

Terrorism and the Psychoanalytic Origins

ABSTRACT: Using a psychoanalytic lens, this paper explores the cycles of violence and the deeper human aggressive and destructive instincts underlying terrorism. Muslim humiliation and the subsequent desire for retribution against America and its allies is one of the driving forces of war-generated terrorism. The author's first-hand community outreach during the Second Chechen war to provide medical and psychological support to Chechens, both stranded in Grozny and scattered throughout the North Caucasus, provided a glimpse into this Muslim sense of oppression and shame as a result of war with the more powerful Russian army. Both the Tsarnaev brothers (the Boston Marathon bombers) and Mohammad Atta (the 9/11 pilot and ringleader) identified as Muslim, and their desire for violent retribution may have been motivated by a sense of marginalization and isolation. The ability to hate can provide a distorted sense of object constancy to terrorists who have suffered narcissistic injury severe enough to threaten their sense of survival. The Tsarnaevs and Atta may have unconsciously sought radicalization as an ideological, sacred object to effect an environmental transformation that they deceived themselves into believing would deliver personal, familial, social and moral change.

INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to acquire a deeper understanding of the human aggressive and destructive instincts underlying terrorism. Terrorism is one of the most complex problems of our time and combating violent extremism requires an understanding of the unique social, political, religious, historical, and other factors for each terrorist act (Bongar, 2006, p. 91). War-generated terrorists, for example, are usually motivated by reasons that may have little to do with the religious and political narratives they spin and they always have a grievance which can be heard if you listen (Stern, 2003, p. 32; Stern, 2010, p. 289; Lotto, 2017, p. 12). Terrorists may be driven by a multitude of factors: hate, trauma, humiliation, a search for identity and craving for attention (Stern, 2003, p. 32; McCauley, 2017, p. 255). The power of terrorists is heightened by terrorist organizations, which are formed by radical-

izers who, using oppression, isolation, and religion as both motivation and justification, recruit the disenfranchised. Another attraction of terrorism is the possibility of experiencing a profoundly thrilling, empowering, and spiritual intoxication (St ern, 2003, p. 3; Cottee and Hayward, 201, p. 965).

Many have documented the lack of mental or psychological disorder and how frighteningly “normal” the recruited, war-generated terrorists can be (Silke, 2003, p. 6; Post, 2005, p. 617; Horgan, 2017, p. 202; Gill & Corner, 2017, p. 234).

“Why terrorism?” has become the modern-day version of the question “Why war?” that Einstein presented Freud in 1932 (Einstein & Freud, 1981, title page). Freud was absorbed in observing the impact of the collective violence of WWI on the human psyche. The psychoanalytic community, however, later became silent on the impact of the war, perhaps because of its own close encounter with the violence and loss experienced during World War II (Varvin & Volkan, 2018, p. xx). As happened not only to Jews but also gay, and the mentally or physically disabled during WWII, victimized groups today such as the Chechens suffer from dignity violations and a resulting sense of isolation, hopelessness, and humiliation which contributes to present-day terrorism.

Muslim humiliation by America and its allies is one of the driving forces of war-generated terrorism and the ensuing cycles of violence. Both the Tsarnaev brothers (the Boston Marathon bombers) and Mohamed Atta (the 9/11 ringleader and pilot who crashed the American Airline plane into the North Tower of the World Trade Center) identified as Muslim and may have been motivated by a sense of impotency in the genesis of their desire for violent retribution. Born in the shame of defeat, radical Islamists, like the Tsarnaevs and Atta, could be seen as sharing a fanatical determination to get on top of history after being underfoot for many generations. They have felt themselves to be victims of a history of violence and powerless to make the aggression stop, which is at the core of humiliating experiences. Their utter sense of certainty that they were right in committing horrendous terrorists acts of violence against Westerners, their perceived enemy, may have provided them with a sense of order and stability. In this article, the possible contextual motives of the Tsarnaevs and Atta will be further explored as a means of deepening our understanding of their terrorist acts and ways we could possibly avoid such tragic events in the future.

CHECHEN OPPRESSION AND THE ORIGINS OF TERRORISM

When we lose sight of the fact that we are all inherently valuable and matter as human beings, we allow our dignity to slip out of our hands. In-

equality, discrimination, and injustice are all violent acts that have been perpetrated by Russia's policy in Chechnya.

