

EXAMINING THE CAREERS OF THE BOSTON MARATHON BOMBERS

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Abstract. *This article casts the spotlight on the careers of the Boston Marathon bombers. Based on the assumption that the Boston Marathon bombings were individual acts of political violence, the author focuses on the individual lives of Tamerlan Tsarnaev and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev plus the familial environment in which they were brought up. The Tsarnaevs conducted the attacks because investigations into their activities appeared to disrupt their identity transformation in the face of social integration challenges. On this basis America had evolved into the 'enemy' that needed to be neutralized in the immediate term while Russia (which has been at war in Chechnya) retained its credentials as their long term adversary.*

Keywords: *Terrorism; Boston Marathon Bombings; America; Chechnya.*

Introduction

The Boston Marathon bombings brought to the fore the challenge of home-grown terrorism facing the United States (U.S). Taking place on 15th April 2013 by Tamerlan Tsarnaev and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, these attacks also cast the spotlight on the challenges to social integration in the country. The Tsarnaev brothers were American citizens of Chechen descent¹. What is perplexing about these individuals is that they chose to attack the U.S (a country which had offered them a home in exile) and not Russia (which was at war in Chechnya, their ancestral country). Equally, they exhibited conflicting signals of social integration: while on the one hand they appeared to have fitted into mainstream U.S society, on the other, they seemed to have rejected the American way of life.

This article examines the Tsarnaev family unit and the careers of Tamerlan and Dzhokhar with a view to determining the factors that may have predisposed them to conduct the attacks. The decision to focus on the individual and familial

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¹ CNN, 'Boston Marathon Terror Attack Fast Facts,' *CNN* Library, 17th January 2015. Available at: <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/06/03/us/boston-marathon-terror-attack-fast-facts/>. Accessed on 17/02/2015.

levels of analysis is dictated by the notion that the Boston Marathon bombings were individual acts of political violence. To this end, the best way to understand the factors that pushed the Tsarnaevs to commit these acts is to examine their individual life circumstances and familial environment. Presumably, these would have been the primary and most immediate social spheres that had an impact on their respective career trajectories. Tamerlan and Dzhokhar conducted the Boston Marathon bombings because they perceived the U.S authorities' investigation of their activities as an attempt to disrupt the on-going transitions in their identity. With this perception, America had evolved into the 'enemy' that needed to be neutralized in the short term while Russia, the country that had 'occupied' Chechnya, retained its credentials as their long term adversary.

This article is organized as follows: First, it looks at the careers of the bombers' parents, Anzor Tsarnaev (father) and Zubeidat Tsarnaev (mother). As architects of the family unit into which Tamerlan and Dzhokhar were born and raised, it is important to establish the kind of social environment they created for their children and how this could have affected their behavioural development. Second, it assesses the individual careers of the Tsarnaev brothers. This is significant because Tamerlan and Dzhokhar may have consciously made some career choices detached from the influence of their family. Finally, the article draws some social integration lessons from this case.

Familial Predisposition to Political Violence Anzor and Zubeidat

The evolution of the Tsarnaev family's world view is quite remarkable. While they were originally domiciled in the north Caucasus where the conflict there could potentially have affected them, the Tsarnaevs did not exhibit any inclination towards radicalism. On the other hand, when they relocated to the U.S where they were physically detached from their ancestral land, they started gravitating towards this behaviour. If this observation is valid, it debunks the correlation between exposure to violent activity and the move towards ideological extremism. This notion, however, could be challenged on grounds that the seeds of radicalism that germinated in Boston could after all have been planted in the Tsarnaev family while it lived in the Caucasus. This section attempts to settle this discrepancy by examining the career trajectories of the parents of the bombers.

By virtue of its origins, the Tsarnaev family was susceptible to 'inheriting' Chechen national culture. Due to centuries of suffering as a result of conflict in their homeland, Chechens are said (by some observers) to have evolved into a resilient and hardworking people². Also Islam, the predominant religion among Chechens has, over the years, evolved into the doctrine around which they have

² Goltz Thomas, 'Is there a Chechen Connection to the Boston Bombings,' *The Nation*, 13th May 2013. Available at: <http://www.thenation.com/article/174026/there-chechen-connection-boston-bombings#>. Accessed on 25/02/2015.

sought to build and defend their national ethos³. The parents of Tamerlan and Dzhokhar are part of the generation of ethnic Chechens raised outside Chechnya after the mass deportations of the 1940s to Soviet Central Asia. Due to unending armed conflict in the Caucasus region, Anzor and Zubeidat moved back and forth between Dagestan and Kyrgyzstan before relocating to the U.S in 2003⁴. In this context, it would be plausible to assume that the Chechen character of ‘toughness’ and Islamic orientation would have manifested in this family unit at an early stage.

