Working Paper Series

The Process of Radicalization: Right-Wing Skinheads in Quebec

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Working Paper Series

The Process of Radicalization: Right-Wing Skinheads in Quebec[1]

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INTRODUCTION

In the United States and Europe, right-wing extremist groups have been on the rise for a decade or so. Although this phenomenon is somewhat less visible in Canada, right-wing extremist groups have existed there for decades and have been extremely resilient, appealing to many generations of those who identify with right-wing and hate ideologies. Even though right-wing extremist groups, including right-wing skinheads, are included on the Canadian Anti-terrorist Strategy list of threats to national security, very little empirical and theoretical knowledge is available about such groups in either political science or criminology. Our pioneer research studies the radicalization process of right-wing skinheads in the province of Quebec by identifying the mechanisms that shape pathways toward extremism and violence. In doing so it makes a theoretical and empirical contribution to understanding a phenomenon not previously studied in Canada. We look at the role and prevalence of violence in such right-wing groups and how it is used by members and consider whether these groups constitute a potential threat and whether it is realistic to fear that a "lone-wolf" event might occur in Quebec. One of our most important findings is that the so-called skinhead movement, while present in Quebec, is composed of fragmented and segmented groups that lack any formal relationships and are thus extremely volatile.

We begin with a review of the literature dealing with right-wing and skinhead movements. Then, based on what we suggest is a more appropriate concept for understanding right-wing extremism in the Canadian concept–that of oppositional groups–we develop our analytical framework, which is grounded on both the social movement (Tilly 2003; Della Porta 2013) and "trust network" perspectives (Tilly 2005). A third section presents our methodological approach and the process of our data collection is described and discussed. Our results are presented in the final part of the paper. We detail the structure of right-wing oppositional groups in Quebec, focusing on skinhead groups. Then we examine the radicalization process of right-wing skinheads, analysing the mechanisms that shape their pathways toward extremism. This research is part of a larger project on right-wing extremism in Canada and, as our fieldwork is ongoing, results are

preliminary.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Although most of our participants described themselves as skinheads, this term should be used with great caution since it is applied to a variety of heterogeneous groups that differ not only in terms of their structure and composition but also in the ideas and values they promote (Young and Craig 1997, 179). Cursory categorization should thus be avoided when looking at the skinhead galaxy. This precaution is particularly important in Quebec or Canada where there has been very little research on skinhead groups. In the following literature review, our objective is to define the subject of the present research and to question the various understandings of "skinhead."

The development of the right-wing skinhead movement in Canada

Throughout its history, the skinhead movement has had an international dimension, although no structured federative movement exists. Begun in England in the 1960s among working-class youth (Zellner 1995), skinhead groups spread rapidly through Europe and North America. Popular images, particularly in the United States and in Canada, usually depict these groups as neo-Nazi and often violent (Young and Craig 1997, 178). This portrait is incomplete. While some skinhead groups are openly racist, there are three other well-defined factions: the "traditional" or "non-political", the anti-racists, designated by the acronyms SHARP (Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice), or RASH (Red and Anarchist Skinheads), also known as the Red Skins, and the gay Skinheads, who appeared in the 1990s.[1] These four coexisting categories are the result of tensions within the original skinhead movement as well as multiple influences from different groups, including occasional connections with other organizations, such as those in the right-wing sphere, or with political parties. The specific political, sociological, and cultural contexts in which these factions developed have also had a strong influence.

Racist or neo-Nazi skinheads appeared in the United Kingdom in the 1970s. Influenced by

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[1] We will concentrate on the first three categories, since there is very little research available on the gay skinheads, who are difficult to situate in relation to the other factions (Borgenson 2005, 55).

white supremacist ideology, such as that promoted by the right-wing party National Front Political, some British skinheads integrated racist elements into their beliefs and openly displayed them in their rock music (Zellner 1995). In response, those in the skinhead movement who wanted to oppose the rise of right-wing extremist ideas created by so-called anarchist or socialist formations, defined themselves by the style of music they played. If racist skinheads prefer a Nutty rock style, the so-called "traditional" or "non-political" skinheads prefer the Oi! style, which blends punk and rock influences (Sarabia and Shiver 2008, 271). Racism, whether espoused or rejected, constitutes the main division between these different factions, all of which are struggling for legitimacy, a struggle that often involves violence (Brown 2004).

These factions are represented in most of the countries where skinhead groups exist, including Canada (on the development of skinheads in the United States, see Ridgeway 1990; Hamm 1993; Moore 1993; Wood 1999; and Borgenson 2005.) Scholars and observers of such groups have focused largely on the violent neo-Nazi faction. Kinsella (1995), for instance, notes the rise of neo-Nazi factions in the alternative music sphere in different Canadian cities, particularly Calgary, Toronto, and Ottawa from the 1980s on (307). Skinhead groups in English-speaking Canada are influenced by the broader skinhead subculture, which is publicized through their music. They also reflect strategies adopted by other American groups, such as the Aryan Resistance Movement, who have turned to Canada to increase their membership (Hubert and Claudé 1991, 44-45). The situation in Quebec resembles that in other Canadian provinces. Neo-Nazi groups began in Montreal, specifically in the English-speaking neighbourhood of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, and then attracted young people from the entire city, gradually spreading to French-speaking neighbourhoods. During this time, weakly politicized groups mixed with openly neo-Nazi groups (Hubert and Claudé 1991, 51).

At the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, several attempts to structure the neo-Nazi skinhead scene took place in connection with musical events (Hubert and Claudé 1991, 64-66). Simultaneously, RASH and SHARP[2] groups, which are still poorly understood because they remain largely unresearched, multiplied in main Canadian cities, and identified with partic-

2 SHARP and RASH groups are present throughout Canada, specifically in Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, and southern Ontario (REF RASH and SHARP Internet sites)

ular musical groups in order to stand out from neo-Nazi groups. From a general point of view, the extreme diversity of skinheads, both in Canada and abroad, is striking. This diversity is illustrated by two ethnographic studies conducted on skinheads in Canada, which reveal to what degree the level of adhesion to and affiliation with the skinhead subculture as well as the content of that subculture varies from one group to another. The group studied by Baron (1997) looks like a street gang composed of idle youths who find a source of structure in the skinhead style, while the "traditional" group analyzed by Young and Craig (1997) is composed of more politicized youngsters. These studies also illustrate how individuals may use aspects of skinhead identity differentially. However, the dearth of research on skinheads in Canada constitutes an obstacle to the analysis of the trajectories of these groups from a long-term perspective.

How have these groups and their development been analyzed?

The literature on skinhead groups is scarce and, as noted above, is largely oriented toward the study of racist groups. This focus on groups affiliated with the neo-Nazi movement blurs our understanding of a diverse and shifting phenomenon. It is important to avoid hasty categorizations regarding groups that may not publicly express their political ideology and our work thus remains exploratory in many areas. Given this, we have chosen to use a mixed approach that encourages constant dialogue between the theoretical tools being used and the empirical material being studied.

The major studies on skinheads were conducted in the 1980s and 1990s, with very little work done after that time, particularly in Canada. Most of the available research deals with a specific context (the United States, for example), a specific group, or specific elements attributed to skinhead subculture. Most of the available theories concentrate on skinhead subculture, focusing on specific characteristics that are apparent within all groups, whatever their claimed political affiliation, such as the spirit of camaraderie, the role of music, the type of music preferred, clothing codes,[3] physical and linguistic postures, and the role of violence (Bjorgo 1993; Bennett 1999; Cotter 1999; Brown 2004; Borgenson 2005; Jibson 2007; Mesner and al. 2007; Sarabia and

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3 Clothing codes vary depending not only on context but also on the cities and the groups under study. This makes it even more difficult to understand and interpret this identity indicator.

Shiver 2008). In criminology, literature focusing on street gangs is often referenced (Hamm 1993; Moore 1993; Chistiansen 1994; Baron 1997). For instance, Baron (1997) notes that in skinhead groups assimilated into street gangs, violence is usually opportunistic and is generally aimed at other skinhead factions who may be defined as "others to be knocked out" (147). Incidentally, this is one of the paradoxes noted by several researchers working on "non-political" or "non-racist" skinheads: these groups present themselves as being against racist ideas, such as those promoted by neo-Nazi skinheads, but maintain an ambiguous relation to race, territory, and patriotism.

More recently, a few researchers have addressed the role of the Internet in the propagation and preservation of skinhead identity. They agree on the importance of the early use of the Internet, particularly by US radical right-wing groups, to reach out to members, broadcast information, and strengthen their appeal (Back and al. 1998; Burris and al. 2000; Back 2002). Skinheads, whatever their affiliation, are no exception in this regard, using the Internet to increase their visibility, particularly with potential recruits. Skinhead blogs, such as analyzed by Anahita (2008), also have prescriptive and performative functions: the responses posted on these blogs both codify and consolidate the borders of the group, thus helping to affirm skinhead identity (2008). These processes establish an online social control, although posts reveal a certain flexibility regarding certain areas, such as the role of women (160). Campbell (2006) focuses on the categorization effects of the Internet, particularly the unarticulated and fluctuating acceptance of certain identity indicators, while Borgenson (2005) reveals cultural differences between skinhead groups who use the Internet as a mean of expression.

