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Identity is Dialogical: The Naturalization of Immigrants in American Military[1]

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In the following article I reflect on how the identities, understood as ethnicity/race, of three immigrant soldiers influenced their naturalization process while serving in the American military. In line with Taylor's (1994) assertion that identity is dialogically constructed, I will show how these immigrants' identities were impacted by the way in which they understood themselves, as well as by how they are seen (and addressed) by others. Unlike Taylor, who discusses normatively the importance of recognition and the implications of non or misrecognizing one's identity, I take a grounded perspective. Thus, through the stories of three immigrant soldiers: Lily, Alexa and Vikrant, I nuance how the process of (mis)recognition takes different and specific contours, depending on one's ethnicity/ race. Based on in-depth qualitative research conducted over four years with three participants from Romania, South America and India who served in the Army and Air force Reserve, I argue that while their military experience propelled their naturalization, it did not succeed in obliterating hierarchies of ethnicity/ race similar to the ones found in the civilian experience of American migrants (Alba and Nee 1997; Portes and Rumbault 1990 and 2001).

Keywords*: immigration, military, identity, recognition, dialogical, ethnicity, race*

1. America and its immigrant soldiers

In America, from the Civil War onward, groups of newcomers such as Irish, Germans, Eastern European Jews, and Italians enlisted in the armed forces and used military service to become "naturalized" (Dragomir, 2012). Currently, about five to seven percent of the country's military personnel are foreign nationals.[3] To

[1] This article is dedicated to the memory of Aristide Zolberg, who was not only an immigrant soldier in the American military, but a great scholar, professor and mentor. I would like to express my gratitude to the Rockefeller College of Public Affairs &Policy at the University at Albany for giving me the opportunity to work on this article while being a postdoctoral fellow.

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[3] Source: http://www.uscis.gov/news/fact-sheets/naturalization-through-military-service-fact-sheet; accessed April 15, 2015

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recognize immigrants' contributions to the U.S. armed forces, changes to the Immigration and Nationality Act streamlined the naturalization process. On July 3, 2002, President George W. Bush signed an executive order providing "expedited naturalization" for non-citizen men and women serving on active-duty status since September 11, 2001. In return for their military service, immigrant soldiers can acquire citizenship in as little as three months. This is significant especially when compared to the civilian immigration process that requires that permanent residents spend at least five years before they can apply for American citizenship.

In addition, in February 2009, Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest (MAVNI) was launched. MAVNI is a pilot recruitment program that allows non-citizens who lived (mainly on temporary visas) in the United States for at least two years to apply for military enlistment.[4] MAVNI participants can get American citizenship within three months without applying for permanent residency status, a step necessary in civilian naturalization. Considering this rapid "naturalization" process aimed at transforming foreigners into both soldiers and citizens, it is important to reflect on the impact of this process over the impact immigrant soldiers' identity.

2. Research design

This study relied on several qualitative/interpretative (Yanow 2006, Wedeen 2002, 2008, Pachirat 2009, 2011) methods: theoretical analysis and ethnographic fieldwork, including in-depth interviews; social media analysis, and participant observation. While the "findings" of this longitudinal approach took over four years, the results are not universal; rather than creating normative prescriptions applicable to all foreigners in the American military, in what follows I describe how these three immigrants' lives changed, and I highlight the role that dynamics of ethnicity/ race played in their naturalization.

This work is not an analysis of the American military, as interesting as that might be. Instead, it is a study of the transformation of immigrant soldiers via military training, therefore only indirectly contours the military as an American institution. Because the institution of the military has explicit and rigid policies based on equal treatment of its recruits, researching the military experience as a tool of naturalization can reveal the impact and result of color (ethnic)-blind policies on the identity of migrants serving in its ranks.

[4] Source: http://www.mavni.info/

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To account for the complexity of the American and for the diversity of its foreign born recruits, my participants were in the Army and Air Force; they were both active and reserve; both male and female; originally from Europe, Latin America and Asia. This sample does not aim to cover the entire variety of the current American military, and it is not a significant sample. It rather shows different lived experiences of particular immigrant soldiers' cases.

3. Immigrants' identity

Since the 1990's the concept of identity in the context of multiculturalism has come to the fore in both politics and political theory. As the concept of identity - both individual and collective - comes under scrutiny, new political visions emerge as well. In the concept of the self as described in *The Politics of Recognition* (1994), Charles Taylor challenges the classical liberal definition of identity by showing that the classical definitions of identity are deficient because they assume to have to "monological" character. He proposes a different conception of identity, one that takes into account the constitution of the self as dialogical; that is, rooted in culture and a specific community. So, if the self is constructed only in relation to others, not recognizing or misrecognizing, one's communitarian identity is an offense addressed to their core individual existence.