While the work rate trait was evident, however, the faith-related one was not. Offering insight into the kind of man Anzor was, Diantha Parker and Jess Bidgood describe him as “...a tough man trained in the law in Russia...”⁵. This description fits in with the notion that credits life in exile in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (where Anzor lived) with hardening Chechens⁶. But on the other hand, an orientation towards Islam is not detected in the then mushrooming Tsarnaev family unit. For example, despite hailing from an area reputed for its Salafist links, Zubeidat did not exhibit any early inclination towards an Islamist lifestyle. According to Michele McPhee: “A photograph of baby Tamerlan and his parents shows Zubeidat’s wild, Western style, a nest of raven hair piled haphazardly, her head not covered by a Hijab. Other family photos of that era show her in low-cut dresses and red lipstick”⁷.

It was also a testament to the apparent secular orientation of the Tsarnaev couple that Dzhokhar was named after Dzhokhar Dudayev (the legendary Chechen secular-nationalist leader) and not, for example, given an Islamic first name⁸.

There are a number of possible explanations for the apparent secular orientation of the Tsarnaevs: First, either Anzor and Zubeidat were inherently non-religious individuals or in a patriarchal society characterized by the dominance of men over women coupled with her desire not to rock a marital relationship still in its infant stages, Zubeidat may have tactfully chosen to conform to her husband’s secular orientation while the couple were still in the Caucasus. Second, while the Tsarnaevs were still in the region, radical Islam had not yet sufficiently taken root within the wider Chechen national culture. Third, the family was not in a poor financial situation that could have put it at risk of radicalization. For example, unlike most Chechens who lived in Khasavyurt, the

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ McPhee Michele, ‘Family Matters: Dzhokhar Tsarnaev and the Women in His Life,’ *Newsweek*, 16th October 2014. Available at: <http://www.newsweek.com/2014/10/24/women-behind-boston-marathon-bombing-suspects-277760.html>. Accessed on 24/02/2015; Boston Herald.com, ‘Marathon bombing defence likely to focus on dead brother,’ *Boston Herald*. Available at: http://www.bostonherald.com/news_opinion/local_coverage/2015/02/marathon_bombing_defense_likely_to_focus_on_dead_brother_0. Accessed on 17/02/2015.

⁵ Parker Diantha and Bidgood Jess, ‘Boston Marathon Bombing: What We Know,’ *The New York Times*, 1st January 2015. Available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/02/us/boston-marathon-bombings-trial-what-you-need-to-know.html?_r=0. Accessed on 17/02/2015.

⁶ Goltz Thomas, *op. cit.*

⁷ McPhee Michele, *op. cit.*

⁸ Goltz Thomas, *op. cit.*

Tsarnaevs lived in Makhachkala, the expensive Dagestani capital⁹. This was an indication of the relatively comfortable financial means at their disposal while they lived in exile.

If we adopt the assumption, though, that the seeds of radicalism in the Tsarnaev family were sown while Anzor and Zubeidat were originally in the Caucasus, then the catalyst factors must have sprung from outside the couple's respective family backgrounds, financial position and the 'contagiousness' of the Chechen national culture. It is likely that the back-and-forth movements between Dagestan and Kyrgyzstan may not only have disrupted the young couple's lives but also exposed it to the dire suffering of Chechens thereby embedding in its collective memory a set of ethnicity-related grievances. In attempting to strengthen this argument, it is plausible to assume that the seeds of radicalism did not blossom while Anzor and Zubeidat were in the Caucasus because other would-be supportive factors (like financial constraints, a break-down in the marriage, individual alienation and perceptions of marginalization based on ethnicity and religion) had not yet matured.