Susan Levine's *Dignity Matters* (2016, p. 177) maintains that dignity is a basic human right, a vital need, that is a birthright to every human being. With that in mind, she examines the role of dignity violations in the understanding and treatment of trauma and the genesis of terrorism. When we treat others with indignity, a sense of humiliation results, which can be an important driver of retribution and terrorism. Acknowledging the loss and violation of a population's dignity and working to restore it can be a powerful force in conflict resolution. She refers to two interviews: one, an interview by a Black African from Cape Town, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela with Eugene de Kock, the infamous white torturer of black South Africans during apartheid (Levine, 2016, p. 178), and the other, Jessica Stern's interview with a terrorist imprisoned for life in Sweden (Levine, 2016, p. 179). Levine maintains that helping perpetrators acknowledge the devastating harm they have done to others, as well as to their own selves, can restore dignity to both perpetrator and victim (Coen, 2018, p. 325; Hicks, 2011, p. 194; Gobodo-Madikizela, 2015, p. 1085; Stern, 2014, p. 447).

Working in the field of international conflict resolution, Donna Hicks (2011, p. 11) has applied these principles to facilitate dialogue between communities in conflict. When dignity is violated, the response is likely to involve vengeful violence. She describes an encounter with a member of an African guerilla organization representing an ethnic minority which was fighting for independence from the African majority government. The African guerillas were able to stay in control of their territory even when they were significantly outnumbered by the majority culture's army because the guerillas were fighting to protect the dignity of their people. This pattern of an unrelenting effort at empowerment by an ethnic minority is similar to that of the Chechen minority's attempt to restore the worth of its people despite being significantly outnumbered by the Russian army in their struggle for independence from Russia during the first and second Chechen war.

Hannah Arendt, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, described loneliness as the common ground for terror and explored its function as the chief weapon of oppressive political regimes. Arendt maintained that when people lose contact and are isolated from their fellow men, as well as the reality around them, their capacity for both experience and thought is diminished. Terror, she argues, can rule absolutely only over people who are isolated against each other (Arendt, 1968, p. 475). This isolation and terror which Arendt describes also reflects the condition exemplified by the conditions in Chechnya during the Second Chechen war.

During the Second Chechen war, it is estimated that 90% of the people living in Chechnya could not leave and more than 2,000 children under the age of three would die each year as a result of inadequate medical care (Cerfolio, 2009, p. 591). The fortunate ones that escaped before the Russian army occupation, nevertheless, lost their homes and familiar way of life. Forced to live in camps, fields, or just the middle of nowhere, they lived in extreme hardship (Politkovskaya, 2003, p. 47). Since 2005, more than 30,000 children have been injured or killed because of the war or land mines spread throughout the country. Chechens experienced acts of state terrorism; kidnappings, and violence on a daily basis. Because of the lack of knowledge of how a loved one died and the lack of a body, it was more difficult to validate the death or mourn the loss. There is a sense of inner emptiness, which children experience during arrested mourning, when they feel they have been deceived about the death of their parent or grandparent. Survivor guilt and shame are often at the core of arrested mourning for these children (Valent, 1998, p. 116).

Adding to the Chechen sense of helplessness is the fact that their struggle was largely ignored by the rest of the world; much of the violence occurring in Chechnya was not reported by the world press due in part to the political agenda of the United States, which further exacerbated the Chechens' sense of isolation. The United States was eager to identify the Chechens' fight as an example of international terrorism rather than as a fight for autonomy and defense against Russian oppression (Goldfarb & Litvinenko, 2007, p. 248, 273). Consequently, the Chechens' sense of hopelessness has left them vulnerable to the lure of terrorism, ironically, as a desperate means to create awareness of their struggle for survival.

OUR CHECHEN MISSION

My research relates to community therapeutic work I engaged in to medically and psychologically support traumatized Chechen children during the Second Chechen war in the North Caucasus. Our team consisted of the founder of the International Track Club, a running club for disabled athletes, and me, a psychiatrist now in private practice who previously ran a psychiatric emergency room of a major teaching hospital. We focused on Chechnya, since the Chechen war has been one of the most dangerous, misunderstood, and underreported in the world today. In August of 2005, I was part of a team that visited Chechnya because we wanted to better understand the downward cycles of violence and the traumatic psychological impact of war on children. Our team visited the war-torn republic, which was surrounded and controlled by the Russian military,

