

Portuguese culture and legal consciousness: a discussion of immigrant women's perceptions of and reactions to domestic violence

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Abstract

This paper uses legal consciousness to discuss the influence of Portuguese culture on women's perceptions of and reactions to domestic violence. It is based on an in-depth small-scale study of Portuguese women living in England, and proposes that culture is central in shaping their behaviour, regardless of whether they experienced violence or not. The cultural characteristics that influence women the most are analysed here under the themes of 'familism', 'shame and community pressure' and 'acculturation'. These do not operate all at the same level and their influence can change according to structural and individual circumstances. As such, the paper suggests that immigrant women's perceptions of and reactions to domestic violence can only be fully understood by articulating national culture with other structural and individual variables; this will enable a multilayered and situated understanding of women's legality that avoids a simplistic attribution of their behaviour to national or ethnic provenance.

I. Introduction

Despite official numbers suggesting that there are currently 175,000 individuals with Portuguese nationality living in the UK (Observatório da Emigração, 2015), research on Portuguese immigrants' legal consciousness is scarce. Specifically, little is known about their perceptions and reactions to domestic violence and about the role of culture in informing these. The possibility of national culture informing a population's perceptions of legality in terms of family organisation and situations of abuse has been established in previous research. Indeed, researchers in Canada have demonstrated that 'Portuguese-speaking culture' and 'way of thinking' have a strong influence on women's acceptance of domestic violence (Barata *et al.*, 2005, p. 139), suggesting that a similar dynamic may occur in other Portuguese communities in different countries. The present paper discusses this possibility by using data from an in-depth small-scale study on Portuguese immigrants living in England. It does so by exploring participants' legal consciousness – that is, how they interpret and react to domestic violence, and the role of culture in shaping their perceptions.

Researching the impact of culture on women's perceptions and responses to domestic violence is not a simple endeavour, partly because of the complexity of the concept of culture itself – an aspect that will be explored later in this paper. The complexity of the concept should not, however, detract from exploring its potential effect on behaviour, as it can be generally accepted that national culture operates at individual and community levels. Although national identities can be conceptualised as artificial and serving the purpose of supporting 'imagined communities', individuals nonetheless adopt cultural practices that reflect these national identities (Anderson, 1991; Berlant, 1991, p. 168; Gellner, 1994, p. 48; Hobsbawn, 2000, p. 269). Once successfully assimilated by a population, state-promoted cultural traits determine how individuals organise their daily lives, including how they perceive and manage family life (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 36).

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A discussion of the cultural characteristics that are most prevalent in participants' discourses is, therefore, presented here. These are addressed against common findings from literature on immigrant women and domestic violence across a variety of countries and nationalities. Such literature reveals that it is not unusual to expect immigrant women to experience certain added cultural barriers that influence how they experience domestic violence and respond to it. Common barriers identified in this literature are here aggregated and explored under the themes of familism (or women placing the interests of the family ahead of their own), shame and family honour, pressure from the community and acculturation (see, for example, Menjívar and Salcido, 2002; Gill, 2004; Anitha, 2008; Burman and Chantler 2005; Earner, 2010; Vidales, 2010).

The identification of the existence of cultural influences does not, however, reveal the full complexity underpinning individuals' perceptions and reactions to domestic violence. Here, the study of the legal consciousness can be exceptionally illuminating, particularly in clarifying the relationship between national culture and the construction of legality. Legal consciousness studies suggest that individuals make sense of the world by referring to cultural practices, against which they assess their problems (Ewick and Silbey, 1998, pp. 22, 23, 45; Hull, 2003, p. 630; Fritsvold, 2009, p. 805). Cultural practices are, in turn, believed to make up, and in time change and transmit, legal consciousness between individuals (Ewick and Silbey, 1998, p. 43; Cowan, 2004, p. 932). These cultural practices, or schemas, have a broad meaning: they are concepts, hierarchies, codes that, when deployed, define social action (Ewick and Silbey, 1998, pp. 40, 45).

The legal consciousness of individuals with a variety of nationalities has been analysed in a multitude of settings; recent examples include research on English, Polish and Bulgarians' 'collective legal culture' (Hertogh and Kurkchian, 2016), on Dutch traffic offenders (Hertogh, 2015), on property claimants in Romania (Serban, 2014) and on Chinese sex workers (Boittin, 2013). Studies explicitly focusing on immigrant populations' legal consciousness are, however, less common. Exceptions include Abrego's analysis of the legal consciousness of undocumented Latinos in the US (Abrego, 2008; 2011) and Gleeson's examination of the impact of the documentation status of immigrant workers in their mobilisation of law (Gleeson, 2010).

There is therefore ample room and justification to explore Portuguese women's perceptions of domestic violence and appropriate responses to it. In order to do so effectively, it is, however, necessary to adopt a flexible multilayered approach that avoids using a simplistic concept of culture or nationality. Exploring legal consciousness helps to develop such an approach in two ways: from a methodological standpoint, by asking participants to explain justiciable problems in their own words, and by providing a framework for analysis, in which the law is one of a variety of structures that individuals use to navigate everyday life. Understanding the influence of culture in women's legal consciousness also helps make the case for a situated legal consciousness (Nielsen, 2000, p. 1086). Even if there are common values across different societies (patriarchy being an example of this), their local implementation and experience may vary according to historical, social and cultural variables and therefore deserve to be discussed in more detail (Menjívar and Salcido, 2002, p. 900).

II. Culture and legal consciousness

Culture is a contested and polysemic concept (see, for example, the variety of meanings found by Saguy and Stuart in a comprehensive study of academic journal papers published between 2000 and 2007; Saguy and Stuart, 2008, p. 150). Part of the complexity in the use of this concept is that it can be understood as the 'beliefs and practices associated with a specific group' or as an 'abstracted *system* of symbols and meanings, both the product and context of social action' (Silbey, 2010, p. 470, emphasis in original). It is the former meaning that will be the focus of inquiry in this paper, although its relationship with the latter will become evident when discussing how it is

shaped by other structural factors, and how these intersect with individual circumstances to inform legal consciousness.

The concept of culture may be misleading if used uncritically, as it hides a variety of factors that influence human behaviour. The cultural aspects mentioned in this paper refer mainly to the 'traditional' notions of Portuguese culture, in terms of family organisation and division of gender roles. Some of these derive from behaviour identified by an attitudinal study on family organisation and gender roles conducted in 2002/03 (Wall, 2007); others draw from participants' own views of what Portuguese culture consists of.

