

Making the American Immigrant Soldier: Inclusion and Resistance

ABSTRACT

This thesis describes the process of immigrants' naturalization via a powerful state institution, the U.S. military. It reveals how the immigrant soldiers participating in this study underwent the process of naturalization using diverse practices of both integration/assimilation and resistance. The study presents the life stories of three immigrants soldiers: Lily, an immigrant from Romania who serves in the Air Force; Alexa, an immigrant from Paraguay, who is an Army veteran; and Vinod, an Indian immigrant serving in the Army's active duty forces. Each life story shows why the participant in question joined the U.S. military, and to what extent did she/he became a full member of the military and host society. This study empowers us to understand the naturalization process from *within*, through the lived experiences of the immigrant soldiers who participated in this research.

My work relies on several qualitative/interpretative methods: life stories, theoretical and historical analysis, ethnography and participant observation. As a result of this methodological approach, I unearthed three distinct discoveries. First, contrary to intuition, the three immigrant soldiers did not simply integrate or assimilate. They engaged in various seemingly contradictory practices of integration/assimilation and resistance in order to find a place for themselves in the host country. Second, the participants joined the American armed forces to obtain recognition of their identity and to access economic resources. Third, the contemporary institution of the U.S. military faces a set of divergent and competing demands for unity and diversity of its personnel, especially regarding foreign-born soldiers. Together, these discoveries portray a unique version of the immigrants' naturalization process.

Making Immigrant Soldiers

An Interpretative Approach on the Political

by

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Understanding Immigrant Soldiers' Naturalization Process

“Identity is no museum piece sitting stock –still in a display case, but rather the endlessly astonishing synthesis of the contradictions of everyday life.”

Eduardo Galeano, *The Book of Embraces* (1991; 125)

Outline

This chapter outlines the underpinnings of the process through which immigrants acquire membership in their host country. It starts by summarizing the classical theory of integration/assimilation and continues by showing how this theory is insufficient when applied to the case of the three immigrant soldiers participating in this study. To overcome this theoretical insufficiency, I suggest distinguishing between the naturalization process and the process of integration/assimilation. Instead of the classical theory, I urge the reader to look at how the three immigrants employ a varied set of everyday naturalization practices, which encompasses assimilation/integration, as well as resistance. Finally, I argue that Lily, Alexa and Vinod engaged in these practices in order to achieve parity, both in terms of economic resources and recognition of their identity. Woven throughout the text (the implicit argument of the chapter is) lays the argument

that the participants' process of naturalization gives us an oblique look into the concept of American citizenship.

Introduction: Immigrants' Identity Transformation as Practices of Assimilation/Integration

Trying to adjust to the new country, immigrants engage in a set of diverse practices that typically falls under the umbrella of *naturalization*.¹ As the term suggests, naturalization means becoming one with what is presumed to be the “nature” of the host society. The term comes from biology and refers to the acclimatization of new forms of life to a host environment. Life forms, such as plants need to adapt or become similar to their environments; otherwise they will not benefit from the resources that ensure their survival. Typically, the naturalization process emphasizes how newcomers fit into the host land, highlighting the consequences (both for the individual and the system) of “going native.”

Traditional immigration scholarship focuses on how the identity of (civilian) immigrants transforms as they try to fit into the new system. This scholarship can be divided along two lines: straight-line and multidimensional/ bicultural assimilation theory. At times, assimilation is seen as a process, at others is treated as an outcome; often these two meanings are used interchangeably. The long-standing research on the naturalization process of immigrants has generally described them as engaged in a straight-line process

¹ According to the USCIS: “Naturalization is the process by which U.S. citizenship is granted to a foreign citizen or national after he or she fulfills the requirements established by Congress in the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA).”
<http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/menuitem.eb1d4c2a3e5b9ac89243c6a7543f6d1a/?vgnextoid=d84d6811264a3210VgnVCM100000b92ca60aRCRD&vgnnextchannel=d84d6811264a3210VgnVCM100000b92ca60aRCRD> (Last accessed August1, 2013)

of assimilation. In the American context, this process is visible on four levels: a) socioeconomic status (SES), defined as educational attainment, occupational socialization, and parity in earnings; b) spatial concentration defined in terms of dissimilarity in spatial distribution and suburbanization; c) language assimilation, defined in terms of English language ability and loss of mother tongue; and d) intermarriage, defined by racial origin, and only occasionally by ethnicity and generation (Waters and Jimenez, 2005).

According to this theory, upon arrival, immigrants shed their former ethnic identities, as well as their involvement and identification with their home societies, and quickly adopt a new identity that helps them adjust to the host country. In the traditional sense, the term “assimilation” points to the act or process of becoming an integral, indistinct part of the community. The theory of assimilation assumes that the process generates a brand new identity, while entirely discarding the old one. Moreover, it asserts that newly adopted values take precedence over the previously held ones, and are therefore become predominant in determining the immigrants patterns of life.