The literature offers numerous keys to understanding the multiple aspects of what is a highly heterogeneous movement. However, several dimensions remain understudied. First, studies on racist groups abound while groups that characterize themselves as anti-racist (RASH or SHARP), "traditional" groups, or gay Skinheads have seldom been part of researchers' agendas. Second, theorization about these groups is almost exclusively concerned with skinhead subculture. But, as emphasized by Pilkington (2010), the "subculture" concept may have been overused; many sociologists and ethnologists who adopt the "post-cultural" way of thought

are no longer using it (10). Moreover, this concept does not really capture two changes that are becoming increasingly noticeable. First, these so-called alternative subcultures focus on youth (Benett 2006). Yet, while young men are in the majority in skinhead groups, these groups also include a large number of militants who were part of the groups from the beginning and have remained a part of it. Second, the fluidity of these groups' memberships continues to increase, particularly in this era of social media expansion. We contend that it is increasingly important to develop an alternative theory that can better explain the engagement of people with these groups and their radicalization, and the development of groups that evolve on the margins of public and political space while also supporting highly politicized discourses. In particular, we need to deal with a central dimension of such highly-fragmented, ill-explored, and volatile groups (at least in Quebec) in the literature. Considering the importance of the group and its influence on its members, the question arises as to how and to what degree the influence mechanisms referenced in the literature are applicable in the Quebec context.

Conceptual framework

Popular representations portray skinheads groups as marginalized. Skinheads themselves largely support this picture, as they openly reject the dominant social and cultural norms, expressing their rejection through alternative music, the adoption of linguistic and physical codes, and violence. However, given the ideological and cultural heterogeneity of skinhead groups, we suggest that marginality should be replaced by a concept that does not emphasize ideological affiliation but instead captures the idea of marginality as one of these groups' core characteristics. We contend that the concept of "oppositional groups" can offer important insights into understanding the skinhead phenomenon.

Skinheads as oppositional groups

In their 2005 article "White Supremacists and the Internet," Adam and Roscigno use the concept of "oppositional culture" to provide a systematic analysis of the actions and culture of a social movement. More precisely, the authors highlight "three functions or processes of social

movement or oppositional culture": "(1) identity building and solidarity maintenance, (2) providing followers and/or potential recruits with an alternative frame for interpreting grievances, and (3) promoting a sense of efficacy relative to group grievances outlined in the frame" (2005, 761). Following this three-pronged concept, we first consider oppositional groups as social movements, here defined as "processes through which informal networks between a multiplicity of actors, sharing a collective identity and engaged in social and/or political conflict, are built and reproduced" (Diani 1992, 13). We then specify what it means to define these social movements through their oppositional nature, defining oppositional groups as groups that consciously and strategically adopt a marginalized position within society, following and defending alternative rules and norms. Some of these groups may choose to go completely underground, becoming "clandestine groups" (Della Porta 2013, 7). Becoming clandestine may also be a contingent process, for instance, as a response to repression or the use of violence.

This definition conveys the idea that the group has a certain power, or at least a form of social efficacy, in that it provides a supportive milieu for its members as well as ready-to-use representations. On this perspective, the process of identity construction is a central component of the group's emergence and survival (Melucci 1995). The definition takes into consideration the structuring role of identity-formation and transformation, the influence of social as well as cultural contexts, and the quality and density of informal interpersonal relationships between members of the group. We contend that the group's symbolic identity is created through a dynamic process that entails continuous transactions between its members, its members and other groups (whether the same category of group or not), and its members and their immediate and distant environment (Tilly 2003, 5). Although unstable and fluid (Steinberg 1999), identity-formation requires that members of the group reach at least a minimal consensus on the meanings generated during interactions and on their transformation. This consensus also concerns common goals (Melucci 1995). Diani (2013) notes that "identity plays a crucial role here as it connects actors to longer-term collective projects, thus making their relation different from that between actors engaged in purely instrumental coalitions" (1). Connection between militants doesn't take place only through shared collective experiences–affective ties also play a crucial role in the dynamics

of mobilization and in sustaining social movements over time (Lefranc and Sommier 2009). More specifically, emotional factors contribute to creating and maintaining a sense of solidarity. In groups that seek to distance themselves from the dominant social order and that may, to some degree, go underground, solidarity is based mainly on trust, as trust expresses mutual understanding as well as defining the nature and scope of interactions between the group's members and between the group and the "outside world."

Oppositional groups can thus be seen as "networks of trust" in Tilly's (2007) sense: "we can think of trust as an attitude or as a relationship with practices attached" (6). According to him, trust "consists of placing valued outcomes at risk to others' malfeasance, mistakes, or failures (4). Networks of trust are thus "ramified interpersonal connections, consisting mainly of strong ties, within which people set valued, consequential, long-term resources" (Tilly 2007, 6). These networks can be based on family or clan relationships or develop around common interests or shared representations. A network of trust exists when the following conditions are created: "the relation has a name mutually known to its participants," "involvement in that relation gives all participants some minimum of shared rights and obligations," "participants have means of communicating and representing their shared membership," and "participants mark and maintain boundaries separating all members from outsiders" (2005, 44).

The use of such a concept provides important insights into the nature of the relationships that create bonds between members of an oppositional group, the communication process that results in the co-construction of shared representations, and the actions that organize and structure the network. As trust is a key component of the solidarity and cohesion of skinhead groups, we contend that the individual process of radicalization is an important part of the group's trajectory.

Radicalization: moving beyond linear models

Since the mid-2000s, the concept of radicalization has become a "catch-all concept" (Coolsaet 2011, 261), used to describe and analyse "what goes on before the bomb goes off" (Sedgwick 2010, 479). Most scholars agree on the confusion created by the absence of a common definition for the term and

a lack of clarity in its use (Pisoiu 2013, 246). For instance, while the concept is often used to capture a change in ideas, attitudes, or behaviour, authors don't systematically distinguish between cognitive and behavioural radicalization (Neumann 2013). As well, radicalism and extremism are frequently confused (Mandel 2010). Additionally, most studies on radicalization deal with so-called Islamist/Jihadist home-grown terrorism. Scholars interested in other forms of extremism (such as right-wing, left-wing, and environmental) study the involvement and engagement of extremist and sometimes violent groups and also analyze the factors that trigger those changes–behavioural or cognitive–that have been recently been considered to be part of the concept of radicalization. But, surprisingly, the conclusions of these studies are often neglected in conceptual discussions. Finally, as is the case in most research on political violence, only a few studies are empirically grounded (Bartlett, Birdwell, and King 2010, 14), with a majority of scholars engaging either in conceptual debates or undertaking research based on secondary sources, which are sometimes of doubtful quality.

Despite this critical assessment, there has been some progress in understanding why individuals embrace radical views or turn to violence. Rather than provide an exhaustive review of literature on radicalization, we highlight three important contributions from this field of research. First, most scholars agree that radicalization should be understood as a gradual process through which an individual changes his/her beliefs and, for some, comes to consider violence as a legitimate means toward realizing these beliefs. As Taylor and Horgan (2006) remark, "describing activities in terms of a process also implies a potential for some form of modelling of the events and their relationships" (586). Different models have been created to describe how people become radicalized (i.e., Moghadam 2005; McCauley and Moskalenko 2008; Borum 2011a and 2011b). However these models have many shortcomings, the most important being their linearity. Although we disagree with such linear conceptions, we acknowledge the explanatory power of the notion of process in understanding the pathways toward extremism and violence.

Second, many authors draw a useful distinction between cognitive and behavioural–or non-violent and violent–radicalization (Bartlett and Miller 2012; Neumann 2013). This perspective recognizes that there is no automatic and inevitable link between the adoption of radical beliefs and violent actions (Borum 2011a, 9). Those who hold radical views are not systematically

the most violent and, as Bartlett and Miller (2010) put it, "becoming a terrorist is not always a natural or linear progression from being a radical" (17). Violence should thus be considered as only one of the possible outcomes of the process of radicalization. This does not mean, however, that we should keep cognitive and behavioural radicalization completely separate. Rather it requires recognizing–and this is the third contribution from the literature on radicalization–that the radicalization process is "complex and highly individualized" as well as very context-sensitive (Vidino 2010, 3). There is no single explanation for why individuals hold radical views and why some of these individuals resort to violence. This observation leads us to consider an aspect in the process of radicalization that is often overlooked–temporality. Does violence come first? Is violence seen as an answer to a perceived injustice or as a legitimate avenue justified by a system of beliefs? To date, the literature on radicalization has provided only partial answers to these central questions. Moreover, the repeated attempts to build models that can predict and ultimately prevent radicalization tend to downplay the role of context. By context, we mean the cultural, social, and political contexts as well as organizational, when the radicalization process involves groups as well as individuals.