To contextualise the notions of Portuguese culture used in this paper, it is useful to understand where some of these originate. In Portugal, women's domesticity was promoted with more or less emphasis by successive governments until the end of the dictatorial regime in 1974. Feminism faced considerable opposition from the state during this period (Esteves, 1998, p. 42; Amácio, 2007, p. 189; Cova, 2007, p. 40), literacy levels remained low and class mobility was limited (Candeias, 2010, p. 180). The education syllabus reflected traditional gender stereotypes promoted by the state, which defended women's domesticity and a narrowly defined ideal of family life (Candeias, 2010, p. 181; Rosas, 2001, p. 1040). Emigration levels were high, with the possibility of a number of emigrants taking with them the cultural values promoted by the state regarding family organisation to the countries of destination (Tavares, 2010, p. 90).

In the 1960s and 1970s, Portuguese emigrants generally consisted of unskilled workers, who moved to European countries, such as France, Luxembourg and Switzerland. Since the 1990s, the characteristics of Portuguese emigrants have been changing, with highly skilled and formally educated individuals choosing to move to countries such as England and Spain (Malheiros, 2010, p. 135). This means that England, which had been receiving mainly unskilled Portuguese workers, has also been receiving skilled and highly educated professionals from this country, since then (Malheiros, 2010, p. 137). Indeed, England is today one of the countries with the highest level of skilled Portuguese migrants in Europe (Pereira *et al.*, 2015, p. 5). This makes the current Portuguese population living in England a mixture of lower-skilled, less formally educated workers, usually employed to do manual labour, and formally educated and highly skilled individuals, working in a variety of services and industries. An example of the recent increase in skilled professionals migrating to England is the recruitment of high numbers of Portuguese nurses by the National Health Service (Dreaper, 2015; Howie, 2011; Pereira *et al.*, 2015, p. 5; Williams, 2012).

With the change in political regime in the 1970s, Portuguese women gained access to the same rights as men. Women's work outside the household became commonplace as a result, but this was not accompanied by a profound change in the organisation of family life. As such, women's association with a domestic role, especially in relation to child-rearing, remains strong in contemporary Portuguese society (Wall, 2007, p. 228). Divorce and births out of wedlock are socially accepted, but a traditional stance towards the sharing of family responsibilities is still in place (Aboim, 2007, pp. 37–38, 41; Inglez, 2007, p. 351; Crompton and Lyonette, 2007, p. 102; Wall, 2007, pp. 228, 247). This has potential implications for the way Portuguese women address domestic violence, especially as children and the family are seen as essential for individual happiness (Aboim, 2007, p. 72). The lack of promotion of women's rights during most of the twentieth century led to a lack of policies to address violence against women until recently. The past twenty years have therefore been dedicated to catching up with developments in other parts of the world, in creating a legal framework that protects women from domestic violence and in raising awareness about it.

It is important to acknowledge that cultural practices may or may not be adopted by all members of a cultural group and that using ethnicity to understand culture may not wholly represent an individual's culture (Yick and Oomen-Early, 2008, p. 1079). By focusing on Portuguese culture, generalisations may be proposed that do not allow subcultures or different

forms of experiencing culture to surface from the analysis. In order to address this limitation, participants were asked to define Portuguese culture in their own words. This strategy helped to avoid incorrect assumptions about Portuguese culture and, by extension, participants' legal consciousness.

Not only is the concept of culture challenging in itself; its use may lead to problematic outcomes. When associating women's victimisation with culture, there is a danger that culture is blamed for the violence perpetrated against them. This can be done by concluding that the reason behind women's victimisation is simply because certain cultures are more accepting of violence against women than others, in what is sometimes called 'subculture of violence theory' (Tartakovsky and Mezhibovsky, 2012, p. 561). Although the normalisation of violence in certain cultures may be an important aspect to take into account, a more complex analysis of culture is needed to fully understand how it operates. Culture is dynamic and socially constructed, and violence against women may come from both within and outside women's culture and community (Sokoloff, 2008, pp. 234–235; Burman *et al.*, 2004, p. 335); its study can, therefore, be enhanced by an intersectional analysis that discusses its relationship with different factors.

Legal consciousness is used in this paper to explore the structural and individual factors subjacent to this process. It also helps to avoid a tautological use of the concept of culture, in that certain (legal) cultural practices are explained by referring back to certain cultures (Nelken, 2004, p. 8; 2007, p. 247; Saguy and Stuart, 2008, p. 156). The approach adopted here, instead, reveals how culture informs individual decisions regarding legal phenomena, while at the same time demonstrating how individuals themselves perpetuate cultural stereotypes. Indeed, the idea of legal communities, as suggested by Cotterrell (2004), may be closer to the stance adopted here, as it suggests the existence of shared meanings circumscribed to a smaller population (which in this case consists of Portuguese women living in England) than the use of broader concept of national culture allows.

The study of the role of culture in women's legal consciousness should not be confused with the study of legal culture. Friedman introduced the concept of legal culture in the 1970s and highlighted the role of 'social forces' in the operation of the legal system (1975, p. 15). Both legal culture and legal consciousness are interested in the influence of a variety of factors on individuals' relationship with the law. Cotterrell proposes that a legal consciousness approach is part of a subset of forms of discussing legal culture, which he equates with 'law and popular culture' and, more specifically when referring to the work of Ewick and Silbey, and Merry and Yngvesson, law and 'popular consciousness' (Cotterrell, 2004, p. 5). Saguy and Stuart propose that legal consciousness is one of three principal approaches to the relationship between law and culture – that which sees 'law as culture' (2008, pp. 158–161, emphasis in original). Silbey, however, focuses on the locus of enquiry and sees legal culture as tracing the ways in which 'law exists in society generally' and legal consciousness 'the ways in which law is experienced and interpreted by specific individuals as they engage, avoid or resist the law and legal meanings' (2001, p. 8626). Similarly, Marshall refers to legal consciousness as an example of how legal culture extends to everyday life (2006, p. 230).

Legal culture and legal consciousness are both concerned with systems of meaning but take on different approaches to the understanding of how culture influences and perpetuates the law. It is a legal consciousness approach that tries to understand the law in everyday life, that is taken in this paper when analysing women's perceptions and reactions to domestic violence. As Ewick and Silbey suggest, understanding legal consciousness means to understand 'how legality is experienced and understood by ordinary people as they engage, avoid or resist the law and legal meanings' (1998, p. 35) or, as Merry puts it, to answer the question of where the 'categories of the law intersect with daily life' (1990, p. 37).

