Paradoxical Precarity & Emotional Labor: Brazilian and Vietnamese Migrant Beauticians in Sweden

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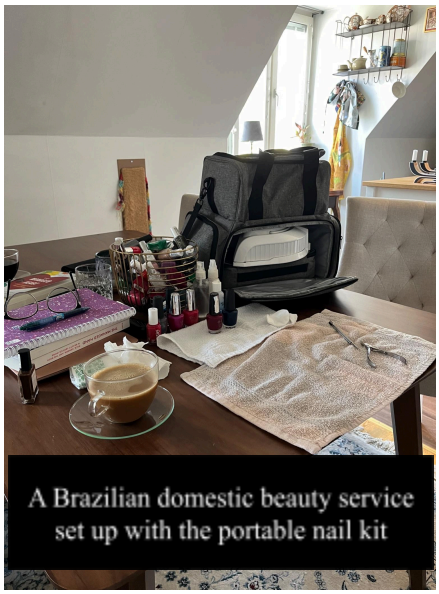

Abstract

Against a backdrop of widespread global precarity and shifting priorities in the Swedish labor market, this thesis explores migrant experiences of precarity in the beauty industry by asking: **how is migrant beauty work characterized by precarity, and how do migrant beauticians navigate it?** Through participant observation and a series of narrative interviews with Vietnamese salon owners and workers as well as self-employed Brazilian domestic beauticians in Sweden, this thesis reflects on the position of migrant beauticians on the basis of interpersonal dynamics. Current research on emerging precarity among migrants in Sweden is largely based on the gig economy, leaving precarity among self-employed migrants unexplored. In order to address this gap, emotional labor is presented as a productive entrypoint into migrant precarity by its ability to demonstrate how relationships and identity construction define obstacles and strategies that drive, reinforce and counteract precarity. This thesis finds that precarity in the beauty industry is characterized by a complex web of network relations and identity construction dynamics which curb but also exacerbate vulnerabilities beauticians face as they shape their trajectories in Sweden. As the title suggests, the essence of self-employed beauty work is paradoxical precarity, in which one's work can be secure and lucrative at the same time as being exploitative and interdependent. Finally, the insights gained throughout this project question the extent to which self-employment is the wise integration solution the Swedish government and institutions envision it to be.

Keywords: precarity, beauty work, Swedish labor market, migrant entrepreneurship, emotional labor, affective labor, networks, identities

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"The carnality of a manicure sets it up as an unpredictable exchange that can lurch suddenly from relaxing to uncomfortable, if not alarming" (Kang, 2010: 2)

Introduction

I stepped into Lauren's salon for the first time nearly six years ago. It transported me back to my hometown of Philadelphia, where countless excursions concluded with a pedicure at a Vietnamese salon. As I dipped my feet in a whirlpool of blue, glittery water, the kitschy, vaguely tropical-inspired souvenirs and unintelligible chitchat punctuated with laughter soothed my homesickness. Over the years, I had become a regular. We exchanged stories about how we ended up in this little Swedish town. She was delighted to hear that I worked at the international school. For the past year, she had been trying to secure a spot for her daughter, Emma, who was about to start preschool. From Lauren's perspective, Emma's future rested on this opportunity: if she goes to the newly opened international school, she can learn English, go to university and be successful. Spreading her hands out in a dramatic gesture with air quotes, she declared that doing nails isn't some kind of "big, special career." It's a job, and one that she would prevent Emma from having to do at all costs, since she wanted her to grow up to be independent and free. I was puzzled as to how Lauren didn't see herself as a role model to her daughter, as a dedicated single mother and owner of a successful salon. That conversation was the first of many indications I would receive that the beauty business was not the pinnacle of freedom and self-sufficiency I had envisioned it to be. Why did Lauren consider beauty work to be at odds with her hopes of Emma having a future of independence and stability?

