Sociality and moral conflicts: migrant stories of relational vulnerability

1. Introduction
The aim of this paper is to inquire into the ways in which understandings of sociality influence how members of a social group narrate conflicts between social and moral oughts, hence discursively animating moral conflicts. Social oughts (see Culpeper 2011) though not necessarily separable from moral oughts represent expectations of how contextually-situated interpersonal interactions typically unfold. Moral oughts refer to the perception of how and often why they should unfold. Social and moral oughts are based on an individual’s socialisation where they learnt to master the situated practices of their communities and the community values that underpin them (e.g. Ochs & Schieffelin 2012). Sociality is thus a constitutive quality of relationships (Ingold 2000). It is contingent on the conventions that offer some measure of common ground between individuals through joint action (Hanks 2006). Sociality could thus be conceived of as forms of sociation that ‘align with’ (Goffman 1981) the relational practices of a social group thus shaping them and being shaped by them.1 However, once an individual needs to cope with sociality in forms that stand in contrast with or deviate from those acquired through socialisation, especially when it involves culturally similar others such as the migrant co-ethnic stories we discuss here, discrepancies may arise between social and moral oughts.

The discrepancy between social and moral oughts in the context of migrant sociality as migrants attempt to make a living by establishing relationships with culturally similar others in new social and physical landscapes represents a noteworthy aspect of interpersonal communication that has received scant attention in sociopragmatics (but see Author 2 and 1 2015) and has only been touced upon in studies that have focused on migrant narratives, especially stories of powerlessness (see, for example, Ladegaard 2017, 2018; Lorente 2017, Trinch 2003). We contend that the examination of the moral conflicts that often emerge in migrants’ stories can shed light into the way that culturally understood relational practices are translocalised and valorised and sociality is reconstituted in migratory contexts. Our study also contributes to the recent moral turn in sociopragmatics and discourse studies, especially in linguistic (im)politeness research (e.g. Author 2 and 1 2015; Author 2 2017; Author 1 2018a, 2018b) as morality is an intrinsic aspect of impoliteness evaluations, and moralisation of behaviour considered to be out of line has been on the wane as a result of social media and globalisation (Sifianou & García-Conejeros Blitvich 2018). Yet, the moral conflicts that emerge as a result of one of the main social issues affecting our globe today (i.e. migration) has been surprisingly absent from the sociopragmatic research agenda. This may respond to the difficulty in capturing the discursive construction of social vs. moral oughts among migrants or perhaps to the traditional anchoring of the discipline whose main focus, by and large, has been on dyadic relationships among middle-class participants who belong to homogeneously conceived cultures as observed by the rather monolithic treatment of the variety of a given language they speak and its implicit connection to the language of a nation State. The present paper seeks to open a new vector in sociopragmatic research by focusing on a context (i.e. migration) that has until now been mainly examined by the associated discipline of

1 For instance, Blum-Kulka (1997) shows the ways in which American Jewish families socialise their children into mitigated jocular aggression at the dinner table. When one engages in jocular aggression one certainly needs a cline to fit in but such an engagement does not necessarily trigger negative evaluations or related feelings because the need to “be tough” in such interactions is part of a daily family ritual and the values that underlie such form of sociability.
social linguistics while incorporating current research on sociopragmatics, especially from linguistic impoliteness where morality has been explored beyond the notion of stance (DuBois 2007). The paper thus investigates data where migrants construct a moral conflict in light of their lived experiences of sociality with co-nationals in a transnational context. As our analysis shows the precarious conditions that our participants are subject to coupled with their lived experiences of forms of sociation back home vs. those with co-nationals away from home, provides fertile ground for the construction of conflicting moral worlds.

Our research focuses on the experiences of Chinese and Latin American economic migrants in London. We pay attention to the metapragmatics of how the migrants who participated in our study reflect on their patterns of sociation with others in an interview situation, and on the sociopragmatic and discourse analytic implications of these reflections. In the economic migratory contexts we concentrate on, the default social ought for migrants is to accept that work realities are different and often harsher than imagined. This means that on occasions migrants may have to act in ways that run contrary to the conventions and forms that provided common ground back home and embrace other conventions. In this case, the conventions are dictated by the economic conditions they live in. These often entail the acceptance of conditions of precarity such as cash in hand work in the co-ethnic niche economy (i.e. cleaning and catering) or knowingly enduring exploitative work to make a living abroad. Whilst this state would constitute a violation of one’s sacred self (Goffman 1981) – and this violation manifests itself in evaluations that are centred on moral oughts, as our examples will show – accepting the violation is the only way to progress.