The ultimate goal of this process is to become similar to the dominant group. As a result, immigrants are expected to behave in ways that conform to social and political norms, and through this process to become citizens of the new country. They vote and adopt similar political values, prefer the same types of food and music, and renounce their religious beliefs to embrace those held by the host community, etc. According to this view, the process of immigration is more than simply moving one’s home from one country (DeSipio and La Garza, 1998). Naturalization implies a deep identity change and it is an act of citizenry. As the immigrant has to give up his or her allegiance to another government and pledge obedience to another state, this process is constitutively political.

This is a conversion in which immigrants “take up a new persona, while they also mirror what the host society would like them to be” (Jacobson, 2002). It is a transfer from one nation to another, from one political system to another, from one form of citizenship to a new one.²

This theory of assimilation has served as a basis for understanding the economic implications and results of immigration. The right to work, the type of work available for immigrants, as well as the payment that they receive in return for their labor, is still an indicator of the degree to which the immigrant has assimilated. Next to voting/political rights, labor is considered to be the trademark for “successful” assimilation. It is generally held that the greater access to better paid white-collar jobs an immigrant group has, the more the group is considered to be assimilated (Antecol et al., 2006). In line with this assimilation theory, it is held that the more time immigrants, especially women (Schoeni 1998), spend in the host country, the better their access to both education and information about employment becomes, and the more they are assimilated.³ For example, studies “indicate that immigrants become assimilated in the U.S. labor force and better utilize both formal and informal labor markets institutions. During successive job searches, immigrants reach information parity with native Americans within

² Even though we refer to assimilation in general terms, we need to acknowledge that not all immigrant groups assimilate in the same manner. Rather, there are differences among the way in which different groups are allowed to enter in a society. (Daneshvary et al. 1992, Glazer 1993, Kossoudji 1989, Schoeni 1998).

³ Studies show that in addition to the number of years spent in the U.S., another important factor is timing: when immigrants arrived in the U.S. If they arrive before schooling is completed, they tend to acquire more skills and therefore assimilate more quickly (Kossoudji 1989).

approximately twelve years of American residence.” (Daneshvary et al., 1992)
Assimilation, therefore, can be calculated by the access that immigrants have to jobs.⁴

While typically assimilation is regarded as a positive upward movement, more recent work looks at the cultural (Arias 2001), linguistic (Alba and Nee 2003, Portes and Rumbaut 2006, Rumbaut et al. 2006), religious (Mol 1971, Lampe 1977), and ethnic (Retiz and Shklar 1997) costs that immigrants pay. Retiz and Shklar (1997) argue that, “the process of assimilation begins rather than ends with upward economic mobility,” and that ethnic attachments have significant economic costs. Immigrants confront substantial economic pressure that pushes them towards engaging in mutual and behavioral assimilation. For example, retaining one’s linguistic and ethnic ties generally results in immigrant laborers getting lower paid jobs. Therefore, these authors argue, while not coerced, abandonment of ethnic ties is strongly encouraged.⁵

The term “assimilation” acquired a negative connotation because of its association with coercive methods of transformation, wherein the only access a minority group has to recognition, rights and resources is by transforming itself to resemble the more powerful and dominant host group. Furthermore, the aforementioned studies challenge the positive effects of assimilation and damaged the concept’s reputation.

⁴ Measuring assimilation through labor is not regarded as a problem-free metric. Scholars who seek to problematize this relationship take into consideration the effects that immigrant labor has on the native population. According to their accounts, foreign workers, in spite of having modest aspirations (Portes et al. 1978), are seen as disturbing the delicate economic, cultural, linguistic (Huntington 2004) and political balance. In her article “Integration or Nonintegration of Foreign Workers: Four Theories” Marylyn Hoskin, (1984) challenges prevailing theories regarding native hostility toward foreign workers in Germany, demonstrating that the general public is neither economically nor psychologically threatened, nor do they see this issue as one that will unsettle the delicate balance of power.

⁵ However, immigrants’ willingness to assimilate is often a necessary but not sufficient condition. Their incorporation also depends on the willingness of the host society to accommodate differences. Using the example of Mexican-Americans, Johnson (1997) argues that while immigrants “seek to assimilate into the mainstream, the costs- which may be quite high- often outweigh the benefits. He or she must carefully navigate through a ‘ring of fire’ in adjusting their life to life in the US. Typically, barriers such as phenotype, language, surnames make assimilation extremely difficult” (177).

In response, another line of immigration studies emerged. This work suggests we understand the process that immigrants undergo as “integration.” The term integration has its origin in psychology, where it typically refers to the organization of personality traits: the process of coordinating separate personality elements into a balanced whole or producing behavior compatible with one’s environment. This meaning is also used in race studies to emphasize the process of disintegration: bringing people of different racial or ethnic groups into unrestricted and equal association, like a society or an organization.

Distinct from assimilation theory, integration theory states that immigrants do not become one with the host country, but rather find a way to preserve their identity and to make it acceptable to the mainstream culture. For example, parts of Latin American immigrant culture, such as cuisine, music, and language, including bilingual announcements at airports and on automated phone services, have all become part of the daily landscape of the U.S. Unique characteristics of immigrant groups are now (at least partially) accepted as parts of American multiculturalism, and immigrants are able to integrate at least part of their identity with the rest of their new identity.

