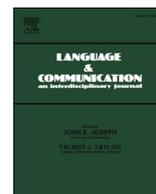


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Translocalisation of values, relationality and offence

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the connection between offence and morality in segments of an hour-long life-story interview with two Latin American migrants in London, in which the participants recount interpersonal conflictive moments with co-ethnics.

It shows that causing and taking offence is largely about the translocalisation of values to a new space where social and moral orders become unstable as the organisation of the social group is contingent on new socioeconomic realities. This, in turn, may generate conflicting understandings of what constitutes “right” or “wrong” ways of acting.

It maintains that in order to understand the valence and reverberations of the offensive actions reported and gauge whose moral grounds can be legitimately validated and by whom, the wider relational context in which the offender and offended parties’ relationship is embedded and the place which it occupies within societal structures should be considered.

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1. Introduction

In this paper, I explore the connection between offence and morality bearing in mind the close yet subtly distinct connection between them and the burgeoning interest it has recently received in language and communication studies.

Testament to the increasing attention that offence and morality have received is the current special issue for which this paper is written. Offence has been on the pragmatics agenda for over a decade now (e.g., [Bousfield, 2008](#)). Both offence and its reactions ([Haugh, 2015](#)) have received attention in a range of linguacultural settings. Despite varied findings, studies coalesce in their understanding that impoliteness arises from the actions that one or more mutually ratified interactional participants in a given relationship orient to as (ostensibly) offensive ([Bousfield, 2008](#); cf. [Kádár and Márquez Reiter 2015](#)) and, that impolite actions or subjects invite evaluations along a right-wrong binary. As a result, issues of morality, largely understood here as a set of shared values that help to explain given sociocultural practices, have gained currency, especially, though not limited to, by scholars of (im)politeness (e.g., [Kádár, 2017](#)).

Research on what we may term ‘victimhood culture’ ([Campbell and Manning, 2018](#)), microaggressions ([McTernan, 2018](#)) and manifestations of “perceived” offence have pointed out the challenges of predicting and tracking offence ([Robles and Castor, 2019](#)) and cast some doubt on the one-to-one relationship between offence and impoliteness (e.g., [Haugh and Sinkeviciute, 2018](#)). The usability and affordances of various social media have added complexity to everyday practices and posed analytic challenges. It has called into question the extent to which actions which are oriented to as offensive are always impolite (see [Culpeper and Haugh, 2020](#) on the metalinguistic and metapragmatics of offence), especially in the contemporary social media settings where they have received most attention (e.g., [Tagg et al., 2017](#)).

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As a departure from mediated settings, the paper brings to life some of the experiences of Latin Americans in London gathered in life-story interviews (Atkinson, 1998) and insights drawn from ethnographic fieldwork. It focuses on a phenomenon that is on everyone's doorsteps but has been largely neglected in pragmatics:¹ migration. It examines the practices of members of this social group as they regularly interact on the general basis of mutual expectations and a common identity.

The conflicts recounted in the stories and their evaluation provide a commanding viewpoint from which to understand the social universe and the moral alternatives faced by its social actors. Indeed, it is in the perceived rupture of norms and in their concomitant condemnation, as reported in these stories, that we can best observe moralities (Malinowski, 1922). Moral evaluations, however, are not fixed; they are dynamically constructed and contingent on the lived experiences that are invoked by the storytellers. Goffman (1983) demonstrated that morality is a ubiquitous dimension of evaluations of any natural fact of life in so far as they are assessed as right or wrong. Morality thus helps us to shine light on how appropriacy is understood in a given sociocultural field (Bourdieu, 1983).

In this paper, I analyse segments of an hour-long life-story interview with two economic Latin American migrants in London, in which the participants talk about their migration trajectories and recount interpersonal conflictive moments. In these interviews, the actions of co-ethnics are assessed as morally wrong and, in some cases, offensive. The narrated actions are presented as undoubtedly wrong with reference to societal canons back home, and as having caused offence in the Latin American social group that the participants are now part of, thus illustrating a common dilemma resulting from being transnational (Bucholtz and Skapoulli, 2009). Their relationship and, more specifically, the expected assistance and behaviour in kind that acquainted members of the social group receive from one another is evaluated according to a resituated normative understanding of how people act, or ought to act, with distant relatives, friends and acquaintances in situations of need while they live abroad. This resituated understanding needs to be considered in the light of the structural conditions in which Latin Americans in London are primarily immersed. Latin Americans are employed in the lower echelons of the economy, under precarious conditions (Butler, 2004) and with limited mobility beyond the social group (McIlwaine and Bunge, 2016). The kind of help they can provide for each other is, inevitably, limited too.

I argue that, in order to understand the valence and reverberations of the offensive actions reported in these migrant stories, and in order to gauge whose moral grounds can be legitimately validated and by whom, the wider relational context in which the offender and offended parties' relationship is embedded and the place which it occupies within societal structures should be considered. For the participants of this study, who mainly socialise with co-ethnics, and for many other migrants, this involves the social order on which relationships are established back home and in diaspora.

In recounting taking offence and offering evaluations of wrongdoing, the participants calibrate their relational needs and the potential ramifications that their practices may have here and there (i.e., back home and in diaspora). I demonstrate that the perceived inappropriacy of a given action and its orientation as offensive by the participants cannot always be explicated in terms of impoliteness, whether seen as (un)intentional offence (Bousfield, 2008) or actions falling short of social expectations (Culpeper, 2011). In some cases, offence is the result of the participants' perceived rupture of the norms that constitute the moral order in diaspora, that of established migrants vs. recent arrivals, without major interpersonal considerations, thus illustrating a case where offence and impoliteness are distinct.

The life-story interviews (Atkinson, 1998) analysed in this paper coupled with conversations with Latin Americans in two London enclaves – Seven Sisters Market and the then Elephant & Castle shopping centre – two important sites of *latinidad* in the city – contained an important number of stories where conflict was present as a result of unmet social expectations with regards to what was felt as unequal reciprocity (e.g., Culpeper and Tantucci, 2021). The analysis provides first order knowledge of their meaning couched in second-order terms.

Before doing so, I offer a précis of the research context and a description of the methods used in the study. This is followed by an explanation of the kind of stories we focus on, an analysis of Examples and finally by the conclusions.