It is the post-immigration phase in the evolution of the Tsarnaev family that appears to usher in the set of contradictions that eventually led to the radicalization of this social unit. As will be observed in the ensuing assessment of the careers of the Tsarnaev brothers, Anzor and Zubeidat showcase remarkable contradictions in their adaptation to life in the U.S. At one stage, they appear to have successfully integrated. At another, they come across as alienated people. McPhee offers a glimpse into such contrasts in the case of Zubeidat: "Zubeidat appeared to have embraced her new country. She enrolled in beauty school and became a state-licensed aesthetician. She cut her hair short, jagged spikes, and wore red leather blazers over tight jeans accented by high heels"¹⁰.

There is a subsequent transformation in Zubeidat's persona with one of her former clients observing: "It seemed like it was overnight. I came one night and she was Zubeidat. A month later, I came back and she was like she had transformed. She was wearing a Burka and talking about 9/11 being orchestrated by the government"¹¹.

The radical transformation in Zubeidat's lifestyle points to the possibility that her orientation towards radical Islam may after all have run deep. The notion that she was inherently non-religious is unsustainable in this respect. If she had been an inherently non-practising Muslim, then relocation from the Caucasus (where the social settings were conducive for religious proselytization) to the U.S (where the environment was less ideal for this social process) should have pushed her further away from radical Islam. The fact that her conduct at the latter stages of her development defies this logic strengthens the argument that this aspect of the Chechen national culture had after all been embedded in her

⁹ Upton Jodi and Overberg Paul, 'Few Chechen immigrants make it to US,' *USA Today*, 20th April 2013. Available at: <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/04/19/chechens-immigrants-us-population/2097065/>. Accessed on 27/02/2015.

¹⁰ McPhee Michele, *op. cit.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

behavioural architecture. To validate this proposition, though, we need to show the kind of social contradictions that could have precipitated the change in Zubeidat's behaviour.

Shifts in the post-immigration career of Anzor were a tipping point in the evolution of the Tsarnaev family unit. Unlike in the case of Zubeidat, it is much easier to account for the social disillusionment of Anzor. Relocation to America reduced Anzor from a higher social status as a legal professional to a lower one where he worked as a motor mechanic earning \$ 10 per hour¹². Whereas financial constraints and negative career shifts have not directly been linked to Anzor's disillusionment while in the U.S, it is hard to imagine that these factors that underpin human survival and progress did not combine with others in pushing him to relocate back to the Caucasus region.

In terms of behavioural attributes, Anzor showcased some aspects of the Chechen national culture while in the U.S. Commenting on his phenomenal work rate, his boss in Boston described him as "one of the toughest guys I've ever known"¹³. In the absence of developments that significantly disrupted the family's rhythm of 'settling in,' Anzor's workaholicism was an ideal instrument for deepening the Tsarnaevs' integration into American society.

An attack on Anzor at the Russian Benevolent Society in 2009; the negative impact of injuries sustained in this attack on his mechanic business; the break-up of the Anzor-Zubeidat marriage; and the subsequent phased relocation of part of the Tsarnaev family back to the Caucasus, however, presented a hotbed of social contradictions which when linked with contradictions in the personal lives of some members of this unit, potentially, turned the Tsarnaevs into candidates for socio-political deviance¹⁴.

The significance of the above chapter in their lives, though, is in the probable emergence of radical Islam at this stage as a doctrine for attaching meaning to the Tsarnaev family predicament. While it is not possible to determine when exactly Zubeidat became pious, the fact that the dissolution of her marriage to Anzor preceded his relocation back to the Caucasus, points to the probable centrality of shifts in her lifestyle in shaping the development of the Tsarnaev family unit at this stage. Ruslan Tsarni, Anzor's brother places the blame for the radicalization of the Tsarnaev family at the feet of Zubeidat. Evidence of tensions connected to her lifestyle change is further adduced by the Tsarnaevs' landlady who once overheard Anzor telling Zubeidat: "Why are you dressing like that? We are in America"¹⁵.

Although Anzor did not subscribe to Zubeidat's radicalist world view, the brawl at the Russian Benevolent Club may, in the long run, have been sufficient

¹² Parker Diantha and Bidgood Jess, *op cit*; Ioffe Julia, 'The Boston Bombing Suspects were Reared by Both Chechnya and America,' *New Republic*, 19th April 2013. Available at: <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/112971/boston-marathon-bombers-brothers-chechnya-forged-america>. Accessed on 25/02/2015.

¹³ Schreck Carl, 'In Small Boston Diaspora, Echoes of Chechnya,' *RIA Novosti*, Sputnik International, 23rd April 2013. Available at: <http://sputniknews.com/analysis/20130423/180799181.html>. Accessed on 27/02/2015.