In a helpful attempt to categorise the variety of papers on legal consciousness published in academic journals, Serban suggests that studies on legal consciousness tend to focus on three broad areas: the mobilisation of rights, relationships with power and the creation of meanings,

identities and subjectivities (2014, p. 777). While the research presented here positions itself in the rights mobilisation area, much in line with Ewick and Silbey's seminal work (Ewick and Silbey, 1998), it does so by looking primarily at the role of national culture in the formation of legality, therefore also considering the creation of meanings and identities.

III. Methodology

The data used in the analysis presented here result from twenty-four interviews with Portuguese women living in England on a permanent basis. The interviews were conducted between 2011 and 2012. Participants were reached mainly in two ways, through local support services and through members of the Portuguese community living in England. Participants were recruited in London, Norfolk and Reading, as these are areas with high density of Portuguese immigrants, visible in the existence of a large number of Portuguese shops, restaurants, media outlets and social organisations. Support services, Portuguese organisations and organisations directed at the Portuguese community were contacted by post, e-mail and telephone. Meetings were set up with representatives of these organisations who, in turn, referred other Portuguese immigrants in the area, who either agreed to be interviewed or were able to indicate someone else who would be. The majority of participants were from London (fifteen) and Norfolk (seven), with the two participants living in Reading recruited through contacts made in London.

A snowballing method was used, building on trust established with members of the community. This consisted of first interviewing women with more prominent roles in the community, who would then reassure other women that the interviews were not intrusive and that they would not have to reveal any personal details that they did not wish to. Participants did not have to be victims of domestic violence to be a part of the research – a fact that was highlighted during the recruitment process. Even though this was made clear to potential participants, the subject of domestic violence deterred a number of women from agreeing to be interviewed. Some women accepted enthusiastically to be interviewed, having understood that the project was on Portuguese culture, and then cancelled the interviews when they realised that it included domestic violence; other women simply said that they were not comfortable talking about it to a stranger or that they had no opinion on the subject.

The fact that victimisation was not part of the recruitment process allowed not only more participants to volunteer to be interviewed, but also reflects the wider purpose of this study. The objective of the research is to understand Portuguese women's perceptions of the justice system in a broad sense and not their victimisation. In the scope of a legal consciousness approach, their subjective experiences are relevant because they reveal their experiences of law in everyday life, rather than an engagement with formal law. As such, it is as important to understand the construction of legality of women who experienced domestic violence, as of those who never experienced it, but might nevertheless one day come in contact with the English justice system. The decision to be more inclusive in recruiting participants also follows Barata *et al.*'s (2005) methodology to study domestic violence amongst Portuguese-speaking women in Canada that was adopted by Sokoloff and Pearce to research immigrant women's legal awareness and responses to domestic violence in Maryland, US (Sokoloff and Pearce, 2011) and by Gleeson to analyse the mobilisation of law of undocumented Latinos, regardless of whether they had actually mobilised the law or not (Gleeson, 2010). Six participants disclosed having been victims of domestic violence. Experiences of direct victimisation will be highlighted in this paper whenever relevant.

The methodology used to gather information consisted of in-depth semi-structured interviews. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed participants to express themselves more freely on these topics than a more structured approach would. This was particularly important as participants were not expected to have knowledge of English law and may have had difficulties

giving an account of their experiences had they not been allowed to tell their stories in the way that best suited them. An interview schedule was used, which concentrated on four broad areas: participants' individual data, participants' understanding of domestic violence and appropriate responses to it, participants' experience with the justice system in England, and participants' views on Portuguese culture and the impact that it had on reactions to domestic violence.

The data were analysed in a first instance using discourse analysis, in which similar responses were grouped under three predetermined headings, namely 'cultural schemas', 'resources' and 'service providers'. These categories then formed the basis of the exploratory study of respondents' legal consciousness, using a grounded theory approach. Although using predetermined categories drawn from a literature review conducted beforehand, the study left the categories themselves open to be completed by the identification of patterns and repetitions in respondents' discourses. As such, the category 'cultural schemas' was used to group aspects related to Portuguese culture and perceptions of domestic violence and responses to it, as respondents chose to identify them. The category 'resources' included length of stay in the country, age and language skills – aspects that had been identified in exiting literature to potentially influence how immigrant women perceive and respond to domestic violence, but also any others that respondents mentioned and had not been identified before, such as economic independence. The category 'service providers' aimed to clarify to what extent perceptions of services (such as their usefulness, cost and accessibility) influenced women's responses to domestic violence (for an exploration of this theme, see Graca, 2015).

An effort was made to recruit participants with a variety of ages and educational backgrounds. Participants' ages ranged from twenty-three to sixty-five years and their educational background from four years of schooling to PhD (fifteen participants had education up to BA level or equivalent, and nine BA level or equivalent or above). Participants were asked to rate their level of English as 'very good', 'good', 'average' or 'poor'; nine out of twenty-four respondents ranked their language skills from 'Average' to 'Poor' and the rest in the remaining categories. There are no particular discrepancies between the population in London and in Norfolk in terms of command of English. The nine respondents who rated their English as 'average' or 'poor' had been living in England for an average of five years, with two living in this country for one month and seven between three and twelve years. Participants' length of stay in England ranged from one month to thirty years, with the majority having been in the country between five and eight years.

Respondents declined to answer questions that related to their income and perceived class, preferring instead to give more generic information regarding socio-economic factors related to household provision and employment status. Because a snowballing method was used and the participation rate was low, a decision was made to accept these answers as indicators of socio-economic status rather than risk alienating participants by pressing them on the questions as they were written in the interview schedule. Moreover, it was found that the class system in Portugal and ideas of class mobility in this country might not equate well with class stratification and mobility in England, thus skewing the analysis, rather than clarifying it. Eight respondents were the main providers of their households; this corresponds to the respondents who were single or divorced; the other respondents shared the provision equally with their partners. Portuguese women are amongst those who most combine paid and unpaid work in Europe (Guerreiro and Carvalho, 2007, p. 136), and this is confirmed by participants' attitudes towards employment and household financial contributions. Respondents in Norfolk displayed lower income and educational levels than those in London and Reading, with the latter also including the respondents with the highest levels of education and command of English.

Sixteen respondents were in a long-term relationship; of these, ten were living with a partner without formalising the relationship and six were married. Only two of the twenty-four respondents did not have any family in England; all others had children, a partner and/or

extended family living in this country with them. Of the twenty-four respondents, five did not have children; all others had one, two or three children. The majority of women who had children gave birth to them in England (twelve out of nineteen). Participants' sexual orientation was not part of the selection process; all participants who were or had been in a relationship said that this was of a heterosexual nature. All of their partners or former partners were Portuguese, except for one. All participants were White, except two, which makes conclusions based on race difficult to establish, particularly as race was not mentioned by any respondent, at any point, in the interviews.