This thesis explores such ideas through the experiences of Vietnamese salon owners and workers, as well as Brazilian domestic beauticians in Sweden by asking: **how is migrant beauty work characterized by precarity, and how do migrant beauticians navigate it?** Salon ownership and domestic beauty work stand on the outskirts of the Swedish labor market and contain perspectives of precarity that have gone unexplored through emerging research concerning vulnerability among migrants in Sweden. Such research has been largely situated in the gig economy or "false" self-employment (see section 3.1), leaving the experience of precarious migrant entrepreneurship underexplored. Reflecting on migrant beauticians' conditions of precarity as a manifestation of Sweden's changing labor market or membership in

the global *precariat* effectively contextualizes beauticians' experiences against a backdrop of ongoing national and global shifts into widespread precarity. However, such conceptualizations are limited in their ability to identify the obstacles and strategies that drive, reinforce and counteract precarity on an interpersonal level. To address this gap (and answer the question at hand), this thesis suggests emotional labor as a perspective to identify the ways in which migrant beauty work is insecure, and explain how migrant beauticians navigate precarity at a collective (via network relations) and individual (via identity construction) levels. To adequately respond to the second part of the research question, this thesis looks beyond vulnerability in administrative, bureaucratic terms to render interpersonal dynamics that condition precarity visible.

In order to delineate the empirical setting and describe what value it contains as a source of insight, this thesis starts out by defining beauty work, as it can be used to describe various types of activities and settings. Following that is a reflection of beauty work as an empirical site, which discusses the social complexities embedded in choosing, receiving and giving treatments. This section also contemplates the value of the research question, considering what knowledge answering it affords us in broader terms. After that, **Chapter 1** maps out the theoretical lenses and conceptual tools used in the further analytical sections, which present various conceptualizations of precarity, leading up to the introduction of emotional labor. The concept of networks and identities are introduced as empirical levels from which emotional labor is analyzed from collective and individual perspectives. Following this, **Chapter 2** discusses the methodological approach taken throughout this thesis. The outline of the analytical chapters comes before **Chapter 3: Paradoxical Precarity in Migrant Beauty Work.**

Defining Beauty Work

Beauty work is an umbrella term that can apply to various aesthetic services that cover hair salons, nail salons, waxing studios, eyebrow threading booths, day spas, and more. The focus of this project has relied on mobility-related facets of beauty work, which happens to fall along the lines of waxing, nails and recently, eyelash extensions. Therefore, "beauty work" in this thesis refers specifically to nail salons and domestic beauty services in which nail-related services are a central focus, even if some of these businesses offer other treatments, such as spray tans or facials. The terms "nail technician" and "beautician" are both used in this work to describe the roles within salon work. They are chosen with the intention to avoid terms "beauty therapist" or

“nagel byggare” (nail builder), as they are charged with internal assessments of (un)professionalism.

Conceptualizing Beauty Work

This brief section contemplates the value of beauty work as an empirical site, which acts as a window into various thematic elements of mobility. Although the premise of beauty work may start with an exchange of aesthetic services for money, it hardly ends there. The experience of a single beauty treatment is a stage on which a variety of multilayered dynamics play out. For example, clients and beauticians describe how people select salons—a choice infused with moral, symbolic meaning: Swedes only go to Vietnamese because they’re cheap and quick, Brazilians opt for Brazilian domestic service to reenact a piece of Brazil in Sweden, and Swedish salons are chosen out of loyalty, paying a higher price to avoid tax-evading migrant salons. Across the manicure table, social boundaries are set or lifted, Identities are declared, and power dynamics are on display. Home is recreated, or altered. In some contexts, a successful, professional beauty treatment entails intimacy, whereas others require silence. Narratives about beauty work and hygiene are interlaced with ideas about ethnic identity and origin. The presentation of materials and techniques tell stories about how beauticians place themselves in Swedish society. For example, Vietnamese beauticians proudly exhibit their Swedish brands of nail polish, as they invested time and resources to attend the nail technician training necessary to buy it. From their perspective, such displays are declarations of successful integration. Beauty work is about gel application and bikini waxes, but it is also about transnational ties and inequality. It functions as a vantage point from which issues of integration, migrant self-employment, stuckness, ethnic discrimination, gendered work and mobility can be explored. Clearly, focusing on precarity and emotional labor is just one way of discussing the work migrant beauticians do. The advantage of inquiring about precarity is that it is a common denominator in migrant beauty work, which touches on many of the adjacent issues and themes mentioned above.

