views, hence he 'never had an alternative'; having two severely disabled parents lacking the capacity for caring such that he 'never experienced any compassion'; and living in poverty for which he 'felt ashamed'. Consequently, he says that the neo-Nazi group, the ideology, and the street violence each fulfilled a vital function for him: the group filled the

vacuum left by his parents; the ideology mirrored the unjust society he had experienced; and through the violence he found a release and gained energy for dealing with his misery.

Inside prison he became a devout Christian because 'god offers redemption – unlike society'. The idea of Christian salvation to be attained merely through faith appealed to Interviewee 8 and it gave him the 'first feeling of freedom' after prison. However, he is discontented with society's fight against extremism because there are still 'winners and losers' and 'no one wants to be a loser'. Thus, he expresses frustration with this society that is still unjust because he has to justify himself for his past.

Despite experiencing prejudices, immediately after his release there was a church that gave him the chance to work with children in P/CVE-like settings.

Although interviewee 8 acknowledges that it 'does not always work', he says that 'Christian values, although not exclusively, should play a role'. He envisions a society that facilitates people to 'live by the values that are the essence of society'. Thus, he highlights how important values are for his current activism.

Discussion

The findings show that motivations to work in the field of P/CVE among those affected by or formerly involved in extremism can manifest in various ways. Apart from obvious differences between families and formers, all affected individuals are motivated by adverse life-events in their own ways and in interaction with their own process of post-traumatic growth or identity change. The personal accounts of former extremists and affected kin therefore point to the temporal dynamics of motivational processes, as their roles in P/CVE settings (or ways of inhabiting their roles) correspond to the current state of their individual journey and to what that journey has entailed in the first place.

Families

With respect to affected family members, we identified three converging themes of motivational and volitional factors that underpinned their engagement in P/CVE-related activities. First, all family members derive motivation from traumatic experiences in relation to their missing, deceased or imprisoned siblings or sons (for whom they all felt some responsibility) as well as in relation to shame they felt as a result. Second, the salience of themes related to trauma in the narratives of the two mothers (Int. 3 and Int. 4) suggests that their underlying motivation for family self-help groups is a form of coping mechanism and the desire for post-traumatic growth. Third, the prevalence of themes regarding a continuous and collective strain and the feelings of being abandoned by their government expressed by the two siblings (Int. 1 and Int. 2) suggests that their motivation was driven by situational factors that resulted in a need and social expectation for collective activism.

Despite differences, all family members saw their suffering as being the result of human agency and being intertwined with shame. The latter is particularly important in accounting for a significant difference between Interviewee 4 and all other interviewees, since she is the only one who is not involved in any public P/CVE-role and still struggles with the anticipated shame if her co-workers were to find out about her son. Interviewee 4 expresses her struggle in trying to make sense of her son's death for which she regrets cooperating with the police. This is in line with a study by Koehler and Ehrt (2018), which found that parents have a strong desire for knowledge to seek closure, and that mothers in particular have to cope with self-blame while resenting security agencies for not sharing information that would have helped them. As Interviewee 4 fears professional repercussions if she were to go public, this suggests an unsupportive environment that is not conducive for her process of dealing with shame. Overall, these factors inhibited Interviewee 4 from getting more deeply involved in P/CVE (beyond family self-help groups) because they are directly linked to her traumatic experience. Echoing Vollhardt (2009), this highlights the importance of considering whether or not affected individuals receive social support and how they deal with social stigma. Hence, traumatic stress and stigma can prevent motivational tendencies from developing (cf.

Kent et al., 2015; Simmen-Janevska, 2014) if the needs of family members (e.g. finding closure) remain unfulfilled (cf. Koehler and Ehrt, 2018). This implies that for some family members it would be more beneficial to focus on healing trauma, if they are at a stage where any public P/CVE activity would risk re-traumatisation.