Taylor points out that the central role played by the discourse of recognition and identity in political debates (including immigration ones) today is due to two changes that took place in the view of the self. The first change was the collapse of social hierarchies "that prefer and honor some," to be replaced by "structure(s) based on the dignity of all" (Taylor, 1994:27). The second development, which helped to modify and intensify the importance of identities, was the emergence of "a new understanding of individual identity" at the end of the 18th Century. (Taylor, 1994:28) Following Lionel Trilling, Taylor associates this development with the ideal of *authenticity*, that is, being true to yourself. As Trilling writes, "There is a certain way of being that is *my* way. I am called upon to live my life in this way. … If I am not [true to myself], I miss the point of my life" (Taylor, 1994:28). In contrast to this monological view of the subject, Taylor proposes another view of identity, one that is universal, but also takes into consideration the individual's historical context and their attachment to specific communities:

> "In order to understand the close connection between identity and recognition, we have to take into account a crucial feature of the human condition that has been rendered also most invisible by the overwhelmingly monological bent of mainstream modern philosophy.

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> This crucial feature of human life it its fundamentally *dialogically* character." (Taylor 1994, 32)

Using Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* as a starting point, Taylor stresses the primacy of intersubjectivity versus subjectivity. Hegel believes that one becomes a subject only when one encounters another. In other words, one becomes a subject through a dialogical act in a field of intersubjectivity. Consequently, intersubjectivity has ontological meaning and value. As the genesis of our identity is dialogical, according to Taylor, we define our identity through our language, modes of expression; the ideas of significant others continuously stay with us, recreating the dialogue (Taylor 1994, 34). It follows that if the self is constructed only in relation to others, not recognizing, or misrecognizing, one's "communitarian identity" is an offense addressed to one's core individual existence, and therefore one's fundamental rights as a citizen.

For Taylor, both the monological and the dialogical views of the self have profound political implications. The monological view of the self supports a politics of equal dignity, based on the Kantian idea that we all share universal qualities; that is, we all share "an identical basket of rights and immunities" (Taylor, 1994:37). This type of approach is on principle blind to the ways in which citizens differ. Politically, this is translated into procedural liberalism; in other words, policies based on "a uniform application of the rules defining… rights without exception" (Taylor, 1994:60), and "[suspicion] of collective goals" (Ibid) similar to polices often used in military environments. In this form of liberalism, rational action is embodied in rules and laws, which, by operating in a purely procedural way, achieve justice.

In the American military the commitment to equal treatment is paramount, and one of its staple values. This conduct, following Taylor's line of reasoning, may in fact deter immigrant soldiers' access to parity. According to Taylor, a liberal society can and should provide its citizens with equal fundamental rights; however, he argues that this should be accompanied by respect for diversity, "especially when dealing with those who do not share" (Taylor, 1994:59) the common goal of the majority of a particular society. Thus, he supports a politics of recognition that allows state institutions to grant preferential treatment to certain groups or communities, to take into account, not only the dignity of the individual citizen, but also the group that citizen identify with. If the self is dialogical, rooted in culture and a specific community, it is always constructed in relation to others. Not recognizing, or misrecognizing one's identity deeply affects one's core individual existence and therefore one's fundamental rights.

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While policies of acknowledging and recognizing diversity exist in civilian life, the military has different procedural practices deeply rooted in equal treatment of individuals (not of communities), aimed at creating internal group cohesion. While these practices may positively affect military goals, the impact on immigrant soldiers' identities is largely unknown. In what follows I explore three life stories of American immigrant soldiers, hoping that this will give an entry to an understudied, yet important subject: naturalization of immigrants in the American military.

4. Coming to America: Three (civilian) immigrants

Like most American immigrants, Lily, Alexa and Vinod came to the U.S. as civilians. Although the three participants in this research come from different parts of the globe and never met, their lives are strikingly similar. According to academic literature they are economic migrants, meaning that they left their countries "pushed" by limited social and economic mobility, and "pulled" to the United States in search of a "better" life. They were young - in their 20s and early 30s - so searching for economic improvement blended with their curiosity and sense of adventure. Alexa and Lily were undergraduate students; Vikrant had just received his Masters degree. Lily and Alexa originally arrived in the United States through "cultural exchange programs" and Vikrant arrived as a graduate student, so all three entered on temporary non-immigrant visas, which presumed that they would go back home when their visas expired.

All three participants were eager to share with me their life stories and their military experiences. Even though they were open to having their identity revealed, I decided to present them under assumed names. I also changed a few details that would make them recognizable, to preserve their privacy.

4.1. Lily

Lily is always full of energy. She walks the streets of Manhattan with a cosmopolitan sophistication and urgent panache. Her talk is as sharp and quick as her smile – a smile that, along with her easy-going manner, garners lots of friends and acquaintances. Lily gets along well with people, and though she still has an accent, she uses it with graceful charm as she interacts with anyone who comes her way. "I like a challenge," she often says, while admitting (sometimes in the same breath) that the military offers her a "safety blanket."

Once Lily arrived in America, she found jobs that would ensure her survival, in fields such as childcare and hospitality. As years went by, she became a

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permanent resident, but her economic situation was precarious, especially because she was also supporting her family back in Romania. She lived in a Romanian neighborhood and household, and often said that in her civilian life she did not have many American friends.