1. Theory & Concepts

The various theoretical concepts used to investigate **how migrant beauty work is characterized by precarity (and how beauticians navigate it)** are outlined in this chapter, as well as a review of relevant literature to which this project responds. The overall theoretical approach taken to reach an answer to the question at hand is inspired by the notion that precarity and emotional labor share a common interest in the lives of service workers, such as beauticians. The argument that an emotional labor perspective can answer the research question effectively is based on the notion that precarity frameworks tend to focus on vulnerability that is visible from the state's perspective. This runs counter to the idea that informal, flexible work is normally somewhat invisible. For example, conceptualizing migrant beauticians' precarity along the lines of Standing's *precariat* or their position in the labor market alone does not satisfy all aspects of the research question, even if some elements of his theory describe certain disadvantages beauticians face. Since the research question is concerned with *how* precarity characterizes beauty work (which is largely informal), depth overrides scope in the selection of theoretical framing.

The second part of the question is not fully answerable by understanding the static, administrative condition of work alone. This rests in understanding dynamics between the stakeholders involved: coworkers, mentors, clients, family members, friends. Observed interactions between beauticians and others in their network highlights conditions of their precarity at work that run far deeper than what is seen by administrative measure and what is visible from formal sources (i.e. unemployment figures, proportion of short-term contracts, union membership). Nevertheless, these social interactions in beauty work are not always strictly about navigating the politics of the network. Sometimes they are about portraying an identity to reach an objective. Therefore, emotional labor exchanges across empirical levels of network relations and expressions of identity are used to narrate how migrants navigate precarity.

1.1 Precarity

Here, various conceptualizations of precarity are presented in order to explain how far they get us in answering the research question, and what limitations arise while trying to apply these understandings of precarity to the case of migrant beauty work. Ultimately, the discussion below

sets the stage for the presentation of the argument that emotional labor is needed as an additional layer of conceptualization to serve the analytical goals of this thesis. To start, the following subsection provides a conceptual background of precarity and related concepts, opening the exploration of this case.

1.1.1 Conceptual Origins & Terminology

Two overarching strands of thought ushered the contemporary discussion on precarity into existence (Kalleberg and Vallas, 2017). The first theoretical angle is derived from French sociology. At the time of its publication in the early 1960s, Bourdieu's writings on precarity among un(der)employed Algerians was a prescient observation of how themes of vulnerability would resurface. The concept of precarity gained relevance and popularity amidst the political and economic climate of the 1970s, when French sociologists started to use terms such as "precarity" and "social exclusion" to discuss poverty (Millar, 2016:3). From here, its spread prompted the translation of *précarité* to the English word, precarity (Choonara, 2020:429). By the 1980s, precarity had come to conceptualize social issues beyond those of poverty and underemployment, when the term started to be ascribed to the administrative side of work (contracts, wages, prospects) (Choonara, 2020). From the 1990s onward, precarity began to encompass the overall quality of insecurity which defines much of its usage today, including the emergence of Standing's *precariat,* which reimagined precarity as an experience shared by a growing, global class of assorted disadvantaged workers who are plagued by uncertainty.

Since then, the erosion of social benefits and labor markets that are "more global and more flexible than ever" have come to define the contemporary labor landscape (Meyer, 2016:39). Some claim that the 2008 financial crisis brought on a change in the way precarity is discussed, bringing a once marginal academic discussion on "flexible" labor to the center of focus (Betti, 2018). Following these trends of flexibility and unemployment, the concept of precarity was reunited with its original context: insecure employment (Millar, 2016). Parallel to the first strand, the second major influence of thought comes from economic sociologists, whose objective was to locate the ongoing erosion of Fordist working conditions: "Together they provide a compelling warrant, underscoring that the era of the Fordist employment regime – one that promised stable, secure employment with benefits – has rapidly come undone" (Kalleberg and Vallas, 2017:3) Alongside the emergence and collision of these macro concepts, precarity

has been identified as a central social issue worldwide, with concentrated effects on younger generations, migrants and the female workforce (Betti, 2018:273). Some argue that the concept of "precarity" itself is a flawed starting point for understanding precarious employment, since it describes insecurity as a state (or identity, in Standing's case), rather than a process (Alberti et. al, 2018).