Interviews lasted usually between one and two hours, and were conducted in locations chosen by the participants to ensure that they were comfortable and ease power imbalances that arise in any interview process. The interviews were conducted in Portuguese, which is the first language of both the researcher and the interviewees. It was hoped that this would allow respondents to express themselves more freely, without concerns about the correct use or understanding of the English language. In fact, it was common for participants to use Portuguese and English interchangeably when answering questions, particularly if they had been in England for over eight years and were well integrated in the wider English community. When expressing themselves in Portuguese, it is an English translation of their responses that illustrates the sections of this paper.

In order to establish a rapport with the participants, and in response to their enquiries, the interviewer often revealed personal details, such as region of origin or length of stay in England, during the initial stages of the interviews. This created a certain level of reciprocity and was used to ensure, as much as possible, that the interview dynamic was non-hierarchical. It was likely that the interviewer's socio-economic background (which would come across, for example, in the way she dressed and her regional accent) would impact on respondents' willingness to talk about their own background and personal experiences. A conscious effort was therefore made to reassure participants that responses would be treated in a non-judgemental way; and, moreover, that, although the interviewer was Portuguese herself, she did not live in the same communities as they did, and so would not inadvertently be in contact with them or their relatives once the interviews were over. Responses were recorded whenever participants authorised it, and notes were taken during the interviews. In order to protect participants' anonymity, all names used in this paper are pseudonyms.

IV. Perceptions of domestic violence

Participants were asked in the interviews to describe what they understood by domestic violence, in their own words and without any legal contextualisation from the researcher. 'Domestic violence' is a direct translation of the expression used in Portuguese to refer to all forms of abuse in a domestic setting ('*violência doméstica*'); this was deemed easier to understand by respondents than the expression 'domestic abuse'. Domestic violence was used as a generic category of violent, controlling and coercive behaviour, allowing respondents to include all forms of abuse that they wanted to mention in their accounts. The choice of language used is particularly relevant when studying any immigrant population, as the conceptualisation of the legal phenomena that is made within a group may not align itself completely with that of the justice system of the country of destination. A bottom-up approach to legality that is closer to a European approach to legal consciousness, as described by Hertogh (2004, p. 477), and that recognises individuals' active participation in the creation of legality (Fritsvold, 2009, p. 804) was therefore adopted. As a result, the expression 'domestic violence' is used throughout this paper in its broadest possible sense, and interchangeably with domestic abuse.

When asked to describe domestic violence, eighteen out of the twenty-four respondents mentioned physical and psychological violence. However, the terminology used to describe the

latter was varied, including 'emotional' and 'verbal' violence. The six respondents who did not name either physical or psychological violence mentioned 'emotional violence' and specific types of conduct, such as shouting and name-calling. Indeed, 'verbal' and 'emotional' violence were mentioned by a large number of respondents, with three considering psychological violence as the most insidious and difficult to overcome. Most respondents who mentioned physical and psychological violence then went on to describe in more detail what they meant by these categories of behaviour. 'Hitting' was the most common form of physical violence mentioned, with 'socially isolating' the other, 'being cold', 'diminishing the other', 'being overly jealous' and 'bullying' or 'controlling' given as examples of psychological violence.

Other forms of violence mentioned related to forms of patriarchal violence found in the community, such as men's greater freedom outside the house, men having the last word when it came to 'important' decisions, men's entitlement to having the house clean and tidy without contributing to this, and men's behaviour being excused if fuelled by alcohol, as the accounts by Helena and Beatriz, mentioned below, illustrate.

The community was often described as being 'very traditional' and there was a perception that this reflected Portuguese culture, which, in turn, had a marked influence on women's understanding of and reactions to domestic violence. This became apparent when discussing topics such as the division of work within the household, or parents' relationship with their children.

Catarina, an academic in her twenties, who immigrated to England four years before the interview and was highly involved in the Portuguese and wider English communities, referred to this by saying:

'The Portuguese are very protective of their families, particularly their children. We still hold very different roles [for men and women]; even young couples preserve very different roles for men and women. Women stay at home in the children's first years; there is a certain role that is associated with mothers, with being preoccupied with children.'

Catarina's mother had experienced violence at the hands of her father. Her mother eventually left him and moved with her to a different country. Catarina's perception of domestic life was infused by this experience and her mother's decision to leave her abuser, but not to seek help from any support services. Catarina did not disclose having experienced abuse herself but demonstrated an acute awareness of how family life can be regulated by gender stereotypes that she associated with Portuguese culture, and how these existed in both her mother's generation and her own.

Barata *et al.* revealed that Portuguese-speaking women saw the Portuguese-speaking community as patriarchal and more traditional than the wider Canadian community – a perception that potentially hindered their ability to end relationships in which domestic violence existed (2005, pp. 139, 140). Here, as with Barata *et al.*, patriarchy is seen by respondents such as Catarina and others as a Portuguese characteristic that is either non-existent or at least not as prevalent in the wider English community, with negative implications for Portuguese women's ability to escape abusive relationships.

Elsa, a divorced mother in her forties, who moved to England twelve years before the interview and was actively involved in the Portuguese community in London, contrasted the attitudes in Portugal and England by saying:

'The people here are much freer; women in England have a lot more freedom. There is no support in Portugal. Here is very different. People are very well informed. Portuguese people here change their attitude. The system is much more efficient here.'

Elsa experienced domestic violence for a number of years and was positively impressed with the response from the police and other support services in London. She disputed the notion that

Portuguese women only stayed with their abusers if they wanted to, and related their responses to domestic violence, instead, to the reinforcement of cultural attitudes and lack of support from the community itself. She volunteered in a local Portuguese group and said:

'I often talk to women who have no alternatives. One big help in leaving is the support provided by the system. In my case, the police did an extremely important work; went to my house, changed the locks. My husband was handcuffed and taken away very quickly.'

A lack of support from the community can be inferred from the discourse of respondents who blamed women for their victimisation. This was particularly the case when women's behaviour was seen to challenge traditional conceptions of family life. These respondents were mainly well integrated in the local Portuguese communities and had lower levels of education and little day-to-day contact with non-Portuguese individuals. Alice, a housewife in her thirties, with two children and twelve years of formal education but a low command of the English language, despite living in England for six years, said:

'It [domestic violence] often starts with verbal violence. It only goes as far as physical violence if the woman allows it, if she doesn't stop it. Today, women do not allow themselves to be beaten and shut up but I know cases of women in their 60s who always endured violence and did nothing about it.'