To capture the role of multiple contexts and their interactions with the factors that may trigger the process of radicalization, we rely on the contentious politics approach towards radicalization, cross-referencing research in this area with the literature on political violence and skinheads. Our interpretive framework focuses on the process dimension of the radicalization process (Bosi, Demetriou, and Malthaner 2014, 3) as well as its relational, contingent, and multifactorial nature. Aligning with Alimi, Bosi, and Demetriou (2012), we define radicalization as "the development of extreme ideology and/or the adoption of violent forms of contention, including categorical indiscriminate violence (or terrorism) by a challenging group" (7). We also adhere to those authors who call for the adoption of a mechanism-based approach, in the sense advocated by McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001, 24). We first identify the main mechanisms at work in radicalization and then analyse how they interact with each other. The mechanism-based approach does not lead to an a priori distinction between non-violent and violent radicalization but instead encourages investigation of how violence is located within broader processes (Bosi,

Demetriou, and Malthaner 2014, 2). To identify mechanisms at work in the process of radical-ization is not a new approach, as in their work, McCauley and Moskalenko (2011) demonstrated twelve mechanisms of radicalization at the micro, meso, and macro levels. Although this book offers valuable insights into the psychological and political factors of radicalization, it doesn't look at the interplay between the different mechanisms at work, neither does it analyse the role of contingency in individual trajectory.

The contentious politics approach goes beyond the traditional debates over agency ver-sus structure, as it proposes linking contextual, cultural, and structural elements into a compre-hensive framework. Structures are here understood as a "structure of relations," as Alimi, Bosi, and Demetriou put it (2012, 8). Then, using a relational perspective, we analyze the interplay of actions and structural changes, emphasizing contexts and events, particularly "transformative events." "Transformative events" are defined as "turning points in structural change, concen-trated moments of political and cultural creativity when the logic of historical development is reconfigured by human action, but by no means abolished" (McAdam and Sewell 2001, 102). Such events can entail a complete repositioning of actors (move/counter-move) and alter their dominant visions of the world. They can also open up opportunities for new actors and frames to emerge (101).

We identify three types of mechanisms: relational, cognitive, and environmental. Relational mechanisms involve both group dynamics and the relationships individuals in the group and the group itself have developed with other actors involved in the conflict, who may include other groups (belonging to the same category or not) and representatives of the state. Cognitive mech-anisms involve the individuals who are members of the group and refer to frame formation, creation of a consensual sense of identification and its interiorisation, and the way an identity frame contributes to altering an individual's beliefs and perceptions. Environmental mechanisms include the relationships a member of an oppositional group has with his/her immediate con-text: family, his/her circle of friends, including "virtual" ones, and the group to which he or she claims to belong. From this perspective, oppositional groups provide a "community of practice" and constitute "informal social learning environments" for new ideas, experiences, and practices

(Taylor and Horgan 2006, 590). Environmental mechanisms also include the way each member of the group and the group itself integrates within the society and interacts with the social and cultural environment. Bartlett, Birdwell, and King (2010) affirm that the counter-cultural characteristics of the radicalization process are often understudied (17). We fill this gap by focusing on an overlooked phenomenon in Canada, the development of skinhead groups in Quebec, highlighting their volatility, one of the core characteristics of these groups, which has a strong effect on the radicalization process at both the individual and collective level.

Elements of methodology

Our approach is mainly exploratory. The last systematic research on right-wing and skinhead movements in Canada dates back to the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. Hence, our first step was to draw a portrait of the current "oppositional groups" in Quebec: Who are their main protagonists? Where are they evolving? What are their main claims? What are their structures? Are they organized and, if so, how? How do members become affiliated with these groups? And what about their radicalization?

Our initial objective was to study the skinhead movement in Quebec. As mentioned, it quickly became apparent that not only was the "movement" poorly structured–if structured at all–but that extreme right-wing actors were not confined to skinhead groups but included a number of other participants who interact with the skinheads and exercise a strong influence on them. We consider all of these to be *oppositional groups*.

Since we weren't familiar with extreme right-wing and skinhead movements in Canada or Quebec before undertaking this project, the initial step consisted in exploring all available sources, beginning with the Internet. The objective was to draw a portrait–which could not, of course, be exhaustive at this stage–of these oppositional movements in order to distinguish clues and indicators that would allow us to identify groups, places, and, eventually, individuals of interest, permitting us to start the second and more delicate phase of the data collection, namely fieldwork and interviews. We wanted to gather as much data as possible from open sources and for this the Internet and social media (Facebook) proved to be very useful, as did articles in the press

related to events implicating right-wing groups or individuals. (These articles also allowed us to document individual trajectories. We also made use of information provided by Facho Watch Quebec, a site available both on Facebook and on the Internet (Facho Watch 2014)). Though rich in terms of information, and well documented and valuable for our objectives, we used this source with great caution since its content providers–who are affiliated with RASH and SHARP– openly display their antiracist and antifascist colours.

Once we had a first–although partial–mapping of oppositional movements in Quebec, our second step was to look for the names of those affiliated with these movements on social media, particularly Facebook. This led to a snowball effect, whereby more and more data, including pictures, comments, and discussions became accessible. Exploration of the web and social media also provided us with valuable information that was useful in preparing for interviews with members of oppositional movements.

Our second step consisted in conducting interviews with actual or former members of oppositional groups. This step was crucial for our research since, given our exploratory approach, we needed direct information from those in oppositional groups in order to obtain the finest-grained material available on individual trajectories, values, and in-group dynamics. This strategy revealed itself as increasingly important when we encountered difficulty in exploiting the data available on the web due to very efficient social control exercised by oppositional groups. For example, despite numerous attempts, we were never able to locate a skinhead concert before it happened. We would see flyers on different Facebook pages but they never revealed the place where the concert was to be held–we would learn the location only after the concert was over. Since in situ observations were part of our methodology, we needed to meet at least one person who could provide us with such information.

Once we identified individuals or places, we established a list of people to contact. In order to diversify our approach and maximize our data collection, we used alternative strategies, such as contacting tattoo salons in Montreal and visiting bars and places that the Internet and social media suggested were frequented by oppositional groups. Although we expected to have some

difficulty in establishing contact with members of oppositional groups, we did not imagine it would be as difficult as it turned out to be. As we explain below, we believe that this difficulty is a result in itself: people revealed themselves to be very frightened of discussing themselves or their groups, even occasionally threatening us. Most did not return our calls or text messages, or if they did, would not show up at the place where the interview was supposed to take place.

However, we finally overcame this difficulty and were able to conduct seven interviews with five persons from oppositional groups: two interviews with one person (respondent 1); one interview with respondent 2; one interview with respondent 3; and two interviews with respondent 4, one of which involved a second respondent (respondent 5). All respondents were males of various ages. Although all respondents advocated oppositional values and right-wing ideas, at the time of the interviews only respondent 5 and respondent 2 were currently affiliated with a group that promoted such ideas. Respondent 4 and respondent 1 were not officially affiliated to a specific group. Respondent 4 had decided to quit the group because he thought it was not radical enough, and respondent 1 had been expelled. Only respondent 4 and respondent 5 agreed to have their interviews recorded. Thus some of the data presented below are transcripts created by the researchers, based on notes taken during the meeting.

We also collected documents and used information from nine cases involving former or current members of oppositional groups who had been convicted of criminal offenses. These documents are available on the database QuickLaw. The keywords used to retrieve the data were *Skinhead, *right-wing extremism, *racism, *anti Semitism, and *hate propaganda, which directed us to sixty-nine Quebec files. Criteria of inclusion and exclusion were defined based on the objectives of our research. We eliminated all court sentences that did not concern skinheads, whatever the criminal offenses for which they had been convicted. This research strategy has a number of limitations. First, cases settled out of court are not included in the database. While there were no figures available for this group, our impression is that it represents a significant proportion of court sentences. Second, we realized in the course of fieldwork that the database we consulted does not include all sentences involving skinheads. For instance, some of our interviewees had past convictions, but the database did not include their names. Obtaining

information then involved going to the different provincial and municipal courts, names in hand, and consulting court sentences one by one, an extremely long and uncertain process. Finally, the information on the life trajectory of individuals and their environment is very heterogeneous in terms of both quality and quantity.

The next sections present our empirical results. First, we describe right-wing oppositional groups in Quebec, providing a detailed picture of the organizational structure of the whole movement and situating skinhead groups within this larger structure. We describe the volatility of skinhead groups and the weakness, or in some cases nonexistence, of their organizational structure. Second, based on our empirical results, we analyse the three mechanisms that shape the process of radicalization of right-wing skinheads in Quebec.

A DESCRIPTION OF RIGHT-WING OPPOSITIONAL MOVEMENT IN QUEBEC

Our first step consists of describing the galaxy of oppositional movements in Quebec. This notion refers to a nebula of actors who define themselves through an alternative frame of references to the dominant values and principles shared in Quebec society (e.g., socio-democratic values). Within this right-wing movement, we observe several formations of actors (groups, political parties, music bands, record labels, forums, websites) that are divided according to a gradation of displayed and promoted symbols (from Quebec folklore to the swastika). We also find a wide range of causes being promoted (from the preservation of Quebec identity to the promotion of violence towards immigrants) and different forms of activism (from the development of websites to acts of violence, with gatherings and concerts promoting white supremacy falling somewhere in between).