1.1 Sociality and politeness

Recently there has been burgeoning interest in morality within impoliteness research with a focus on how evaluations of impoliteness indicate different subjective and contextually-situated perceptions of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ (Bergmann 1998), of how the social vs. the moral order is conceived (e.g. Spencer-Oatey and Kádár 2016), including whether a distinction between the two is tenable (e.g. Spencer-Oatey 2000). These studies, however, have principally homed in on evaluations of actions to the detriment of what these evaluations tell us about sociality as observed in patterns of relationality (Ingold 2000). This is important in the migratory contexts we examine in this paper though admittedly less of a concern when research interest primarily lies in action and in the extent to which participants can be made accountable for their behaviour (e.g. offence, denunciation, humour, verbal abuse, cyberbullying, etc.). While action is also relevant in our study, especially actions that are conceived of as out of line by our participants, the precarious conditions of economic migrants’ lives in London mean that even if they can legitimate attribute responsibility for wrongdoing to someone else, doing so may not stand them in good stead but can instead negatively affect their livelihoods. In these circumstances, therefore, it is important to understand the broader relational context where migrants are embedded (Long & Moore 2013) where rights and obligations towards one another may be understood anew and (im)politeness represents stylised interaction with others, that is, a form of sociability.

Sociality involves understandings of how one can successfully cope with the exigencies of interpersonal relationships by engaging in practices that are common to both parties and often to the wider community where the relationship is embedded (Eble 1996). Sociality thus assumes perceptions of how one can make preferable impressions and ‘align’ (Goffman 1981) with others, even if expectations are at odds with one’s instinctive understanding of how things should be in other settings (e.g. Nie 2001). Sociality is somewhat similar to ‘pragmatic competence’ (Takahashi & Beebe 1987) in that it is a sense of awareness of relational and contextual requirements that people acquire through interaction. However, sociality and pragmatic competence are not the same: one needs some form of pragmatic competence in any
interpersonal setting, including settings that trigger communicative patterns and forms of sociability. However, if one needs to collaborate with various persons on a daily basis, one is supposed to be both pragmatically competent to align oneself with others by accepting how situated patterns of relationality work.

Westoby and Owen (2010: 60) note that sociality exists as “an inescapable fact about human beings as social creatures and living, as it were, in essentially social contexts.” We argue that it is not ‘just given’ but also requires the exercising of agency, especially when migrants attempt to establish relational connections with co-ethnics to find their feet in a new cultural environment and make a living. The economic pressure migrants are under often means that they have to seek and sustain relations with co-ethnics and others for primarily instrumental purposes, triggering thus potential moral dilemmas. We examine how moral conflicts are discursively constructed as migrants reflect on (Silverstein 1992) patterns of sociation in migratory settings. We do this with reference two life story interviews with a Chinese and a Latin American migrant, respectively taken from a corpus of X interviews conducted in X and Y. These two interviews will be used as our case study. In interview settings such as the ones we concentrate on in this paper migrants often reflect on the way sociality differs or not from the sociocultural practices that are common back home (Author 1, 2018a; see also above). Such differences often manifest themselves in migrants’ tellings of the relational entanglements they have been sucked into.

Our attention to sociality does not intend to add yet another term to the already complicated inventory of politeness-related technical terms, in particular ‘relational work’ (Watts 2003; Locher 2003; Locher & Watts 2005) and ‘rapport’ (Spencer-Oatey ed. 2000). Negotiating relationships, which is the focus of the concepts of ‘relational work’ and ‘rapport’, takes place once the individual is deemed to fit into the relational expectations of a given member category within a social group and engages in the conventional ways associated with it, that is, meets sociability exceptancies. Sociality entails navigating the relational landscape to fit in. Sociality is what makes politeness possible but the latter is a form of sociability insofar as it represents conventionally accepted forms of interaction with particular categories of others.

Put differently, politeness can be understood in many ways, such as the expression of consideration towards others, especially when such consideration is seen as favourable to both the speaker and the hearer (cf. Leech 1983), as a form of self-display (Chen 2001), as interpersonal engagement to maintain the face-needs of others (Brown & Levinson 1987), and so on and forth. It is is one of the many practices that individuals deploy to maintain sociation with others. At the same time, one can have patterns of sociation where politeness may not be necessarily required. Instead, other forms of conventionalised interaction may be seen as appropriate. Thomas (1976), Wutich (2006), Smith-Hefner (2007), Eble (2012), and Argyle (2013), among others, point out, that sociality is essentially about fitting in and belonging to a group (see above). Politeness is only part of sociality inasmuch as it is part of the behavioural repertoire of members of a given group in relation to each other (see Section 1.1), and so the individual who attempts to fit in needs to mimetically deploy it. In the context of migration we examine here, sociality entails a spur to individual and social progression; it includes a sense of cooperation (Argyle 2013) in situations of precarity (Butler 2012) that many migrants may not have experienced or imagined back ‘home’. Migrants now find themselves dislocated, “living in conditions of unwilled adjacency” (Butler 2012: 134) in which they are temporally and spatially bounded (ibid: 141) to each other. They are, however, aware that their often