She wanted to continue her education, but she was not able to afford the tuition; she lacked stable employment and realized that to further her career she needed to be a part of a large organization. Thus, eight years into her immigration process, she decided to enlist in the Air Force reserve. Love, loyalty and a sense of belonging to her host country were not Lily's main reasons for deciding to serve. Lily bluntly admitted that these feelings "only came later," highlighting that for her solidarity, belonging and loyalty were not solitary acts, but developed over time, taking on overlapping forms and meanings.

Her commitment to the military as an institution and respect for the host country were underscored when she reflected on being in the military:

> "Being in the military made me proud to be an American, much more than I would have been as a civilian. You know, to me maybe I am more like the sentimental person, but whenever I see the flag or they play the national anthem I just... it is a moment of emotion for me. That's when I realize I do something important, something that actually counts. …. And this I come to realize, that what I do for the military is not just a job, it is not just getting up in the morning, putting the uniform on and going and doing a job. Because in the end it comes down to that."

She later confessed that she had a strong sense of loyalty to both the military and the host country whenever she was taking the pledge of allegiance:

> "I think every time is like that: the military brings you a sense of belonging, belonging to an organization, to a nation, to a brave nation."

Upon her enlistment Lily was not an American citizen, so she was not an official member of the nation whose flag she was saluting while pledging allegiance. But she was sworn into an institution that emphasizes its commitment towards the unity of the American nation, and this leveraged for her membership into a larger, national group. Hence, by becoming a member of an institution that serves the nation and defends its constitution, and by pledging allegiance to a nation to which she did not yet belong, Lily learned to become American.

Symbolic practices, such as saluting the flag, made her feel close to a community that she will never meet, an "imagined community" (Anderson 1991). Benedict Anderson revealed, in his now classic "Imagined Communities" that

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"regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly die for such limited imaginings" (Anderson 1991). Likewise, by seeing the American flag, Lily imagines a whole community to which she belongs, a community of which she is an equal member, in spite of a reality filled with social, economic and legal inequalities.

For Lily, belonging to the host nation was not the outcome of a series of personal achievements; it was built through ritualistic acts and the use of symbols, such as the national flag or the anthem. The military trained Lily to recognize the flag as a symbol of the group, of collective belonging, and she appropriated these performative acts as her own. In turn, this informal patriotic training socialized her and made her an integral part of the American citizenry, which further translated into appreciation for her overall current situation, into assuming the legendary belief in America as "the country of opportunities."

Lily's reflection on how she felt about the two "imagined communities" to which she now identified with, shows how through everyday military practices Lily felt like a member of her host country. This became obvious in the way she responded when I asked her to describe what it means for her to be member of the military: "I think you feel a sort of attachment. It is very difficult to say. I think it is more at the emotional level. You know, you understand more about it; and it is a sense of pride: being a part of a nation."

Lily constructed her new American identity and felt recognized as such. But if identity is dialogical (Taylor, 1994), we need to understand how others saw Lily while she was undergoing the process of Americanization via the military. As "belonging" was realized through a set of performative practices, i.e. repetitive acts that she learnt in time and to which she was subjected through social interactions (Wedeen 2002), looking at how others saw her is paramount.

Ethnicity and whiteness

Lily's experience of acceptance of heightened nationalism within the military is connected with the ways in which her identity was perceived by military personnel. During our meetings and conversations Lily self-identified as Romanian, but she readily admitted that within the military few people knew what it means to be Romanian: "Many times they do not even know where it is, and I leave it as that. I move on; that is it. They do not say it is a country of beggars," Lily added, frustrated, referring to how Romanians are thought at times as pariahs in Western Europe. "It is a quick conversation: question and answer. Sometime they ask, where is Romania? Generally, people do not know where it is." She laughed and

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added ironically, “Or people would say: ‘They are gymnasts and Dracula!’ Usually Dracula, and they ask: ‘Is there such a thing like Transylvania?’ And then I try to tell them, as I am a talker, ‘yeah there is a part of Romania’. ‘Oh interesting’, [and] they move on, that is just conversation you have anywhere.”

She always said this with a smile, accepting that her ethnic identity was mostly invisible to other military personnel. Because her ethnic identity was largely unknown, she did not think it contributed negatively to her military experience." In fact, Lily believed that it was precisely this non-recognition of her (collective) identity allowed her to gain another type of (individual) recognition as a member of the military."

But this attitude also showed that she belonged to an “invisible” ethnicity. Her ethnic background being ignored or treated as a mere social entertainment within the military was seen by Lily as a blessing that she did not enjoy in her civilian life. She said that being a foreign-born person was not an obstacle in her military career, but that in her civilian life people perceived her ethnic identity differently.

> “In my [military] career I was put in charge of people, of a team of people,” she often said with great pride in her voice. “I have never got the chance to do this in my civilian career. ’Cause you know in my civilian career I manage resources in a territory, not people. In the military I had the opportunity to be in charge of a team. To be a leader! It did not matter: I was an airman, I did not even have a higher rank, and because I proved to be bright enough, I was put in charge. It did not make a difference that I was a girl, that I was Romanian,” she concluded.