Nationalist groups and movements

A first circle of right-wing oppositional groups is composed of nationalist groups or movements, among them the Nationalistes du Sagunenay, the Nationalistes Jeannois, the Coalition pour l'Histoire, and the Fédération des Québécois de Souche. These groups promote Quebec identity, claiming to be its protectors and keepers. They provide many platforms for Quebecers

who want to advocate for the protection of Quebec identity and heritage as well as promoting a nationalist ideology through which they can express themselves and broadcast their opinions. For example, one of the most representative and visible groups, the Fédération des Québécois de Souche, founded in 2007, states on its website (2014):

> We are a network of men and women, young and old, Quebecers by descent, believers in the principle that there is a sacred union between a land and its people. We are nationalists.[4]

The oppositional nature of this movement is displayed more clearly in the next excerpt, captured on the same webpage (Fédération de Souche 2014):

> Confronted with globalization, multiculturalism, and other movements that try to homogenize us, to cut us from our roots and to turn us into simple soulless consumers, we have chosen active resistance. We refuse to endure History, preferring to write it.

These groups insist that Quebecers need to protect themselves from a major crisis created by multiculturalism, a series of threats to the French language, and disinformation provided by the mass media (which is accused of attempting to turn the population into zombies). The current situation is denounced and framed as having been poisoned by individualism and indifference. Democracy is seen as corrupt, not only because of the models it chooses to promote (e.g., Dr Henry Morgenthaler) but also because of a series of evils perceived to be inherent in it, such as the hypersexualisation of the younger generation, global warming, and the drop in birth rates. Confronted with these challenges, the inefficiency of elected political parties is believed to be exacerbated and the solutions they offer are presented as inadequate. The solutions offered by radical groups are then required to solve the problems. As the Fédération des Québécois de Souche (2014) concludes:

> Quebecers, the time to make sacrifices has come. Once, there was a time when current practice consisted of temporarily settling problems, hoping they would go away by themselves while trying to satisfy the population as it continued on its materialist and individualist quest. Today, it is too late avoid feeling the consequences of this pathological cowardice, but there is still time to reverse its effects...NO, we will not accept inaction any longer!

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4 Translation is ours. This group and its website are less active than they were when the group first began

It is worth noting that the Fédération des Québecois de Souche is considered by at least one respondent to be the main hub for current right-wing activity in Quebec:

> The Fédération des Québécois de Souche ... is not just a skinhead group, but there are many skinheads within its ranks. They are not really present in Montreal, but rather in the Saguenay–Lac-St-Jean region of Quebec. They might be a right-wing group … I consider them to be a right-wing group, the biggest in Quebec.[5]

Right-wing skinhead groups

The next circle of right-wing oppositional movements is distinct because its members have crossed a symbolic threshold by actually committing acts of violence in relation to the implementation of right-wing values. Many groups qualify for this circle, including skinheads. As mentioned above, the skinhead movement is composed of different groups, including some whose members are openly racist and others whose orientations are "traditional" or "non-political," anti-racist, or gay. This typology is echoed in Quebec, in particular in two types of groups. On one hand are "red" and anarchist skinheads, who fight against fascism, racism, and capitalism and have existed, largely in Montreal, since about 1994. On the other hand are a series of skinhead groups who define themselves as nationalist and promote right-wing values and ideas, even though many of their members do not define their group as belonging to the extreme right. These groups, as well as the clearly neo-Nazi groups, are the subjects of our study. These actors use a discourse that is largely drawn from the repertory of the extreme right and make use of both radical gestures (fights, use of violence against strangers) and words (openly racist). All of our respondents come from this circle. According to some interviewees,[6] most of the groups in this circle are composed of from five to ten individuals.

Reliable data on this second circle are very scarce. The following description is based largely on press articles (Touzin 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2010d; Desjardins 2011), social media (mostly Facebook), and interviews conducted with respondents affiliated with this circle. Only groups where information was confirmed by at least two sources are included here; further research will be conducted to draw a more detailed

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5 Interview, respondent 3, Quebec, 2013. (This and all interviews for this study were conducted in confidentiality: the names of interviewees and biographical details that may indirectly identify are withheld by mutual agreement.)
6 Interview, respondent 4, Province of Quebec, 2013; Interview, respondent 5, Province of Quebec, 2014.

picture and thicker description of this second circle of oppositional groups.

A striking element is how fragmented and segmented these groups are, revealing their extreme volatility. Not only is it difficult to identify individual affiliations, it is also difficult to determine which groups are willing to work together, something that proved to be problematic during the interviews when two respondents threatened to withdraw from the study if we had, or were about to, meet with group X or Y. In addition, individuals move from group to group for all sorts of reasons, as discussed in more detail later. In one case, for instance, the individual considered the group to be insufficiently radical (respondent 4), while in another case the individual was expelled (respondent 1). Such mobility renders any attempt to map this second circle's structure even more complicated. As one interviewee said:

> I went [to a concert]. I was curious and I'll tell you, it hasn't changed [from the 80s, when he was part of this circle], in the sense that it is so disarranged, the movement, so … democracy, they made sure that all split, that there are no … nothing that connects, that people hold together. Forget it, there is no danger [of any threat]. There are 50, in a room and they look like stupid people and they fight each other and people are drunk. What do you want to do with that? You can't do anything, there is no danger. We are not in the United States here … As for me, and from what I know, it is a pity. I was embarrassed to see them act like that.[7]

Many groups make up this circle. For example, there is the Dead Boys Crew, from Montreal, who are considered to be neo-Nazi, violent, and armed (Oire Scene 2011). Other similar groups are Légion Nationaliste and Quebec Radical, also known as Feux Follets, which is a xenophobic identity organization founded in 2003. It claims to be "a[n] extreme right group, ready for anything to have a country, a language, and a culture" (MySpace 2014). According to Facho Watch Quebec, members of this group vandalized a mosque in 2006, leaving flyers with the Quebec Radical signature.[8] Ragnarok and Ragnarok Vinland are also part of this second circle of oppositional groups and operate in Montreal and Amos. Social media present them as a neo-Nazi skinhead street gang composed of about thirty individuals (Touzin 2008)[9]. They present themselves as the Quebec branch of Combat 18 (the armed branch of the international organization Blood and Honour). Vinland Front, or Vinland Front Skinhead is also part of this circle. It was founded in 2000 in the region of Montreal, essentially around the music scene. One of its members was

7 Interview, respondent 4, Quebec, 2013.
8 Unverified source. These events are paradoxically poorly covered by the media.
9 This description was confirmed by respondent 4 and respondent 5.

convicted of having stabbed a black man outside a bar in Montreal on 22 June 2002 (Ragnarok 2011).

The activities of the oppositional groups in this circle revolve largely around the music scene. We have been able to identify at least nineteen music groups, although not all are equally active and most perform in public very rarely. The extreme right skinhead music scene in Quebec is organized into different "crews." We identified four of these: the Quebec Stompers (Quebec city); Nouvelle France Skinhead crew (unidentified specific location); Section de Guerre (Montreal), and Coup de Masse (Montreal). However, according to one interviewee, many more crews exist–he referred to forty-five in Quebec City alone.[10] Crews generally emerge out of "old time comradeship" and among groups of friends in specific neighbourhoods. Ideology comes later.[11] The frontiers between these crews are very porous and musicians and members often switch between them. For example, Section de Guerre and Coup de Masse share strong links. At some point, Bootprint, a Montreal group who insists that "we have to fight in order to preserve our heritage and our culture," although they sing in English, were part of the Coup de Masse crew. These groups also take part in concerts abroad, increasing their international visibility: in January 2012 Bootprint participated in the Rudolf Fest–which honours Rudolf Hess–in Colombia (Quebec Stompers 2011) and a band from Quebec City, Légitime Violence, became notorious due to media coverage of their concerts in Europe (Teiceira-Lessard 2013).

There are links other than music between groups, such as those between Coup de Masse and bands like Prison Bound and Dernier Guerrier. In general, groups affiliated with the Coup de Masse crew consider themselves self-proclaimed "a-political" patriots. Some claim they are true patriots, while others identify as ultra-nationalists. Among the groups that make up the Quebec Stompers crew, we identified Dernier Guerrier, whose members also make up the group Prison Bound, which is related to the Coup de Masse crew. All these groups share links with the Dead Boys crew from Montreal, who, as mentioned earlier, are considered to be dangerous and violent and whose members provide security for many concerts. Another group is the Vinland Warriors, in Montreal, which promotes fascist, neo-Nazis, and white supremacy values. Founded in 1997, it

10   Interview, respondent 4, Quebec, 2013.
11   Ibid.

is probably the oldest band still active and has played in many places, including the rest of Canada, the United States, England, and Germany (Neo-nazis et Rascists 2011).