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2The concept of ‘sociality rights’ is highlighted in Spencer-Oatey’s (2000) rapport-management framework. There may be a strong sense of rapport involved in sociality, but in terms of sociality rights it features a unidirectional scenario (it is essentially an individual who needs to be sociable with others), in which the sociality rights of the person who engages in forms of sociation are relatively unimportant in the pragmatic agenda.
economically dictated forms of sociation are not necessarily morally exemplary or, follow a purely altruistic objective (Author 1, 2017).\(^3\)

It is important to emphasise that in spite of the above-discussed differences sociality and politeness, understood as conventionalised sociability are of course related. While on the evaluative level (Eelen 2001) face-violations resulting from not meeting the expectations of a social group may not be impoliteness-related, in the narrower sense they are face-aggravating by nature and, as such, can be difficult to demark from impoliteness. Simply put, when people evaluate other behaviour negatively, their evaluations are based on what the expected behaviour of the group is.

1.2 Case study
In this paper we report on ongoing research (Authors forthcoming) on the sociocultural practices that Chinese and Latin American migrants in London engage in to fit into their co-ethnic social groups and attain occupational mobility (see Section 2). We have examined the relational practices of Chinese and Latin American economic migrants in London, by devoting special attention to guanxi (‘relating’) and palanca (‘leverage’), respectively. Guanxi and palanca are usually associated with the ‘backdoor’ ways through which Chinese and Latin American people obtain jobs and access to scarce resources, with the involvement of family, friends and acquaintances. While these concepts, and related practices (e.g. Zeyrek 2001), have received attention in sociology (e.g. Yang 1994), economics (e.g. Luo 1997), economic anthropology (e.g. Kipnis 1997), anthropology (e.g. Adler de Lomnitz 1982, Lomnitz Adler 2001), intercultural communication (e.g. O’Rourke & Tuleja 2009), communication studies (e.g. Archer & Fitch 1994; Fitch 1988) and other areas, they have not been looked at in pragmatics or indeed in the economic migratory contexts we examine here.

We have gathered 102 oral histories, 56 conducted with Chinese migrants and 46 with Latin American migrants (Section 2) who, by and large, when asked about guanxi and palanca associated these with the cultural practices of those with social capital, in spite of the fact that they themselves engage in such practices and, arguably, have little social capital. The present paper focuses on the analysis of two representative Chinese and Latin American life story interviews (Atkinson 1998) (see Section 3) as illustrative examples of a) the theoretical points we make and b) the metadiscursive patterns of narrating sociality and related conflicts in our data. We focus on excerpts from the two oral histories as the aforementioned tension between expected and actual realities comes to the surface as the participants evaluate the behaviours of others in light of seemingly contradictory moral worldviews.

2. Data and methodology
The data on which this paper is based was collected in Chinese and Latin American enclaves in London, namely Chinatown, in and around the Seven Sisters Market and the Elephant & Castle shopping centre (see a detailed overview in Authors, forthcoming).

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 Brazilian followed by Colombians who constitute the largest Spanish-speaking national group with circa 30,000 members (McHwaine et al. 2016). 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; thus increasing the diversity of the group as far as varieties of Spanish are concerned and ethnic mix (Author 1, 2017).

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\(^3\) It is pertinent to note that in this moral respect, the findings of our research may have validity beyond the immigratory setting, to other contexts where exigencies are relevant.
Although the history of the Chinese dates back to as far as 1782, the vast majority of Chinese migrated to the UK for primarily economic motives after the 1950s. The Chinese population in London is roughly the same size as that of the Latin Americans. There are a total of 393,141 Chinese immigrants in England and Wales with 124,250 Chinese living in London (UK Census 2011). The most ‘powerful’ members are business owners who are either descendants of Chinese immigrants or who migrated to the UK in 1950s, and who are speakers of Cantonese. According to the 2011 census, Mandarin Chinese is generally spoken by younger and more recent immigrants from Mainland China, while Cantonese and Hakka Chinese are most commonly used by older residents, who often have links to Hong Kong.