for ten days to start a running chapter for the disabled children in Grozny, the capital of Chechnya. Despite block after block in Grozny being a ravaged wasteland scarred with the detritus of ferocious bombings, the sense of Chechen pride was on display as they were walking the streets prideful of what little they had, dressed as if they were going to their offices. It was in this squalor in Grozny that 90,000 to 190,000 Chechens made their home. During our stay, I provided medical care to many of the refugee Chechens displaced in the Caucasus as well as those trapped in Chechnya. Upon our return, despite numerous refusals regarding their exit visas, I fought for three years by cajoling bureaucrats to bring three disabled Chechen children whom we had met during our Chechen visit to New York in 2009 for medical treatment. Even though there was a far greater need for intervention than we could provide, I believe that by reaching out to even one child and attending to their needs, we slowly began to contribute a sense of connection. There is a tremendous need for medically and psychodynamically trained aid workers in Chechnya. The risk of non-intervention is that the next generation of Chechens will feel a deepening isolation—the obliteration of a sense of belonging and connection to humanity—as they struggle alone with the emotional and physical toll the war has brought. *The New York Daily News* as well as local Chechen and Russian newspapers covered our humanitarian work during the Second Chechen war. The news coverage of our Chechen community outreach provided a glimpse into the Chechen sense of oppression by the more powerful Russian army, which had generated a deep sense of Muslim humiliation. This sense of Chechen shame may have been one of the motivating factors that drove the Tsarnaev brothers to feel the need to commit their violent acts of retribution.

In addition to surviving starvation and oppression as a result of living in a war zone, the Chechen children I met in 2005 in Grozny suffered medical injuries including loss of limbs from land mines and artillery fire. Ruslan, for example, was scrawny, walked with a limp, and had the wide-eyed stare of a small hunted animal who expected nothing but trouble. Ruslan had a left leg above-the-knee amputation and right arm above-the-elbow amputation, and part of his penis blown off when he was 10 years old by stray artillery fire that struck him in his backyard play area. Four years old when the war first started, he was five when he saw his village destroyed and his father kidnapped, never to be heard from again. In 2009, after bringing him and two other Chechen children to New York, we were able to provide Ruslan with prosthetics that were suction-based and decreased his edematous stumps, as well as other sorely needed medical care.

Ruslan's childhood trauma was typical of many of the Chechen children we met, who suffered from unattended debilitating medical problems and had at least one parent who was tortured by the Russian military or abducted. During the First and Second Chechen Wars, UNICEF reported that from 1994 to 2009, 25,000 Chechen children lost one or both parents (Seierstad, 2008, p. 9). The Chechens' sense of humiliation was not unique. Other people subjected to genocide, have similar experiences (Cerfolio, 2009, p. 600). Nor could the Chechen sense of shame be wished away by our team's respectful ideas and medical aid. The violence and persecution perpetrated in the war produced a collective sense of humiliation in those who had been denied any agency. The violent suppression by the Russian army led to a deeper penetration and fragmentation of the Chechen survivor psyche (Hoffman, 2004, p. 54).

By slowly changing the environment of humiliation and lack of opportunity, I believe it is possible to begin to slowly chip away at the present trends of violence. Towards this goal, we took one small step. We organized a 5-kilometer Hope and Possibility race from Nazran to Magas, Ingushetia. It took place two weeks after we left the North Caucasus. More than 200 Chechens, including invalid children and refugees, ran for Hope and Possibility on September 11, 2005. This race marked the first time a Muslim republic banded together to run in defiance of terrorism.

Despite our efforts of hope to slowly begin to lessen the cycle of violent retribution, there was a murder of a race participant. A deaf Chechen woman, a teacher and founder of a deaf school for the refugee Chechen children in Ingushetia, was run over by a speeding government car that left the scene of the crime. While we were in the North Caucasus, we had visited her in her stark one-room school, while she proudly served tea. She told us about her deaf daughter who was a student at the school. Taking this hit-and-run murder as a warning from the Russian government, the Chechens did not hold this race against terrorism in the North Caucasus again.

Our team taking time to care for the Chechens, who had been ostracized and marginalized, may have helped plant a seed to diminish their feelings of humiliating isolation and begin to chip away at the cycles of retribution.

True belonging is initially fostered by good-enough parenting (Winnicott, 1973, p. 10) creating a sense of justice, beauty and love. This sense of belonging is needed whether we are in dire circumstances or just leading peaceful lives. By the United States and the international community becoming more aware and involved in providing stability in Chechnya, a sense of Chechen hopefulness and belonging—a bulwark against the lure of terrorism—will begin to develop. Our work as psychoanalysts is cut out for us.