Lily did not reflect upon her race or European descend, that provided her with “whiteness” privileges (DuBois, 1890, 1962; Baldwin, 1963, 1992; Allen 1976, 2012; Frankerberg, 1993, Roediger, 2007). This invisibility allowed her to fit into the new group. By performing symbolic gestures of belonging she was not only recognized as a member of the military, but as an equal member of the larger society. Moreover, through her military service, she established ties with other peers within the military, outside of her ethnic circle:

> “I DO have friends because of the military,” she told me when I asked about her military ties. “I think they [i.e. the armed forces] build relationships. I do have close friends because of my military career. I meet them outside of military. (…) One of the ladies I work with, she just invited me to a jewelry design party. So you see, we do more than work together. She came to my wedding; she sent me a gift. I went to hers. I can count

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> on her. She is a dear friend. And there is another guy, whom I went to school with. To technical training, and then it just happened that we are in the same unit. I visit him in the city. He is like my big brother; if I want an advice I will ask him. Because he is a guy and he is an American. There are two things I can relate to: he is older than me and he was in the military and he was born and raised here in the States. (…) So, you how, the work relationship from the military turned into great friendship."

The relationships she nurtured in the military furthered Lily's feelings of belonging to the host country and enabled her to further her integration in ways that she deemed impossible in her previous civilian life. As a result of her military service, she used the GI Bill[5] to earn a Master of Science degree from a prestigious American university, which in turn further supported her civilian career.

Through dialogical interactions, Lily felt accepted within the military and happily undertook the process of naturalization." She eagerly displayed her newly acquired nationalism through symbolic gestures, like saluting the flag or singing the national anthem." As she was "entertainingly" and was eager to conform to the norm of the system she was hoping to enter, she did not question her race, and occupied a privileged place within the host country's military and overall society.

Lily's story of migration via American military, while complex and sinuous (see Dragomir, forthcoming) is one of success, and showcases military service as a positive and straightforward path of naturalization, one in which one's identity is overshadowed by equal treatment that the institution provides. But when placed next to Alexa and Vinod, Lily's story changes its contours.

4.2. Alexa

Alexa is medium height, with dark gleaming eyes. Her wavy, dark-hazel hair was pulled tightly back when in a military environment, but became unruly and fell over her shoulders in civilian life. She had olive skin, was amiable, and had a soft accent and dressed in a non-assuming manner. But behind her pleasant and flamboyant surface, a deeper inner being could be uncovered. Life had not been smooth for Alexa, but in spite of this – or maybe even because of this – she was an eternal

[5] The military started offering educational benefits through the "Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 - commonly known as the GI Bill - upon completion of service. Now military careers shape parallel to and support civilian life, offering transferable skills and work experience. Not without controversy this change, brought about the U.S. military's image less of a "calling," and more as a "professional employer" (Moskos, 1966)

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optimist. Her optimism ran so deep that she did not even acknowledge it. Maybe it became her way of being

I first met Alexa in the summer of 2000. I was working for an international company, in charge of a cultural exchange program in the U.S. She and her boyfriend arrived at JFK airport on a hot summer evening. I picked them up and took them to the company's site. At the time, she told me that while in the United States they would be working in New Jersey for the entire summer. They were both from South America, but were actually coming to the U.S. from the Czech Republic, where they had been exchange students for the past few years.

She stayed in the U.S., and alike Lily found employment in childcare in wealthy communities on the outskirts of New York City. She lived with a precarious immigration status for many years, and her dependence on the families who employed her both precluded continuing her education and her social mobility. During the time when she worked in domestic jobs, Alexa had very little agency over her life and time, but she did not complain. Intuitively aware that beauty and social, political and economic power are rooted in a history of white domination, Alexa's struggled to be identified as white. She changed her physical appearance to resemble her employers: she cut her hair medium-short, wore it straight with highlights that made her look almost blond, and wore clothes bought from the neighborhood malls. Through changes in physical appearance, Alexa tried to overcome her social status and identify with her employers, and thus with the dominant group. But these changes did not translate in her social and economic mobility.

In 2009, after she became a permanent American resident, she tried to find stable non-domestic employment. When this failed, and struggled to make ends meet and she enlisted in the Army. With its stability, its medical benefits, and its clarity and structure, Lily had nothing but praise for the Army and America's overall military institution. In the first year of her service, she underwent basic training, fell in love with an American soldier and married. But shortly after they were separated; Alexa was assigned to a unit in upstate New York; her husband, to a unit in the South. Then her health suffered, and as a result, when her unit was deployed to the Middle East, Alexa stayed back, which led to tension between herself and her supervisors, and often put her at odds.

In her second year as an American soldier, I asked Alexa if she was an American. She looked me straight in the eyes. "I am American. Remember that. I am very good at defending that I am American, too." She immediately reflected on her narrative. "I was just born in South America, but I am an American." I quietly accepted my guilt of overgeneralization.