The volatility of the right-wing oppositional circle

As already mentioned, a striking element that characterizes this second circle of oppositional groups is how fragmented and segmented it is. The interviews we conducted help understand to some extend why this occurs. For example, some respondents explained that it "depends on the context, but mostly on the members' personality and also their leader's personality."[12] The same person also noted that: "It goes by waves. Youngsters enter the group and may bring a new dynamic. Therefore, it depends on the context surrounding the group, but also on the group, its members and their personalities." Respondent 5's response illustrates this point: "As for me, it is thanks to [its leader] that I stayed with them [the group]."[13] Respondent 3 pointed to frequent conflicts within the circle and between the members, which can lead to a group breaking up and disappearing.[14] Respondent 4 adopted a more cynical perspective: "It is impossible, the way it works, it [the group] is made so that people split up in the skinhead world. They will never be able to do anything, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing."[15] More specifically, he pointed to the fact that members of these groups are always fighting each other over little things (for example, one member insults another member's girlfriend and a fight breaks out). 'Nobody wants to join [such a group] in these circumstances … people think they will get respect [by acting] like that: not in my book!"[16] According to the same respondent, the only group that might be taken seriously is Ragnarok: "These guys have families, they don't even have criminal records, and they don't want to. They work [in front of] a computer."[17] A crucial reason this circle of oppositional groups is so volatile and fragmented appears to stem in great part from the personality of its members; for example, groups like Ragnarok, whose members have a "quiet" or at least "crimeless-life," last longest. Yet surprisingly, some members of this circle fear this group and

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12   Interview, respondent 2, Quebec, 2014.
13   Interview, respondent 5, Quebec, 2014.
14   Interview, respondent 3, Quebec, 2013.
15   Interview respondent 4, Quebec, 2013.
16   Interview respondent 4, Quebec, 2013
17   Ibid.

consider them to be "real dangers."

Another explanation of the fragmentation and volatility of this circle might be their lack of visibility in the real, or physical, sphere. To some, including respondent 5, if members do not mobilize and make their presence known, the movement will fade away:

> If you want to show that politically [the right wing movement] still exists, fuck, you got to build your own music band, your show will have to take place on Ste-Catherine [Street], next to the Foufounes [a famous punk and skinhead place], and it has to scream loud and that it turns into shit so that you show that the right [wing] still works. But the politics, they will not follow you … Because they are not right anymore, real right" There is nothing anymore, it is dead, There is nothing, nothing, and nothing to be done, fuck all![18]

Respondent 5 adds "The system is against them, but mostly, it is how this [right-wing] world evolves you know … at night they are skinheads and during the day they are pink."[19]

Finally, a striking element that came out multiple times during the interviews is fear of the "outside world," the public sphere and groups that do not share their values and culture. It appears that it is becoming increasingly costly for people who hold right-wing views to join these groups in the physical, rather than the virtual or social media, sphere.

The right-wing oppositional circle and criminal activities

Many members of these groups are involved, or have been involved, in criminal activities. Respondent 4, for instance, was convicted for illegal possession of firearms. A member of Bootprint was convicted for having used an iron bar and baseball bat to assault customers of several Montreal bars in 1998 (Quebec Stompers 2011). He was accompanied by seven other persons, among them a member of the Dead Boys crew. In total, the Montreal police have laid 237 charges against these individuals, some of whom were present on 23 June 2000 when members of two groups, the Berserkr Boys and the Vinland Hammerskins, killed Christian Thomas (Quebec Stompers 2011). Yet the relation of these groups with crime is ambiguous. For example, a member of the Coup de Masse crew was forced to leave the band after being convicted of domestic

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18   Interview, respondent 5, Province of Quebec, 2014.
19   Ibid.

violence–but his replacement was a member of Dernier Guerrier who had been accused of several armed attacks. Two members of Coup de Masse were convicted of stabbing a man during an altercation with Redskins (SHARP or RASH) in a bar in Quebec City in 2006 (Quebec Stompers 2011). According to other sources, this aggression can be attributed to the Quebec Stompers, but the name of the accused remains the same, confirming not only how difficult it is to map this second circle of oppositional groups but revealing how porous the borders are between these groups. It is worth mentioning that the attack on Redskins occurred after a RASH publication suggested that the rise of fascism in Quebec was related to the groups described. Other sources suggest that it may have been an attempt to settle scores after the brother of one of the Quebec Stomper had been bounced from a bar.

Two more examples are worth mentioning. Two members of the group Faction Nationaliste–formerly Strike Force–which operates in the region of Montreal, were convicted of stabbing two persons of Arab origin seven times in Montreal in 2008 (Touzin 2010a). Although the judge could not prove without reasonable doubt that the act had been motivated by racial hatred, in 2012 one of the two accused was sentenced to three years in prison. The other, then a minor, was sentenced to three years in a youth detention center. Once free, he founded a new skinhead band, called Section St-Laurent, in Montreal.

Skinhead Radicalization in Quebec

In Quebec, as in the other Canadian provinces, the skinhead movement is composed of fragmented and segmented groups that have no formal relationships. Their members are mainly young men who, according to one of our respondents, are "willing to change the world."[20] This idealistic picture does not entirely correspond to what is actually a more complex reality. As discussed in the literature review the process of radicalization is highly individualized and very context-sensitive. The high degree of heterogeneity among skinhead groups only strengthens this aspect. In the next sections, we look at the mechanisms involved–environmental, cognitive, and relational–and the interplay between them. In so doing, we analyze the pathways both toward

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20   Interview, respondent 4, Quebec, 2013.

and of right-wing extremist skinhead groups in Quebec.

Environmental mechanisms

Primary and secondary contexts of socialization to right-wing extremist ideas

Family, social networks in school and after graduation, peer groups, and mass media are powerful socialization and learning contexts in which opinions form and change. Multiple agents of socialization can intervene at different stages in the socialization process, including social-ization to radical ideas and practices. As previous studies have shown, no specific social setting leads an individual to become part of an extremist and sometimes violent group. However, for-mative experiences during childhood or adolescence may influence the radicalization process, as responses to situational factors and to new ideas are shaped by previous experiences and subjec-tive orientations (Inglehart 1990). Most of our respondents identified moments or influences in their lives that played a role in their radicalization, although no one spoke about a transformative event that suddenly and radically transformed their opinions and practices. Rather, environmen-tal mechanisms shaped social disposition, political orientation, and behaviour over the long-term.

Family is a powerful primary context for socialization, cultural transmission, and social re-production and thus a key environmental mechanism that shapes the trajectories of children and adolescents. We do not argue that pre-adult socialization can predict adult political behaviour and orientation, although such a causal link has been widely discussed and debated (Sears 1990; Niemi and Hepburn 1995). Instead, we analyze the potential influence of such contexts for socialization on individual political opinion formation and behaviour (Sears and Funk 1999). Respondent 1's father, who was described as a "racist," exposed his son to right-wing extremist ideas,[21] which his son seems never to have questioned, instead internalizing them as his own. Respondent 4 father's was part of a gang that had no relationship to right-wing organizations, but his father valued comradeship, solidarity, and violence and handed these values down to his son.[22] In such a configuration, cognitive radicalization, at least in its first steps, could be seen as a

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21   Interview, respondent 1, Province of Quebec, July 2013.
22   Interview, respondent 4, Province of Quebec, 2013.

passive process that entails a progressive interiorization of ideas, visions of the world, and values. This does not mean that the cognitive radicalization process is completed during childhood and adolescence but rather that the parents' influence may constitute a formative experience that influences their children's future political behaviour and orientation. While some reject the ideas and values passed down by their parents, others reproduce them.

Perceptions and visions of the world transmitted in the family context are, however, rarely the only forces driving the engagement of future skinheads with right-wing skinhead groups. Respondent 4 recalled that he was looking for friends "like him" when he was a teenager and that some peers at school led him to discover "semi-punk" and "semi-skinhead" music performed by English bands. During the same period, he listened to TV reports on Nazism and neo-Nazism. These reports seem to have been one of his main sources of information, but it was through his network of relations that he became a full member of a skinhead group.[23] For respondent 1, his environment as a teenager and a young adult contributed to strengthening opinions developed during childhood and adolescence: living in Montreal, he vehemently denounced multiculturalism and admitted that regular contacts "with the others" in the streets only reinforced his anti-immigration feelings.[24]

These cases illustrate how young males who had gone through a first, passive, cognitive radicalization during their adolescence or adult life then entered a more active phase of the radicalization process, either by seeking to strengthen ideas conveyed by relatives before becoming a full member of a skinhead group or by engaging with a skinhead group and then confirming their beliefs. In some cases generational clashes within the family context may also be a precipitating factor when the rejection mechanism drives peoples to look for new structuring references. This was the case for Convicted 1, convicted in relation to hate propaganda in 2013. Court records note that he isolated himself from his family environment during his adolescence.[25] His engagement with a skinhead group appears to have been a contingent process. Family milieu does not, however, always play a direct role and the rejection mechanism can also be directed