In order to assuage the feeling of absolute loneliness that often breeds terrorism, we need to find, individually and in groups, the courage and passion to demonstrate that they are not alone and others care. Reaching out to the Chechens, the medical team aspired to slowly chip away at the chronic hopelessness and despair that often breeds desperate acts of violence. As Hillel the Elder, the famous Jewish leader, stated, "If you save one life, you save the entire world"; one person's effort to reach another who is suffering reverberates to assist all. We hoped that this important therapeutic intervention presented a different paradigm that would take root in at least one Chechen's life and encourage her to envision a more hopeful future.

THE BOSTON MARATHON BOMBERS

The Chechen sense of not belonging—not sharing in the inherent rights of mankind, a history of betrayals, and an eye-for-an-eye mentality—are exemplified by the events in April 2013 in the Boston Marathon Bombings.

The Tsarnaev brothers' background was one of dislocations and not belonging. Their father was Chechen, while their mother was Avar, another Muslim ethnic group, indistinguishable from the Chechens in the eyes of their Russian rulers, but a different Muslim population, nevertheless. The mother was never fully accepted into the Tsarnaev family because of these Muslim ethnic differences (Murphy, 2015, p. 3).

The family continuously moved around in a desperate attempt to find violence-free areas, financial stability and opportunity for autonomy: from Siberia to Kyrgyzstan, from Kyrgyzstan to Kalmykia, back to Kyrgyzstan, then to Chechnya, back to Kyrgyzstan to flee the Chechen war, then to Dagestan, then to the US. The parents emigrated in 2002 via refugee status to the United States and settled in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

During one of the Chechen wars in the 1990's, their father was tortured in Chechnya in one of the many Russian camps, and as a result often hallucinated that KGB agents were following him. He and his family were granted asylum in the United States (McPhee 2017, p. 86). The Tsarnaev's father was later diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder by an American psychiatrist, who testified to the father's torture in a futile effort to change Dzhokhar Tsarnaev's death sentence to life in prison (CBS, May 5, 2015).

My goal is not to condone the Tsarnaev brothers' horrible act of human destruction but to provide a background of the Chechen psychological, historical, and political milieu that contributes to a sense of humiliating powerlessness; that impotency which obliterates a sense of belonging which in turn can breed terrorism. The despicable killing of innocents did nothing to further the brothers' cause. The brothers not only demeaned

their victims in order to carry out the killings, but dehumanized themselves in the process. They disconnected from the part of themselves that felt the horror of taking someone's life.

James Jones (2008) points out that to the extent that one is identified with those who are victims of violence, the humiliation that results from a sense of not belonging can be experienced vicariously. An example of this vicarious identification, the Tsarnaev brothers were descendants of ethnic Chechens deported to Central Asia in the Stalin era (Gessen, 2015, p. 17).

The brothers struggled to assimilate in the US. Dzhokhar, the younger brother, was charming but was a master of mirroring everyone's expectation of him, and he struggled to develop an authentic sense of self and connection to others. Few people noticed his slow deterioration into a stoner who was failing out of a mediocre college. Perhaps in an attempt to create a sense of stability, connection, and belonging, he began to forge a Russian-speaking, Chechen-centric identity. Living a marginalized immigrant existence and feeling like outsiders (Murphy, 2015, p. 5), the brothers grew to hate the United States, which led to their growing rage and radicalization. As their radicalization developed, they became even more embittered, enraged, and vengeful.

Tamerlan, the older brother, was the perfect candidate for recruitment by the US government with a promise in regard to his citizenship. Broke, desperate, and with a new American wife and baby girl to take care of, he spoke fluent English, Russian, and a dialect of Chechen. Despite being on several terrorist watch lists, he was recruited by the FBI as a "mosque crawler" to inform on radical separatists here and in Chechnya during the six months he spent in Russia. But upon his return to the US, the FBI broke their promise of granting him citizenship (McPhee, 2017, p. 109, 133).

The US betrayal of the promise may have destroyed his final hope to belong. A basic human reflex when humiliated is to humiliate the perpetrator. Already having a fragile sense of self, Tamerlan's responses to having been denied US citizenship may have generated affects he could not intrapsychically contain. His desperate attempt to deal with his chaotic feelings was to inflict his terror on the perpetrators, the United States. When one feels there is nothing left to live for, the will to die through murder is kindled (Merari, 2010, p. 124). The sense that the Tsarnaevs might have felt that they did not belong is evident in the younger brother's writing a note scrawled on the interior of a boat in Watertown where he was hiding from the FBI that stated the Boston Marathon bombings were "retribution for the United States' military action against innocent Muslims in Afghanistan and Iraq." He called the Boston marathon victims "collateral damage".