Terminology used to describe precarity is embedded in a complex, overlapping web of ideas, which broadly describe experiences of temporariness and uncertainty related to one's position and opportunities in the labor market. While the term "precarity" has been popularized in many European countries and North America, terms such as "casualization" or "vulnerable" work have become common in the United Kingdom to describe precarious labor (Lewis et. al, 2015:518). Broadly defined by its ability to conceptualize uncertainty and unstable work under neoliberal capitalism (Jørgensen and Schierup, 2016:53), precarity and related concepts of *precarization* and *precariat* visualize precarity as a condition, a process and an identity (Jørgensen, 2015). Although controversial, labor insecurity tends to be defined by discussions on *precarity* in the Global North and *informality* in the Global South (Wilson, 2018).

The concept of uncertainty in work predates current debates surrounding precarity. The notion that precarity represents a new phenomenon is challenged by scholars who see insecure work as a historical norm, rather than an exceptional, new feature of working life. Scholars such as Bryan Palmer point out that the concept of precarity is unconscious of history: "work has never been anything but a precarious foundation of life lived on the razor's edge of dispossession" (Palmer, 2014:44). Likewise, Wilson (2018) claims that if we look at the global history of capitalism, "it is precarity that is the norm and not Fordist economic organization" (Wilson, 2018:472), and others call the assertion that precarity describes some new phenomenon " simply laughable" (Choonara, 2020:428).

1.1.2 The Precariat & The Case of Migrant Beauty Work

Throughout precarity's conceptual journey, some attempts have been made to develop frameworks to explain its influence on working conditions and lives. In an effort to capture the various categorizations made within the debate surrounding precarity, Campbell and Price (2016) define five levels of research: **precarious employment** (insecurity fuelled by job characteristics), **precarious work** (waged, standard precarious work), **precarious workers** (the

effect of precarity on the lives of workers), **the precariat** (Standing's concept of precarious workers comprising a class of their own), and finally, **precarity** (generalized insecure conditions, expanding into life outside the labor market, such as housing and relationships) (Campbell and Price, 2016).

Standing's idea of the global precariat (a portmanteau of precarious/proletariat), which visualizes precarious workers as a "class in the making," or "an army of unemployed and a detached group of socially ill misfits living off the dregs of society" (Standing, 2011:8) provide dimensions of precarity**: labor market security** (income-earning opportunities in a "full" employment scenario), **employment security** (protection against arbitrary hiring and firing), **job security** (potential for upward mobility of status and income), **work security** (accommodations and protection against accidents and illness as well as regulated working hours), **skill reproduction security** (opportunity to gain skills), **income security** (assured adequate income, protected through some form of government safety net) and **representation security** (voice in the labor market to organize unions or strikes) (Standing, 2016:10-11). The precariat considers migrants as its "quintessential incarnation" (Schierup and Jørgensen, 2016). Its claim to relate to migrant work on a universal scale would suggest that it could serve as an avenue of exploration on the pursuit to answer the question of how migrant beauty work is characterized by precarity. However, beauticians' narratives challenge precariat logic about how insecurity is experienced by migrant workers, an allegedly central group in the global precariat. At the same time as beauty work can be highly precarious by Standing's measures, each case represents contradictory conditions of precarity, as seen in cases where skill development leads to heavier exploitation and economic security is found through distrust in the state. While some beauticians experience exploitation along conventional precariat lines of employer/employee relations, salon owners and independent workers face precarity that is not addressed by Standing's framework.