¹⁴ On instability in the Tsarnaev family unit, see: McPhee Michele 2014, *op. cit.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

in pushing him to question the feasibility of the ‘American dream’ and start to entertain Chechen ethno-nationalist sentiments which would otherwise have remained suppressed. Anzor may have interpreted the attack at the social gathering as a social extension of the Russo-Chechen conflict. Whereas the U.S may have given him the opportunity to escape this ‘Russian imperialism,’ the grievous injuries he had sustained made it difficult for him to continue pursuing the ‘American dream.’ And with the propensity for Chechens to remain nostalgic about their ancestral homeland while in exile, for Anzor, relocation back to the Caucasus may have seemed like a plausible solution¹⁶. As shall be noted in the ensuing sections, turbulence in the Tsarnaev family unit would have a profound impact on Tamerlan and Dzhokhar as well.

Individual Predisposition to Political Violence
Tamerlan Tsarnaev

The propensity for Tamerlan to have undertaken the Boston Marathon bombings was rooted in the collapse of the foundation of what would have been his ‘American dream’ and the attendant reversal in his hierarchy of identity that placed least significance to his ‘Americanness.’ If the notion that Tamerlan failed to fit into American society is valid, his attempted relocation back to the Caucasus would then have been aimed at providing him with ethno-nationalist fulfilment peacefully or violently through participation in the Chechen insurgency. This development would have been consistent with the behaviour of Chechen Americans, who are known to be largely nostalgic about their ancestral lands¹⁷. It is then probable that the U.S authorities’ investigation of Tamerlan’s activities was the tipping point that raised the ‘enemy’ status of America. By acting as a ‘stumbling block’ to Tamerlan’s identity transformation, the U.S then evolved into the ‘enemy’ that needed to be dealt with in the immediate term while Russia retained its credentials as the long term adversary to Chechen nationhood.

Although Tamerlan spent most of his life in America, it is worth observing that up until his mid-teens, he was domiciled in the Caucasus¹⁸. This point supports the notion that by the time the Tsarnaevs moved to the U.S, Tamerlan might have picked up some vital aspects of the Chechen national culture. Illustrating the ‘contagiousness’ of the Chechen martial streak, Ioffe observes: “The fact that the region now produces international wrestling and martial arts stars is not a coincidence, nor is the fact that Tamerlan Tsarnaev, 26, was a devout boxer as a he was a Muslim and that Dzhokhar, 19, was an all-star wrestler in high school”¹⁹.

¹⁶ On the nostalgia of Chechen-Americans, see: Gray Rosie, ‘Chechen Community in the US: Tiny, Isolated And Disorganized,’ *Buzz Feed News*, 21st April 2013. Available at: <http://www.buzzfeed.com/rosiegray/chechen-community-in-the-us-tiny-isolated-and-disorganized#.mdwN0Jo671>. Accessed on 27/02/2015.

¹⁷ Gray Rosie, *op. cit.*

¹⁸ McPhee Michele, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ Ioffe Julia, ‘The Boston Bombing Suspects were Reared by Both Chechnya and America,’ *New Republic*, 19th April 2013. Available at: <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/112971/boston-marathon-bombers-brothers-chechnya-forged-america>. Accessed on 25/02/2015.

Whether Tamerlan picked up the Chechen martial streak while in the Caucasus or by virtue of being brought up in the Tsarnaev household, it was a useful instrument on the path to social integration. As a promising boxer, Tamerlan not only participated in the Golden Gloves National Tournament in 2009 but also had ambitions of representing the U.S in the Olympic Games as a route to acquiring American citizenship²⁰.

On this account, excellence in sports emerges as an important pillar in Tamerlan's pursuit of the 'American dream.' Considering that he once mentioned that he would compete for the U.S as long as Russia 'occupied' Chechnya, it was also a means of political expression²¹. Tamerlan's comments were an indication that as he worked towards adopting an American identity, he was already aware of the contradictions underpinning his Chechen roots.

While appearing to have been focused on a pastime that would have delivered the 'American dream' to him, Tamerlan at the same time sent out signals pointing to a rejection of the American way of life. In a 2010 university magazine interview, he remarked: "I don't have a single American friend. I don't understand them"²².