The more public P/CVE engagement (esp. Int. 1, Int. 3) points to Unger's (2000: 163) concept of a 'Positive Marginality', which postulates that people can reframe seemingly negative stigma 'and use it as an agent of both personal and social change', i.e. individual perceptions may be the determining factor out of which marginality becomes activism. For one, Interviewee 1 felt emboldened to create an NGO by the overwhelming social affirmation that he received after his first media appearance, which allowed him to resist social stigma and publicly defend the common fate of all affected families. In a similar vein, the supportive environment of Interviewee 3 may have led to a cascading effect: the extensive social support and perceived common fate with other mothers may have stabilised her to a point where she could feel rewarded by telling her 'heart-breaking' story publicly and co-found a parents' association to address the taboo experienced in affected families. Moreover, the motivation of both Interviewee 1 and 3 also combines with situational factors, i.e. in recognizing and responding to pressing situational demands of others that needed a help or a voice. This supports Vollhardt's (2009) assertion that the motivation for pro-social behaviour rooted in adverse life events cannot be sufficiently understood from only a clinical psychology perspective as they must be contextualized with situational and sociocultural factors. The results suggest a motivating force in the positive affect derived from social relatedness, because it likely positively influenced resilience to or adjusting after trauma (cf. Kent et al., 2015). This in turn increased the capacities for feeling self-efficacy and constructing meaning after a disruption of their life story, which is what allowed some family members to respond to situational demands. Taken together, these motivational forces help explain differences between interviewees and point to the relative importance of how their P/CVE engagement reflects diverging experiences with traumatic stress and social relatedness (cf. Ibid.; Simmen-Janevska, 2014).

In sum, the findings suggest that the individually experienced trauma of losing a child to violent extremism fuels the desire for helping as coping. We hypothesize that depending on the progress of dealing with trauma, the motivation to engage in P/CVE can shift from reducing negative affect (if trauma is still significant, Int. 4) to increasing positive affect and finding meaning (post-traumatic growth, Int. 3). Thus, a shift from immediate and interpersonal (family self-help) towards collective and long-term (primary prevention workshops) P/CVE-related activities, may be attributed to the positive effect of identifying with others (cf. Vollhardt, 2009). This again highlights the strengthening potential of volition, however, it also calls into question whether the perception of a common fate could be weakened as a result of social or cultural factors, since Interviewee 3 did not identify with or receive social support from a Muslim community. Similarly, perceiving a common fate through a 'positive marginality' (cf. Unger, 2000) can be a strong motivator to engage in a more public P/CVE-role. Hence, the motivations of family members to become involved in P/CVE cannot be separated from sociocultural factors in conjunction with situational demands.

Formers

The narratives of formers yielded three sets of motivational factors for interviewees' engagement in P/CVE, each of which can be illuminated with reference to similar findings in the criminological literature. First, this study identified the role of redemption scripts that enabled Interviewee 6 and Interviewee 7 to make amends and earn their way back into the community (Bazemore, 1999: 4), thereby to a certain degree also connecting to the family members' mitigation strategy for dealing with feelings of shame. Second, social rituals were found to be significant in facilitating Interviewee 5's negotiation of a reformed identity through a process of pro-social labelling (Maruna, Immarigeon, and LeBel, 2004: 329). Third, a collective (or religious) narrative was identified as supporting the meaning-making of Interviewee 8 as he constructed self-schemata and found a way to protect his cherished values and sense of self (Atran, 2017).

The convergence of motivational tendencies among Interviewees 6 and 7, on the one hand, and among Interviewees 5 and 8, on the other hand, highlights the explanatory potential of identity ownership to account for these divided story-telling practices. In this context, Rotter's (1966: 1) concept of a 'locus of control' from social psychology seems applicable. This refers to the degree to which individuals believe that they control the outcomes in their lives (internal locus) as opposed to those who believe in fate or luck (external locus). In this study, Interviewee 6 and Interviewee 7 largely anchor their autobiographical narrative in agentic control, i.e. in the conscious decisions of their past that they cannot evade, but for which they must take responsibility. In contrast, Interviewee 8 and (to a lesser degree) Interviewee 5 make sense of their past in more deterministic terms by emphasising their biographical trajectory that afforded them limited capacity to respond to outside forces (cf. Glinka, 1998: 25). In view of the literature on desistance narratives, these two strands of self-stories likely suggest varying degrees of cognitive transformation. While all formers stated that their P/CVE-related activism was supposed to 'make good' (cf. Maruna, Immarigeon, and LeBel, 2004) in one way or another, it could be argued that their narratives indicate different stages of cognitive change (or deradicalisation) along the lines of sustained desistance narratives (internal locus) and early desistance narratives (external locus). It is important to point out that the perception of 'being active' against perceived grievance or societal injustice in itself has a strong identity formation effect, which not only influences individuals in the P/CVE field, but also those on the path of (non-violent and benevolent) radicalisation (Reidy, 2018).