2. Research context and methods

The data was collected in Latin American enclaves in London: in and around the Seven Sisters Market and the Elephant & Castle shopping centre in 2016. It comprises 47 life-story interviews (Atkinson, 1998) with Spanish-speaking Latin American migrants across the life span – from 20-year-olds to senior citizens – as part of a larger project on the cultural practice of *palanca*.² Prior to this, I had been conducting ethnographic work in the community for *circa* three years. The data collection was thus facilitated by the fact that I was a familiar face for many of the participants. The observations and recordings I previously conducted between, 2014–2016 also help to provide a backdrop for the life-story interviews. Overall, the database from which the examples analysed are taken comprises 50 h of observations, 47 interviews, and documentary evidence (e.g., local and national press and media) gathered between 2013 and 2016.

¹ See Garcés Conejos Blitvich (2018) on Latinex identity in the US.

² *Palanca* is generally understood as comprising social networks or connections that have been built over the years, principally based on, though not limited to, the nuclear and extended family as well as with close ties. These connections enable those who are part of the network to obtain favours such as obtaining employment or to gain access to scarce resources.

Almost 250,000 Latin Americans live in the UK with more than half of them in London (145,000). Over a third of Latin Americans are Brazilians followed by Colombians, who constitute the largest Spanish-speaking national group with circa 30,000 members (McIlwaine and Bunge, 2016).³ The vast majority of Latin Americans in London have arrived since 2000 for principally economic reasons. The economic crisis of 2008 resulted in onward migration of Latin Americans from mainland Europe, principally from Spain. Although employed in many spheres of the London labour market, the majority are unable to make use of their professional skills. More than half are employed in low-skilled and low-paid jobs in cleaning, catering and hospitality services, mainly in the co-ethnic niche economy, despite having had careers in areas such as accountancy, engineering and social work (Márquez Reiter and Martín Rojo, 2015). Generally speaking, their working conditions are precarious as observed by flexploitation (e.g., low pay, zero-hour contracts, etc.) and social exclusion (e.g., high costs of living in London and welfare cuts). They live in impoverished areas of the city, along with other minority groups, in overcrowded living spaces, in what, in short, arguably constitute self-contained ghettos (Kymlicka, 2001). It follows that the help they can provide for each other is somewhat limited to, for example, sleeping on someone's couch for a limited period of time; covering for someone's work shift in the early hours of the morning; and helping to resolve culture shock when life in London is not the way migrants imagined it would be. This means that their agency, broadly conceived of as the ability or willingness to act (Laidlaw, 2013), is curtailed. However, their accountability, generally understood as the obligation or willingness to accept responsibility for one's actions and to answer for them, is not. This is observed in the examples in the participant's taking some responsibility for having helped to incorporate fellow nationals into the co-ethnic labour market.

The stories represent situations of cultural encounter and change. In these, the interview participants (Carolina and Beatriz) narrate some of the ways in which Spanish-speaking Latin Americans from different backgrounds engage with each other to sustain a life in London. Their stories allow us to hone in on the way unexpected events are used to (re)produce and project normative social practice (Ochs and Capps, 2001). In telling these stories, the participants (re)construct their experiences and social expectations by articulating their own voices, evoking that of an alleged wrongdoer and the discourses that circulate in their wider social group. This serves to confirm the storytellers' mutual understanding that an infringement has occurred and to critique it. The combination of voices produces a double metapragmatic articulation (Boltanski, 2011; Martín Rojo and Márquez Reiter, 2019). In critiquing the behaviour of others, the storytellers interweave the description of the events that led to the offence and the offensive act itself with its evaluation, thus making 'a propositional claim but also staking a practico-moral claim' (Jayyusi, 1995, p. 87). Specifically, the narration of the events is interspersed with reconstructions of the 'social oughts' that underlie the actions of the storyteller vs. the 'moral oughts' that the beneficiary of those actions should have followed (Márquez Reiter and Kádár, 2022). These oughts are evaluated anew: in the context of an environment in which agency is limited by structural conditions. In telling these stories, the storytellers demonstrated their mediated capacity to act (Ahearn, 2011) as they relived the unfolding events by stepping outside of them and critically evaluating the stories as well as their place inside them (Keane, 2014). One way in which they did this was by jointly constructing (Bergmann, 1998) 'their moral worth relative to the moral worth of other individuals' (Douglas, 1970, p. 6) (i.e., alleged offenders).

Drawing on Günthner's work on exemplary stories (1995), the stories examined contain accounts of conflict arising from the antagonism between two or more persons, namely accounts of a series of related events or experiences when 'morally sensitive evaluations of persons or their actions are at stake' (p. 148). Speaker judgements are used here 'to evaluate the 'rightness' or 'wrongness' of [their] actions.' (p. 148). In this sense, the stories reveal the moral values, that is, complex social constructions of "right" and "wrong", that the participants orient to as relevant in their practices and in their lives in general.

The stories are tied to one another and occupy a large chunk of the participants' narrative. They are embedded in the developing interview discourse between the interviewees' and interviewer's contributions (see Briggs, 1986, on the linguistic and social norms presupposed in interviews). The latter, in particular, helps interviewees to interpret how their contributions are evaluated and the kind of subsequent contributions that are expected as a result. We thus observe how the telling of a story triggers a second story and how the latter is treated as expected and as completing the first story. In other words, the second story constitutes a receipt of a first, and so the chain may continue, with each story expanding on or improving the previous one in some way. Thus, the stories are woven into the texture of talk (e.g., Psathas, 1995). They are jointly constructed with the interviewer who helps to shape them, either by eliciting a reaction to a question previously asked, or, as in the case of the examples examined here, by displaying affiliation with the storyteller who expands on the story as a result.

The stories represent situated interactions (De Fina and Perrino 2011; Márquez Reiter, 2018) where the participants recount complex relationships of experiences across their migration journey to the present day – in the case of Carolina, from Cali to Bogota then to Madrid and from there to London, and for Beatriz, from La Paz to Buenos Aires and from Buenos Aires to London – without my asking too many direct or predetermined questions. One of the recurrent themes across the experiences shared was the assistance they received from co-ethnics, as well as the help they extended to other co-ethnics to find their way and the extent to which their expectations of assistance from others were met.

It is in the context of the participants' sharing personal stories in which general assistance and favours were extended to distant friends or acquaintances of friends and family that they engaged in the three chained stories examined. In these, they

³ The 2021 Census is currently in process.

reconstructed some of the social and moral landscape of interpersonal relations among co-ethnics in London. The stories thus deal with the ethics of co-ethnic relations. They bring to light cases of offence that touch upon moral issues centring around perceptions social justice from an interpersonal, cultural or social plane. The stories are rich in moral content in so far as they capture what the participants understand to be morally good or bad, allowing us, thus, to concentrate on various aspects of the alleged injustices. The main focus of the paper will be on instances where morality, offence, impoliteness and their interrelatedness come to light.