Scholars such as Lyman (1972), Portes and Zhou (1993), Rumbaut (1994), and Karpathkis (1999) view the classic theory of assimilation, which describes the transformation of immigrants as a ‘one way street,’ with both disenchantment and suspicion. They argue that the assimilation process is “multidimensional and bicultural” (Karpathkis, 1999). New immigrants identify with immigrant groups already formed, adjusting not through direct assimilation to the host culture, but through ethnic groups already present in the host society, in order to strengthen their ethnic ties. For example, Karpathkis (1999) argues that in the mid-1970s, Greek immigrants who sought

naturalization and assimilation were not driven by their desire to Americanize, but by their concern with Greece's political situation. Greek immigrants realized that in order to influence American foreign policy in their favor, they first needed to organize themselves politically within an ethnic community and then become citizens with the vote. This scholarship supports the idea that immigrant identities are organized around concerns related to their home society (Buchanan 1977, LaGuerre 1984, Stafford 1987). Immigrants preserve parts of their identities, while simultaneously accumulating new ones, and in this way integrate into the host country while preserving their key cultural values (Kuo and Lin 1977, Maykovich, 1976).

Government policies that directly concern immigrant integration and diversity are the path through which immigrants integrate. In this view, immigrants do not undergo a straight-line assimilation process, but rather use institutions and other groups to facilitate integration (Bloemraad 2006). This view generates advocacy for changes in both education (McCormick 1984) and in support of policies that promote cultural pluralism in a multiracial society (Hing 1993). Emphasizing the complex process of integration brings to the fore the idea that immigrants may have an identity that does not entirely correspond to that of the host society. In spite of trying to adjust to their new host country, immigrants still maintain and present some of their previous characteristics and attachments.

This rich body of literature in immigration studies produces what is indeed a revolutionary turn by allowing us to understand that the process of identity formation amongst immigrants consists of multiple aspects. However, this scholarship also regards integration as the goal of the process and assumes that all immigrants strive to integrate.

While integration is at times the outcome of this transformative process, rarely do immigrants set out to achieve this. Throughout the many years of research, not once did my participants show any concern with how would they fit into the system. They engaged in practices of integration, but their primary motivation was to better their lives and access rights and resources. Their aim was always to become equals in the host society. Hence, at least in the case of the participants in this study, we need to see integration as a daily practice, as a part of the process, not as a goal in itself. In doing so, the field of analysis opens up to recognize the wider variety of daily practices which immigrants engage in.

Throughout my work, I appropriate the concepts of integration and assimilation to mean one set of practices Lily, Alexa and Vinod used to render their resemblance to the host society and to the host (military) group. Specifically, I use the term composite “practice of assimilation/ integration” to denote performances through which the three immigrant soldiers tried to fit within a preexistent and accepted group. For this specific purpose the difference articulated above, between integration and assimilation, is not of crucial importance. For example, when one of my participants changed his manner of speaking and started using a vernacular typical of the young military recruits, I marked this as a practice through which he aimed to become more like the members of his newly adopted group, and described it as a practice of integration/assimilation.

Resistance as a Practice of Naturalization in the Military

As the body of literature outlined above shows, today’s American immigrants see different aspects of their identity accommodated by the host country. This brings into

view a major change, a transformation that took place in American citizenship over the past few decades: the acceptance on the part of the U.S. of multiple ethnic identifications amongst its citizens. The wide usage of the concept of “hyphenated identity” is standing proof of this change. The term was first used pejoratively, with the U.S. demanding the primary political loyalty of its citizens. For example, former President Theodore Roosevelt said on Columbus Day 1915:

There is no room in this country for hyphenated Americanism. When I refer to hyphenated Americans, I do not refer to naturalized Americans. Some of the very best Americans I have ever known were naturalized Americans, Americans born abroad. But a hyphenated American is not an American at all....The one absolutely certain way of bringing this nation to ruin, of preventing all possibility of its continuing to be a nation at all, would be to permit it to become a tangle of squabbling nationalities, an intricate knot of German-Americans, Irish-Americans, English-Americans, French-Americans, Scandinavian-Americans or Italian-Americans, each preserving its separate nationality, each at heart feeling more sympathy with Europeans of that nationality, than with the other citizens of the American Republic....There is no such thing as a hyphenated American who is a good American. The only man who is a good American is the man who is an American and nothing else.⁶

Despite Roosevelt’s views, over the years hyphenated identity was used to signify one’s origin and it became more and more accepted in common language. The understanding lying behind this shift is that the American identity is in effect compatible with other (ethnic) identities. It supports the idea that the fusion of identities within the United States strengthens the nation rather than weakens it. For the most part, maintaining one’s cultural heritage has ceased to be seen as a threat to American loyalty, and has been embraced as part of American multicultural makeup.