Latin Americans, like the Chinese, are primarily inserted into the service sector of the economy, mostly working in cleaning and catering jobs for co-ethnics with a longer history of settlement in London. Latin American and Chinese migrants thus share a number of features – from the size of the populations to the type of jobs they occupy, including the existence of co-ethnic brokers or gatekeepers who mediate access to the internal labour market (Author 1 2015). These gatekeepers often act as ‘donors’ given that they have the resources to provide access to jobs and often can assist in the attainment of occupational progression within the sector of the economy where Chinese and Latin American migrants are mainly incorporated (see Algan et al. 2010). The use of ‘donors’ is one of the ways migrants may find jobs (Authors, forthcoming). Migrants often make use of networks of friends or acquaintances who, in turn, may become donors themselves. Relying on others plays a key role in satisfying basic needs such as obtaining employment and accommodation. Naturally, this assistance carries concomitant interpersonal expectancies.

The interviews conducted mostly focused on our participants’ interpersonal experiences of sociality. The Latin American interviews were conducted in and around the Seven Sisters Indoor Market, the Elephant & Castle shopping centre and at cultural and business events organised for and by Latin Americans in London during the months of August, September and October 2016. Author 1 conducted the interviews herself. At that time, she had been conducting fieldwork in the community for over two years. She was thus a familiar face for many Latin American retailers and regular customers alike and had a point of access to the community. The Latin American interviews were thus carried out in situ during slow business hours. Author 1 approached the retailers and customers she was familiar with and obtained referrals from these participants to others. The illustrative example examined as part of the case study we present in this paper followed from an interview conducted in a hair salon during slow hours.

The Chinese interviews were carried out by Author 2 with the assistance of a native speaker of Mandarin Chinese: Xiaoyi. Since Xiaoyi is not fluent in dialects other than Mandarin, an interpreter provided by the Chinese Community Centre where the interviews were conducted helped her when interviewees could not speak Mandarin. Author 2 and Xiaoyi interviewed Chinese migrants with the assistance of Mr Li. Mr Li, a third generation Cantonese descent Londoner, was the Manager of a Chinese Community Centre in London. He was in charge of recruiting interviewees for the project. Contact with Mr Li was originally made by two postgraduate students from Hong Kong while conducting fieldwork in the Chinese community in London. Following that, Mr Li became our broker. He acted as an intermediary between the researchers and the community. Unlike the gatekeepers the interview participants referred to, Mr Li’s assistance did not carry any social expectations on the researchers’ part. Instead, it required some modest financial assistance to ensure the work of the staff at the Centre was accounted for and interpreting from Cantonese and other languages spoken in the community (e.g. Hokkien) was made available if needed. Author 2 was not always directly involved in the interviewing process due to the general distrust that many Chinese economic migrants feel towards non-ethnic Chinese (Pan 2000).
Before conducting the interviews, consent was sought: we informed potential participants of the purpose and procedures of the research, the risks and benefits associated with the study, how the data provided by them would be protected and stored. A confidentiality agreement was duly signed.

The two examples we focus on in this paper are typical of the discursive patterns through which migrants in our dataset reflected on their vulnerable status and the practices they need to engage in to make a living. Invariably, every interview we conducted had an implicit or explicit reference to vulnerability. While narrating personally sensitive moments – undoubtedly facilitated by the reflective nature of interviews – people discursively (re)position themselves to make sense of their situation (Author 1, 2017). In so doing, they not only indicated a moral stance (see Introduction) but reflected on moral oughts, often by considering how things are versus how they ought to be (e.g. Boyer 1978) in line with the ways things ought to be back home. Interview participants thus discursively contrasted the working practices they are subjected to with expectations of camaraderie between fellow country people who have undergone similar migratory trajectories or experiences away from their home country. Sensitive moments are also constructed and oriented to as such with reference to the common ground that has been established or not between the interviewee and the interviewer in the arena of the interview (Author 1, 2018). Yet, also predominant across the interviews is the tension between practices in the here-and-now and the there-and-then of the home settings in which different forms of sociation are evaluated in a moral light drawing on spatial and time scales, as has been amply reported in the sociolinguistics of globalisation (i.e. Bloomaert 2010, see also Author 2 2013 for a historical pragmatic perspective on associated phenomena). One such case, as we shall see below, is the valorization of friendship (e.g. pengyou 朋友 ‘friend’) and its resituatedness under the economic conditions they live in.

3. Analysis
In the present section, we analyse two segments from two interviews from our Chinese and Latin American life-story interview datasets. We point out that while Chinese and Latin Americans represent distant lingua-cultures, immigrant people who live transnational lives often have similar life experiences, especially if they have experienced the rather exploitative conditions that characterise the co-ethnic niche service sector economy in London where both groups are mainly located.

The analysis pays attention to discursive patterns in which our study’s participants construct the ‘ordinary’ or expected order of things within their communities. It comprises accounts of their forms of sociation, principally for occupational purposes within the co-ethnic market where they are mainly inserted. The accounts often reveal moral stances (Ignatow 2009) as they showcase how and why people fit into their communities. In so doing, participants evaluate actions that are seen to deviate from the expected behavioural norms that ought to bind members of the ethnic group together. They often do this by invoking a higher transactional order: a moral world where fellow country people pursuing similar goals under challenging socioeconomic circumstances should bind together (Author 1, 2018b) creating thus a conflict between how things typically are and how they should be. Specifically, actions which are seen as reducing or impeding the personal gains of one member relative to another are presented as dissonant with the way things should be.