Tamerlan's inability to integrate into American society, his sense of not belonging, combined with his sympathy for the rebellion in the Caucasus region, contributed to his motivation for retaliation in the Boston bombing. Through the bombings, the brothers may have seen a chance to not only lessen their intrapsychic sense of emasculation but to create a sense of significance and belonging to a cause greater than themselves by waging war on the United States. The brothers may have felt a collective sense of shame as a result of the United States' wars waged against Muslims that was compounded by the international community largely ignoring the Chechen War. The Tsarnaev brothers' sense of despair may have left them more vulnerable to the lure of terrorism as not only a means to bring awareness of the Chechens' struggle for survival against a much more powerful Russian adversary, but also for retribution for all.

The terrorist's push is to reconstitute a distorted sense of belonging. The Tsarnaev brothers' hatred served as a prosthetic device to maintain a steady relationship with an object, the US, which they could hold on to by seeking revenge. Hate was a device that stabilized the brothers' tattered psyches with a malignant sense of object constancy. The brothers' hatred may have created a pseudo-sense of self-organization and provided a sense of stability and equilibrium for their unsettled lives.

In addition to being inspired by the Chechen political, historical and psychosocial issues, the Tsarnaev brothers' violence may have been driven by a need to demonstrate and reconstruct their sense of masculinity. The brothers were psychologically steeped in the traumatic violent history of the Chechens, including the two wars waged by the Russian military in Chechnya during their childhood in the 1990s, in which tens of thousands of civilians were killed (de Carbonnel, 2013, p. 57). Tamerlan may well have felt emasculated by his failure to achieve the American dream; his boxing career and studies at a junior college did not work out, he never found a full-time job, and family members say his wife supported him while he stayed home with his child (de Carbonnel, 2013, p. 41). Demonstrating bravado helped the Chechens to keep their identity in the face of Russian oppression and the perception of their history as being one of constant powerlessness and subjugation; the younger Tsarnaev tweeted, "#chechnyapower" and "A decade in America already, I want out" (de Carbonnel 2013, p. 18). The younger brother said of his terrorist killings: "This is easy to do. These tragedies happen all the time in Afghanistan and Iraq" (de Carbonnel, 2013, p. 22).

As Ruth Stein notes in her book, *For Love of the Father*, defensive rephrasing of evil and hate as love is what constitutes perversity. Terrorism, in which the drive to kill in the name of God is present, involves false reli-

gious love. The brothers were radicalized online by the Muslim fundamentalist Anwar al-Awlaki, who was a member of al-Qaeda. Prior to his being sentenced to death, Dzhokhar spoke in court about his love and devotion for Allah and that there was only one God. Their radicalization permitted them to relinquish accountability for killing as they were disavowing their will; they were acting in the name of God.

There is a significant amount of evidence that violent criminals come from broken families and that serial killers often grew up in abusive and cruel conditions (Miller, 1990, p. 92; Reavis, 2013, p. 44; Gilligan, 2015, p. 45). The criminal incorporates his abuser as an internalized persecutory object. Rittenberg (1987, p. 130) points out that perverse thinking is linked to modern forms of violence and can be used in the service of propaganda. Steiner (1981, p. 241) describes perversity of character in which a “bad,” ganglike part of the psyche takes over; it dominates other healthier parts of the self. Lowenstein (2017, p. 3) maintains that the perverse or destructive part is motivated by a sense of omnipotence, envy, and hatred; it attacks links of trust and dependency on good objects.

The perverse parts of the brothers’ personalities may have allowed them to choose to become terrorists and murder others. Klein’s internalized persecutory object and Fairbairn’s inner saboteur address this. Then the simultaneous identification with the persecutor leads to abuse of the external victim, which allows for murder. The external victim has to be annihilated as a symbol of the internalized victim, which then alleviates the individual’s self-loathing. In a vicious cycle of violence, the former victim becomes the perpetrator, who inflicts violence on a new victim, who will then become the perpetrator

MOHAMED ATTA: KILLING IN THE NAME OF GOD AND THE DIVINE ALIBI

Similar to the Tsarnaevs’ obsessional, shamed sense of self, the perverse part of Atta’s personality allowed him to kill in the name of Allah in an attempt to restore his masculine dignity. Both the Tsarnaev brothers and Atta committed their vengeful acts with utter certainty, which may have given them a sense of order and stability.