This, despite in 2004 having stated: "I like the U.S.A"²³. Whereas for most immigrants, the failure to appreciate the culture of their host country does not necessarily result into hostility towards the host society, the case of Tamerlan is significant in the way his revulsion towards the American way of life progressively paved the way for him to drop his interest in boxing. Commenting on his decision to quit the sport, Tamerlan said it was against Islam²⁴. The termination of Tamerlan's sporting career not only removed an important avenue for facilitating his integration into American society but it also brought with it a reversal in his hierarchy of identity. Henceforth, Tamerlan's Islamic identity would take precedence over his 'Americanness.'

The second important pillar in what would have been Tamerlan's successful integration into American society was the opportunity to pursue formal education. This would have widened the array of career opportunities at his disposal beyond those spinning off his boxing talent. Although he had the opportunity of going to college, he dropped out at some point in his career. It is not clear whether this was as a result of poor academic performance, a career preference not contingent on academic qualifications, financial constraints, social tensions within the Tsarnaev family unit or the start of his path to radicalism. Yet the fact that, in 2010, he took a semester off from Bunker Hill Community College to prepare for a major boxing competition points to the dispensability of formal education in the face of competing career interests²⁵. In the event Tamerlan

²⁰ Parker Diantha and Bidgood Jess, *op cit*; BBC 2013, 'Boston Bombings: Suspects' Chechen Connections,' *BBC News US & Canada*, 22nd April 2015. Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-22229442>. Accessed on 17/02/2015.

²¹ BBC, 'Boston Bombings: Suspects' Chechen Connections,' *op. cit.*, 2013.

²² BBC, 'Profile: Dzhokhar and Tamerlan Tsarnaev,' *BBC News US & Canada*, 22nd April 2013. Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-22219116>. Accessed on 17/02/2015.

²³ BBC, 'Boston Bombings: Suspects' Chechen Connections,' *op. cit.*, 2013.

²⁴ BBC, 'Profile: Dzhokhar and Tamerlan Tsarnaev,' *op. cit.*, 2013.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

experienced a glitch in his boxing career, the de-prioritization of his formal education would have left him with no back-up avenue for realizing the ‘American dream’.

The third pillar that would have assisted Tamerlan to fit into American society would have been the Tsarnaev family. This social unit would not only have acted as a domain for imparting positive values, it would also have acted as his refuge for coping with the challenges of social integration. But as it turned out, turbulence in the Tsarnaev household predisposed Tamerlan to pursuing a terrorist career in a number of ways. First, the attack on his father equipped him with a personal grievance and prospectively allowed the use of violence to emerge as a means of not only exacting revenge in this case but also resolving other contradictions in his life. Second, the turbulence undermined the smooth evolution of his own family unit. When Anzor and Zubeidat relocated back to the Caucasus, the Tsarnaevs struggled to pay rent for the Norfolk apartment which the remainder of the family was occupying. Considering that his wife was also part of the household there, the turbulence was not only affecting his primary family (the one into which he was born) but also his secondary family (the one he was starting)²⁶. Under these circumstances, the institution of family which would have assisted him to fit into American society had instead evolved into a domain for triggering the kind of events that potentially undermined his adaptation to life in the U.S.

Of critical significance in this debate is the role of Zubeidat in re-orientating Tamerlan’s world view. According to Baudy Mazaev (a friend of the Tsarnaevs), Zubeidat and Tamerlan “had a deep religious epiphany”²⁷. Zubeidat confirms her mentorship role in this relationship: “I started reading and started learning. I started reading (the Quran) with my Tamerlan”²⁸. With Zubeidat’s piety coinciding with the peak of turbulence in the Tsarnaev household, it is plausible to assume that her social mentorship provided Tamerlan with a doctrinal framework for interpreting the woes facing the Tsarnaev family. Just to prove Zubeidat’s over-bearing influence on Tamerlan, when Tamerlan fell out with his girl friend, Nadine Ascencao, after slapping her for allegedly dressing provocatively at a barbecue, it was Zubeidat who advised him to find a more pious partner. The subsequent search led to Tamerlan marrying Katherine Russell, an American who converted to Islam and changed her name to Karima²⁹.