In the two migrant communities we examine members are bound together by a principally economic based order that dictates that ‘the best action is one that maximizes personal gain’, and relations are mainly ‘forged by the personally beneficial consequences of members’ actions towards themselves and one another’ (Author 1 2017: 1). Actions that are seen as contravening this order either by a matter of degree or absolute difference are constructed as salient in so far as they constitute disharmonious behaviour relative to the
established moral order on which the community has been built. Participants thus position themselves interstitially relative to how things typically are and how they should be in terms of the personal benefit that they represent. Drawing on Goffman’s (1983) sacred self, as the interview progresses, many interviewees offer an alternative order of things by switching the ‘line’ (Goffman 1955) to one where the exploitative actions they have had to follow or endure from co-ethnics are negatively scrutinised. In this respect, along with appeals to social and moral oughts, the negative evaluations of our interviewees are also subject to impoliteness considerations as they indicate violations of face.

3.1. On the importance of pengyou ‘friend’ in Chinese
The example below which forms our Chinese case study was drawn from an interview in Mandarin with an elderly female who migrated from Hong Kong to London.4 To understand the dynamics of the interview, it is worth noting that the interviewee who emerges with the pseudonym Lee, is a native speaker of Cantonese who migrated to the UK four decades ago, and while she is relatively fluent in Mandarin she had to stop a number of times in the course of the interview to search for words.

4Note that while Lee could communicate in Mandarin, she had a Cantonese accent, and as example (1) illustrates, she occasionally needed the research assistant Xiaoyi to formulate certain meanings.
82. 采访人：直接
Interviewer: Direct
83. 李：很合作但是我说是真的后来，我（1.0）
Lee: Very cooperative But this was right Later I (1.0)
84. 采访人：发现
Interviewer: Found
85. 李：时间久了，看到这些（）因为在伦敦的华人啊，有中国的来，马来西亚来
Lee: As I spent more time here, I saw that (.) because our London Chinatown has
86. 的，越南来的，不同（）不同（）
Chinese, Malays, Vietnamese, all kinds of (.) all kinds of (.)
84. 采访人：地方的
Interviewer: From all kinds of places
85. 李：还有他们来，是真的，那些餐馆雇主，他们只给狠一点员工。
Lee: And there are also those, and this is certainly the case, those restaurant owners,
who make people work for horrible salaries
86. 采访人：就是说给的工资低一点
Interviewer: They give lower salaries
87. 李：其实，其实我刚刚来的时候，很多雇主用非法的员工
Lee: In fact, in fact when I just arrived here, many owners employed people illegally
88. 采访人：哦哦
Interviewer: Ah, ah
89. 李：正是他们非法，就跟马来西亚一样，你是不是马来西亚
Lee: Yes, illegally, they were like the Malay owners now Are you Malaysian
90. 采访人：我不是，我是中国人，我大陆的（笑）
Interviewer: No, no, I am Chinese, from the Mainland (laughs)
91. 李：他们呢（）因为现在中国大陆的工资都很高，我们香港也高，他们呢，马
Lee: They are like (.) Because now the salaries on the Chinese Mainland are high, in
92. 来西亚还很低，我刚刚来的时候，他们平均在 100 磅一个月。 来
Hong Kong are high, but they, the Malaysians still have a low salary, and when I came
here, they (workers in Chinese restaurant) received an average of one hundred pound
per month.

In the first part of the interview, Lee and the interviewer narrate the way patterns of sociation
in Chinese immigratory settings work: Lee delivers the story of how she found her initial
position with the involvement of a ‘friend’ (pengyou 朋友; see also below). Note that in the
narratives of Chinese economic immigrants the relationship of ‘friendship’ is relatively
ambiguous: one’s friends include both fellow migrants who help on a daily basis and
gatekeepers who provide access to positions.5 When it comes to the expectations of ‘friends’
who arrange employment for them, the Chinese seem to be relatively silent. Accordingly, in
her narrative Lee says relatively little about the nature of the work she was doing after she
arrived in London. Note that in interviews where we explicitly asked whether they found their
jobs difficult, our subjects reacted with surprise, or with utterances like Na dangran 那当然
‘Of course!’ – this seems to suggest that for our interviewees this is an almost redundant
question given the exigencies of the sector of the economy where they tend to work and the
challenges of a life away from home. This metapragmatic redundancy showcases that, at this

5 That is, supposedly due to its Confucian historical semantic load (Conolly 2012), ‘friend’ is a euphemistic
term that Chinese migrants use to describe a cluster of relationships (see Authors, forthcoming).
point of the interaction, the interviewee narrates patterns of sociality by following the line that many migrants normally take in our dataset (see also Berger 1975 on this behaviour in other data types). Note that we did not try to elicit details as regards the work practices, partly due to ethical considerations and partly because Chinese economic migrants often go silent when the interviewer inquires about information that counts as ‘internal’ to their communities.