The experiential quality of psychic pain is the awareness, at varying levels of consciousness, of the gap between one’s “actual” self and one’s “idealized” self (Sandler, 1963, p. 142). The emotional work of coming to terms with this traumatic loss and guilt can be an essential part of psychoanalytic work. Working between awareness of what is causing pain and protective dissociation from this realization, the patient learns to mourn. Psychoana-

lytic acknowledgement of the loss of achieving the idealized self keeps the gap from becoming an abyss, while omnipotent denial of this realization of a gap between the actual from the idealized self can be a driving force in some terrorist acts.

Ironically, in the mind of the terrorist, when one detaches from one's human moral judgment, one tragically merges with "God" (Stein, 2010, p. 25). The enemy becomes the depository of the unconscious rejected parts in oneself and a negative binding link between the believer and his God. The shared fantasy of symbiosis with the omnipotent and idealized persecutory object creates a myth that enhances this perverted imagination. Relinquishing the responsibility to find one's own moral judgment parallels the avoidance of the vital internal process of developing one's own autonomous ethics and contributes to the mindless obedience to authority.

Jihadi terrorism unveils a narrow and exclusive belief system where any deviation results in lethal punishment because difference and indecision threaten its existence. The call to dominate the world by the sword and to eradicate nonbelievers involves the conscious shelving of the central core of a humanitarian moral code. The abusive, tyrannical practices toward women and moderate Muslims exhibit a totalitarian mindset of evil posing as righteousness. Westerners came to represent the terrorists' own "bad boy" self in projection and had to be killed off for such unforgivable sins as listening to music and enjoying sex (deMause, 2002, p. 43). In a perverted effort to expel the unwanted part of themselves that is drawn to Western pleasures, the suicide bomber is created.

The self-deceptive reliance on a "divine alibi" (Stein, 2010, p. 111) to justify attacking the different other illustrates a part of this moral responsibility. Stein (2003, p. 38) describes a simplistic, concrete "horizontal" division between good and evil and right and wrong that characterizes the fundamentalist¹ sensibility and creates two phenomena at the same time: a gross emotional intensity that endows experience with a stark quality of grandiosity and abjection and a "vertical" division that constitutes the basic inequality between God and man. The "vertical" difference between the believer and his God intensifies longing and mystical desire. By renouncing his individuality and autonomy, the believer longs to merge with a perfect and cruel God. In his regression and merging with an archaic Father, a dangerous process of de-differentiation occurs, so that the believer becomes a submissive supplicant. The images of father-regression, which includes extreme asceticism, martyrdom, sacrifice and renunciation of sexuality, and the banishment of the mother are the fantasies that propel terrorism that leads to an explosive self-destruction.

The radicalization of Atta and his horrendous violent acts demonstrate this regression and merging with the Father in a dangerous process of de-differentiation, where Atta became a submissive supplicant. Atta was born in Egypt, the youngest son of a strict, austere, reclusive lawyer. His father kept the family insulated and forbade the already shy Atta from playing with neighborhood children. His father felt that Atta was spoiled by his mother and that she raised him as a girl (Yardley, 2001, p. 15). In 1990, Atta obtained an engineering degree from Cairo University. Under pressure from his father, he continued his studies at the Hamburg Technical University in Germany. Atta was socially isolated and struggled with hopelessness, guilt and shame (Lankford, 2012, p. 150). Physically, there was a feminine quality to him; Atta was elegant and delicate (Benjamin, 2015, p. 5). Atta's shame may have related to his sense of being effeminate.

While in Germany, he became more religious, following Muslim dietary restrictions and abstaining from alcohol and women. During his Islamic lessons each Sunday at the Turkish mosque in downtown Hamburg, several acquaintances noticed Atta's mounting interest in the political struggles and oppression of Muslims and *jihad* in the Middle East, North Africa, Indonesia, and Chechnya (Crewdson, 2004, p. 39). Ironically, for all his malice toward Israel, for he believed that the Jews had planned the Muslim waged wars in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Chechnya and were the group that planned to extinguish Islam and control the world, Atta spoke not of murdering Israelis and Americans but of wanting to kill Russian soldiers in Chechnya (Crewdson, 2004, p. 93). In late 1999, Atta arrived at a bin Laden Al Qaeda training camp in Afghanistan in search of paramilitary training and assistance in reaching Chechnya. While in Germany, he began researching flight schools in the United States (Kean et. al., 2012, p. 49).