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I reformulated my question to reflect both my interest and Alexa's critique. To this she answered: "What about being North American? I cannot think about it; I am not North American."

As seen in the previous section, Lily continuously referenced her strong feelings for being a member of the host country, and how emotional she got when she engaged in performative acts of assimilation, like seeing the American flag. But Alexa's attitude was different. She often made it a point to distance herself from the American identity. Since citizen status is the most visible sign of one's belonging to a nation, and the military can expedite the process, I asked Alexa several times if she would apply to become a U.S. citizen. I was surprised to see Alexa exhibit discomfort about being an American citizen. While in 2012 she decided to obtain American citizenship, whenever she was asked why she had reservations, the same reason surfaced:

> "It is too much trouble with the United States. People hate them. Having that passport is putting my head on the target. Everywhere. (…) Of course, that is not because they are nice, that is because they are arrogant. Nobody likes them and the whole situation with the war thing. They are going to a war where nobody invites them. Iran, Iraq, they have the war for years. They have the war since Christ. They go and try to do stuff. I do not know why."

As her adherence (symbolic as well as legal) to the new county was delayed, I turned to her military life. I asked her if she felt included. While she praised the values of the American military, she often complained that she did not receive fair treatment. What were the reasons? "I am not the right color!" She claimed that she was different from the supervisor, whom she called "white bread."

Alexa's responses highlighted her understanding of the intersection of race and ethnicity: she was ethnically South American, but in her "dialogical" interactions with the host society rendered her presence racialized.

Being South American and Internal Hierarchies

One evening, two years into her military service, as we were walking and browsing through the items on the shelves of the One Dollar Store in her upstate town, Alexa shared details about her daily military experience and her interactions with colleagues. She spoke in Spanish, in a low tone. While at her Army base, she said, she did nothing all day long. I asked her about the people with whom she worked with. She raised her hand in despair. She did not get along with them. "Sometimes they look at me and say 'Alexa, Migra, migra!'" Because 'la migra" is a term used

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among urban undocumented immigrants, to signify "Run! The immigration police are coming!" I looked at her in surprise. She was clearly *not* an undocumented immigrant. She was military, and the military does not accept undocumented or irregular migrants. The comment didn't make sense. "Yes," Alexa said in English, dismissing them with a wave of her hand, "They just want to make a joke, to make fun," she said in.

Alexa took the joke lightly, but it showcases the rupture between natives and foreigners in the American military. It illustrates that in spite of her military service, she was seen as a Hispanic, as possibly an "illegal immigrant." While this could come from her peers' lack of knowledge, pointing out her potential immigration status (and not for example her height) clearly references her ethnicity. Alexa said that often she was thought be Mexican; in reaction, she struggled to establish for herself a different profile: a South Americans as a "better immigrant":

> "If you want to get into this point, there are a lot of differences. We do not speak the same way, we do not look alike. We do not come here in the same way. [Mexicans come] by water, illegal way. Crossing the river. The wet cross- or whatever they call this. The majority get settled in Texas or Arizona, and from there they go. I do not know. I kinda' defend them. 'Cause it is hard to get here, and no one treats them well. They do not get paid well. And that is also different. I came and I did not speak so well [English], and I got a good job: $450 [per week]. (…). Because they [i.e. Mexicans] do not really push to learn more. They do not try to learn, I am always like that. If I go to a country I try to speak the language, so I can see and I can have my own rights."

Alexa's attitude towards other "Latino" or "Hispanic" identities was a mixture of compassion and discrimination. In one breath she sympathized with the hard lives of Mexican immigrants' and then accused the entire ethnic minority of lacking the drive to better themselves and learn the language of the host country. Alexa's comments exposed her confusion regarding different migrants' modes of entering the United States, but also revealed her refusal to become like "other" Latin American migrants. Moreover, it revealed the inherent hierarchies within the often too large "Latino" or "Hispanic" identity. For Alexa, being different from her Mexican colleagues and friends placed herself in a better social position, which she tried to maintain by highlighting the distinction. Alexa understood the ethnic/racial stratification prevalent in the host country. By describing herself as South American she struggled to carve a different place for herself.

Due to her worsening medical condition, Alexa received an honorable discharge at the end of August 2012. In late October of the same year, she became a U.S.

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citizen. But she still struggled to improve her economic standing. She still dreamed of earning a degree. Alexa stopped by my apartment the day before her naturalization ceremony. She was exhausted from walking around the city, interviewing and doing paperwork, so she crashed on my bed. I asked her about a job she was applying for. It was a security guard position, she said, and paid $20 an hour. “It is good,” she assured me. “So, I am waiting to see my schedule and maybe then I can take some college classes. I tried to transfer credits, but they did not want to do it.” She lowered her eyes and said in a soft voice, “[The] military failed me on that.”

Unlike Lily, Alexa acknowledged and reflected upon her identity and the role that her ethnicity/race played. She was aware of ethical/racial disparities in the American military. She saw “white” people as being in positions of power, and acknowledged that her peers joked about her ethnic background. However, she reflected on ethnical/racial hierarchies only after she joined the military. Her newly found critical voice may be seen as a sign of awareness, but also as a sign of empowerment, because while in the military she felt more secure about her position with the host country; was able and willing to give voice to the injustices she experienced.