Some respondents gave more specific examples and said that it was up to women to try to deal with the situation sensibly and not to provoke men if they arrived home drunk. This confirms the claims of Beatriz, whose (then) husband was violent towards her when drunk and who said that there were sections in the community that condoned alcoholism and excused drunken behaviour, placing the onus of avoiding violence on the women who were victimised.

Beatriz was in her thirties and had been living in England for eight years before the interview; she was interviewed in London, where she revealed that did she had not only to face violence from her husband and the fear of losing custody of her child, but also to deal with pressure from the community and her own family to keep the marriage intact:

'For a while, I was seen as *persona non grata*. I avoided certain places and took myself out of that community. They knew that he drank too much, he did already in Portugal, but no one sees it as a problem. I was the problem for acting against him.'

Another respondent, Helena, in her sixties and living in Norfolk for the past ten years, said that, in many households, women engaged in paid employment and men helped with household tasks but, if women went to work and did not leave the house in what can be considered a 'good state', for example of cleanliness, then it was 'normal' that there would be problems when the men arrived home in the evening. Helena did not disclose experiencing domestic violence; she had little contact with anyone outside the local Portuguese community and had low levels of education and command of English. She was interviewed while accessing support services in Norfolk.

Some respondents provided a more nuanced definition of domestic violence. Barbara described it as 'behaviour that is considered abusive by those who suffered it'. Her self-confessed difficulty in defining domestic violence lay in the fact that, according to her, the same conduct could be considered abusive or not, depending on the context and the participants. Barbara did not place the blame for the violence on the victim, but instead drew attention to the volatile nature of the concept, in which different people can interpret the same form of behaviour differently. Barbara's atypical approach to the subject may reflect her social and economic standing. She was not

inserted in the Portuguese community, was educated to PhD level and had a lot of contact with members of a variety of communities in England.

Respondents who experienced domestic violence added to their descriptions behaviour that they encountered during their victimisation, such as 'forcing others to obey every whim' and 'controlling the other's phone calls' or restricting access to a passport.

V. Reactions to domestic violence

Barata *et al.* demonstrated the existence of a large gap between Portuguese-speaking women's opinions of what women should do in situations of domestic violence and what they thought other Portuguese-speaking women actually did in these circumstances (2005, p. 138). Cultural stereotypes, both within and towards the Portuguese-speaking community, the inability to see patriarchy as non-culturally specific and the fact that Portuguese-speaking women acted out these cultural stereotypes when reacting to domestic violence were all important factors in explaining this discrepancy (Barata *et al.*, 2005, pp. 139, 140). In order to assess the existence of a similar mechanism operating in the Portuguese community in England, respondents were asked what women should do when experiencing domestic violence, as well as what they thought other Portuguese women did in these situations.

When answering the question of what women should do in situations of domestic violence, respondents agreed that the violence should stop. The course of action deemed appropriate to make it stop was, however, not the same for all. Carolina said that she would not call the police in a situation of domestic violence because the police had nothing to do with family matters and should only be called to deal with 'crimes'. Carolina was in her sixties and was interviewed while accessing a support service in Norfolk not related to domestic violence. She had moved to England two years before the interview. Her levels of education were low and she had some contact with the local Portuguese community but not with the wider English community. Carolina was not the only respondent to say that the police should only be called to deal with 'serious' matters; however, she was the only one to consider domestic violence as a whole as a 'non-serious' matter.

Her stance is unique amongst respondents as other women tended instead to see domestic violence either as a continuum of abusive behaviour or as outright unacceptable, and would use the justice system to address it, unreservedly or under certain circumstances. Indeed, all other women would use the legal system if informal attempts to resolve the situation failed, thus confirming that legality is dynamic and, as such, individuals fluctuate between forms of legal consciousness when faced with different circumstances (Ewick and Silbey, 1998, p. 50; Fritsvold, 2009, p. 805; Olson and Batjer, 1999, p. 155).

Respondents were then asked what they thought other Portuguese women would do in situations of domestic violence. They were asked to draw from the knowledge of friends or cases they knew in the Portuguese community, if they so wished. Adopting this speculative approach allowed respondents to speak more freely about possible reactions to domestic violence that occurred in the community, including those that they thought might not be deemed socially acceptable. The same approach was used by Young (2014) when developing the concept of second-order legal consciousness. Implicit to this question is the possibility that the behaviour that other Portuguese women adopt might be different from that which respondents described as the appropriate one – a concept that they generally had no problem engaging with and indeed led women to become noticeably more relaxed and open to volunteer information. This question therefore worked well in overcoming the problem of social desirability in interviews, where respondents give an answer that they perceive to be what the interviewer is expecting from them, rather than their actual views on the subject.

There was a large consensus amongst respondents that Portuguese women would either endure a violent relationship or hide it as much as possible (a total of twenty out of twenty-four respondents),

with five respondents saying that Portuguese women would both endure and actively hide domestic violence. These findings are in line with the results from Barata *et al.*'s research, where participants also said that they would put an end to a violent relationship if they experienced it themselves, but that other Portuguese women would endure and hide it (2005, p. 138). Some respondents added that Portuguese women would endure domestic violence until it became so serious that a third party, such as neighbours or the police, would intervene. Carla, a highly skilled, well-educated mother in her thirties, living in Reading for seven years, illustrated this by saying: 'They will try to hide it. The same as in Portugal, they will hold on until the situation becomes so bad that it is no longer sustainable or the family has to intervene, for example.'

Carla was drawing from the example of her Portuguese neighbours, whom she said were difficult to help, as they would see her intervention as interference in their private lives. She associated this with Portuguese culture, particularly with a great desire for privacy. As such, it was not culturally expected that one would intervene in these situations, in the same way as it was not expected that women would seek help, unless the situation became unmanageable.

Catarina, in a similar way to Carla, suggested that Portuguese women would most likely hide the abuse. She drew attention to the importance of culture in determining Portuguese women's reactions and stated that this would make them endure and hide a violent relationship, especially if this led to a loss in social or economic status. In line with the findings of Barata *et al.* (2005, p. 149), Catarina attributed women's behaviour to 'Latin culture', which, according to her, differentiated Portuguese women's behaviour from that of women from other cultures. Catarina thought that Latin culture led Portuguese women to value privacy and protect their family lives from outside intervention, which in turn encouraged them to endure and hide domestic violence.