While diverse ethnic identities generally coexist peacefully, and are, for the most part, also accommodated in the host society, they can also become a challenge. This challenge appears evident when immigrants are integrated via a state institution, such as

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<http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archivefree/pdf?res=9901E0DD1239E333A25750C1A9669D946496D6CF>
(Last accessed August 10, 2012)

the military, that demands total assimilation. The following aspect further complicates this: in theory, the American military is appreciative and seems to encourage diversity in its realm. It understands that recruits who speak a variety of languages and who are culturally sensitive to the areas where American troops are conducting their activities are extremely valuable, especially in this day and age when counterinsurgency has become the main mode of fighting. However, in practice (i.e. in terms of training and goals), the military still demands total and unique identification with both the nation and the military. While one can still call herself “Arab-American” in civilian life, within the U.S. military it is difficult to identify oneself in such a way. An example of this tension emerged early in my research when my participants were discussing their Basic Training experience. Vinod, the recruit from India, was admitted to the U.S. military based on his education and language skills. However, once in the military he had a hard time expressing his ethnic heritage. He described that, during Basic Training, the only materials available to read were military newsletters and the Bible. In this informal way, the military is curtailing one’s religious identification and directing one’s spiritual endeavors towards mainstream Christianity.

The three immigrant soldiers faced these competing demands: the need to preserve and use their identity, on the one hand, and the urgent need to assimilate into the new group and country, on the other. As a result, they engaged in a new set of practices that parallel those of integration/assimilation outlined above. These new practices are modes of resistance. In the civilian realm, multiple identifications are the norm rather than the exception. In the military, conversely, demands for assimilation and for maintaining a unified allegiance and identity are prevalent. Even small gestures are

perceived as a disturbance to the *status quo*. Hence, these gestures should be seen as acts of resistance.

The fact that immigrant soldiers engage in acts of resistance seems counter-intuitive. Typically, military immigrants embrace the goals of the host country; they are probably more willing to support U.S. political acts than immigrants who do not enlist in the American armed forces. Due to their self-selection, this group considers assimilating/integrating an important and respectable goal. However, in spite of their commitment to integration/assimilation, they do not blindly accept the given system. Even under these conditions (i.e. self-selection and the stricter control and imposition of the military rule over their life), military immigrants still use their own tools to carve out a place for themselves. To further understand the normative underpinnings of the concept of resistance, I will now turn to the literature on this topic.

Traditional and Contemporary Theories of Resistance

Resistance is usually seen as a negative practice, as a form of negating or challenging *the status quo*. In the military world, a soldier resisting the orders of her superior is seen with disdain and fear. However, the term “resistance” is widely employed today, going beyond its negative connotations. In psychology, “resistance” refers to the process whereby the ego opposes the conscious recall of anxiety-producing experiences. In biology, the meaning is similar: the capacity of an organism to defend itself against a disease or the capacity of an organism to withstand the effects of a harmful environmental agent. Both definitions see resistance as a form of protection for the individual in order to ensure its own preservation. In the realm of political science, it

is used on the left and right ends of the political spectrum to mean different things. However, across the spectrum, it always points to the radical character of political actions. Current discussions about the topic of resistance fill journals, books, conference rooms, and roundtable discussions. This talk of resistance has taken the concept far beyond its customary interpretations; recent analysis of resistance ranges from observing its obvious forms, i.e. revolutions and social movements, to its hidden versions, including everyday forms of resistance such as gossiping.

The current vivid preoccupation with resistance can be traced back to Michel Foucault. In the writings from 1972-1977 collected in the volume *Power/Knowledge*, Foucault breaks away from traditional understandings of power and tells us that power does not belong to a privileged person or group, but is rather everywhere. This new paradigm of understanding power, also called “de-faced power,” allows scholars to observe its distilled and omnipresent character and the way in which power alternately courses and meanders through all facets of life. While Foucault never intended for value judgments to be attached to his analysis of power, later interpretations of his work were often gloomy. They saw power as the form of an oppressive system that limits one’s freedom and constrains individuals to a certain way of being. Consequently, they also began asking the question: if power is indeed omnipresent, is it then an impenetrable system to which we must succumb? Or can we imagine forms of resistance?

In previous paradigms of theorizing power, it was enough to look at the center of power to find a way to resist it. Plots against the prince or revolutions (Skocpol 1979), and social movements directed against the power of government (Rupp and Taylor 1987; Silva 1997) each offer classic representations of resistance to power. But, when we

recognize that power is disseminated and present everywhere, then we must recognize that the classical representation of practices of resistance is inadequate. If power is everywhere, so is resistance; if power is manifested in our everyday lives, so is resistance. Resistance has become a practice of everyday life.

Accordingly, social scientists have turned their attention to various daily practices. For example, looking at consumerist behavior, Michel DeCerteau (1980) in “On the Oppositional Practices of Everyday Life,” challenged the idea that consumers passively accept the knowledge that is given to them. He argued that, while indeed there are dominant forms of power, there are also practices of resistance visible in everyday behaviors. According to DeCerteau, from the stealing of pencils to interactions that one makes with general marketing campaigns, diffuse forms of resistance are always within reach and always present.