Overall, Alexa’s naturalization process is more sinuous than Lily’s. While she obtained her American citizenship and was able to enjoy the awarded rights, when it came to her ethical/racial identity she felt misrecognized (Fraser, 2000). However, while she experienced discrimination and struggled to carve a different place for herself in the host country’s’ identity hierarchy, she also gained both awareness and power to critically engage with the status quo, and to voice her opinions regarding injustice. As we will see next, Vikrant’s military empowerment did not translate into a critical stand of social and ethnic/racial hierarchies.

4.3. Vikrant

I first met Vikrant on a windy fall day in 2009. We had arranged to meet in Manhattan, when he was visiting friends and processing the paperwork necessary for his military service. As I approached the busy intersection at 42nd Street and 8th Avenue, I saw him from far away: a slimly built Indian man with dark hair and dark eyes, dark sports jacket (a size too big) and had an army backpack slung over his shoulder. I introduced myself and asked what he wanted to do for the day. He wanted to see Ground Zero. At the time, eight years after 9/11, the site, though under construction, was still a tourist attraction. We took the subway downtown. We pushed our way through the underground, surrounded by tourists and commuters. At the site, Vikrant took out his small, simple camera and snapped

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many pictures over people's heads. We walked around. He read the names inscribed on large stones.

Later that day, Vikrant had to take a bus back to Washington, D.C., where he was living at the time. Before he left, we sat in a small coffee shop and talked. He seemed a shy man, comfortable speaking only when he was talking about familiar things, like his Army enlistment or his previous studies. Throughout our research relationship, which continued for years over the phone and online, he displayed the same personality, slightly timid but jovial.

Of the three participants in my research, Vikrant had the highest level of education at the time of his enlistment. He had a graduate degree from India and a Masters from an American Ivy League university. While these degrees allowed him to come to the United States, they did not help him obtain a stable job or to legally immigrate. His decision to join the armed forces was not motivated by the opportunity to continue his studies, as it was for Lily and Alexa. He wanted to practice his skills and expertise, and of find a stable and rewarding job.

Vikrant respected and followed immigration laws. After graduation, he applied and received his temporary work visa in a non-profit educational organization, a job that he seemed to enjoy, but that only paid him $15/hour. The pictures from this time show a rather shy, isolated Vikrant, eager to pose with his colleagues in the office, even as they showed restraint toward him. His social media did not comment about his social life or about the friendships that he was creating in the host country. A rather different image of Vikrant contoured during this time, one of eagerness for assimilation into a new environment, but one met with slight reticence by others.

Vikrant is from Northern India, and a part of "the migrant streams [that] have been reshaping the global landscape" (Kapur 2010, 2). In many ways, Vikrant was a typical immigrant of Indian origin: he was male, in his 30's, highly educated and from a high-caste Hindu background.[6] During our interviews, and on his social media/ public activity, Vikrant rarely talked about race or ethnicity, or about encountering prejudice or practices of discrimination/*othering* (Chakravorti, Kapur & Singh, 2016). Even when I directly asked him, he dismissed any idea that he noticed any racial or ethnic differences. However, categories of race/ethnicity, as well as the dynamics they generate, were visible in ways that he could not ignore.

[6] According to Kapur 2010, "an overwhelming majority of households reported that the family members who lived abroad were male (81.8 percent) (Kapur 2010, 610); moreover the "highly educated migrate to industrialized countries while the less educated go to the Middle East," (Ibid: 62) with 19.7 percent of the total Indian emigrants present in the U.S. (Ibid: 64). Regarding religion, In the United States Indians was Muslim 14.27, Christian 14.92, Hindu 38.7 and Unidentified 36.73.

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A few months before he enlisted in the American military, Vikrant made public an event that took place when he was tutoring young children. One child in his care, a 5-year-old girl, "said something which might shock even the most hardened," he blogged. The little girl told him, "Your skin is brown, peach and black. I am white and pink and peach. We are different types of people." His response to this blunt and unexpected *othering* based on the color of his skin was, "Shocking !! you must admit. How can anyone say that. How can anyone highlight the differences between different races. Is this a statement from a white supremacist? Isn't this blatant racial profiling?" In spite of his outrage, Vikrant took his time and tried to understand this further. "I looked at her self-portrait," he wrote describing the picture the young girl drew before she made the statement.

> "Her **self-portrait** is something no Indian girl can make: an oval head slanting, straight shoulder-length red hair (which ends in sharp curls) and bright blue eyes and a wide smiley mouth. No Indian girl can boast of red hair and blue eyes. She can say and did. 'You are brown, black and peach and I am white, pink and peach,'" Vikrant continued in his blog.