However, this seeming silence on the nature of work does not imply that our interviewees lack awareness of the fact that they as immigrant workers need to follow normative expectations to fit in. It is relevant to refer here to the language use of Lee: in Line 67, she applies the word ‘friend’ pengyou 朋友 to describe the person who sponsored her to come to London, and who contacted another local ‘friend’ for her. ‘Friend’ is a recurrent term in the Chinese data: it seems that most Chinese find jobs with the help of ‘friends’. This term is typical of the moral ordering activity of our interviewees. On the one hand it is an expression that is intrinsic to Chinese culture and has a fundamental moral role. This polysyllabic expression originates in the Chinese Confucian Classic Lunyu 论语 (Analects), and it describes one of the ‘Five Relationships’ (Wulun 五伦), which is supposed to determine a person’s social life. In the discourses of the Chinese we interviewed, pengyou seems to have an exceptional importance: for instance, in 13 interviews within our dataset, people argue that ‘friends’ actually play a more important role in their daily lives than family. On the other hand, pengyou ‘friend’ has a specific semantic meaning. If one examines the ways in which this word is used, it becomes evident that ‘friendship’ does not necessarily entail a personal relationship. For instance, many of our interviewees who state that they found jobs through ‘friends’ do not even remember who these friends are, mainly because there is often a significant fluctuation in the translocal community (Massey & García España 1987), with many ‘friends’ moving to other areas within the UK, elsewhere or going back to China, and so on. Thus, while there is a certain level of variation in the use of this term, it seems that ‘friend’ is a euphemistic expression for a cluster of relationships, including practically all interpersonal connections that help in employment mobility. Accordingly, ‘friend’ occurs in the narratives that our interviewees constructed with us in a moralising function, as part of describing the patterns of sociation of the Chinese immigrant communities.

In the second half of the interview Lee points out that having ‘friends’ can be problematic (see below), as she changes the ‘line’ (Goffman 1955) of the interaction, in the first part she delivers a moral narrative, by arguing that having friends is key: in Line 77, she confirms friends are important in her daily life by answering the interviewer’s question without a pause, which may be a sign of that she perceives the question as either redundant or sensitive. Note that our interviewees seem to be aware of the semantic load of ‘friend’: 1) for instance, one of our interviewees vehemently emphasised that he would not use ‘friends’ to find a job, by stating that relying on friends would not have been a preferable option for her to find a job; 2) other interviewees mention that one is having more obligations to ‘friends’ than to others, which again indicates their awareness of the fact that one is expected to cope with the concomitants of accepting a favour in the migratory setting.

The fact that having ‘friends’ is a euphemism of relationships is confirmed in Line 77. Here we can observe a noteworthy change in the ‘line’ (Goffman, 1955) of the interview: Lee switches topic, by referring to having ‘friends’ as a “complex” (fuza 复杂) and morally conflictive phenomenon clearly associated with sociality. This shift of line opens up a more explicit discussion on sociality, in terms of exploitation. Note that the shift of ‘line’ is also

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6 Note that the Analects open with a verse that describes the importance of having friends.

7 Note that in certain interviews there is a sense of variation in the ways in which ‘friend’ pengyou is used: for instance, one of our interviewees delivered a direct meta-discussion on the difference between ‘friends’ and real friends, i.e. people with whom she is having personal bonds.
marked by the fact that Lee briefly switched to English, by referring to the “complex” Chinese society with the English word “society”, hence distancing herself from the previous line in the conversation. These interactional moves seem to indicate an attempt to engage the interviewer in an alternative discussion: moral oughts by having some form of common ground with her. In Lines 79, 81 and 83, Lee goes explicit, by describing her negative experience with information of Chinese employers whom she represents as exploitative. Here she makes an indirect moral appeal (Author 2, 2017) to the higher-order expectation of camaraderie that should exist between people who are from the same country, by contrasting people from other immigrant communities whom she depicts as much more collaborative than the Chinese. In Line 85, she expands on her previous categorisation by qualifying ethnic Chinese employers (or, subject to one’s interpretation, employers in the sector in general) as people who give “horrible salaries”, and who engage in illegal practices such as employing staff in situations of irregularity (Line 87). Thus, by implication she offers a picture of the vulnerability of many of the employees and of the ways things are in the community.