3. On the interrelated dimensions of offence

A common thread across the stories was unmet social expectations in interpersonal relations with co-ethnics especially along reciprocity. The first story, illustrated in Example 1 below, occurred during fieldwork when I interviewed Beatriz and Carolina while they were having breakfast at a market eatery. I had asked the interviewees about the ways in which Latin American migrants seek assistance from one another and the kind of assistance this entails.

Beatriz had provided Carolina with assistance since her arrival in London from Madrid and continues to do so, by, among others, offering interpreting assistance.⁴ The participants are good friends. Before sharing her story, Carolina orients to the potential offence that the disclosure of new personal information previously unshared with Beatriz may have on their relationship.

Example (1), first story – *viene de cicada y deja el trabajo tirado* ('she flies in like a cicada and leaves the job without notice')

B: Beatriz, C: Carolina, E: Interviewer

456 E: Claro que no °claro que no° .hh pero me decías antes que
457 la palanca funciona hasta ciertos=
458 C: =hasta cierto límite te voy a decir por qué porque:: (h)
459 .HH :: (hh) a mí en España pues e(h) s:í me: (h) llamaban
460 Ay (Carolina) que la recibas (reciba) .hh o sea(h) (.) una
461 amiga a mí siempre me llama que recibiera a fulanita que
462 era amiga conocida cómo es? .hh no: es buena persona no le
463 puedo decir más sino buena persona(h) .hh (.) yo:: en dos
464 ocasiones no lo vuelvo hacer porque (en dos ocasiones) me
465 ha pasado o sea voy a contar que nunca lo he contado a
466 (Beatriz) .HH (.) e::: (hh) (pues ya) no recibí a una .hh
467 porque es conocida de una hermana MÍA Nelsy pobrecita que
468 está muy mal que esto y lo otro le dije (va:::le) .hh bueno
469 yo la recibo .hh ((carraspeo)) yo la recibí ((carraspeo))
470 .HH (1.0) e::: (h) le ayudé a conseguir trabajó (.)
471 consiguí trabajo en un hotel (.) hablé con una amiga que
472 trabajaba en un hotel entonces pues la recibieron allá (.)
473 pues a ella no le gustó .hh (.) no? (.) y::: (h) y yo dije
474 °y está(h)?° .hh que esta viene de (cicada) .hh y deja el
475 trabajo tirado .hh no::: (hhh) a mí ese trabajo es muy duro
476 esto no me gust- .hh y es- .hh y yo yo (.) yo estudié cinco
477 años de con tabilidad .hh en la universidad para que venga
478 una perei:rana de miERda .hh (0.9) o sea ella es de Cali
479 (0.3) colombiana (.) que venga una P: ereirana de miE:rda
480 que es supervisora .hh a decirme lo que tengo que hacer
481 .hh yo profesional y esa limpiamiERda .hh (0.5) °dije yo°
482 a los tres días no? .hh dije yo m::: (hh) (.) voy a tener
483 problema con esta (0.4) preciso (.) dije yo con esta voy a
484 tener problema porque uno si m- .hh SI UNO necesita(h) (.)
485 uno recibe lo que haya (.) lo que haya (0.3) así de
sencillo

Example (1) (translation)

456 E: Of course °of course° .hh but before you were saying that
457 palanca works to a certain=
458 C: =to a certain extent and I tell you why because:: (h)
459 .HH :: (hh) to me in Spain then u(m) y:es they(h) would call me
460 ah (Carolina) lodgeher/put her up .hh I mean (h) (.) a
461 friend of mine always calls to /put so and so up that
462 was a friend acquaintance what is she like? .hh no:::she's a good
463 person I cannot tell you anything else besides she's a good person(h)
464 .hh I::: on two occasions I won't do it again because(on two occasions)
465 it's happened to me I mean I'm going to tell something that I haven't
466 told (Beatriz) .HH (.) u::: (hh) (so then) I lodged/put someone up .hh
467 because she's an acquaintance of a sister of MINE Carolina poor thing

⁴ Beatriz's mother is English and moved to Bolivia where Beatriz was born to follow the diplomatic family for whom she worked as a housekeeper.

468 she's doing very badly this and that/and so on and so I said (O:k) .hh well
 469 I will take her in/put her up .hh and I lodged her/so I did
 470 .HH (1.0) u:::m I helped her find work (.)
 471 she found work in a hotel (.) I spoke to a friend of mine that
 472 worked in the hotel and as a result they took her there(.)
 473 well she didn't like it .hh (.) no? (.) and:: (h) and I said
 474 °and this one(h)? °.hh that this one flies in/like a (cicada) .hh and
 475 leaves the job unattended .hh no:: (hhh) to me that job's too hard
 476 I don't like this- .hh and is- .hh and I I (.) I studied five
 477 years of accountancy .hh at university for someone to come
 478 a shiTty Pereirana .hh (.9) I mean she's from Cali
 479 (.3)Colombian (.) that a shiTty P:ereirana
 480 that is the supervisor .hh tells me what I have to do
 481 .hh I'm a professional and that shIt cleaner .hh (.5) °I said°
 482 within three days right? .hh I said I m::: (hh) (.) I'm going to have
 483 problems with this one (.4) exactly (.) I said I'm going to have
 484 problem because IF ONE needs (h) (.)
 485 one accepts whatever there is available (.) whatever there is (.3)
 486 it's that simple

Carolina utters a prospective alignment in the way of a disclaimer (Hewitt and Stokes, 1975) followed by inbreathing and hesitation (l. 466) in an attempt to prepare Beatriz to react favourably to her telling of the story. With this, she signals the potentially delicate nature of her upcoming story and, by way of inference, the confidence and trust on which their relationship is built. This serves to remove potential grounds for her friend and confidant to take offence upon learning about the story there and then and, in the presence of a stranger (i.e., the interviewer). It also shows the rapport that had been established with the interviewer (Márquez Reiter, 2018), and the developing interview discourse insofar as her story is triggered by Beatriz's earlier story and helps to complement it.