As for the strong identity ownership in the narratives of Interviewee 6 and Interviewee 7, they both share the salient commitment to working to gain society's trust because they understand that they have violated that trust. This characterises their reckoning with who they once were and their handling of the discomfort of cognitive dissonance (cf. Festinger, 1957). While it is important to note that they each spent at least 15 years inside their movements, they do not seek to avoid this mental discomfort ('I have to take responsibility over those thoughts' – Int. 6), e.g. by shifting responsibility outwards ('I never blame anything on my

childhood, I had agency' – Int. 7). This ownership over their past identity also reflects their expectation towards society since they do not expect redemption simply by renouncing their past beliefs. Hence their main motivation can be traced back to the notion of 'earned redemption' (Bazemore, 1999), which suggests an advanced stage of cognitive transformation given the social and psychological contingencies for successful desistance (King, 2013). In a similar vein, the all-out rejection of their formerly held extremist beliefs suggests that their P/CVE involvement is not constrained by any incomplete deradicalisation. This might have been a justifiable concern given the broad activism of Interviewee 7 that spans from primary to tertiary prevention measures. However, this concern is assuaged by the fact that he first engaged in P/CVE after having gone through lengthy and gradual processes of disengagement and deradicalisation. It could have also been a concern with Interviewee 6, given how important Nazi ideology was for him. However, this risk is not realised as he only engages in low-risk P/CVE intelligence-sharing (Tapley and Clubb, 2019).

In contrast, the formers who make sense of their past in more deterministic terms exhibit signs of 'role residuals', or leftovers from their extremist identity that impact their current identity (Ebaugh, 1988: 174). This is particularly visible in the narrative of Interviewee 8, who had the most role residuals of all formers. By projecting his biographical trajectory outwards, Interviewee 8 is able to justify his past with his own victimhood and this allows him to claim that the goals he always had are still valid and that only his actions that put him in prison were not right. Hence, Interviewee 8 still wants to fight for a better Germany and justifies the misguided actions of his past self by saying that ideology was the only way his past self could make sense of the world. These apparent role residuals generally manifest shortly after an exit, especially where a large part of the self-identity was equated with role definitions (Ebaugh, 1988: 178), and they could also be read as signs that Interviewee 8 had not yet completely deradicalised. Given that the P/CVE involvement of Interviewee 8 started immediately after he was released from prison, this points to potential risks, especially in view of his involvement in primary prevention formats (Walsh and Gansewig, 2019).

In sum, the formers who based their narratives on strong identity ownership showed a high willingness to deal with cognitive dissonance and earn back the trust of society. Former extremists who exhibited an external locus of control showed role residuals that may signify an incomplete deradicalisation. In this way, the concept and degree of external locus of control might be used to chart and assess one important type of exit pathways or to facilitate a sustained exit from extremism. This implies that the timing and type of P/CVE involvement matters in terms of potential risks because role residuals are more likely to manifest shortly after the disengagement. Hence, an incomplete deradicalisation could be particularly problematic in primary prevention settings.

Echoing Pemberton and Aarten (2018: 546), the narratives of formers suggest that emotions can play the role of a trigger to explain the motivation for a course of action and they can act as a transmitter, e.g. by emphasising emotions in reaction to victimisation. Interviewee 5 exemplifies this in his emotional response to a particular incident, namely, the humiliation he had felt when he was spat at in the face and called a Nazi. By referring to this stigmatising event, which left him 'horrified and ashamed', Interviewee 5 expresses the revelation that he too was stigmatising Muslims. As a result, Interviewee 5 felt the desire to rebuild his confidence by destigmatising himself and others through pro-social labelling. The way he went about it – sitting down with people he once thought of as 'being a bit of a problem' (Int. 5) – can be characterised as 'delabelling rituals' (Maruna, Immarigeon, and LeBel, 2004). Hence, the feeling of humiliation and stigma triggered a chain of events within the narrative of Interviewee 5 that led him to pursue delabelling rituals through which he could renegotiate his identity and regain confidence ('this time I am on the right side' – Int. 5). These social rituals allowed him to simultaneously disengage from the movement while also engaging in P/CVE. By going public with the community dialogue, this offered him a public stage for the recognition of his personal reform (cf. Maruna, Immarigeon, and LeBel, 2004; Maruna, 2001). This suggests that Interviewee 5 is motivated by delabelling through P/CVE-related activities, which is also embodied in his main message that underpins his cross-community dialogue ('don't judge or label, listen, allow the other person to be wrong' –

Int. 5). King (2013) suggests that such delabelling rituals are indicative of an 'early desistance narrative'. However, the role residuals of Interviewee 5 do not seem to conflict with his activism, not least because he had no direct victims that could be disregarded.