Lee’s negative evaluations of employers is centred on the offence caused by the face-violations of the employers’ trespassing(s) their rights. Perhaps due to the cautiousness or pursuit of the ethos of ‘harmony’ that characterised many of our Chinese interviewees, Lee delivers her evaluation in a relatively indirect way, the essence of her message is that the behaviour of these employers is cruel. As Slugoski and Turnbull (1988; cited in Culpeper 1996: 352) point out, cruelty is a key impoliteness evaluator, and so while Lee’s evaluation is not within the domain of impoliteness, it is very similar in character to impolite evaluations of, say, speech acts associated with evaluations of cruelty.

Note that the interview excerpt above shows another recurrent feature of the moral conflicts in our data. In Line 89, Lee makes an attempt to align with Author 1’s Chinese research assistant Xiaoyi who conducted this interview: she first compares the unfair practices of Chinese managers at the time when she arrived to London four decades ago with the present-day practices of Malaysian (Chinese) bosses, and then she asks Xiaoyi whether she is a Malaysian Chinese. By doing so she supposedly attempts to check for a potential offence and perhaps also to establish a personal tie with Xiaoyi. To us, this indicates that the interviewee makes an appeal to moral oughts as they construct the interaction with the interviewer. In this part of the interview, patterns of sociation are narrated negatively, and as such there is a noteworthy contrast between this and the previous part of the interaction.

3.2 On taking undue advantage

The excerpt below was captured after a day of ethnographic fieldwork in Seven Sisters when the first author went into a beauty salon to have her nails done. Upon opening her handbag to pay for the service, she noticed that the recording button on the audio-recorder was still on. She thus asked the manicurist whom she had known for seven years whether she wanted to delete the recording. Upon receiving her authorisation to keep it and use it for her ongoing project notwithstanding appropriate data anonymisation procedures, she played it back in light of the illegal practice reported. Marcela, the manicurist, had learnt manicure techniques from her cousin with whom she lived in London in order to top up her income as an office cleaner. Marcela had recently obtained permanent residence in the UK and was thus able to offer manicures and pedicures at a beauty salon in the market rather than just privately in addition to cleaning offices.

8 Importantly, camaraderie between migrants is an expectation, which often emerges in meta-language (see also Bailey 2000), rather than an actual norm.
Rosina: Qué bueno que me pudiste atender hoy.

Marcela: Ayy sí (.) es que ya no tengo el trabajo de la mañana.

Rosina: no?:

Marcela: No doña Rosina (.) ni modo = ahora que tengo mis papeles que se monte a otra.

Rosina: =qué pasó?

Marcela: El muy hijoeputa =disculpe = He wanted to continue paying me like when I was using the other documents.

Rosina: Pero ahora no los necesitas.

Marcela: Me quería seguir pagando como cuando usaba los otros papeles.

Rosina: Pero: podría haberte dado de baja.

Marcela: =eso digo yo (.) muy berraco< pero es así se aprovechan de uno> =that’s what I say (.) most disgusting <but it’s like this they take advantage of you>.

Rosina: Qué horror.

Marcela: Pero se terminó el reinado de ese hijoeputa.

This short interaction has a different interactional style from the Chinese example above, but ultimately they are rather similar from a discursive point of view due to the prevalence of a moral conflict in them. The interaction above captures one of the illegal and exploitative practices which Latin American migrants and others, especially those in a position of irregularity are subjected to gain access to the segmented sector of the economy where they mostly work – i.e. the cleaning sector. The practice involves the renting of national insurance numbers or relevant passports for labour market incorporation by co-ethnics with irregular status. In many cases, a percentage of the wages is retained by the gatekeeper for mediating access to the internal labour market. In some cases, the fee is split between the gatekeeper and the rightful document owner, as explained by Marcela at lines 98–100. Note that the narrative here resembles that of Lee who complains about the negatively-perceived practice of Chinese ‘friends’ charging money for finding jobs (lines 78–92), i.e. as Marcela feels that there is a sense of common ground with the interviewer she portrays fellow Latin Americans who are supposed to be one’s friends by using expletives.
The practice of exploiting compatriots is not necessarily endemic to Latin Americans. Arguably, it results from the material conditions many economic migrants face and the way the economy is segmented. The practice is illegal and all concerned parties are aware of it. However, it is one of the ways in which interpersonal relations among Latin American economic migrants are established and managed. Trying to survive and make a living away from home may lead migrants into practices that the society at large would view as illegal, but very often it is the migrants rather than the person responsible for the practice, that is labeled as illegal, and therefore likely to attract moral judgement in the discourses of migration that circulate in society. The existence of such practices are part of the moral order that many Latin American economic migrants involuntarily inhabit and help to construct as observed by its evaluation as amoral (que se monte a otra, lines 91–92) in the interactional moment when common ground is reasserted. This change of line can be seen in Marcela’s invocation of moral oughts where individuals should not be indifferent to questions of right and wrong i.e. the practice of taking undue advantage of other co-ethnics is reported as pervasive when in theory the employer should not be claiming part of the fee, given that he is already benefitting from it having an ‘obliging’ employee.