Similarly, Alexandra, a businesswoman with twelve years of formal education, who also lived in London but had been in this country for considerably longer (twenty-six years) and, being in her forties, was older than both Carla and Catarina, described the Portuguese community as: 'The community is more traditional and less free than the English. Much more conditioned by family, community and what others think of us than the English.'

Other respondents attributed hiding violence to pressure from the community to accept it as part of a relationship (as Beatriz's story reveals), but also to feelings of guilt and to finding excuses for the violence suffered (as Carla and Helena's discourses reveal).

The impact of Portuguese culture on women's reactions to domestic violence is, however, not straightforward. Although Elsa concurred with the respondents above and Barata *et al.*'s findings that there was something specific to Portuguese culture that was related to a heightened patriarchal attitude, which impacted on individual attitudes towards domestic violence, Elsa also highlighted the permeability of Portuguese immigrants to the receiving country's culture and customs. Elsa developed this point by stating that:

'There is a lot of shame in Portugal, here [in England] people feel a lot more at ease and lose their boundaries. There is an openness of mind here that is contagious. This is a country focused on women and with empowered women.'

Elsa was not alone in drawing attention to a change in behaviour in immigrants when arriving in England. Diana, also a divorced mother, who had moved to England three years before the interview, had twelve years of formal education and worked as a cleaner, also described situations in which Portuguese men and women changed their behaviour in a way that is more reflective of mainstream English culture, in what she saw as both a positive and a negative influence of English culture on Portuguese immigrants. These included not paying as much attention to children's well-being as they would in Portugal and going out at night much more often than they would in Portugal. It could be argued that Diana's more recent move to England, and therefore

lesser exposure to a different culture, led her to find changes of behaviour in other Portuguese immigrants more striking than they did for Elsa. The impact of acculturation on perceptions of family life is discussed in more detail in the next section of this paper.

VI. Discussion

Research on immigrant women and domestic violence has found that there are a number of added cultural barriers that impact how women relate to the justice system of the country of destination when faced with domestic violence. Often, these barriers are related to practices that exist in different cultures (see Menjívar and Salcido, 2002; Gill, 2004; Anitha, 2008; Burman and Chantler, 2005; Earner, 2010; Vidales, 2010). The factors identified in the research presented in this paper as influencing Portuguese women in their responses to domestic violence may, therefore, not be present in Portuguese culture alone. This aim of this paper, however, is not to make a comparison between different legal cultures, but to identify the ways in which Portuguese culture influences immigrant women, regardless of whether a similar type of influence can be found in other cultures or not.

The most salient cultural factors that emerge from respondents' discourses as having an influence on Portuguese women's perceptions of and reactions to domestic violence can be aggregated under the themes of 'familism' and 'shame and community pressure', with 'acculturation' playing an important mediating role in the dynamic between individual choice and cultural pressures in terms of acceptable behaviour. Each of these will now be discussed in more detail.

6.1 Familism

Familism, or the existence of close familial ties, usually means that women put the interests of the family ahead of their own (Vidales, 2010, p. 536; Fuchsel *et al.*, 2012, p. 269; Fuchsel, 2013, p. 380; Kyriakakis *et al.*, 2015, p. 12; Tonsing, 2016, p. 23). This often translates into women not leaving abusive relationships in order to keep the family unit intact, or feeling embarrassed to seek help for fear of showing that they are not meeting family expectations (Vidales, 2010, p. 536; Fuchsel *et al.*, 2012, p. 270; Fuchsel, 2013, pp. 386, 387; Tonsing, 2016, p. 25). Although the term 'familism' is most often associated with Latinas, it also describes behaviour adopted by Portuguese, Chinese, Korean and South-Asian women (Aboim, 2007; Barata *et al.*, 2005; Midlarsky *et al.*, 2006; Kyriakakis *et al.*, 2015; Tonsing, 2016).

Almost all respondents mentioned being close to one's family as a Portuguese characteristic that differentiated Portuguese women from English women. Barbara illustrated this when she said:

'We are less individualistic than the English. Whilst an English couple will maintain very much the individuality of each partner, this is not the case with the Portuguese, where the family unit gains precedence to the individual. In these cases, it is more difficult to leave this relationship.'

In line with the findings of wider literature, respondents who disclosed having experienced domestic violence refrained from engaging with the justice system (altogether or for a period of time) to avoid negative repercussions for their children. For example, Amélia, a writer in her fifties, living in London for eight years and well integrated in the Portuguese and wider English communities, stated: 'I didn't go to the police because I didn't want my children to have a father who had been in jail.'

Similarly, Joana said:

'I never complained about my ex-husband during a three year period after the separation because I didn't want my children and grandchildren to have a father who had been in prison. The name needs to be preserved; it may have implications on children's future. Not in the UK but in Portugal and Africa where one's reputation (and family reputation) are very important.'

Joana had dual citizenship: she was Portuguese and a national from an African country. She had lived in England for over ten years and was now in her fifties. She had twelve years of education and was heavily involved in the Portuguese community in London.

Some women were deterred from engaging with formal instances of support because of the possibility of losing their children to social services and the desire to protect them from stigma. This contrasts with feelings solely associated with personal or family shame determining their actions. Respondents stated that they did not leave their abusers immediately because they put what they perceived to be, at the time, the best interest of their children ahead of their own, and not because leaving an abusive relationship, in itself, would bring shame to themselves or their extended family. Children took on a significant role in determining women's behaviour to leave their abusers, confirming the importance of familism in their decisions, but also demonstrating that familism can operate independently from shame and pressure from the community, which will be discussed in more detail in the following subsection.

Familism can isolate and repress women, but the existence of a close family network can also be an important source of support (Sokoloff, 2008, p. 247; Sokoloff and Pearce, 2011, pp. 257, 261). Indeed, close family relationships were generally seen as a distinctive and positive cultural characteristic by respondents. Alice demonstrated this by saying: 'The Portuguese community is healthier than the English community. They are much closer in terms of family relationships.'

This is corroborated by Patrícia, who was in her late thirties, had four years of formal education and ran a coffee shop in the local Portuguese community. Having lived in London for twelve years before the interview, when asked what was distinctive about Portuguese culture, she replied:

'We're family oriented. The Portuguese are very sociable. The Portuguese are very united when it comes to family life. They like to live as a community a lot and they integrate well with other communities. They bring a traditional vision of family life with them that they uphold here.'

For some respondents, having a close family network in the country, even if consisting of only a small number of relatives, was seen to be essential to their ability to escape domestic violence. In particular, it meant that they had somewhere safe to go if they chose to leave the abuser. For these women, the extended family, rather than being a source of pressure to keep the family together, may actually provide a pragmatic and immediate form of support (for example, by providing temporary accommodation and financial help).