In the will left in his luggage, Atta insisted that "No women be allowed to attend his funeral or visit his grave site." In these misogynistic fundamentalist families, women are regarded as polluted and one is encouraged to reject and disown feminine vulnerabilities. His father nicknamed Atta "Bolbol," Arabic for a little bird and described him as "a very sensitive man... soft and extremely attached to his mother" (Cloud, 2001, p. 64). Words used to describe Atta were mostly feminine ones, "like a soft girl, kind and nice, very delicate, elegant" and not physically imposing or ever aggressive (Crewdson, 2004, p. 27). Enacting his father's master script of reifying masculinity, the American Airline Boeing 767 airplane that crashed into the World Trade Tower silenced once and for all Atta's despised, fluttering, feminine wings. Atta's behavior can also be seen as exemplifying a simplistic, concrete fundamentalist sensibility on a horizontal division where the

impure feminine, soft, and timid aspects of the self are purged and there is a celebration of the cherished masculine, potent, doer self.

Hallmarks of a coercive and violent fundamentalism are a sense of utter certainty, hermetic consistency, and highly rhetorical reiterations of truths (Stein, 2006, p. 205; Gilligan, 2017, p. 179). This simplification of complexities into binary oppositions of good and bad creates order out of vagueness and constitutes a “vertical” homoerotic quest for God’s love, an ecstatic reunion with Allah. In Islamic thought, there have been attempts to explain *jihad* as an inner struggle against the baser elements of the self. The *jihad* struggle is conceived as the purification of the contaminated inner self.

There are two elemental types of fear leading to fundamentalist formulations: the fear of death and the rage in the face of the very existence of the other human being who is viewed as corrupted (Stein, 2006, p. 201). The destructiveness of fundamentalism is the quest to get rid of this fear and rage by violently transcending them and projecting them onto the non-believer. This process is accomplished through the idealization of a cruel God in whose service destructiveness is being enacted and worshipped.

Atta’s letter to the hijackers found in his luggage in his car that was left at Logan Airport prior to the World Trade Center attack is illuminating. The letter is a testimony of rituals to transform young Muslims into warriors through spiritual practices that create inner calm, fearlessness, obedience, and a dissociation of feeling during the killing. Atta’s voice is calm and reassuring; it encourages thoughtful control for a heightened consciousness. The letter does not mention hate or the act of killing the non-believing infidel and themselves. Atta’s letter informs the terrorists to wash and perfume their bodies and clean and polish their knives. It encourages the terrorists to be confident and serene in carrying out their continued attentiveness and devotion to God. The letter stipulates what needs to be done for the terrorists to gain entry into Allah’s eternal paradise. The letter does describe a spiritual ritual at the end of which the supplicant is to receive God’s approval. The merger with God by performing their acts accurately and mindfully is stressed.

Atta’s letter details a perverse love of a dutiful intimacy between a son and his father to finally obtain the father’s previously withheld approval. This murderous martyrdom is a symbiotic killing and dying, where achieving God’s will means becoming one with the victims in death. This transformation of self-hatred and envy into God’s love allows for the obliteration of those unwanted, contaminated parts of self that require purification. Ironically, purification means killing the corrupted parts of self so as to wring sanctity out of death. The 9/11 terrorists were taught to perform

numerous rituals of washing themselves prior to the attacks. While washing was seen by Atta as a key element of purification, fire also played a role in his vision; fire is regarded as a more radical and stronger cleansing agent than other means in many religions, including Islam. The fire generated from the World Trade Center attacks brought elevated purification status for the terrorists as the baseness of their and their victims' souls was burned away and an exalted spiritual transcendence was thought to be obtained.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTIONS

Richard Galdston, in *The Longest Pleasure: A Psychoanalytic Study of Hatred*, maintains that hatred affords a homeostatic adaptation of the impulsive reaction of retaliation. Hatred enables the ego to retrieve aggression through a process comparable to incomplete mourning of a disappointing object, so that those who hate do not process the loss. Hatred can be distinguished from anger, which is a time-limited response to a proximal irritation which passes. The ability to hate is a skill indicative of ego development to the level of object constancy (Galdston, 1987, p. 371).