At lines 98–100, Marcela further illustrates one of the basic principles of sociality: that ‘co-ethnic relations are primarily forged by the personally beneficial consequences of members’ actions towards themselves and one another’ (Author 1 2017: 1). In view of this, she evaluates her employer’s lack of willingness to remove her ‘rented identity’ from the books and register her as new employee on the basis of her rightful documents as muy berraco ‘very disgusting’ (line 102) and her employer as hijeputa ‘son of a bitch’ (line 104). This negative evaluation, unlike the one she made at lines 91–92, is based on her employer contravening the moral order on which intra-ethnic relations should be established and sustained.

Marcela’s evaluation reveals how the social oughts on which relations in the community are established is upset when one of the parties infringes on the personal benefits that should be gained by both parties. While her employer may well have to continue paying the rightful owner of the documents that Marcela used to work for, the concomitant reduction in Marcela’s wages represent a loss to the benefits that her sociation with her employer should offer. Marcela thus evaluates her employer’s action by appealing to a higher transactional order that dictates that human beings should not take advantage of each other, let alone fellow country people who ought to show camaraderie. In a similar way to the Chinese example, Marcela’s negative evaluations are not de facto impolite. They are triggered by being exposed to the continuous face-violations she has had to endure to fit in and gain access to the labour market under vulnerable conditions.

4. Conclusion
In the present paper we have explored the connection between sociality and the moral order in a migratory context, and illustrated our discussion on the basis of two interviews with economic migrants of Chinese and Latin American origin. Specifically, our discussion sought to elucidate the relationship between patterns of sociation and the moral order of things from a sociopragmatic perspective, by devoting special attention to the role that sociality ought to occupy in the field of sociopragmatics. We consider this to be important as sociopragmatics, especially linguistic impoliteness has until now mainly focused on the way speakers show consideration to one another in primarily face to face interactions and on the reactions that emerge as a result of contravening social interactional expectancies, including what the latter reveals about the moral values associated to given conventions. The economic migrants of our study mostly live in precarious conditions and are vulnerable to forces that are often beyond their control, such as the segmentation of economy and the lax deregulation of certain service sectors (i.e. cleaning). Under these conditions and away from home, patterns of sociation and
relationality naturally creates moral quagmires. Indeed as we have shown, it is the patterns of sociation that inform the social oughts on which migrant relations are established, maintained and evaluated. In these contexts, charging a co-ethnic for a service that is low cost such as introducing a contact who might help them obtain work does not contravene the norms of conventional interaction. Instead it attends to the way forms of sociation and relationality are valued. These valorisations stem from their ‘perceptual monitoring and mutually attentive engagement in shared contexts of a “practical activity”’ (Ingold 2000: 196).

Sociality and (im)politeness cannot be clearly separated – which has of course implications to the relationship between (im)politeness and morality, a theme that has witnessed significant research interest lately. This is why, in our view, sociality is a term that needs to be considered within sciopragmatics, in particular in contexts that trigger unavoidable clashes between moral and social oughts. In particular, negative evaluations of forms of sociation are not necessarily impolite. They are centred on the same moral concepts than impolite evaluations. This is because impolite behaviour is judged in keeping with patterns of relationality within a given social group. On a related note, one may argue that it is potentially problematic to limit the subject of politeness theory to what is conventionally understood as ‘politeness’ in a 2nd order analytic sense. As Mills (2003, 2017) has argued, our analytic understandings of politeness are often rooted in middle-class perceptions of language use and interpersonal relationships. In other words, in contexts of precarity our participants live in, the impoliteness domain is less important than coping with the social exigencies of fitting in to make a living. This does not mean that various understandings of politeness in a middle-class sense may be not relevant in these settings. For instance, being considerate or deferential towards others may prove helpful and be socially expected. As far as our data is concerned, the native equivalents of ‘politeness’ such as limao 礼貌 in Chinese and educación/buenos modales in Spanish are infrequent in the narratives of the interviewees, (im)politeness may as well be part of what people need to engage in to be sociable but is not a primary concern.

Along with contributing to pragmatics and the broader understanding of the relationship between language and morality, the present paper has delivered a contribution to transcultural relations, an area that up to now has received no attention in pragmatics despite the pervasiveness of such phenomena in late modernity.

References


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