Carolina presents the initial request for assistance as warranted. The beneficiary was in serious need (l. 468) and is an acquaintance of one of Carolina's sisters in Colombia (l. 467) despite the latter being unable to provide a character reference beyond the generic 'she's a good person' (l. 462–463) when the partner of Carolina's sister is one of the beneficiary's stepsons. In helping an acquaintance of her sister (i.e., a distant relative of Carolina's sister's extended family-in-law), Carolina acted according to cultural expectations. Drawing on Levinas (1991), it can be argued that her sense of ethics, understood as 'the immediate response to another human being who makes a demand on me without negotiation of or legitimation on my part' (Lecture 7),⁵ and behaviour in line with the practices of a given social group – i.e., the cultural practice of taking in people in need, in l. 467–468, led to Carolina's assistance. In these stories, and mostly elsewhere within the database, ethics is not immediately separable from morality (cf. though consider acts of war which are unethical but often morally justified Levinas, 1991). As we will see in the other Examples, it is the combination of the normative expectancy back home, and Carolina's general sense of ethics, i.e., her reaction to the suffering and vulnerability of the beneficiary, that led her to help a distant acquaintance of one her sisters in Colombia whom she did not personally know. Carolina thus took her sister's acquaintance in and helped her to obtain a cleaning job in a London hotel through one of her co-ethnic connections (l. 467–472). Arguably, Carolina's sense of ethics alone would not have necessarily led her to help a complete stranger in need as she would have been under no moral obligation (understood as the wilful actions taken to benefit someone other than just the speaker) to do so.

The reciprocity this would entail from the beneficiary would, however, sway the balance towards assistance along the moral order of the group, a generally shared understanding of where one's and other's actions sit within the spectrum of "right" and "wrong" behaviours. In other words, the combination of her moral obligation towards her sister back home, which is part of cultural expectancies, and the dire need of the beneficiary, made it impossible to refuse to help. The kind of assistance provided by Carolina is, however, constrained by economic conditions and this holds for many of the characters in these stories. Carolina's main goal was to help her friend to secure a livelihood.

3.1. Relational ramifications

The offence has other ramifications for Carolina. She lost face (Goffman, 1967) with the cleaning supervisor as she recommended someone who did not fulfil the essential requirements of the job (i.e., hard work under generally precarious conditions). This suggests poor judgement. It means that Carolina may not be fully trusted or entrusted with higher responsibilities (e.g., those of a cleaning supervisor). It can negatively impinge on her chances of progression, and also on her contact's face. The supervisor would now have to find a replacement at short notice and explain her actions to the cleaning contractor. This can potentially affect the supervisor should a replacement not be found in time and a complaint be lodged and this, as a result, can undermine the life of the contract⁶ and the livelihood strategies of everyone involved. The chain effect

⁵ According to Levinas ethics is conceptual and morality is the relation to the other in their individuality. *Levinas on the Difference between Morality and Ethics* – Lecture 7 <https://drwilliamlarge.wordpress.com/2016/08/29/levinas-on-the-difference-between-morality-and-ethics-lecture-7/>.

⁶ Typically, businesses outsource cleaning responsibilities to professional and commercial cleaning services suppliers.

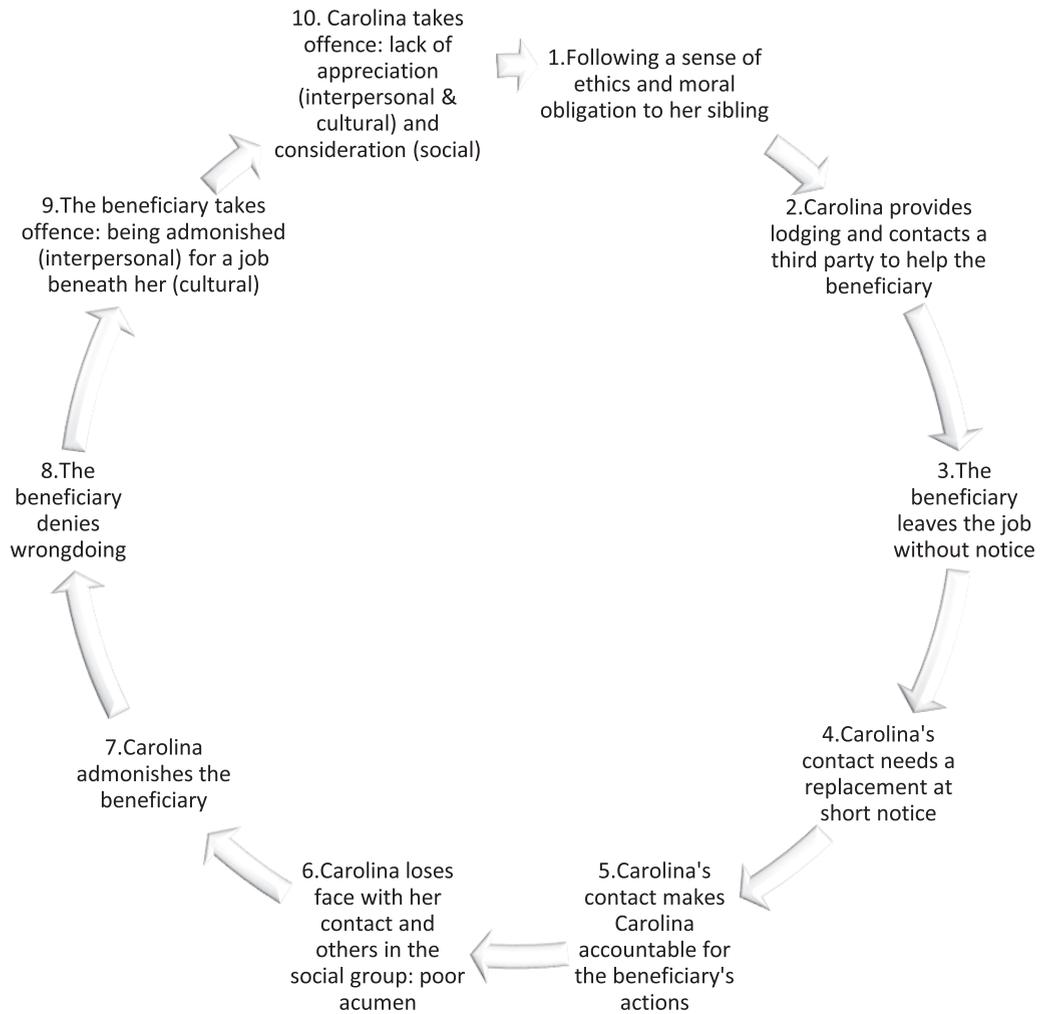


Fig. 1. Chain reaction of Carolina's assistance and concomitant offences.

that such actions can have for the livelihoods of members of a social group that are highly dependent on the co-ethnic niche economy, and the potential for offence this can generate, is summarised in Fig. 1, below.