If allegations advanced by the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) are accurate, then Zubeidat’s mentorship went beyond merely influencing a change in Tamerlan’s lifestyle. In 2011, the FSB informed the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) that it had intercepted telephone communication in which among others, Zubeidat declared Tamerlan’s readiness to participate in Jihadist activities³⁰. If true, these allegations show that progressively, Islam (as interpreted by Zubeidat) had emerged as Tamerlan’s framework for not only making sense of his family’s social predicament but also for violently resolving contradictions underpinning the wider social groups to which he belonged.

²⁶ Parker Diantha and Bidgood Jess, *op cit*; McPhee Michele 2014, *op. cit.*

²⁷ Parker Diantha and Bidgood Jess, *op. cit.*

²⁸ BBC, ‘Profile: Dzhokhar and Tamerlan Tsarnaev,’ *op. cit.*, 2013.

²⁹ McPhee Michele, *op. cit.*, 2014.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Turbulence in the Tsarnaev household also paved the way for Tamerlan to assume a dominant position in the family which he not only used to impose his world view but also most likely influence Dzhokhar into participating in the Boston attacks. As already mentioned, Tamerlan became the head of the Tsarnaev family when his parents relocated back to the Caucasus³¹. Whereas the onset of the leadership phase of Tamerlan's career would naturally have been the starting point of his dominance of the household, there is evidence that this character trait was inherent. According to Elmirza Khozugov (former husband of Ailina, one of Tamerlan's sisters), "He was the eldest one and he, in many ways, was the role model for his sisters and brother. You could always hear his younger brother and sisters say 'Tamerlan said this' and 'Tamerlan said that.' Dzhokhar loved him. He would do whatever Tamerlan would say"³².

Tamerlan's streak of dominance was also evident with respect to his own family. According to Alexander, a neighbour of the Tsarnaevs and Russian student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Tamerlan always spoke on behalf of his wife.³³ It can be deduced then that the 'official' assumption of leadership only served to consolidate the wealth of authority Tamerlan already commanded over his siblings. Under such circumstances, any mushrooming dissent by either Dzhokhar or his sisters would have been difficult to sustain. This could explain why despite Dzhokhar initially being irritated by Tamerlan's pious lifestyle, he eventually conformed to the same³⁴.

From the foregoing, it is evident that as contradictions crept into the life of Tamerlan, he experienced reverse social integration where his American identity was progressively subsumed by his Chechen and Islamic roots. Ioffe captures this point succinctly: "For Tamerlan, national identity was thrown into the heady mix, and he seems to have stuck with the one he knew his whole life: Muslim Chechen....If the You Tube channel that is said to be Tamerlan's really is his, you can see him fervently clinging to this torn identity. It is full of Islam and Russian rap, which makes sense given the Soviet policy of Russifying Chechnya"³⁵.

It was these shifts in individual identity formation that saw Tamerlan travel to Chechnya and Dagestan in 2012 where he spent 6 months. There are conflicting perspectives on the purpose of this trip: whereas his father and one of his aunts say he was in the Caucasus to renew his Russian passport and study Islam respectively, the Russian authorities insist he was there to join Islamist insurgencies³⁶. Whichever perspective one adopts, it is evident that as Tamerlan

³¹ Parker Diantha and Bidgood Jess, *op. cit.*, 2015.

³² Boston Herald.com, *op. cit.*

³³ Gray Rosie, *op. cit.*

³⁴ Parker Diantha and Bidgood Jess, *op. cit.*

³⁵ Ioffe Julia, *op. cit.*

³⁶ BBC, 'Q&A: Possible FBI Failings in Boston Bombing,' *BBC News US & Canada*, 23rd April. Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-22262288>. Accessed on 17/02/2015; McPhee Michele 2014, *op. cit.*; Parker Diantha and Bidgood Jess 2015, *op. cit.*; BBC 2013, 'Profile: Dzhokhar and Tamerlan Tsarnaev,' *op. cit.*

tried to reconnect with his ancestral roots, his American identity started losing meaning. Thus, when the FBI interrogated him at the instigation of the FSB, the American state evolved into an immediate stumbling block to his identity adjustment³⁷. An attack on American society (which the U.S authorities represent) was Tamerlan's way of violently resolving this contradiction.

Dzhokhar Tsarnaev

If there was ever a member of the Tsarnaev family with the credentials to fully integrate into American society, it was Dzhokhar. Unlike Tamerlan, whose talents and skills were in the main prospective, Dzhokhar was a gifted individual – an attribute that accelerated American society's propensity to embrace him. Dzhokhar veered off the path to complete social integration because he got trapped in the social turbulence of the Tsarnaev household. Like Tamerlan, once his life was gripped by social contradictions, he retreated back to his primary identity.