The ability to hate can provide a distorted sense of object constancy to terrorists who have suffered narcissistic injuries severe enough to threaten their sense of survival. David Lotto (2017, p. 12) examines terrorism through the lens of Heinz Kohut's (1973) theory of narcissistic injury and rage with the desire for revenge. The narcissistic injury and the consequential reaction of fury and desire for vengeance for the purpose of righting a wrong is an important cause of terrorism. The role played by humiliation in the creation of narcissistic injury followed by retaliatory violence is emphasized in understanding how terrorism arises (Lotto, 2017, p. 12). How do we acknowledge and begin to lessen these downward cycles of revenge and violence?

Lotto (2017, p. 16) argues that the sequence of humiliation leading to revenge is helpful in understanding the United States' response to the events of September 11. Our customary sense of invulnerability was shattered. It marked the end of American innocence and the beginning of a way of life we had fooled ourselves to believe that we could avoid (Cerfolio, 2019, p. 14). We were attacked by our own planes on our homeland and suffered a major defeat. Robert Lifton's book (2003), *Superpower Syndrome: America's Apocalyptic Confrontation with the World*, describes our first response to September 11 as involving a sense of individual and collective fear as well as vulnerability and feelings of injured national pride and humiliation. The process of mutual narcissistic injury and humiliation followed by retaliatory violence as a primary way that Americans have responded to the trauma

of September 11. Lifton (2003, p. 75) also points out that Osama bin Laden, Al Qaeda, and the Islamist fundamentalists have engaged in a parallel process and cycle of revenge.

The Tsarnaev brothers and Atta may have unconsciously sought radicalization as an ideological, sacred object to effect an environmental transformation that they hoped would deliver personal, familial, economic, social, and moral change. Christopher Bollas (1979, p. 100) maintains that in adult life there is a wide-ranging collective search for a transformational object to effect a self-metamorphosis. In this aesthetic moment, an individual feels a deep subjective rapport and uncanny fusion with an object (which can be a new partner, painting, poem, or religion) that generates renewed vision, hope, and confidence. As an ego memory of the ontogenetic process, this fusion with the object recalls the kind of ego experience which constituted the individual's earliest experience. Once the ego memories are identified with a contemporary object, the subject's relation to the object can become fanatical, as occurs with radicalization. The Tsarnaev brothers and Atta may have been unconsciously searching to lessen their sense of marginalization through a transformational object by becoming radicalized to create a sense of belonging, meaning and potency.

These men may have felt that they had little effective voice in society and were encouraged by radicalizers to display their aggression. They became socialized to see terrorist organizations as legitimate and America and its policies as evil. Although exploring the unique and complex underlying factors that drive individual terrorist acts is vital, focusing solely on these individual acts misses the importance of group phenomena.

Ultimately, the best long-term policy against terrorism is prevention, which is made possible by respecting the dignity and humanity of others, encouraging socioeconomic equality and self-determination, and helping protect all societies and individuals from the affective threats of shame and humiliation.

Deleuze and Guattari (1983, p. 61) put forth three criteria required for liberation from oppression: lessen the force of unconscious prejudices, increase in the investment of marginalized people by the social field, and remove and disinvest from repressive structures. The restoration and respect for all people is necessary to begin to change the social field of oppression. A recognition of the humanity of others slowly decreases the cycles of retribution and violence. Equality of man is not just economical; it is treating "others" with respect and dignity. Respecting the dignity of other people is vital to begin to create space for dialogue and understanding.

While the political solutions to oppression are worth addressing, the need for psychoanalytic understanding is paramount to help build bridges between groups and move beyond generalizations to viewing one another as human beings from varying cultures and having experienced different realities. When we lose contact with strangers, we lose our sense of interconnectedness and humanity. The self is social in nature and begins its reflection from a sense of relationality.

There is a great need to work with marginalized groups to restore the emotional meaning of the traumatic events that was ruptured by the traumatization. Whether for individual victims or groups, the need for greater reflection about terrorism and the feelings engendered by it, is required in order to encourage psycho-political dialogue. It is unprocessed losses and psychological trauma that perpetuate the divide between warring communities. Further psychoanalytic exploration of the trauma of loss, which addresses the societal compulsion to repeat cycles of violence, is needed. By working through these catastrophic displacements, new psychoanalytic perspectives of hope can unfold.

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ENDNOTE

1. Ruth Stein's article "Fundamentalism, Father and Son, and Vertical Desire" refers to all fundamentalist religions.

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