Contrary to Carolina's expectations, the beneficiary was not appreciative of the assistance received and, perplexingly, took offence as a result of it. The beneficiary's actions (i.e., leaving the job without any notice) had negative implications for Carolina's relationship with her friend (i.e., a cleaning supervisor) who had procured employment for the beneficiary-turned-transgressor. The latter took offence when Carolina called her to order.

Carolina's taking offence is brought to the current here-and-now of the interaction as the actions of the transgressor are mainly reported in the present. This helps to present the offence as an actuality (Anderson, 1987). The beneficiary's behaviour is presented as transgressive insofar as normative social practice in London is concerned and depicted as analogous to that of a *cicada*. These insects are part of the fauna of Colombia, where Carolina and the transgressor come from, and are known for carefree living, in this case, living at Carolina's expense (l. 474). They carry diseases, something to which Carolina alludes (l. 482–483). Carolina thus describes the adverse effects that helping someone who ended up being a bloodsucker would have for her (l. 482–483).

3.2. Values

Carolina's alleged causing and taking offence occurs at three different, though interconnected, levels: the interpersonal, as far as her relationship with the beneficiary and the cleaning supervisor who provided an employment opportunity for the former is concerned; the social, with regards to the Spanish-speaking Latin American community in London; and the cultural, especially in terms of her relationship with her sister back home.

These dimensions are also relevant in the remainder of the stories examined in this article and across the database. In the case of this first story, at an interpersonal level, the beneficiary-turned-transgressor is described as not responding in kind to

the help provided by Carolina. She has shown no appreciation. Instead, she expected Carolina to procure her a position in-keeping with her social status (i.e., a university graduate). An acceptance of her taking offence for being questioned about leaving the job without any notice would imply, on the one hand, a validation of the beneficiary's grounds for her action: acknowledging that she is overqualified and denying the irrevocable reality of migrant deskilling, the segmentation of the economy, and the social order of the Latin American community in London. On the other hand, it would mean turning a blind eye to the moral obligation the beneficiary-turned-transgressor should have accrued towards Carolina for her help and, by extension, to Carolina's supervisor for obliging. This would demand at least some notice.

Carolina describes the beneficiary's leaving the job without any notice⁷ (l. 474–475) by positioning herself as above the everyday work realities of the social group (l. 477). In the often-inverted universe of migration, the dynamics of different flows, and especially the length of settlement of flows relative to each other, help to delimit hierarchies anew. The cleaning supervisor, irrespective of her place of birth or education, occupies a higher position in the social scale, in this case, by virtue of her length of settlement in London and the connections she has managed to forge since then; she is a cleaning supervisor rather than a cleaner. She has a less physically strenuous job as well as more access to the scant resources that are available to members of the social group, in this case employment positions within the ethnic niche market to help others. The beneficiary-turned-transgressor's discriminatory categorisation is thus used by Carolina for a two-fold purpose. It demonstrates the beneficiary's moral worth relative to that of the storyteller and her lack of knowledge of the principles followed by members of the social group to sustain a life in London (*si uno necesita(h) (.).uno recibe lo que haya (.). lo que haya*, 'IF ONE needs one accepts whatever there is available', l. 484–485).

Sustaining a livelihood in London entails, for certain groups, the acceptance of deskilling (l. 476–477). Therefore, the beneficiary was expected to perform the job accordingly. Let us consider the following lines where some of the values of the social group in London are further articulated: seize any work opportunities irrespective of what they may be (l. 485), whether one is in a regular position or has professional qualifications (Example, 2, l. 488) so as to manage a living (Example 2, l. 490, l. 493).

3.2.1. Seizing opportunities

In the following lines of the interview with Carolina and Beatriz which are captured in example 2, below, Carolina articulates the importance of seizing opportunities to sustain a livelihood in London.

Example (2), first story, *hay que hacer lo que sea* ('one has to do whatever')

487 E: Claro
 488 C: Así tenga papeles profesión l: o que tenga=
 489 E: =lo que sea
 490 C: Pero hay que hacer lo que- .hh o si no con qué va a
 491 comer?
 492 (0.9)
 493 E: Y pagar la renta
 494 (2.3)
 495 C: Llam:: (h)' (1.4) Gloria como m(h) (0.9) bue no me
 496 acuerdo ni del nombre (.) porque le cogí fastidio .hh
 497 y:: (h) (.) le dije yo por dios Gloria (digamo') así .hh le
 498 dije pero cómo se te ocurre? como que un pereirana de
 499 mierda (pero una) pereirana de mierda .hh es. la lambona del
 500 (manager)

Example (2) - translation

487 E: of course
 488 C: even if you have documents a profession o: r whatever you have=
 489 E: =whatever
 490 C: but you have to do what - .hh ori f not what will you eat
 491 with?
 492 (0.9)
 493 E: and pay the rent
 494 (2.3) (while they eat)
 495 C: Call:: (h)s (1.4) Gloria as m(h) (.9) well I cannot
 496 even remember the name (.) because I got annoyed with her .hh
 497 and:: (h) I said for god's sake Gloria (let's say) like that .hh
 498 I said to her but how dare you? How come a shitty Pereirana
 499 (but a) shitty pereirana .hh is. The manager's arse
 500 licker

⁷ Later in the interview, it emerges that this is the third time that the transgressor had left similar jobs for the same reasons. This helps to construct her behaviour as habitual and elevate the moral worth of the storyteller who, in spite of knowing this, nevertheless helped her.

Following the normative expectancies of this migrant group in London would have entailed a return of an action in kind. Carolina would have maintained face with the supervisor, and the supervisor would have sustained hers with respect to the cleaning contract holder as people whose dicta can be trusted. That the beneficiary left the job without notice constitutes her contravening one of the principles in which the social group is based: the acceptance that deskilling (l. 476–477) is often part and parcel of migration and the conditions of precarity that characterise the elementary occupations in which most Latin Americans are inserted in London. The beneficiary's transgression is presented as undermining Carolina's livelihood sources and opportunities (e.g., causes extra costs, tarnishes her name), including their potential for diversification (i.e., becoming a cleaning supervisor, setting up a cleaning company, etc.).