Theories of resistance spread quickly in the realms of sociology and political science, where scholars used various methodological techniques to look at resistance practices across cultures and countries. The recent rise of complex systems of organizational control was seen as generating forms of informal or routine workplace resistance patterns (Prasad and Prasad 1998). Further research revealed that studies of resistance could also benefit gender studies. Women seek power by both resisting and accommodating mainstream norms for female agency. These studies reveal the complex role that the body (Dellinger and Williams 1997, Elowe MacLeod 1991) plays in sustaining and challenging the subordinate position of women (Weitz 2001).

One of the most important studies of everyday practices of resistance is James C. Scott’s *Weapons of the Weak*, which is an investigation of rural Malaysia. Scott offers a

Marxist analysis of Malaysian society, noting that the upper class obviously dominates the working class through economic means. Nonetheless, he argues, the subordinate classes (such as the working class, peasants) are not powerless. On the contrary, they have at their disposal considerable tools for resisting and they use these means to oppose a strict and unfair power regime. One such tool concerns forms of speech. Scott discerned the presence of two contradictory ways of speaking among the villagers. When in the presence of the powerful, peasants would speak one way; while in private, they spoke another way. In trying to make sense of these contradictory discourses, Scott began to discern what he calls “hidden transcripts” or “patterns of disguising ideological insubordination.” These might take the form of rumors, gossip, folktales or other forms of cultural expression. Scott argues that the dominated often have much at stake in “conspiring to reinforce hegemonic appearances.” Broadly, he claims that: “cultures of resistance are best nurtured when hidden from view, but, in a more quotidian way, appearing to believe in one’s own inferiority can mask small acts of resistance against material exploitation – such as pilfering and foot-dragging” (Scott 1985).

In a similar manner, resistance has been noted in the dynamics of immigrant or minority groups. Here, “cultural resistance” is regarded as an attempt to preserve the minority culture against assimilation into the host culture. Resistance has been noted in the military, as well. Even though the army is predominately masculine territory and women hold only limited access to power, women employ means of resistance against this *status quo*. Male aggression and harassment towards women in the military is also regarded as a form of resistance towards a changing environment that is becoming more welcoming towards women (Miller, 1997). However, counter to the aforementioned uses

of resistance, both in the realm of immigration and military studies, resistance is acknowledged as a negative occurrence. A systematic approach which regards resistance as a creative practice has yet to be undertaken.

Studies of resistance in line with Scott and De Certeau reveal that resistance can be understood as a positive process through which individuals and groups seek to empower themselves. This scholarship has the merit of changing the perception of resistance from that of a purely negative process, through which one causes damage to the existing system in order to allocate power to the needy, to seeing resistance as a mode of accessing and becoming a part of the existing system.⁷

Similar to peasants in Malaysia or to workers in large companies, Lily, Alexa and Vinod struggled to ‘naturalize,’ in part by engaging in everyday resistance practices aimed not at disrupting the system, but rather at retaining their identities and finding ways in which they could access political and social institutions without giving up those identities. In some cases, these practices were needed as a last resort for survival or making ends meet. For example, Vinod, faced many subtle forms discrimination, such as being called Osama; to cope with this, he looked to the company of other soldiers from his part of the world, which strengthened his ethnic identity and balanced out an unjust situation. While enforcing ethnic ties and remaining solidly within one’s ethnic group can be seen as resisting assimilation, it ultimately enabled Vinod to access to resources and avoid potentially cruel, quotidian forms of exclusion. What at first could be seen as

⁷ Another question raised by Scott’s work is whether the individuals engaged in acts of resistance consciously regard it as resistance. Or, is it instead a matter of the researcher labeling it as resistance? Scott is unable to provide a clear answer to this question, as the peasants in Malaysia seem in some ways to be reacting unconsciously, while at other times they seem to be consciously seeking power. The individuals, I would argue, do not label the acts of resistance as acts of resistance. This is the researcher’s doing. I believe that we need to be aware of the fact that resistance is an analytical tool for understanding methods of accessing power, which allows for our interpretation, even when it is not employed consciously as such.

disrupting the system, by refusing to integrate and to become like the majority, appears now as a practice necessary for survival.

In spite of its revolutionary impact, resistance scholarship has its own Achilles' heel. All of the extensive research on resistance has one point in common: it generally looks for and finds resistance. Scholarship that follows Scott and De Certeau informs and enables us to better understand the networks of power. However, this scholarship takes practices of resistance as privileged object of analysis. This analytic focus obscures other practices, as such creating biases and implying that practices of resistance are the only practices that engage people. This is hardly the case; while practices of resistance are widespread, resistance is but one part of a larger whole. One could perform practices of assimilation within the networks of power while simultaneously performing practices of resistance. The issue lays in the confusion of conceptualizing assimilation/integration as a process versus seeing assimilation/integration as a practice. As stated above, immigrant soldiers are not simply moving towards assimilation/integration in a linear fashion. In other words, assimilation/integration is neither a process, nor a goal. Rather, assimilation/integration is a set of practices that subjects carry out or perform. If these practices belong to a plethora of performances, then they can easily coexist next to conflicting ones, such as the practices of resistance. The immigrant soldiers of this study did not subscribe to one unique process with a singular aim. They engaged in various exercises that at first glance may appear to be in opposition to one another.