Even though Vikrant's tone expressed his outrage, his words, in effect, supported the girl's claim of color difference. By saying that what the young girl drew was something no Indian girl could have sketched as a self-portrait, he implied that no Indian girl could have the same physical characteristics as the young American one. While taking for granted the racial difference between American and the Indian girls (and also falling prey to monolithic understanding of race and national identity), Vikrant voiced his surprise. This incident drove Vikrant to reflect upon racial differences, which most times were not addressed.

Indian immigrants' adjustment to the new country considering hierarchies of race and caste have been explored in several studies (Bhatia, 2007; Mishra 1996; Prasad 2000, Ruggiero and Taylor 1997), that agree that Indian immigrants are generally not inclined to see discrimination as a negative experience. They feel that admitting to being discriminated against "lowers their social self-esteem and the perceived personal control over their performances and outcomes" (Naujoks 2012, citing: Ruggiero, Karen M., and Donald M. Taylor. 1997).

The example above showcases how, in spite Vikrant's integration efforts, he found it difficult to be seen as a full member by the host group. Similar to Lily and Alexa, throughout his pre-military life, in spite of his efforts to be recognized as a full member, to make a stable life and assimilate both socially and economically, Vikrant could not make ends meet, and he was still seen as "the other." But his "dialogical" encounters of social recognition drastically changed when he enlisted in the armed forces. Starting with basic training, Vikrant found a new, more secure

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and well-defined voice. When he joined his Army unit he was happy and started making public – via social media postings- his admiration for his “buddies”:

> “We have gotten to know each other pretty well here and impressions have changed. I have grown to respect the skills and attitudes of 18 year old ‘battle buddies’ some of whom have helped in family trade - like my battle buddy - and through his earning bought 8 different motorbikes in 2 years. … Many are married incl two 20 yearolds [sic]. One guy who is 19 just became a father - beating his father's record. Here all in the infantry are guys,” he shared.

This post, not unlike many others he posted during this time, shows his transition. He simultaneously acknowledged that it took him time to understand and accept his “battle buddies,” as they were so different from him, and that he belonged to a common identity now, that he was a part of a larger group, but that they were “all infantry now” in spite of their differences, such as age, marriage, family or education.

In a manner similar to Lily, who was happy to publically participate in national symbolical acts like singing the American anthem, Vikrant proudly and publicly acknowledged his new membership. In a post on his social media a few months into his enlistment, he shared his enthusiasm for the newly found ties: “Really miss platoon! first day away from the 1st was a strange feeling. miss my "Gangster" squad leader. (…) Buddies forever!”

Through his public display of solidarity, Vikrant emphasized his membership in the new group, but distanced himself from the other Indians and from his diasporic networks. Just a day later, after he officially became an American citizen, Vikrant rushed to change his Social Security number to reflect his newly acquired citizenship. He enthusiastically posted, “Took the Oath! Now doubly ready to fight for the country!! (…) Thanks guys! Ready to vote, serve on the jury and doubly ready to fight for the country!” Vikrant’s post reflects his eagerness to participate in all the citizenship duties. While these are a part of what constitutes being American, Vikrant regards them as privileges and wants others to acknowledge his “double readiness” to fight for the host country.

Like Lily, Vikrant took the symbolic representations of his inclusion seriously. He accepted and behaved according to military ideology, coupled with the national discourse of citizenship. Referring to his recent success of becoming a member of the military community, he shared on social media his allegiance and alignment with the values officially promoted by the Army:

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> "yes !! I graduated. I AM THE INFANTRY. I AM THE HEART OF THE FIGHT, WHEREVER, WHENEVER.....I AM PHYSICALLY STRONG, MENTALLY TOUGH AND MORALLY STRAIGHT. As the Infantryman's Creed says."[7] (original writing)

Vikrant's process of inclusion into the host country was propelled by his military enlistment, where his national and unit allegiance were both recognized and appreciated. As a result, Vikrant was proud to show his loyalty to both the military and the new country.

4.4. Osama and Limits of inclusion

The only time Vikrant addressed the impact of his ethnicity was when he told me over a phone conversation that his "buddies" call him Osama. At the time, Osama bin Laden, America's number one terrorist, had not been apprehended and killed. I asked Vikrant why he thought his buddies would call him that. He answered that it was because of his looks, as "they do not know." Then he changed the subject. I tried further to understand how this made him feel, but he brushed it off, saying it happens in the military, that everyone has a nickname.

Vikrant's reaction was similar to Alexa's dismissal of being assumed an "illegal" migrant and afraid of the American deportation forces. Just like Alexa, Vikrant wanted to share this experience. Both emphasized that they were not negatively affected, that they understood these were jokes peers played on each other. While name-calling is a common practice not specific to immigrants or foreigners in the American military, the choice of names is telling. For Alexa, the joke alluded to her immigration status, which, because of her presumed Latino/Mexican origin, was seen as "illegal." For Vikrant, his racial/ethnic appearance made him similar to the enemy, a primary target of the armed forces. While calling him Osama points out, as Vikrant rightly said, the ignorance of his "buddies" in terms of race, ethnicity, geography and religion, it nevertheless points out the fact that Vikrant was not yet fully accepted as an integral member of the group, and that his identity was misrecognized.[8]