In sum, emotions can function as autobiographical anchors that can connect turning points of formers to their engagement in P/CVE. It could be argued that the better formers are able to reflect on their own emotions, the more likely they will be to bring a critical self-awareness and professional distance into P/CVE work. This implies that employing formers in P/CVE can be problematic if emotional triggers and transmitters become dominant motivational factors, e.g. if formers transmit an emotionally-laden counter-narrative that hinders them from seeing other factors of relevance in their P/CVE work. While it would be obviously beneficial to help formers disentangle their complex variety of emotions, it seems questionable if professional P/CVE-settings are the right place to do so given the potential risks, at least in client work and in primary prevention formats. In addition, it would be highly demanding of formers and family members alike to master emotional disengagement from their past, effectively holding them to a standard that is rarely met by anybody. This only strengthens the need for professional training and supervision, as well as collegial support during P/CVE work to have a third party available who might provide the necessary intervention or critical reflection in highly emotional situations. Unfortunately, emerging empirical research on the perspective of P/CVE organisations regarding the use of former right-wing extremists in prevention workshops in Germany has shown little awareness of that critical aspect (Walsh and Gansewig, 2021).

However, we are aware that our findings are subject to significant limitations. First and foremost, the small sample size of only eight interviews is naturally highly selective and prone to bias. The pre-selection of the interview sample essentially only left us with the option to assess the existing cases without making any changes to the sample or enlarge the dataset. With this significant limitation also automatically comes a specific focus on those countries that were represented in the original workshops and of course also various additional potential sources of bias. For example, family members or formers who were not

able to travel internationally or not able to communicate in English for the purpose of the workshop could not have been reached as potential interviewees. Hence, we do not attempt in any way to claim generalizable findings but rather a first insight into the motivational drivers of family members and formers to engage in P/CVE to raise awareness about the importance of assessing this aspect whenever persons affected by radicalisation are to be included in P/CVE measures. The importance of this is established in other research where some organisations using former right-wing extremists in Germany, for example, are found to have limited understanding of the professional and emotional support required to avoid risk to the formers or third parties (e.g. school classes exposed to workshops led by former extremists) (Walsh and Gansewig, 2021). Second, we are conscious that our comparison of family members of jihadist foreign fighters, on the one hand, and former right-wing extremists on the other can be rightfully criticised for bringing together fundamentally different ideologies, roles in P/CVE, and personal connection to radicalisation. Again, as it was not our aim to produce generalizable findings, we approached this issue by using separate methodologies and theoretical frameworks to account for the different nature of the two sub-samples. In this way, we are confident that our findings are valuable contributions to an emerging field of research that looks at the use of formers and families in P/CVE with a more sober, critically distanced, and evidence driven perspective than previous assessments. Third, while it might be argued that one of our key findings - that motives and pathways out of extremism or for dealing with emotional strain are as individual and context-bound as the routes leading into extremism or becoming impacted by it - is neither new nor surprising, this does not alter its significance. Exploring the content, themes, and drivers of those pathways allows us to better understand them in a context that has so far been almost completely neglected in research and P/CVE practice. Fourth, and finally, we must consider the possibility that motivations as stated by the interviewees have also been used (consciously or subconsciously) as a retrospective justification of their pathways and current P/CVE activism. As a potential form of retrospective bias, a motivational driver might have been constructed where it in fact did not exist.

Conclusion

This study has shown that family members and former extremists derive motivation from adverse life experiences to engage in pro-social behaviour through P/CVE. However, the way in which affected individuals describe their journeys points to diverging motivational tendencies, over and above obvious differences between families and formers. Family members are motivated because it provides them with coping mechanisms and post-traumatic growth, an increased identification with others, or because they respond to situational and volitional factors related to their sociocultural context ('positive marginality'). Former extremists were motivated because it allows them to earn their way back into society ('earned redemption'), to renegotiate their identity via pro-social labelling or to switch to a new identity that pursues previously held goals ('role residuals').

With regard to family members who lost their sons or siblings to violent extremism in conflict zones, this study provides further support for the assumptions of Vollhardt's (2009) model 'altruism born of suffering'. It does so, firstly, by understanding family members' motivations as mediators that explain the relationship between traumatic events and the type of P/CVE-related activism in which they engage. It also highlights the role of volition as the moderator influencing the strength of this relationship. These findings also suggest a number of propositions that might be explored in future research. First, we suggest, a high degree of individually experienced suffering due a close family member's involvement in violent extremism – be it in the form of dealing with uncertainty, personal regrets, or social stigma – will motivate the person (at least initially) to reduce negative affect by participating in family self-help groups as a form of coping. Second, motivational tendencies for deeper P/CVE involvement will only develop or lead to action if a person's volition is strengthened by a supportive social environment or an increased perception of a common fate, in which case the motivation will shift towards finding meaning and positive affect by talking more publicly in various prevention formats. Third, societal settings with a high degree of domestic political conflict, militancy, and government reluctance towards P/CVE will increase situational