Locating areas of precarity is not inherently useful in the pursuit of capturing a meaningful picture of the precarity faced in migrant beauty work (and hence answering the research question). Beauty work can be simultaneously uncertain and exploitative, as well as highly lucrative, independent and long-term. This reality clashes with Standing's portrayal of precarious work, in which members of the precariat "fare badly in all respects" (Standing, 2016:10-11). Measuring precarity by the dimensions presented by the precariat might tell us *what* is precarious about migrant beauty work. By these measurements, precarity looks relatively

similar across Brazilian and Vietnamese cases. For example, they have no union, lack of contracts, no professional development is guaranteed, and earnings can be low. Some aspects of these are more pronounced in each case, however there are more similarities than differences. Despite this, the conditions of these factors vary significantly. Such shortcomings call for an additional layer of conceptualization, which accounts for the individuality of precarious work.

Schierup and Jørgensen (2016) present a "varieties of precarity" approach, which "take different forms in different parts of the world, on different scales and in different socio-economic contexts, and yet they share certain characteristics in terms of conditions and capacity for agency" (Schierup and Jørgensen, 2016). They present a range of useful ideas that capture the way in which precarity can be used to expand understandings of exclusionary dynamics in society that are not an "error" that can be fixed through social engineering or politics of moral improvement; rather it serves an essential purpose in a disjointed political economy of neoliberal globalization within which the excluded are unsafe and vulnerable – but not superfluous. Not a regrettable mistake; on the contrary, seen from this perspective, the excluded are 'valuable' because they are 'vulnerable', i.e. open to exploitation" (Schierup and Jørgensen, 2016). While more an approach than a framework, the duality of being needed yet exploited aptly describes migrant beauticians' experiences of being both needed and valued by clients, and their value is denied by Swedish beauticians, as migrant beauty work does not serve their interests. This is what the concept of emotional labor unpacks, which this thesis argues can help highlight interactions that underpin precarity. Furthermore, the stakes emotional labor interactions have in migrant beauty play a central role in how businesses are run, and how workers think about their own stability, financial and otherwise.

1.2 Emotional Labor

Emotional labor represents an implicit element of work that contributes perspectives on interpersonal dynamics that serve the research question. Expressions of emotional labor can be conceptualized as manifestations of precarity as well as a strategy of challenging it. Here, the concept of emotional labor is presented to provide a means of discussing the subjective vulnerabilities. Therefore, emotional labor is an additional theoretical angle that helps unpack experiences of precarity among migrant beauticians in Sweden. From this perspective, we can focus on what migrant beauticians do in their daily work, rather than the structures that impose

precarity upon them. This aids the fulfillment of the second part of the research question about how migrant beauticians navigate precarity.

The section below showcases emotional labor as a concept, and its overall relevance to the research question. In the case of migrant beauty work, seeing interactions in terms of "exchange value" frames the various ways in which the management of relationships and personal feelings interacts with employment status and prospects, and thus conditions of precarity. Migrant beauticians often resort to drawing upon their individuality to gain opportunities in the Swedish labor market. Emotional labor entails workers constructing various senses of self to navigate service work. Specifically, it provides a vocabulary with which we can describe the interpersonal dynamics and precarity encompassed in beauty work.

1.2.1. Emotional Labor & Related Concepts

The term *emotional labor* was first presented by the sociologist, Arlie Hochschild in the 1980s (Choi and Kim, 2015:285) to describe the ways in which employees self-regulate their emotions to comply with organizational expectations or fulfill professional roles. Since its debut, a range of literature followed, which discuss emotional displays in service roles and customer service settings (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993, Morris & Feldman, 1996, 1997). Specific acts described in Hochschild's work on emotional labor lend themselves particularly well to understanding how migrant beauticians navigate precarity. Emotional labor is defined as: "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value" (Hochschild, 1983). Crucially, the "exchange value" of interactions brings emotional labor from an unpaid, unseen dynamic into a financially compensated commercialization of emotional display. In the case of beauty work, migrant beauticians are very aware that their emotional disposition has a dollar value. The concept of emotional labor questions the degree to which the emotive expressions workers use to navigate the workplace are truly theirs: "the worker can become estranged or alienated from an aspect of self–either the body of the margins of the soul–that is *used* to do the work" (Hochschild, 1983:7). As abstract as this concept comes across in Hochschild's writing, it contributes a useful description of how the pursuit of professional trajectories hijacks workers' sense of self to perform a job. The idea of emotional labor was brought forth from the perspective of classic service work in an organizational, standard employment setting. In that sense, it could be argued

that its relevance for dynamics within self-employment are limited. However, the nature of solo self-employment among migrant beauticians reveals a dependent employment structure that runs on emotional exchange, even if its enforcement does not happen along the lines of organizational management.