The literature on resistance ignores the ambiguity that is inherent to the practice and over simplifies it by reducing it to a dichotomy: domination and subordination. If we were to follow the mainstream literature on resistance *ad literam*, we should expect to

find the three immigrant soldiers resisting continuously in the new host country, trying to find a way in which they can defeat the system. In this sense, the literature on resistance fails to understand their process of transformation, which often instrumentally engages them in a subsidiary process of accepting the rules of the host country.

My view of resistance differs from the traditional views, as it does not imply an organized movement meant to destabilize the system. Typically, resistance has been associated with revolution, which implies a group/community of people working together to destabilize the *status quo*, in order to replace it with a different system. The peasants in Malaysia are not generally engaged in this kind of collective effort. While they do gossip with other community members, which entails a certain degree of cooperation, their communal involvement stops there. Peasants do not further organize themselves in larger acts of resistance in order to demand change or challenge the system. Following this new approach, resistance is seen as a process through which individuals access the system without trying to replace it. Now resistance accentuates the agency that individuals, as opposed to groups, have in addressing injustices.

Nevertheless, this is not an entirely optimistic view on resistance practices. Resistance practices empower the individual, but they rarely contribute to an overall change in the system. While peasants in Malaysia find ways in everyday life to act against an unjust system, their efforts do not change the overall situation, and at best lead to an ephemeral and precarious empowerment. Similarly, while the three immigrant soldiers engaged in individual acts of resistance, such as gossiping or retaining their ethnic identity, none of these acts had an important impact on the situation or on the ways in which the military as an institution conducted its activities. A more pessimistic view

might even argue that these acts of resistance can exist only because, at the end of the day, they are not harming the existent system of power. A cynic might make the further point that these acts of resistance are only tolerated by the system because they create the false sense of empowerment for the “oppressed,” whilst perpetuating an unequal system of power.

Lily, Alexa and Vinod’s Practices of Resistance

Following Scott’s claims, I argue that resistance does not necessarily need to take place in an organized manner or in the form of social movements, but can rather be located in everyday life. However, diverging from Scott, I argue that we need to distance ourselves from the reactionist paradigm of oppressor vs. oppressed, and to accept that while practices of resistance are indeed taking place, mostly off-stage, there are numerous practices of integration or assimilation that are simultaneously taking place both off and on-stage.

Similar to assimilation/integration practices, resistance practices need to be seen as practices and not as goals. I refer to resistance practices as daily acts performed by my participants that contravened existent military rules or goals. For example, I identify as resistance Lily’s decision to marry within her own ethnic community, as her way of holding on to and reinforcing her ethnic identifications, in spite of the U.S. military’s goal of achieving unity. Now resistance practices mainly refer to retaining one’s ethnic, religious, linguistic and/or gender identity in order to achieve parity in the host environment.

These practices are premised on the expectation and knowledge that different degrees of resistance are possible. In this study, these degrees were dependent on the contexts in which the three immigrant soldiers lived. For example, Lily, being an Air Force reservist and therefore on the military base only one weekend per month, displayed different resistance practices from Alexa, who lived in the barracks for a certain amount of time. Akin to Scott, I contend that practices of resistance tend to be more numerous in contexts in which the consequences are not immediately threatening. Hence, the more visible the consequences of resistance are, the less visible the acts of resistance will be. For example, in civilian life, one is able to see a myriad of forms of resistance to assimilation by immigrants in the host culture. However, in the military, where more drastic repercussions could come about as a result of resistant acts, more subtle forms of resistance are employed. But power and control are never perfect (even in the military) and resistance never disappears. Instead, it finds new, subtler ways to manifest that are further removed from the gaze of power.

Resistance encompasses a wide range of practices from which individuals can choose, depending on the context. Lily, Alexa and Vinod's resistance practices were visible through a plethora of small gestures: they engaged in verbally criticizing the system, in disobeying rules, in conducting alternative practices, etc. The first example of a resistance practice is gossiping, as a mild form of criticism. Criticism is not easily accepted by the military and the repercussions for voicing it openly are drastic. Therefore when it takes places, it is revealed in the "private" realm, behind closed doors, among friends, among people considered close enough not to further report, and/or with members of the civilian realm. It is never in the open. According to James C. Scott,

gossiping (or criticism) is an every-day form of resistance, less visible and employed over time through a course of persistent subordination. While all of my participants engaged in this type of resistance practice, Alexa has been critical to the military as an institution. “The army is only for stupid people. Oh, yeah! I am telling you. For people with no brain!” she often said in fervent disagreement with the institution. Alexa discussed these issues only with people who were in the civilian life, mainly with her sister and me, and rarely did she address them with another military personnel. When she did, she ensured that the person was “safe” and equally critical of the military. At the same time, when in the military realm, she acted as a model soldier, obeying most of its rules and conducting herself in a professional manner.