As some respondents highlighted, also important is the role that the extended family can play in terms of providing emotional support. Portuguese women are unlikely to access non-statutory organisations to address domestic violence, and they do not associate seeking counselling with taking positive steps to exit a situation of violence (Graca, 2015). By enabling women to talk to someone who could potentially help them choose the most appropriate course of action, familism takes on an essential role in providing them with the space and time to find a suitable strategy to exit a violent relationship. This means that, although familism may be keeping Portuguese women from resorting to the English justice system to address situations of domestic violence, it may also be helping them to escape violence in a way that they are more comfortable with.

6.2 Shame and community pressure

Shame has been found to have a particularly important impact on some immigrant women's ability to escape domestic violence. This often translates into women hiding the abuse from other family members and the community, who they think expect them to meet predetermined social expectations of family life (Chew-Graham *et al.*, 2002, p. 341; Bostock *et al.*, 2009, p. 103; Burman and Chantler, 2005, p. 69; Fuchsel *et al.*, 2012, p. 269; Gill, 2004, p. 476; Kulwicki *et al.*, 2010, p. 729; Midlarsky *et al.*, 2006, p. 287; Vidales, 2010, p. 536; Wallach *et al.*, 2010, p. 1285; Dhar, 2014, p. 550).

Respondents often described the Portuguese community in an unflattering way when it came to addressing matters of a personal nature. Some of them described the community as judgemental and its members as 'living off appearances'. This has a potentially large impact on women's attitudes towards domestic violence and explains why respondents thought that other members of the community would deal with it quietly. In this setting, shame and fear of gossiping may be preventing women from disclosing domestic violence, if not from taking action altogether.

While some respondents mentioned the existence of pressure from the community on Portuguese women to accept violent behaviour, this did not seem to operate in the same way as it did for other immigrant communities, for example, where issues of family honour are more prevalent (see Wellock, 2008; Hague *et al.*, 2010; Kallivayalil, 2010). Most respondents mentioned a generalised sense of shame as the explanation for the apparent inaction of Portuguese women towards domestic violence, rather than shame associated with loss of reputation for the whole family, as the term 'family honour' would indicate. Even respondents who did not take formal steps against their abusers because they did not want them to have a parent who had been in prison did not mention how publicly disclosing the abuse would impact the family as a whole. With the exception of Joana, who mentioned a desire to protect the family name as a reason for not going to the police to address the abuse she suffered, respondents focused instead on the feelings and well-being of the children as their main concern. There seemed to be a more generalised anxiety with how others perceived success at an individual level than a preoccupation with honour that extended to the family unit as a whole.

Diana describes the Portuguese community in London as:

'People like to talk in the Portuguese community. They are also very envious and extremely concerned with appearances, especially with giving the idea that they are well off when they go back home. They'll spend a lot of money on cars and shoes to show off in Portugal but then live poorly here. People will always talk about everything; gossip is easy to come by. I don't care much about it.'

Shame can also contribute to hiding domestic violence for fear of losing one's socio-economic status. Catarina stated that women in this situation would be apparently accepting a situation of violence in order to preserve their own and their family's social standing. In effect, all of the women who experienced domestic violence were eventually made financially worse off when they left their abusers. Alexandra, for example, left a life of luxury behind and 'spent a lot of money on lawyers'. Alexandra was married to her abuser for eleven years. At first, she had little contact with the Portuguese community but she now volunteers with it in London. She described her life while married to her abuser as 'well off' and highly controlled. Her husband was also Portuguese and used to 'show her off' to his friends and work colleagues. She said the following when describing the Portuguese community:

'The community is disorganised but very tight. It's not open, not honest. There is shame in admitting that something is wrong in your family. Most people come here wanting to build big houses in Portugal. They work all day, every day, and don't mingle with the community. They don't know what is out there. What their next door neighbour's name is. They live on very tight budgets, and control their finances a lot.'

Other respondents who experienced domestic violence were left without a source of income and had to relocate to other countries or parts of England. The shame associated with the loss of socio-economic status was not central for their decision-making but nonetheless contributed to delay leaving the abusers.

Shame and community pressure have a clear impact on women's ability to escape domestic violence, but this is moderated by a variety of factors. They operate in the background, informing legality, but giving way when other factors are involved in the decision-making process, such as the well-being of children. Its impact can be better understood by discussing another characteristic that emerges from respondents' statements, which is acculturation.

6.3 Acculturation

Reactions to domestic violence are not the same for the community as a whole. While certain aspects such as familism and the importance of children in women's decision-making cut across the whole group, others such as shame and acculturation play a less clear part in respondents' reactions to domestic violence. Acculturation can be defined as the assimilation of the culture of the country of destination. It is a process that can be more or less consciously engaged with, and immigrants sometimes use to find solutions for difficulties that they encounter, such as securing a job in a new country (Ben-Porat, 2010, p. 2488; Belknap and VanderVusse, 2010, p. 338; Menjívar and Salcido, 2002, p. 902; Kim-Goh and Baello, 2008, p. 653; Mose and Gillum, 2016, p. 53).

As discussed earlier, some respondents, such as Catarina, Elsa and Diana, mentioned 'Latin culture' or 'Portuguese culture' as a source of pressure for women to hide domestic violence. They said that this culture gave men more freedom in and outside households, and encouraged women to value privacy and family life. They thought that culture had a strong impact on Portuguese women's ability to escape violence because it reinforced traditional stereotypes and the machismo present in the community. Examples of these can be seen in the accounts, already mentioned here, of respondents, such as Helena, who blamed women for not leaving the house clean and tidy before going to work, or made excuses for men's violent behaviour when drunk.

Without denying that Portuguese culture may influence women's behaviour towards domestic violence, other respondents said, however, that a large proportion of Portuguese immigrants changed their behaviour when they came to England. This change resulted in acting in a way associated by respondents with the 'wider English community', fuelled by the added freedom that they perceived that it offered women. By wider English community, respondents meant a mixture of Western European communities that were not Portuguese. They claimed that, as a result of the exposure to 'English culture', Portuguese women were no longer worried about leaving a partner, should there be any violence. Elsa, for example, talked about a relative who is now in her sixties and who never thought about leaving her husband while she lived in Portugal. When she moved to England, however, she changed her behaviour dramatically by having a boyfriend and taking holidays abroad with him – something that would be deemed very unusual in Portugal.