23   Interview, respondent 4, Province of Quebec, 2013

24   Interview, respondent 1, Quebec, July 2013.

25   Sentence record n° 250-01-021106-116; sentence record n°° 250-01-020104-104.

toward the entire society or the dominant norms (whether combined or not with a generational clash). Some of our respondents became interested in right-wing extremist ideas without having been pushed in that direction by a parent or a friend. During adolescence or in their early twenties they discovered neo-Nazis or white supremacist movements in the course of a conversation, in school, or on the Internet and quickly identified with them.[26]

Right-wing skinhead groups as marginalized groups

Three interrelated principles–trust, a culture of secrecy, and the need for (semi)-clandestinity–constitute core rules shared by most right-wing skinhead groups we encountered and shape the environment in which full members of skinhead groups are socialized. Skinheads generally cut themselves off from the world during group activities (meetings, music concerts, booze-ups, and so on). Shows, presented as private events,[27] are always organized behind closed doors. Like booze-ups, they are moments when members of the group display their solidarity and cohesion and confirm the rules and codes that make up the group's identity. They are not organized for recruitment purposes.[28] Music provides a good opportunity to make contact with other similar groups, but attendance at performances organized by another skinhead group always occurred only after a very long period of preliminary contact.[29] Trust also structures the relationships between similar groups, whether the group is a member of the same crew or not. The isolation of right-wing skinhead groups makes it easier to exert control over the members of the group, generate strong cohesion, and frame a consensual message, although these are not the main reasons given by group members when justifying their secrecy, clandestinity, and suspicion. Right-wing skinheads don't want to attract the attention of the general public, the police, or left-wing skinhead groups. They fear being further stigmatized and losing the support of some of their members and partisans, as well as others they have to deal with, such as people willing to rent concert venues to them.[30] This climate of isolation is paradoxically both cohesive and destructive for the group: cohesive, in that it reinforces trust and solidarity between the members of the group, mak-

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26   Interview, respondent 2, Quebec, 2014; Interview, respondent 5, Quebec, 2014
27   Facebook page, group Z, last time consulted 17 March 2014. Interview, respondent 5, Quebec, 2014.
28   Interview, respondent 3, Quebec, 2013.
29   Facebook page, group Z, last time consulted 17 March 2014.
30   Interview, respondent 4, Quebec, 2013.

ing the group a powerful context for socialization, especially with regard to the group's specific codes and rules, but destructive in that suspicion may generate tensions within the group. For instance respondent 5, who holds very violent views, was considered to have broken some of the group rules and was marginalized until he finally left the group.[31]

This climate generates strong constraints. Although violence represents a practice that structures right-wing skinhead groups, all our respondents noted that the level of physical violence is considerably lower than in the early 1990s. Right-wing skinhead groups no longer represent a threat, according to all our informants, who expressed great disillusionment with the current situation. They all believe that right-wing skinhead groups have become fearful and no longer stand up for what they believe, describing them as weak, pliable, and spineless. Yet, violence continues to structure group relationships and to constitute both a practice to which new members are socialized and an environment that shapes the group. Violence in skinhead groups takes different forms: it can be verbal, symbolic (tattoos, clothes, linguistic, and physical codes), and physical. Most of our respondents displayed a real fascination with physical activities, guns, including prohibited ones,[32] and violence. Most of them had developed this fascination before joining a skinhead group and some confessed that they had become members of a skinhead group "just for that." Some wanted to enlist in the army but had been rejected for various reasons.[33] Others join paintball and milSim (military simulation) clubs, two activities valued as good training experiences that do not attract much police attention.[34] Violence is now rarely used against "the others." One respondent remarked that most of the time violence is not organized but occurs after a show when drunk members of a group challenge other members.[35] He was strongly critical of this attitude, which, according to him, illustrates the weaknesses of right-wing skinhead groups. Although most violence in skinhead activities is verbal and symbolic, violence continues to be highly valued as a means to gain respect within the group and is perceived by most skinheads as a sign of pride and dignity.[36] As one song puts it, "We will never die; we will

31 Interview, respondent 5, Quebec, 2014.
32 Sentence records n° 250-01-021106-116 and n° 250-01-020104-104 (Convicted 1).
33 Interview, respondent 2, Quebec, 2014.
34 Interview, respondent 4, Quebec, 2013.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.

always be there, to frighten you, to [bother you]!!!!"[37]

As these few examples show, it is very difficult to draw a clear picture of how environmental mechanisms shape individual pathways towards extremism. Our results confirm that this process is highly individualized and related to cognitive and relational mechanisms.

Cognitive mechanisms

Pathways towards extremism: the weak role of ideology

How to locate changes in beliefs? When and how does it happen? We contend that there is no simple answer to this question. The discussion on environmental mechanisms shows that the dynamic and contingent processes of radicalization follow different temporalities, combining passive and active phases. The timing of the formation and transformation of opinions and frames depends on skinheads' primary and secondary milieus of socialization. Interviews also create distortion effects as respondents analyze their past trajectory in light of their situation at the time of the interview and the perceptions they have developed of their past or present experience as a skinhead. Indeed, cognitive mechanisms proved to be the most difficult ones to address for most of our respondents, who were uncomfortable answering questions on this aspect, whether because they were unable to organize their ideas or because they were uninterested in this part of the questionnaire.

One of our respondents told us that no changes in beliefs had occurred in his life for he had "always thought like that."[38] Another stated, "We do not become racist. You are born racist." However he admitted that he had only recently connected his racist ideas to his engagement with a skinhead group "after reading a lot."[39] Respondent 2, whose parents did not come from this milieu, confessed that he became interested in neo-Nazism when he was a teenager and informed himself through reading before approaching a right-wing skinhead group.[40] Respondents 2 and 5 are in some sense exceptions, in that other informants had difficulty in clearly expressing, orga-

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37   Facebook page, group Z (c.1429), last time consulted, 17 March 2014.
38   Interview, respondent 4, Province of Quebec, 2013
39   Interview, respondent 5, Province of Quebec, 2014
40   Interview, respondent 2, Province of Quebec, 2014; Interview, respondent 5, Province of Quebec, 2014

nizing, and structuring their ideas. None of them mentioned being engaged in an active learning process or were able to coherently answer questions on how their opinions had been formed and transformed.

This does not mean that skinhead groups are composed only of non-educated individuals or those suffering from psychopathologies, although we did encounter cases that involved psychological issues. Respondent 1 confessed that he had spent some time in a mental hospital, but he insisted that he had never suffered from mental illness. According to him, his anti-immigration ideas led to his being confined in a mental hospital, because everyone rejected his opinions.[41] Convicted 1, one of those sentenced for hate crimes, was diagnosed as having "a serious borderline personality disorder."[42] Skinhead groups attract marginalized peoples and some among them suffer from mental problems. By the same token, some skinheads have had a criminal career before becoming a full member of a skinhead group. Their criminal activities include theft, assault, and drug-related crimes.[43] Such cases, although well represented in our sample, should not be considered as representative of a majority of skinheads.

Most skinheads are young men (and women)[44] willing to break with the dominant norms and engage with a new referent group. Cognitive mechanisms often do not constitute a driving force behind joining a skinhead group. Music, friendship, a spirit of camaraderie, and a sense of solidarity are said to be the most important forces in the radicalization process. Indeed, most of our respondents did not consider ideology or belief as a strong motivation for joining a skinhead group. Respondent 4 stated that he had joined a skinhead group because he valued violence and wanted to become a soldier. As he put it, "beliefs came after."[45]

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41   Interview, respondent 1, Province of Quebec, July 2013.

42   Sentence record n° 250-01-021106-116.

43   Sentence record n° 500-22-067849-029 (Convicted 2); Sentence record n° 250-01-021106-116 (Convicted 2); Interview, respondent 5, Province of Quebec, 2014.

44   We have so far interviewed only men, but women seem to be quite active in some groups. Although they represent a tiny minority, their engagement would be well worth analysing.

45   Interview (2), respondent 4, Province of Quebec, 2014.

Pathways to acceptance of extremism: a blurred message

More-educated individuals had often formed their political opinions before becoming full members of a skinhead group, while the less-politicized or less-educated altered their beliefs after joining the group. The latter usually accept the group's message without question. For instance, they express anti-immigration ideas but are not able to clearly articulate them. The dynamic of the group, based on strong cohesion and trust, plays a central role in the process of ideological acceptance. Music, symbols (tattoos, clothes, flags, posters, etc.), and activities (booze-ups, shows, activities involving violence, etc.) are strong conveyors of meaning. Skinhead music serves to reassure the group about its ideas and has proved to be a powerful means of diffusing ideas to the less-politicized and/or less-educated members. Symbols also have a cohesive function.[46] But, once again, the signification given to symbols and even to music varies from one group to another.