demands and opportunity structures to which affected individuals are likely to respond through a more collective manifestation of P/CVE-related activism that is directed towards a nation or strained collective. Future research should examine the role of volition and how affected family members can receive social support that helps them to find closure and deal with trauma. By the same logic but from a different perspective, it would be promising in the future to look at why many formers and family members do not become involved in P/CVE work. How are they able to satisfy some of the emotional and psychological mechanisms we have highlighted here? Furthermore, we were unable here to explore the significant dynamics of gender and P/CVE involvement from a formers and families perspective. It has been noted in recent P/CVE research that the aspect of gender plays a significant role in P/CVE (e.g., Pearson, Winterbotham & Brown, 2020) and future research should therefore also pay closer attention to the influence of gender in the decision to engage in P/CVE activities.

By carefully extrapolating from the findings about the motivations of former extremists in contributing to P/CVE, the following propositions for further research are made. First, if former extremists exhibit an internal locus of control by largely processing their biography through agentic action, they might be more likely to be on the path of deradicalisation and also more able to bring a professional distance to their P/CVE engagement. Conversely, if formers externalise most causes of their actions, this can signify residuals of their old extremist identity. Second, formers with a high degree of role residuals are likely to be motivated by strong emotions that can signify notions of competitive victimhood or a reduced ability to abstract from their own biography.

The findings of this study, in particular those about the motivations of formers, have the potential to inform a critical self-awareness of the field to avoid a P/CVE 'mission creep' where formers are employed only based on the assumption that they are effective (cf. Koehler, 2020: 20). Future research should examine whether the propositions above are borne out in practice and if there are differences between former Islamist and right-wing extremists, e.g. by using quasi-experimental designs, or combining impact evaluations and psychological surveys. We need a better understanding of the underlying motivation of former extremists

and how it can impact their contribution to P/CVE. At a minimum, formers should find their engagement in P/CVE inherently satisfying without being financially dependent on it. Work such as that recently conducted by Gansewig and Walsh (2021) should be significantly expanded in our view.

If there is a risk of adverse effects, especially when former extremists conduct primary prevention workshops without the appropriate pedagogical training, there may be considerable ethical concerns. For example, if a former were to use their activism as a vehicle to perpetuate a fixed set of (e.g. religious) values (that may have worked in one case), they would be promoting their own personal theory of change in the name of P/CVE, which challenges the concept's core philosophy (Tapley and Clubb, 2019). Such risks should be taken seriously because any case of ethical misconduct in P/CVE settings may cause a backlash (e.g. if victims are disrespected), which in turn would be detrimental for time and resource intensive P/CVE programmes that rely on public support (cf. Schuurman and Bakker, 2016). Again, this highlights the consequences of employing formers, especially if they are still deradicalising or in the process of coming to terms with their own feelings of guilt or wanting to project their changed identity outwards. Of course, receiving social confirmation that one has changed is a necessary stage for desistance. However, employing formers who are motivated by a range of emotions introduces a significant amount of complication and unknown factors into the practice of P/CVE. It is important to help formers disentangle the variety of emotions and the sequence in which emotions influenced their own radicalisation and deradicalisation; the question is whether professional P/CVE settings are the right context for doing that, if these emotions can damage those very prevention efforts.

Finally, individuals' underlying motivations need to align with the scope and risks of the P/CVE role in question, as one's (initial) motivation can be indicative of potentially adverse effects for themselves or others. It may be that an affected individual is not yet ready to take on (more) responsibility in a P/CVE measure because she or he needs more time to achieve a level of post-traumatic growth or deradicalisation that would be most beneficial for all actors involved. Ideally, the involvement in P/CVE should offer affected individuals gains

in *communion* and *agency* as healthy levels in both are known to motivate pro-social behaviour while being associated also with positive outcomes in mental health and overall well-being (Hegelson, 1994). Since former extremists are not a panacea in the fight against violent extremism, and given that not all family members of deceased terrorists are stable enough to avoid reliving their trauma during prevention workshops, it may be worth rethinking their role in P/CVE. Echoing Pemberton et al. (2018), we assert that instead of asking 'what can this former or that family member achieve for P/CVE', the question 'where does this affected individual need to belong to achieve healthy levels of *communion* and *agency*' may provide more meaningful answers.

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