Vinod made his entire military experience public and posted about it on Facebook and other social network media venues. As his profile was public, Vinod exhibited very little (almost no) criticism towards the military. However, he exhibited another practice of resistance. In the military, the unity with the entire group is encouraged. While deployed in Iraq, Vinod decided to form a smaller group and became close to people with whom he shared his ethnic, cultural background. Forming cluster groups, which were meant to strengthen his ethnic, religious or linguistic ties, is the second example of a resistance practice.

The third form of resistance practices was visible when Lily divided her life and her allegiances between two separate realms: military and civilian. Her resistance was manifested in the way she developed a “split identity,” which allowed to her be a model soldier, conforming to all the rules and values of the military, on the one hand, while developing an entirely different identity in civilian life. This split allowed Lily to function

well in both realms, but, at the same time, it shows the superficiality of her commitment to the military. The military, which empowered Lily by giving her special skills, which easily translated to her civilian career, did not succeed to create a unique and unitary identity that would dominate and control all the other identifications. This practice of resistance is similar to what James C. Scott calls “false compliance.” Nevertheless, Lily was not necessarily “false” in her acts. She was firmly dedicated to her identity in both realms, but she kept them separate, avoiding a unitary allegiance.

A final point to be made about these forms of resistance is that while these practices are at the fringes of the (imposed) military system, they do not drastically threaten it. If a real threat to the actions and the structure of the military would be perceived, intervention would be imminent. Through their acts of resistance, the three immigrant soldiers created a space for themselves, while enabling the military to perpetuate its overall structure.⁸

Nonetheless, we need to employ the concept of resistance practices with care. We need to be aware that this is mainly an analytical tool, as individuals who are concerned may not label their own acts as such. It is not that they act unconsciously; rather, they may not be aware that these practices may be considered acts of resistance. For them, these acts are necessary to access rights and resources.

It is also important to mention that the immigrant soldiers participating in this study did not regard these diverse practices as a goal in itself. On the contrary, they

⁸ At times, these acts were successful means to transforming the system, even if not in a revolutionary way. For example, during the First World War, rabbis were brought to perform religious services in units that had a large number of Jewish recruits. Today, due to the growing number of immigrants from Latin America, salsa classes are sometimes introduced during free-time activities for the soldiers, and in this way diversity of the military is highlighted and accepted. These outcomes reveal both the very dynamic nature of power and the transformative nature of resistance practices.

employed them in order to achieve equal membership. At times, the three immigrants understood that it was better to practice integration and focus on adopting some of the characteristics of the members of the host society. All three found that adopting a military identity ensured their rapid access to benefits. For example, if they chose to travel dressed in uniform, they received priority-boarding, access to private airline lounges, civilians offered to pay for their meals etc. Similarly, they also employed practices of resistance when they believed that this would actually allow them to access other resources or when they wanted their ethnic identity to be recognized. Acts of resistance can also be productive in providing access to society's economic, social, and political resources. For instance, if one holds on to her ethnic identity, she might be able to closely collaborate with members of the same ethnicity, and through this collaboration access funds or educational benefits that might otherwise be denied. For example, depending upon the ethnic identity of her superior officers, an immigrant soldier may choose to heighten, minimize, or even reject other identifications in order to receive positive consideration.

Scholarship on immigration studies and studies of resistance are helpful in understanding the life of immigrant soldiers. Bringing into play immigration scholarship allows us to observe practices directed towards social mobility and access to resources, but also to see the negative effects of naturalizing. Studies of resistance complement this work, giving an account of how the system is perceived from the immigrant soldiers' perspectives, allowing us to conceive of the tactics that they engage in their struggle to find a place for themselves. Only by observing both sets of practices are we able to account for the multiple practices that the three immigrants underwent in their process of becoming citizens.

To What End?

Throughout this study a question repeatedly arose: Why did Lily, Alexa and Vinod choose this complex and assiduous path of naturalization, when it would have been seemingly simpler to assimilate and become similar to the host country? In order to answer this question, I turned to another body of literature, which studies minorities in nation-states. I approached this literature abductively, in order to address my puzzle.⁹

This body of work places identity, both individual and collective, on central stage. The issue of seeking parity in the society for members the minority groups brings into view the idea that identity is “dialogical.” Accordingly, the self is constructed only in relation to others, and 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 (Taylor 1990). It follows that, as citizens, all members of a society need to be treated in a manner that recognizes not only their individual identity, but also their group identity, as well. When applied to the situation of immigrants, this suggests that we must regard the immigrant’s identity-as-an-immigrant as a constitutive part of the self. Hence, even newcomers in a society seek recognition for their identity.