Although Dzhokhar has spent most of his life in the U.S, it is worth noting that he was not only raised in a Chechen family but also attended his primary school in Makhachkala, Dagestan³⁸. These facts trigger interest in whether the above spheres of formal and informal education could have had an impact on his career development. The fact that he developed an interest in and pursued a sport consistent with the Chechen martial streak cannot be ignored. While he could have been influenced by the World Wide Wrestling Federation (WWF) television series, it is equally possible that his brief stay in the Caucasus or his family could have socialized him into following in the martial sporting tradition of Chechens.

Whatever the source of Dzhokhar's interest in wrestling, this sport accorded him celebrity status thereby easing his acceptance in American society. Rose Schutzberg, one of his high school friends captures this fact: "He was a very studious person. He was really popular. He wrestled. People loved him"³⁹. In comparing the careers of the Tsarnaev brothers, it is apparent that while Tamerlan appeared to have banked on boxing to achieve the 'American dream,' wrestling was just one of Dzhokhar's options for achieving a similar objective.

Dzhokhar was spoilt for choice that he could have done without wrestling and still integrated into American society. He was a promising second year medical student with the ambition of becoming a brain surgeon. It was a testament to his academic excellence that while in high school, he was offered a scholarship of \$ 2,500 to further his education⁴⁰. While it is not clear whether

³⁷ The Federal Bureau of Investigation, Updates on Investigation into Multiple Explosions in Boston. Available at: <http://www.fbi.gov/news/updates-on-investigation-into-multiple-explosions-in-boston>. Accessed on 17/02/2015.

³⁸ Kordunsky Anna, 'Boston Bombing Suspects Put Chechnya in Spotlight,' *National Geographic*, 19th April 2013. Available at: <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2013/13/130419-chechnya-russia-caucuses-boston-marathon-bombing-suspects-world-militants/>. Accessed on 25/02/2015; BBC 2013, 'Boston Bombings: Suspects' Chechen Connections,' *op. cit.*

³⁹ BBC, 'Boston Bombings: Suspects' Chechen Connections,' *op. cit.*

⁴⁰ BBC, 'Profile: Dzhokhar and Tamerlan Tsarnaev,' *op. cit.*

Tamerlan dropped out of school due to radicalization, the slump in Dzhokhar's educational career coincides with the upsurge in his ideological consciousness. Whereas in 2012, Dzhokhar was focussed on his studies, two weeks before the attacks, his priorities had changed. Sanjaya Lamichhane (Dzhokhar's wrestling team mate) recalls what Dzhokhar told their friend: "God is all that matters. It doesn't matter about school and engineering. When it comes to school and being an engineer, you can cheat easily. But when it comes to going to heaven, you can't cheat"⁴¹.

The debate on whether proselytization triggered the end of the Tsarnaevs' educational careers is important. If Tamerlan became radicalized after dropping out of school, then his ideological consciousness may only have emerged as an instrument for rationalizing, among others, some of his own social integration incapacities. On the other hand, if it is true that Dzhokhar was radicalized while his educational career was still on track, then his growth in ideological consciousness did not happen as a result of struggling to adapt to life in the U.S. Rather, it suggests that Dzhokhar's path to radicalism was externally influenced.

Unlike Tamerlan, by the time he became radicalized, Dzhokhar appeared to have embraced the American way of life. He enthusiastically participated in the kinds of activities that imparted and consolidated American values. According to Mark Faria (his course mate and friend), he for example took violence prevention classes becoming part of the Students Teaching and Advocating Respect (STAR) association, in addition to undertaking a life guard certification course while at Cambridge Ridge and Latin School⁴².

Unlike Tamerlan, whose behavioural make-over was noticeably gradual (progressively moving from making anti-American statements to dropping his interest in boxing), Dzhokhar's was rather dramatic. Nancy Aiguier, a reggae music presenter at a local station in Boston offers a glimpse into this abrupt behavioural change: "I used to see him skateboarding. He made a lot of noise. About a week and a half ago, I saw him walking kind of fast on our street. He looked sort of reclusive, inward and he was wearing a hoodie"⁴³.