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[7] Infantry Creed https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oLllrADCvP0 ; accessed November 2, 2016

[8] Curtailing hazing within the military has been a struggle for some time. For example in 2013 Dr. Richard Oliver from the Hope Human Relations Research Center and in 2015 Rand Corporation conducted different studies on the topic.
https://www.deomi.org/EOEEOResources/documents/Hazing_Pilot_Study_Svec_20130510.pdf
and
http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR900/RR941/RAND_RR941.pdf; accessed October 27, 2016

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On social media Vikrant behaved according to the norm, over-displaying the image of a model soldier who enjoyed and took pride in being a member of the armed forces, and being a perfect American citizen. Unlike Alexa, he did not criticize his military life, and he did not reflect upon the role his race or ethnicity played. However, in spite of his obliviousness, his racial/ ethnic identity was visible to others, thus it was "dialogical." Just like it was for Alexa and Lily, Vikrant's identity was a double-edged sword. On one side was his ethnic identification, as he saw it; on the other were the perceptions of outsiders: the ways in which other military members saw him as "the other." While his military enlistment allowed him to be recognized as one of the "buddies" and was a source of pride and joy, his military training and experience did not obliterate his ethnicity/race, it only kept it at bay, and allowed it to resurface in the form of hazing. In spite of Vikrant's assiduous efforts, others did not see him as a full member by the host group.

5. Conclusion

Taylor's vision of identity recognition, based on the idea that one's identity is dialogical, implies a commitment to respecting one's cultural and ethnic background, and therefore to differentiated policies and practices. Furthermore, Taylor's perspective understands misrecognition of one's identity in a general sense, which leads to a negative/ harmful effect onto one's rights. The life-stories of Alexa, Lily and Vikrant show that their identity was dialogically constructed, and therefore impacted by the way in which others referred to their ethnic/racial background. However, as scholars of immigration (Alba and Nee, 1997; Cornell, and Hartmann, 1998; Hirschman, 1983; Portes and Rumbault, 1990 and 2001; Silberman, Alba and Fournier, 2007; Waters, 1999; Zolberg, 2006) argued, that immigrants do not enter a homogenous America, but a highly stratified America one in which their ethnic/racial background influences their naturalization process and the place they will more likely occupy in the host society.

Lily's identification as white allowed her to enjoy the privilege of race/ethnic invisibility; Alexa's Latino background was perceived by her as an obstacle in accessing her military rights; Vikrant's experience is along the lines of other Indian Americans – those whom are identified as foreign, but still manage their identity and are successful.

Alexa has been successful at attaining recognition outside of the military, but struggled for recognition within it. While in her civilian life people related to her

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through military symbols such as the uniform, which made her ethnic identity recede, in her military life she still faced misrecognition of her identity, which revealed the tensions still present regarding ethnicity. In Lily's experience, ethnic differences, which create a certain social hierarchy in civilian life, were (mostly) obliterated in the military. Simultaneously, within the military environment she accessed different parts of a career that she found unreachable in her civilian life, because she was not an American (in spite of her citizenship status). Alexa's route from a foreigner, to a soldier, to becoming an American was marked by her ambivalence towards becoming like the host-country members, often rejecting any resemblance to them. Vikrant transitioned from being a "model immigrant" to being a "model soldier." His enlistment supported his economic advancement, and his naturalization led to having ties within the military. However, his identity did not become invisible, but came to the fore in the (soft, in this case) forms of hazing.

Lily, Alexa and Vikrant were made aware of their race/ethnicity while present in the host country, both in their civilian and military realms, even though for them these identity markers did not seem important. Their stories demonstrate how in these cases military enlistment and service were powerful transformative tools of naturalization. Military service boosted their naturalization process, not into a monolithic, undifferentiated America, but into one in which and hierarchies of ethnicity/race operate in its structures.

This article examined the impact of ethnicity/race onto the naturalization process of three immigrant soldiers. While Lily, Alexa and Vikrant were not interested in practicing identity politics, identity politics had already categorized them. In doing so, their experiences revealed that systematic practices and policies that consider only individual equal treatment, and overlook differences, are successful in supporting immigrants' integration in the host country. However, Lily, Alexa and Vikrant's situations also brought to light the limitative nature of this approach, as it did not obliterate ethnic/racial hierarchies, but merely severely weekend and pushed them to the margins.

Further, in-depth research with a large group of immigrant soldiers, from different branches, coming from different parts of the world, would broaden our understanding and promote successful military policies. Moreover, in the quest of understanding immigrant' naturalization via the military, we need to take into account other salient markers to one's identity, such as class and gender. While analytically distinct, race/ethnicity operates in tandem with class and gender; these are fluid, yet intersecting markers that often surface both in military and civilian life. Ultimately, to understand Lily, Alexa and Vikrant's naturalization process we

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need to account for their intersecting identities, and reflect upon how their ethnicity/race, class and gender are interlinked, furthering or deterring them from carving a place for themselves into the new country (Dragomir, forthcoming).

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