Ideology is not fixed and the degree of ideological volatility is high, making it difficult to definitively classify a skinhead group as right-wing. As one of our respondents put it, at certain moments in its history a skinhead group could be considered to belong to the right-wing galaxy of oppositional groups, while at other times it could claim an a-political position or even change side and integrate left-wing references into its message.[47] We also noticed that there was sometimes a huge gap between discourse and daily practice. For instance, most of these groups support anti-immigration ideas, but some of them had accepted people of various origins at their shows and on social media, if the people had been introduced by a trusted group member.[48]

As both the message and frames are group-specific, they sometimes appear to be the result of very personal combinations of diverse references. Anti-immigrant and homophobic sentiments seem to constitute core references in most right-wing skinhead groups, but while some considered immigrants to be evil, others supported a more moderate position, stating that they would accept immigrants if they agreed to respect "our ways of living" and our "values." In the same way, most of our respondents claimed to be "patriotic," but this term was given different mean-

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46   Interview, respondent 5, Quebec, 2014.
47   Interview, respondent 2, Quebec, 2014.
48   Facebook page, group Z, last time consulted 17 March 2014.

ings: for one, it meant being separatist,[49] for another, it meant defending French-Canadians,[50] and for a third, supporting Canada.[51] This again reveals the great heterogeneity of right-wing skinhead groups in terms of both structure and ideological affiliation.

The maintenance of beliefs

The cohesive nature of the group and its semi- (or full) clandestinity may explain why beliefs and frames are transmitted within groups and persist over time. However, our respondents provided similar information relating to the influence of environmental mechanisms and their interplay with cognitive ones. All expressed strong feelings about having been stigmatized by "society." Over time they had developed a strong sense of victimization that appears to have strengthened their beliefs and reinforced their extremist ideas. Even those who had left skinhead groups, sometimes years before, and undergone behavioural de-radicalization retained their extremist beliefs. According to our respondents, right-wing militants, including skinheads,[52] are not given the opportunity to freely express their "politically incorrect" ideas in the public space. On one hand, they cultivate their difference and marginality but, on the other, they strongly disapprove of what most of them called a ban on right-wing extremist ideas in Quebec society. One of our respondents even considered this to be evidence that Quebec was a "false democracy," as individuals "don't have the right to think what [they] want … to wear the sweater [they] want."[53] Another remarked that the majority of the society "doesn't want to hear [their] point of view."[54] This social context plays a key role in confirming our respondents in their beliefs, even if most of them have left skinhead groups. This sense of victimization explains why those who left skinhead groups have undergone only a very partial de-radicalization.

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49 Ibid
50 Interview, respondent 5, Quebec, 2014.
51 Interview, respondent 4, Quebec, 2013.
52 This remark also applies to militants of more structured right-wing organisations.
53 Interviews, respondent 4, 2013 and respondent 5, Quebec, 2014;
54 Interview (2), respondent 4, Quebec, 2014

Relational mechanisms

Relational mechanisms constitute the most powerful mechanisms in the radicalization process. Earlier discussions on environmental and cognitive mechanisms touched on the centrality of networks of relationships at the different stages in the radicalization process. This section goes further, focusing first on intra-group dynamics. We then address the types of relations skinheads maintain with "the outside world," including left-wing groups, the police, and "society."

The dynamics of intra-group interactions

As one of our respondents put it, skinheads are first and foremost young people "looking for friends, for a structuring group, and for recognition"[55] Some also primarily want to have fun and see in skinhead groups a good opportunity for new experiences.[56] Nevertheless, drawing a clear picture of the dynamics of intra-movement interactions and their influence on the radicalization process is not an easy task given the great heterogeneity of skinhead groups. What follows are some clues to the recruitment strategies and the dynamics of intra-group interactions.

Recruitment strategies vary from one group to another. Some groups are composed of a bunch of friends who have known each other since childhood and accept new members only exceptionally,[57] while others have developed active, but understated, strategies to recruit new members. The Internet plays an ambiguous role in recruitment. As most of the forums on right-wing extremism or social media pages have restricted access, people willing to participate in forums or to become "friends" with one of these groups first have to produce some identification and prove their affiliation with right-wing ideology. That means that people recruited on the Internet have to display signs of belonging: they have to use the right codes and references in order to attract attention and be admitted to a virtual network. Respondent 5, for instance, had been recruited after revealing his beliefs and ideas on forums or social media.[58] None of our respondents had gone through initiation rites, but respondent 4 alluded to the need for new members to comply with the group's implicit rules of the game. The first rule seems to be to assert their

55   Interview (2), respondent 4, Quebec, 2014.
56   Interview, respondent 3, Quebec, 2013.
57   Interview, respondent 2, Quebec, 2014.
58   Interview, respondent 5, Quebec, 2014.

position within the group and avoid exhibiting any sign of weakness.[59]

The dynamics of the group depend on its membership and its structure. In groups with no leadership, the core membership engages in a permanent competition to determine "who is the best,"[60] leading to frequent conflicts. These conflicts often prevent the group from attracting new members, while pushing others to leave. In groups with strong leadership, the dynamics of intra-group interaction depend on the leaders' personality,[61] his ability to exert control over members, and the message developed within the group's boundaries and used to generate consensus. The leaders' personality represents a key dimension in shaping intra-group interactions. Although trust and cohesion are strongly valued within skinhead groups, tensions may run high in certain contexts. They may be related to personal conflicts and personality conflicts or may concern the core message the group conveys in its music and on the Internet. Respondent 3 spoke about tensions generated in a group after some members called for the adoption of a new message and a new strategy in order to widen its audience. They suggested including "more politically correct" references in the message in order to avoid stigmatization. Others members vehemently opposed this idea and even proposed enhancing the right-wing identity of the group.[62]

Finally, the average age of the group's members also influences the nature of interactions. Two respondents spoke about "waves" in the trajectory of a skinhead group: the involvement of young idealistic people with new ideas usually transforms the group from within.[63] These transformations range from the creation of a new dynamic to a change in ideological affiliation. The new leadership may decide to join a different crew and bring the group's message into line with that held by the new crew. In some cases, the importance of an ideology is so weak that a skinhead group can adopt a new message based on ideological references that are completely contrary to right-wing ideas.[64] When a new wave begins, older members may be encouraged to step down or to become less active in the group.

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59   Interview, respondent 4, Quebec, 2013.
60   Ibid.
61   Interview, respondent 2, Quebec, 2014.
62   Interview, respondent 3, Quebec, 2013.
63   Ibid.
64   Interview, respondent 2, Quebec, 2014.

Relationships with the "outside" world

As discussed earlier, each right-wing skinhead group frame its own message. Nevertheless, they all share a common definition of the "other" and, in their discourse and sometimes in their violent actions, target the "usual suspects": immigrants, blacks, Jews, homosexuals. However, their main enemies are said to be left-wing militants, especially those who belong to left-wing skinhead groups. RASH and SHARP are frequently criticized and are considered to be hereditary enemies. Using colourful language and symbolic violence, right-wing skinheads consider them to be "déchet" [trash](c. 1295); "les enculés d'en face" [motherfuckers](c. 751); les "sous-merdes" [lower-level shits](c. 422); "crevards de rouges" (c. 232)[65]. Groups like Facho-Watch are said to be evil, their only objective being to harm right-wing groups by publicly denouncing their members, thus breaking one of their core rules, that of secrecy.

Hate directed toward left-wing groups encourages the development of conspiracy theories. Indeed, one of the fears of many right-wing groups is that they will be infiltrated by left-wing militants or by the police. This, in part, explains why we encountered so many difficulties in making contact with skinheads during our fieldwork. Even those who have left skinhead groups years before still fear being identified, located, denounced, and, sometimes, assaulted.[66] The reason behind the fear of being arrested or "harassed"[67] by the police can be found in the life stories of some of our respondents, who have been arrested and convicted because of their activism in skinhead groups or right-wing organizations or because of past criminal careers. Some skinheads also define themselves as being against "the system." The signification given this term varies from one respondent to another and, to some extent, from one group to another. Some groups are anti-state and denounce the political system, particularly taxes, which they considered to be unfair,[68] while others deplore "globalization" or the dominant "aseptic culture," which is compared to a "dictatorship."[69] Frustration and resentment against "society," which, according to our respondents, stigmatizes those with right-wing extremist affiliations, only strengthens an-

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65   Facebook page, group Z, last time consulted 17 March 2014.
66   Interviews, respondent 2, respondent 4, respondent 5, Province of Quebec, 2013 and 2014.
67   Interview, respondent 5, Province of Quebec, 2014.
68   Interview, respondent 1, Quebec, 2013.
69   Facebook page, group Z, last time consulted 17 March 2014.

ti-system feelings and, paradoxically, contributes to further marginalizing active or former right-wing skinheads who feel disconnected from society and, perhaps, isolated.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS: RIGHT-WING SKINHEADS AND THE LONE-WOLF SCENARIO

In a context where groups are loosely structured and frustration is overtly expressed, should we fear a lone-wolf scenario, something like the bombings carried out by Breivik in Norway, for instance? In other words, how should we deal with people who consider violence to be a legitimate means of action, may be trained in combat techniques, and express strong resentment not only of the "system," "dominant norms," or "society" but also of their peers and the movement they belong (or belonged) to? Although frustration and resentment are dominant feelings among members of these groups, according to most of our respondents, the lone-wolf scenario is unlikely to occur in Quebec for three reasons.