Carolina suggests that remembering the event has made her relive the offence. It has evoked the heat of anger. This is shown by her inability to recall the transgressor's name (Example 2, l. 496) and her acknowledgment of the pending debt she now has with the cleaning supervisor (Example 3, l. 523). Carolina lost face with the cleaning supervisor as, theoretically speaking, she failed to honour the favour that, out of trust, had been extended to her. As a result, she feels she can no longer ask the supervisor for any similar favours and thus help others in need. In saying this, Carolina presents herself in a thoughtful light in so far as she shows that, despite this negative experience, she is still willing to help others in need. She presents herself as morally invested. She is willing to enter a relationship with another individual for the benefit of both, in line with the norms of the social group (i.e., appreciate economic favours and show gratitude in return). This is a relationship that the transgressor did not respect, as manifested in Carolina's description of her as an ungrateful piece of shit (Example 3, l. 520) in Example 3, below.

3.2.2. Being grateful

A few lines further into the interview, Carolina evaluates the beneficiary-turn-transgressor as devoid of gratitude. This is illustrated in example 3, below.

Example (3), first story, *mal agradecida me hizo quedar super mal con la manager* ('ungrateful she made look very bad in front of the manager')

520 C: Ah? porque (hh) r es una mal agradecida de mierda (0.4) la
521 mujer me hizo quedar super mal con la manager.
522 E: mm
523 C: imagínate ya no puedo colaborarle a más nadie con trabajo ni
pedirle favores a la manager .HH mi cuñado yo ya lo llamé y le dije
.hh m(h) hh o sea

520 C: ah? Because (hh) r is an ungrateful piece of shit (.4) this
521 woman made me look very bad in front of the manager
522 E: mm
523 C: imagine I can no longer help anyone with work or ask the manager favours. HH mi brother-in-law I've already called him
and said
.hh m(h) hh I mean

The ramifications of the beneficiary-turned-transgressor's actions not only impact on Carolina's life among the diaspora but also back home, as both these realms are part of her everyday life. In Example 4, below, Carolina continues her story by recounting how she took the precaution of telephoning her brother-in-law in Colombia to avoid negative implications with him, her sister or between the two of them. Carolina uses third party evidence to endorse her stance vis-à-vis the transgressor.

Example (4) first story, *mándela a comer mierda se lo merece* ('tell her to fuck off she deserves it')

543 C: Le dije yo a la- e- e- él soltó la caracaja y me dijo
544 mándela a comer mierda me dijo mi cuñado .hh me dijo porque
545 se lo merece porque es una mujer mal agradecida ella fue
546 m:ala con mi papá y mala conmigo

Example (4)- translation

543 C: I said I and the-he-he burst into laughter and told me
544 tell her to fuck off said my brother-in-law .hh he said
545 because she deserves it because that woman was ungrateful she
546 was me:an to my dad and to me.

At lines 543–544, she voices her brother-in-law's assessment by using direct reported speech (*mándela a comer mierda* – 'send her to eat shit', idiomatically, 'tell her to fuck off') to add legitimacy to her account and retells the immoral actions of the transgressor toward her brother-in-law. These actions contrast with Carolina's good deeds: providing a roof over the transgressor's head and food on her plate. They emphasise her moral worth relative to the offender.

3.2.3. Being honest

The climax of the story is reached when, later in the interview, Carolina reports an exchange of insults with the beneficiary in the early hours of the morning as she was leaving for work, after which Carolina asked her to leave. This triggered Beatriz to initiate a story of her own (Example 5, l. 668, 'I've learnt') while Carolina continued to vent her anger by presenting the transgressor's line (Goffman, 1967) as incongruous (l. 671 – 'there would not be any need for someone who lived like a queen back home to migrate to London in search of a better life'). With this, Beatriz acknowledges Carolina's story and expands on it. Beatriz offers an upshot of it: the moral of the story as a preamble to her upcoming story ('you cannot recommend a person you don't know', l. 673–674).

Example (5), second story, *terminaron robando, mi madre casi me mata* ('they ended up stealing, my mother almost killed me')

667 C: =y () BLA BLA BLA BLA blablablablaba(h)=
 668 B: =Yo escarmenté=
 669 C: =hablar=
 670 B: =por ejemplo de recomendar=
 671 C: =que vivía como una reina:: que ella vivía a c- como
 672 millo[naria en Colombia]
 673 B: [Yo: creo que no p] no podés recomendar a una persona
 674 que no conocés
 675 C: No
 676 B: Porque a mí me ha sucedido dos veces .HH con Lady
 677 (Byron) (.) dos veces recomendé dos personas latinas y
 678 las dos personas le terminaron robando .HH (.) mi madre
 679 casi me mata a mí (.) t .hh (0.4)
 695 B: =Una vez le encontré llevándose azúcar
 696 C: HHHHHH entonces [digo yo uno tiende la mano pero]=
 697 B: [como me dijo .hh me diz- me dijo ella]
 698 C: =todo depende de la persona (.) [como se comporte]
 699 B: [como ella me decía]
 700 .HH (Brenda) y si ella me decía que necesitaba azúcar yo se
 701 la hubiera dado (.) .hh bah=
 702 E: =pero claro=
 703 B: =if she steals my sugar .hh she will steal anything in
 704 my house (.) y es verdad
 705 C: Es verdad °es verdad es verdad°
 706 B: M(HH)
 707 C: Y ganando buen dinero
 708 B: Y ganando buen dinero entendés? .HH le pagaban
 709 vacaciones porque si ella se f- se se ha id- se fue
 710 a Bolivia le pagaron el mes todavía como si ella
 711 hubiera trabajado (hh) y 12 libras cuando se pagaba f6 entonces,
 712 imagínate la vergüenza con Lady Byron y mi madre= horrible me
 713 hizo pasar

Example (5) - translation

667 C: =y () BLA BLA BLA BLA blablablablaba(h)=
 668 B: =I've learnt=
 669 C: =to [talk
 670 B: [for example, recommendations=
 671 C: =that she lived like a queen:: that she lived like l-like
 672 A millio[naire in Colombia
 673 B: [I: think that no] you cannot recommend a person
 674 You don't know
 675 C: No
 676 B: Because it's happened to me twice .HH with Lady
 676 (Byron) (.) I recommend two Latin people
 677 And they ended up stealing.HH (.)my mum
 678 almost killed me(.) t .hh (0.4)
 695 B: she found him stealing sugar once
 696 HHHHHH So [like I say one offers a hand but
 697 C: [like she said to me but
 698 B: it all depends on the person (.)how [they behave
 699 C: [like she said to me]
 700 B: (Carolina) if she had told me she needed sugar I would have given
 701 it to her (.) .hh bah=
 702 E: =but of course=
 703 B: =if she steals my sugar .hh she will steal anything in
 704 my house (.) and it's true
 705 C: It's true °it's true it's true =°