While being susceptible to misinterpretation, Dzhokhar's apparent overt behaviour would seem to suggest that his social disorientation was a 'recent' phenomenon occasioned by 'recent' developments and probably engineered by an external actor.

Like in the case of Tamerlan, it is challenging to determine the extent of Dzhokhar's acceptance of the American value system purely on the basis of his communication. On one hand (on Facebook), he appears materialistic, prioritizing career and money as his life goals. On the other hand, he indicates Islam as his world view and is a member of Chechen groups on Vkontakte, a Russian social networking website⁴⁴. While these identities and ideological orientations are not

⁴¹ Parker Diantha and Bidgood Jess, *op. cit.*

⁴² McKelvey Tara, 'Disbelief in home district of bomb suspect Dzhokhar Tsarnaev,' *BBC News US & Canada*, 20th April 2013. Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-22229176>. Accessed on 24/02/2015.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ BBC, 'Profile: Dzhokhar and Tamerlan Tsarnaev,' *op. cit.*

incompatible per se, the fact that his social media communication becomes radical in the years leading to the attacks was indicative of intervening developments that appear to push his identity further away from America. Just days before achieving American citizenship, he wondered why most people did not realize 9/11 was an “inside job,” appearing to concur with his mother that this incident was covertly orchestrated by the U.S government⁴⁵.

If Dzhokhar was an ‘innocent’ immigrant on the path to social integration only to be ‘derailed’ by external forces, it is imperative that this sudden shift in his career is explained. First, it is possible that his father’s predicament could have triggered and embedded emotions of grievance in his psyche. When Anzor relocated to the Caucasus, Dzhokhar sorely missed him⁴⁶. Second, Tamerlan’s domineering character and Dzhokhar’s admiration of his elder brother could have combined to influence Dzhokhar into treading a radicalist path. Third, the social and financial turbulence in the Tsarnaev household could have pushed Dzhokhar to question the very feasibility of the ‘American dream’ that appeared to be unfolding well in his sporting and educational careers but ‘faltering’ in his family.

On the other hand, if we adopt the position that Dzhokhar’s behaviour was not a product of ‘recent’ developments, then it is important to show the roots of his reverse social integration. Like in the case of Tamerlan, Dzhokhar may never after all have been assimilated into the American way of life. Ioffe captures this point: The most revealing image of Dzhokhar is not the one of him hugging an African-American friend at his high school graduation, but the one of him sitting at a kitchen table with an arm around a guy his age who appears to be of Central Asian descent. In front of them is a dish plov, a central Asian dish of rice and meat, and a bottle of Ranch dressing⁴⁷.

Conclusion

This analysis brings to the fore the complexities of social integration and by extension those of mitigating home-grown terrorism in the U.S. Overtly, the Boston Marathon bombers signalled conflicting social integration results: on one hand, they appeared to fit into American society while on the other, they seemed to reject the American way of life. For community workers and law enforcement agents, this kind of a situation makes the detection and mitigation of social alienation-related violence quite challenging. It is hard to tell whether psycho-social intervention is required with respect to certain migrant individuals or families.

This discussion also reveals cross-generational social alienation within the Tsarnaev family unit. Disillusionment is evident between the bombers’ parents as much as the bombers themselves. This is a remarkable finding given that with

⁴⁵ Parker Diantha and Bidgood Jess, *op. cit*; McPhee Michele, *op. cit*.

⁴⁶ Parker Diantha and Bidgood Jess, *op. cit*.

⁴⁷ Ioffe Julia, *op. cit*.

better social advancement opportunities, the bombers should have been less disgruntled than their parents. If lack of social progress was a key factor in orchestrating the bombings, then the Tsarnaev brothers evaluated their situation relative to their peers and not their parents. In this respect (despite relative improvements in the social conditions of Chechen immigrants), they perceived themselves to have gotten a raw deal in their new homeland.

By themselves, the above perceptions of deprivation would not have been sufficient to trigger the attacks. What heightened the siege mentality were the investigations into the activities of the Tsarnaevs. These intrusions were perceived as processes intended to disrupt the identity transformation that Tamerlan and Dzhokhar were undertaking. Thus, American society (which the law enforcement agencies represented) evolved into an ‘enemy’ that needed to be neutralized in the immediate term. Russia (by virtue of its ‘occupation’ of Chechnya) retained its credentials as the long term adversary of the Tsarnaevs.

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