Even the seemingly individual process of identity formation is essentially social in nature, as individual identity is shaped in and through ongoing of social interaction and social recognition. There are three types of recognition which are preconditions for

⁹ In “Interpretative Research Design” Scharztz-Shea and Yanow argue, following Charles Pierce, that, “Abuctive reasoning begins with puzzle, a surprise, or a tension and then seeks to explicate it by identifying the conditions that would make the puzzle less perplexing and more of a normal or natural event.... In this puzzling but process, the researcher tacks continually and, constantly, back and forth in an interactive - recursive fashion between what is puzzling and possible explanations for it, wheatear in other field situations ... or in search-relevant literature” (2012, 27).

autonomous agents: intersubjective relations of emotional recognition, legal recognition, and solidarity. Recognition, in turn, promotes and maintains the development of self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem in individuals (Honneth 2004, 2005). In the case of immigrants, obtaining these three forms of recognition is part of their everyday struggle. Moreover, “self confidence, self-respect and self esteem in individuals” are overlapping goals with the military’s vision of itself.

While still being deeply concerned with questions of identity and the just treatment of all members of the society, scholars argue that recognition is necessary, but not sufficient if it is not supported by considering and addressing possible issues of maldistribution (Fraser 2000). While recognition and distribution are deeply connected in practice, we need to analytically distinguish them and avoid collapsing one into the other (Fraser 2004).¹⁰

Misrecognition of immigrants follows similar patterns. For example, policies may determine and minimize immigrants’ native language usage in the public domain, such as in school, hospitals etc., and, as a result, give them secondary status within the host society. Moreover, if the immigrants’ ethnic identity is either ignored or abused, they may incorporate this view, acting to forcefully disassemble their identity in order to make room for the new one. For example, in the hope of better integration, many immigrants struggle to teach their kids the language of the host country, and, to this end, minimize speaking the mother tongue.

¹⁰ In 2004, Fraser added a third dimension to the theory of justice: the importance of national framing in political claim-making, bringing to the fore the problem of framing, which enables us to understand both recognition and redistribution. *Representation* allows us to problematize governance structures and decision-making procedures. While I think this dimension is crucial in understanding justice, throughout the study I only use recognition and redistribution as axes of analysis. Due to their military status, the immigrant soldiers’ political voice is minimized, and therefore – in this particular case – the criterion of representation does not apply.

These theories, usually grouped under the umbrella of social justice, proved to be tools of understanding Lily, Alexa and Vinod's struggle of becoming full members in the U.S. These theories brought to light the idea that an important step in a fair treatment is having opportunities to use one's mother tongue and to eat and dress as one pleases. Moreover, immigrants such as the soldiers in this study need to earn self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem through their interactions other individuals. An additional step in becoming full members is access to resources. Both redistribution and recognition are important aspects in their process of "naturalization."

Social justice scholars often focus on how the state acts supports or hinders these two dimensions of justice. Differently, the present work takes an approach that focuses on how the three immigrant soldiers access both dimensions. Without understanding the manner through which they struggle to become full members of the host society, the efforts to deinstitutionalize patterns might be futile, as it would miss important aspects of the human journey.

Conclusion

Neither Lily, nor Alexa or Vinod ever described their goals as integrating or assimilating. They were concerned with living a life that allowed for them to become equals in society, without fear of discrimination. They aimed at achieving a better economic standard, which included better finances, but also good benefits and a possible career. Therefore, different from classical scholarship on immigration, which sees integration or assimilation as a goal of the naturalization process, we need to see these three immigrants as engaged in practices of both integration and assimilation.

This does not mean that we should discard the concepts of integration and assimilation. Quite the contrary, we need to fully employ them, but this time as practices rather than straightforward goals. This new approach opens up the “naturalization” process, allowing for many diverse practices to come into view. This method further sheds light onto the fact that, next to practices of integration and/or assimilation, we can observe a parallel set of resistance practices. While in the civilian life these practices of resistance (such as retaining one’s previous identity) are readily accepted as a part of the *status quo*, in the military they are seen as diverging from the main goal. This situation is further complicated by the transformation of identities within the military, which encourages ethnic, religious, linguistic diversity, but at the same time still requires (and informally encourages) one unified and unique allegiance.

Therefore, we need to understand the process of transition for Lily, Alexa and Vinod as one in which they engaged in diverse practices of both assimilation/integration and resistance. Through this process, they navigated a continuously shifting terrain of institutional and policy change, where goals competed and, at times, conflicted. Their cases illuminate the process of naturalization, allowing us to see how they were able to become full-fledged members of the host society. This normative framework enables further analysis of their otherwise chaotic, uncoordinated lives.¹¹

¹¹ As mentioned in the “Introduction,” this work does not speak about all immigrants, not even about all immigrants in the U.S. It speaks about a special group of three immigrants within the U.S. military. While its scope is limited, it reveals certain dynamics that are specific to a particular setting, which are the result of special policies (such as the MAVNI program) and describes members of a small group. This approach is necessary, because without it we risk sweeping generalizations about obtaining membership in the host country. Furthermore, often the process of naturalization is obscured. This work hopes to break this veil of generalization, and to allow for individual (special) stories to blossom.

Following these immigrant soldiers' life stories, we catch a glimpse of what it means to access American citizenship. As the naturalization process takes place via a state institution, the diverse and divergent practices employed by participants portray the path to American citizenry as a dynamic and multifaceted process, in which both individuals and groups play an important role in accessing rights, resources, and ultimately parity in the society.

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