First, all our respondents vehemently denounced the apathy of skinhead groups since the 1990s. They identified the lack of interest in political matters as a strong weakness of right-wing skinhead groups[70] and denounced the absence of politically motivated violence. Some of them considered current right-wing skinhead groups to be groups of people addicted to alcohol and drugs, with no strategy or objectives.[71] One respondent even held that the rule of organizing music shows and meetings behind closed doors shows an unwillingness to go outside and fight.[72] Second, they condemned the high level of individualism within skinhead groups. Cohesion is said to be weak in some groups and skinheads are believed to be unwilling to serve a cause and to make sacrifices for it.[73] Changes in members' lives, for instance getting married and having a child, often lead to revisions in their level of engagement with skinhead groups. Some leave the group or become less active; some groups even disband. In one of our respondents' words, right-wing skinheads are "a lost cause."[74] Third, and most important, stigmatization and marginalization are strong factors explaining disengagement and demobilisation. Our respondents,

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70   Interview, respondent 1, Quebec, 2013.
71   Interview, respondent 4, Quebec, 2013.
72   Interview, respondent 5, Quebec, 2014.
73   Interview, respondent 1, Quebec, 2013; Interviews, respondent 2, Quebec, 2014.
74   Interview, respondent 4, Quebec, 2013.

who held very violent views, admitted that their fear of being unable to find a job, for instance,[75] had made them realize that their engagement with right-wing skinhead groups generates prejudices and creates difficulties that are finally not worth it. They left the groups and underwent behavioural de-radicalization, but maintained and even reinforced their political orientations. Although, we share their assessment regarding lone-wolf behaviour, it remains, given the role of contingency, extremely difficult to predict any sort of violent behaviour.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

As noted in the introduction, there has been very little research on right-wing oppositional groups and, more specifically, on right-wing skinhead groups in Canada. Given that, our pioneering research, although preliminary, contributes to helping to theoretically and empirically understand a phenomenon that is understudied in the Canadian context. However, before addressing the main results of this research, it is important to remind the reader that this paper is still very preliminary, given the difficulty we encountered in making contact with members of the very suspicious and distrustful right-wing community. It required a great amount of time and energy to establish contacts that would allow us to conduct our first interviews. Even then, the snowball effect did not work as well as we had expected due to the highly fragmented structure of these groups and their volatility and fluidity, as well as conflicts between individuals that often lead to tension between members. Building trust and confidence proved to be a very long and difficult task. However, as we were writing this paper, the contacts we have made within the right-wing skinhead community have begun to provide valuable information.

Our first contribution is using the concept of oppositional groups to analyse the right-wing movement. Oppositional groups consciously and strategically adopt a marginalized position within society, following and defending alternative rules and norms. As it quickly became apparent, the groups commonly categorized as skinheads are in fact extremely heterogeneous and promote different ideologies and values, making it clear that one-size-fits-all categorization must be avoided. This concept also gave us a better position from which to grasp the complexity of the right-wing movement in Quebec. This oppositional movement is extremely fragmented and no formal links exist between the different groups that comprise it—at least

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75   Ibid.

not among those groups that we are aware of. Such fragmentation may be attributed to several factors, but one important element, as indicated by most of our respondents, is the personality of the members and the leader - when there is one. To some extent–and this aspect will be addressed more systematically in the next part of our research–this fragmentation in the *physical* sphere might also be attributed to ways of communicating, namely in *virtual* spaces such as the Internet and social media. As one respondent suggested, those who used to express their frustration by actively participating in skinhead groups now tend to turn to the Internet, which has become a new catalyst for frustrations as well as a channel for their diffusion.[76] Behind a veil of anonymity, these tools provide channels through which ideas and contents can be shared without necessitating contact in the physical world, thus avoiding surveillance not only by law enforcement agencies but also by anti-racist groups and a wider public that does not allow free expression of their views. Most of the respondents expressed fear of actually being in the public space, which is perceived as a potential threat. Possibly most illustrative of this phenomenon are concert announcements, which do not mention the exact venue. To get this information, one has to be given it by a "known" member of the crew. However, in the absence of a physically visible skinhead movement, it becomes more and more difficult to mobilize such groups and keep them alive. A next step will thus be to look at the virtual structure of this oppositional movement, focusing on the Internet and social media.

A second contribution, both theoretical and empirical, concerns the radicalization process. Taking a relational approach to political violence and radicalization, we suggest that radicalization results from the interplay of environmental, cognitive, and relational mechanisms. We also distinguish between pathways towards extremism and pathways to acceptance of extremism, as the interplay between the three mechanisms can result in different outcomes depending on many different factors, such as primary and secondary contexts of socialization, the dynamics of intra-group interactions, relationships to the "outside world," and the role of beliefs. Empirical results show that radicalization is above all a contingent process rooted in individual and collective trajectories. When it comes to discussing the temporality of the process of radicalization, it is very difficult to come up with a general conclusion, as journeys through extremism are highly individualized and context-sensitive. Nevertheless, the dialogue between our analytical framework and our empirical data leads us to identify four ideal-typical pathways: 1) From passive cognitive radicalization to

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76   Interview, respondent 2, Province of Quebec, 2014.

active cognitive and behavioural radicalization; 2) From active cognitive radicalization to behavioural radicalization; 3) Contingent behavioural radicalization without cognitive radicalization; 4) From behavioural radicalization to cognitive radicalization.[77] Violence, both symbolic and physical, is a key phenomenon in this process as its use reveals a great deal about the relationships skinheads develop with society and the "dominant norms." In a context where violence seems to be simultaneously a central motivation, a daily practice, and a value, the role of beliefs remains uncertain. While they represent a driving force for the people who, after spending some time in skinhead group, joined more structured right-wing organizations, they do not play a central role in the pathways towards and to acceptance of extremism for a majority of grassroots skinheads.

This research also raised an important epistemological point that we think is crucial for the next steps of this research: to what extent can the focus on skinheads be considered a valid approach to understanding what we referred to above as the oppositional movement? To put it differently, are skinheads a good case study of an oppositional movement? The answer is clearly no when it comes to studying right-wing extremist groups, because, as we have insisted, the skinhead circle is very fragmented and composed of several antagonist factions. This situation reveals the high volatility of the movement, not only structurally but also ideologically. As some of our respondents indicated, these groups are highly dependent on the personality of their leaders and members and personalization is a crucial defining characteristic of these groups. Therefore, any discussion of right-wing extremism that was grounded only on analysis of skinheads would necessarily be partial and incomplete. On the other hand, focusing on skinheads reveals itself to be relevant when it comes to analyzing the dynamics of radicalization of extreme-right *groups* and radicalization as a phenomenon looked at more globally. As our respondents demonstrate, it is not unusual to see former skinheads becoming members of more structured right-wing extremist groups and to find such groups using skinheads as security guards during an event or to diffuse violence. Skinhead groups, however fragmented they might be, still constitute an important step on an individual's pathway to extremism, as indicated by most of our respondents. Therefore, focusing on skinheads, though not sufficient to understand right-wing extremism, still provides a crucial insight about the phenomenon as joining such groups appears to bring something new to the "candidates'" trajectory toward violent extremism, intro-

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[77]   As our study only concerns people who engaged (and sometimes disengaged, but without altering their beliefs) with right-wing groups, we don't cover the configuration where cognitive radicalization alone occurred. That is a strong limit of our study as we can hypothesize that this configuration is certainly the most common.

ducing a qualitative change. But, as is apparent in the respondents' discourse, this qualitative novelty is not related to ideology–which seems to play a weak role–but to confirmation of their rejection of widely shared social values. The fact that one respondent[78] revealed that he had become interested in neo-Nazi values in his youth and, much later, joined a skinhead group because of their interest in this frame of reference is illustrative of this phenomenon. We contend that people who join such groups do it in order to have their beliefs confirmed, rather than because they are looking for a new ideology. These groups provide such confirmation, but also tend to de-inhibit their members by normalizing violence (between members of the same group, other skinhead groups, or with outsiders during shows or social gatherings). These elements, which require further analysis based on a larger pool of interviewees, indicate why it is important to think of radicalization from a new perspective rather than focusing exclusively on ideology.

Finally, this study makes it clear that further research is needed in this area. First, as suggested by some respondents,[79] there are signs that survivalism is on the rise. Whether this is due to the highly individualistic atmosphere that seems to characterize oppositional groups in Quebec or constitutes a "natural" evolution of right-wing extremism, the phenomenon deserves more systematic attention. Second, as mentioned above, the role of the virtual sphere also needs to be addressed since our preliminary results suggest that the oppositional movement tends to move from the physical sphere to the virtual (the Internet and social media), making it imperative to conduct further research that will allow us to develop an adequate methodology for exploring this new venue.

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78   Interview, respondent 2, Quebec, 2014.
79   Ibid.

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