706 B: M(HH)
 707 C: and earning good money
 708 B: and earning good money you see?.HH they paid her
 709 for her holidays because if she she w-en s-went
 709 to Bolivia they pay as if she had
 710 worked (hh)and £12 when the going rate
 711 was £6,
 712 imagine my embarrassment with Lady Byron and my mum=she made me
 713 feel horrible

Beatriz follows up with a story of the unjustified behaviour of a beneficiary for whom she found work cleaning Lady Byron's home in London. The act reported (i.e., stealing) is illegal insofar as it constitutes a crime. The stealing of a low-cost staple like sugar helps to paint a picture of the beneficiary as morally unprincipled and likely to repeat (petty) criminal acts. Consider Beatriz's use of the conditional at l. 703–704 followed by the assertion 'and it's true' which is echoed by Carolina thus helping to assert Beatriz's character assessment as a general truth.

Beyond the negative face implications that her behaviour generated, Carolina implicitly voices her lack of appreciation and common sense by describing the employment conditions as excellent. The beneficiary was paid £12 instead of the ongoing £6 an hour rate at the time. She was entitled to holidays as observed when she visited her native Bolivia and 'was paid as if she had worked that month' (Example 5, l. 710–711). With this, Carolina shines light on the exploitation that many Latin Americans in the co-ethnic London economy are subjected to, and the lack of common sense of the beneficiary for not availing herself of the opportunity. The stealing of sugar illustrates the beneficiary's bad judgement. It follows that someone bereft of moral principles and common sense will be unable to picture the consequences that their actions may have on the donor, that is, failure to recognise the import of their actions on Beatriz's and her mother's loss of face with Lady Byron is concerned (e.g., Example 5, l. 711). Although Beatriz did not steal, the fact that she recommended the beneficiary-turned-transgressor for the job has vested her with a cloak of responsibility for their actions for which she may be inclined to offer some remedial work. The example nicely illustrates a case where accountability can be non-directly agentive (Laidlaw, 2010). Carolina illustrates another case of accountability in her follow up story.

In example 6, below, Carolina explains that, following a request from a friend in Colombia, she took a friend of the latter in (an onward Colombian migrant from Spain whom she did not know) on the proviso that she could only stay for fifteen days as her own daughter was arriving after that time and there was no room for the three of them in Carolina's small room. Fifteen days with Carolina would allow the beneficiary to find a room of her own. In taking in an acquaintance of a friend, Carolina fulfilled what she understood was her moral obligation, towards her friend back in Colombia, in this case, her willingness to be responsible for the new arrival. However, the beneficiary overstayed her welcome. She stayed for over a month, did very little to find alternative accommodation during this time, was reluctant to leave and got offended when Carolina asked her to do so. The beneficiary-turned-transgressor is no longer on speaking terms with Carolina nor does Carolina's friend in Colombia answer her calls. After introducing her story, Carolina describes the terms of the agreement and the beneficiary's transgressive behaviour (not actively looking for employment or accommodation elsewhere) in the light of her repeated notices and pleas.

Example (6) third story, *gente descarada, como si la hubiera dejado desamparada* ('disrespectful people, as if I had abandoned her')

726 B: No yo le dije sorry Lady (By) pero (h) mejor
 727 que se busque usted una porque (hh) .HH
 728 C: .HH después otra chica que me sentó muy mal tenerle que
 729 decir que se fuera pero yo es que la gente es descarada .HH
 730 porque yo le dije e(h) eso fue otra amiga que me pidió el
 731 favor para que recibiera a SU Amiga (0.3) .HH yo la recibí
 732 .hh le dije pero eso sí con una condición quince días
 733 .hh porque a fin de mes viene mi HIJA(HH) (0.3) .hh venía
 754 C: Esta- .HH y ella estaba durmiendo en el sofácama (0.5)
 755 y dije yo es que es para mi hija (0.3) entonces hh le digo
 756 yo: (.) por la mañana .hh (.) creo que fue un sábado (.)
 757 (como) tenía yo que trabajar como a las nueve de la mañana
 758 le dije yo .HH () no ha encontrado habitación .hh es que
 759 mi hija ya llega el l- mañana o el lunes o algo así .HH
 760 ya llega mañana (.) estoy en ello (.) .hh le dije bueno
 761 (.) e::(h) ya lleva::s como tres semanas diciéndome que
 762 estás en e- qué es eso de estar en ello? .HH (.) qué es
 763 estoy en ello? (.) estoy en ello está en nada (0.6) le dije
 764 yo necesito que me desocupes hoy (.) le dije te he tendido
 765 una mano (0.3) de emergencia (.) pero es que la emergencia
 766 se alargó (0.5) le dije se ha alargado demasiado (.) y yo
 767 y(h)- ya no puedo tenerte más de emergencia (.) porque
 768 mañana llega mi hija (.) y yo necesito limpiar el espacio
 769 (.) .hh y necesito el espacio .hh (4.2) no me habla ella
 770 está aquí (.) pero no me habla Y: lo peor del caso es que mi

771 amiga de Cali está toda ofendida conmigo y no me responde las 772 llamadas
 773 B: NOhh
 774 C: sí miija como si la hubiera dejado desamparada