Diana mentioned Portuguese immigrants who adopted what she considered to be an English approach to life by displaying a lot more independence, going out clubbing and not being as preoccupied with their children as they would be in Portugal. Specifically in relation to domestic violence, she said:

'I know women who are abused and don't leave their partners but this is because they say that they love them, not because of a cultural or community pressure. Women are very savvy once they come here; they get by just fine and use the services if they need them.'

It is difficult to know how widespread changes in behaviour amongst Portuguese immigrants are. It is not unusual for immigrants from the same country to display different levels of acculturation. Most often, first-generation immigrants are less likely to integrate well into other communities in the country of destination, preferring to stay in close contact with the community of the country of origin. These immigrants tend to be older and to have fewer language skills. Conversely, second-

generation immigrants tend to be younger, with better language skills, and integrate better in the community of the country of destination (Abrego, 2011, pp. 347, 354; Rocha-Trindade, 2006, p. 9).

Respondents consisted of women who were very involved in the Portuguese community and with little contact with the wider English community, women who lived in close proximity with the Portuguese community but who also had friends and jobs that put them in constant contact with the wider English community, and women who were well integrated in the wider English community – that is, whose jobs and network of friends and acquaintances were in the wider English community – and had little contact with the Portuguese community. Looking at the levels of contact of respondents with the local Portuguese community and the wider English community, it would seem that there are nearly as many deeply involved with one as there are with the other. This may correspond to a difference between Portuguese immigrants who came to England in the 1960s, usually with low levels of education, and immigrants who came to England in the 1990s and 2000s, who usually have better language skills and tend not to live in areas that are as densely populated by other Portuguese immigrants (Malheiros, 2010, pp. 135, 137). Respondents presented broadly the same characteristics and corresponding levels of acculturation as those identified in other research, with the exception of age not being a good indicator of how well integrated someone is in either the Portuguese or the wider community. Both older and younger respondents could be found to have jobs, friends and acquaintances in the Portuguese community, as well as in the wider community.

VII. Conclusion

Portuguese culture influences the perception immigrant women have of domestic violence and of what is appropriate conduct to address it. In many respects, the responses the women interviewed adopted or saw fit to adopt in situations of domestic violence do not differ from those of other immigrant (and indeed domestic) populations. However, by associating Portuguese culture to certain (usually, more traditional) forms of behaviour, these women are themselves, to a large extent, perpetuating the cultural stereotypes that they saw as distinctive of this culture. As a result, they behave according to cultural and social expectations that they saw as solely Portuguese, even though they may be found in a cross-section of cultures. There is, nonetheless, a certain consistency in the forms of behaviour that are deemed acceptable that are specific to the population researched and worth highlighting.

The women interviewed largely did not see domestic violence as acceptable behaviour, but there was room for variation when it came to determining when to engage the justice system to address it. This was particularly visible when respondents were asked what they thought other Portuguese women would do when faced with domestic violence. Although most women said that they would stop the violence if they were victimised and considered using the justice system in doing so, they thought that other women would hide and endure violence. The role of 'Latin culture' or Portuguese culture in informing (other) women's reactions to domestic violence is very salient in respondents' statements and reflects earlier findings by Barata *et al.* (2005).

Portuguese culture in some cases reinforced an acceptance of what can be described as behaviour derived from male privilege (such as women being chastised for not leaving the house clean or taking good care of children). Individuals who were more susceptible to this type of pressure were those more involved with Portuguese communities and with little contact with other communities. In these circumstances, shame and pressure from the Portuguese community played an important role in women's willingness to engage with the justice system to address domestic violence. Seeking help to address violent behaviour that is to be expected as a result of male privilege, or because it was precipitated by the victim, would not be deemed acceptable. This, however, does not detract from the fact that, although some women would not think it appropriate to seek help

under such circumstances, more would do so unreservedly. Important in this dynamic is acculturation and the exposure to what respondents called the 'English community'.

Shame and community pressure may lead women to hide the abuse and address domestic violence informally, particularly because of pressure from what Chew-Graham *et al.* (2002, p. 342) termed the 'community grapevine' – that is, the possibility of unacceptable behaviour being known quickly throughout the community and leading to negative repercussion for those who engaged in it. However, acculturation plays a balancing role in this respect for some women. As would be expected, women who were highly involved in the Portuguese community were more prone to be influenced by shame and pressure from this community. Not all respondents living in a Portuguese community in England, however, conformed to this pressure. Some immigrants, instead, adopted cultural traits they associated with English culture, and behaved in ways that they would not otherwise have done. The influence of acculturation needs, nevertheless, to be articulated with other cultural and individual characteristics, such as the support provided by the extended family that may offer a viable alternative to the justice system when escaping an abusive relationship and, as such, still detracts women from engaging with the English justice system.

Although shame and pressure from the community do have an impact on respondents' perceptions of and reactions to domestic violence, this is somewhat secondary to the role of familism. The extended family can provide a level of emotional, financial and practical support that service providers are not deemed to offer. Importantly, the extended family provides this support under a layer of discretion that the justice system cannot match. Having children was the most important deciding factor for women escaping violence, with the children's well-being taking precedence over any decision to leave or stay with the abuser. Respondents who suffered domestic violence and had children stayed with the abuser, or at least did not report the abusive behaviour to the police, as long as they thought that this was most beneficial for their children, even if not for themselves.

To fully understand the complex nature of immigrants' legal consciousness, a monolithic perception of national culture is not appropriate. Culture is a broad concept that needs to be deconstructed into the cultural characteristics or factors that influence a particular group (in this case, familism, shame and community pressure, and acculturation). Only when these cultural characteristics are identified can the dynamic and evolving nature of legal consciousness surface. It is important that service providers and law-enforcement agencies understand that Portuguese culture is not static and does not operate at the same level throughout the Portuguese immigrant population living in England. While some Portuguese immigrants live in very close contact with the Portuguese community, others prefer not to engage with other immigrants with the same nationality as them. Some Portuguese immigrants have a very good command of English and high levels of education, others do not.

The diversified impact of cultural factors in women's perceptions and reactions to domestic violence needs therefore to be taken in context and cannot be ascertained without a discussion of how both structural and personal circumstances inform legality. The approach suggested in this paper to better understand these is to unpick the constituent parts of legality, namely the schemas and individual resources that are available to each individual, and analyse them in light of structural factors. Culture has an important role in this dynamic but the extent to which it influences women's perceptions of and reactions to domestic violence, and the ways in which this influence manifests itself, would not have been truly understood without a multilayered approach that takes into account not only the different aspects of culture itself, but also the different dimensions that inform women's experiences of legality, as women and as immigrants, essentially revealing the connection between structure and agency, between schemas and resources.

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