Example (6) - translation

726 B: no I said sorry Lady (By) but (h) it's better
 727 you look for one because (hh) .HH
 728 C: then another woman that I felt bad having to ask
 729 her to leave but I say people are disrespectful .HH
 730 Because I ask her to u(m) that's what another friend asked me to do
 731 the favour to lodge a friend of HERS (.3) .HH I lodged her
 732 I said yes but there's one condition fifteen days
 733 .hh because my DAUGHTER(HH) is arriving at the end
 of the month from Spain to stay fifteen days with me .HH
 754 C: this one- .HH and she was asleep on the sofa 9.5)
 755 and I said it's because is for my daughter (.3) so hh I tell
 756 her: (.) in the morning .hh (.) I think it was a Saturday (.)
 757 I told her .HH (.) you haven't found a room .hh is that my
 758 daughter arrives t-tomorrow or Monday or something like that .HH
 759 that she arrives tomorrow (.) I'm on it (.) .hh I said well
 760 you are on-on what is this thing of being on it? .HH (.) what does
 761 to be on it mean? (.) to be on something nothing. (.) I told her
 762 I need you to vacate today (.) I said I lent you
 763 a hand (.3) as an emergency (.) but the emergency
 764 was extended (.5) a long time I said (.) and I
 765 can no longer have you as emergency (.) because
 766 my daughter arrives tomorrow (.) and I need to
 767 clean the room (.) .hh and I need the room .hh (4.2) she does
 768 doesn't speak to me she's here (.) she doesn't talk to me (.)
 769 and: worst of all my friend in Cali got offended and doesn't answer
 my calls
 773 B: Nohh
 774 C: yes darling as if I had left her helpless/as if I had abandoned her

Carolina presents the original agreement as breached by the beneficiary who did not consider Carolina's family commitments. Despite the negative repercussions of the transgressor's behaviour on Carolina's relationship with her friend back home (l. 728–9, *me sentó muy mal tenerle que decir que se fuera* 'I felt bad having to ask her to leave') and evaluating behaviour with a collective essentialization (l. 729 'but I say people are disrespectful'), Carolina did not seem to have taken offence. This can be explained by the fact that she can legitimately claim the moral high ground over the transgressor on the basis of the normative expectancies back home (i.e., reciprocity – helping a friend of a friend) and in London (i.e., exercising their/her agency to sustain a livelihood). The behaviour of the transgressor is presented as short of meeting expectations. It represented a disregard of relational expectations and the concomitant moral obligations that have been accrued. While impoliteness may have accentuated the offence, it was not its main cause. The beneficiary-turned-transgressor and Carolina's friend back in Colombia's taking of offence is presented in the conditional past subjunctive. This helps to convey a statement contrary to what actually happened. It invalidates the potential grounds for taking offence while emphasizing Carolina's good deeds.

Across the examples, the participants shared reflexive accounts of relational conflict with co-ethnics in which they drew on their sense of ethics, as shown by their response to the needs of others (Levinas, 1991). The transgressors are presented as ungrateful and inconsiderate in line with the help that had been extended to them and moral values that underlie the social order of the group. They did this by engaging in stories and evaluating the events or experiences therein when 'morally sensitive evaluations of persons or their actions are at stake' (p. 148) along a rightness-wrongness scale. Speaker judgements are used here 'to evaluate the 'rightness' or 'wrongness' of [their] behaviour or actions.' (p. 148). In this sense, the stories help to (re)construct moral values, that is complex social constructions of "right" and "wrong", that the participants orient to as relevant in their lives. They provide us with a lens through which to observe the connection between offence and morality: a set of shared values that help to explain given sociocultural practices.

The stories show interpersonal conflict in the context of economic migration where seizing any opportunities and showing appreciation for assistance (e.g., obtaining employment) are oriented to as normative.

4. Conclusion

Beyond the specificity of examples drawn from the experience of Latin American migrants in London, this paper demonstrates that our understanding of offence and moral evaluations is not merely based on ideologies, representations of societal positions and interests, stemming from primary socialisation (family values, community values) acquired back home. Nor is it entirely about what a person chooses to be or do (Laidlaw, 2013). Instead, these examples showcase that causing and taking offence is largely about the translocalisation of values to a new space with certain structural conditions (e.g., the

segmentation of the economy and the co-ethnic niche occupied by Latin American migrants in London) and the multiple positionings of social actors within those structures that are shaped by structural conditions, such as economic and migration policies. In this new environment, social and moral orders become unstable as the organisation of the social group is contingent on new socioeconomic realities that were not imagined before migrating. This, in turn, may generate conflicting understandings of what constitutes “right” or “wrong” ways of acting.

In sharing the stories, the participants oriented to rights and responsibilities in co-ethnic relationships and reflected upon the behaviour of others and of themselves in specific practices and, outside of them, as they engaged in another situated interaction, that of the life-story interview. In critiquing transgressors or their actions, they (in)advertently reinforced hierarchies within the social group (i.e., more established vs. recent arrivals) and the injustice that prevails (Lambek, 2015) in their lives. The life-story format enabled the participants to reflect on critical incidents with friends and family abroad, and their own role in them, including their agency and accountability.

Their evaluation of transgressors’ actions offered an opportunity to explore the combination of ethics and morality, or at least allowed us to see some of its facets in action. Morality was observed in the way the obligations of incumbents in a given relational category were met or not by members of the group. Whereas, ethics was mainly signalled by the storyteller’s capacity to reflect (Laidlaw, 2014) on the obligations themselves, including their own role in the recounted events, and to present them as reasonably supported by others. These moral valuations have brought to purview a case where the role of agency and accountability in offence taking and attribution can be distinct. Such differentiation was possible by considering the wider relational connections in which the participants’ relationship is embedded and the structural conditions in which they take place. It was thus possible for the participants to feel accountable for the wrong actions of the beneficiary-turned-transgressor when they did not directly take part in them. I have demonstrated that, only by understanding how the choices made by the participants are seen by the wider society in which their relationship is embedded and the place their relationship occupies within larger structures, can we get closer to an understanding of the potential causes of the offence and the extent to which taking offence is the legitimate option across a constellation of relationships.

The migration process offers a poignant window from which to view morality, in the light of its ever-changing cultural bases. Despite the context’s natural reflective nature (life-stories), and the idiosyncrasies of the participants, the paper shows that offence is not just about what should not have happened, but also about what people normally do or have done in light of their roles in a relationship and their relational history. It also demonstrated that the causing and taking of offence in a given relationship can have ramifications for other relationships within a given social group, thus moving the purview of offence beyond the dyad.

Finally, I hope to have offered insights into the practices of moral life and the place of offence therein. I showed how moral evaluations are socioculturally constructed (e.g., translocalised values), space centred (e.g., physical location), and emergent. And note that we should be careful not to reduce them, in a theoretical sense, to being “right” or “wrong”, despite the prevalence of this perspective in thinking and in the assessments of the participants themselves.

Transcription conventions

[beginning of overlap
]	end of overlap
=	latching
-	indicates a cut off of the prior word or sound
::	indicates pitch rise
'volume'	is indicated with capital letters
()	indicates that the talk or item could not be heard
(0.3)	numbers in parentheses indicate silence represented in tenths of a second

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