Emotional labor and care is not only a widely documented feature of service work, but has been conceptualized as a cornerstone of beauty work, since it has been said to involve immaterial, affective labor (Jarrin, 2017, Kang, 2010), listening and therapy (Black, 2001, Hanson, 2019) and emotional intimacy in precarious conditions (Liao, 2016). Milian Kang's 2010 book *The Managed Hand* (a nod to Hochschild's *The Managed Heart)* is widely sourced in both literature on beauty work and emotional labor. Kang's work addresses the commercialization of emotional labor in nail salons, alongside what she calls *body work* and *body labor.* Not to be confused with *physical labor,* these terms refer to physical acts of commercialized care (e.g. manicuring, massaging) or "commercialized bodied exchanges" (Kang, 2010:21). Through such concepts, she explores themes of race, class and ethnic identities conveyed across the manicure table. She designates Asian salons as a rich empirical site for understanding a range of emotional labor that is "not necessarily governed by the feeling rules of white middle-class America" (Kang, 2010:21). This perspective is inspirational to the goals of this thesis, since it relates to how beauticians navigate precarity in spaces that are governed by mixed social norms and expectations.

1.2.2 Display Rules, Surface Acting and Deep Acting

Emerging research on affective and emotional labor has offered new perspectives about how emotional labor frames work in relation to precarity across professional fields. Attributed to contemporary capitalism, the idea of "connective labor" refers to "the work of emotional recognition" (Pugh, 2022). It is conceptualized as a response to work which increasingly demands efficiency on one hand, but emotional sincerity and intimacy on the other. Migrant beauty work relates to elements of all three domains of Pugh's classification of connective labor: emotional labor as a tool, commodity or vulnerability (Pugh, 2022:23). In Pugh's view, the act of connective labor is embodied across three main activities: empathetic listening (cultivating a shared understanding of a situation), emotion management (managing the display of emotions, such as Hochschild's *surface acting* and *deep acting* described below) and witnessing (workers

mirroring the emotional disposition of the other person) (Pugh, 2022:24). Throughout these processes, the practitioner and client co-create the meaning of the encounter. This is a productive starting point for understanding how migrant beauticians interact with their social circles, and how those interactions expose/generate precarity as well as alleviate it. Specifically, the idea of co-created meaning aptly addresses the participatory nature of exchanges, representing beauticians' objectives on one side, and client reactions and reciprocity on the other. This two-way process is important, as some scholars have declared emotion to be "tied up with organizational and social norms," (Denker, 2017:22), arguing toward the growing extent of human emotion commercialized through service work. In the context of migrant beauty work, it is important to remember that such norms are not universally understood due to their respective understandings of *display rules.* Hochchild's concept of emotional *display rules* refers to how employees alter their emotional disposition to align with organizational goals as a part of a professional performance. In addition, Ashforth and Humphrey's definition of *display rules,* or "overarching rules regarding how and what emotions should be expressed during service encounters" (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993:91) relates to what is considered "good" service. While following display rules, workers' gestures and the organizational image becomes one. For example, a hotel concierge's smile at guests could be seen as an extension of the hotel's dedication to friendly service and vision of hospitality. In a self-employed context, such *display rules* are not derived from an organization, but from people. The implications of this is that the rules are less obvious, change from case to case, and often entail linguistic and cultural barriers. Also, not being able to anticipate how (or if) customers participate in an invitation to connect hampers the ability of beauticians to use friendliness and familiarity to secure business. This relates back to Kang's discussion about emotional labor that takes place in spaces that are not governed by the norms of its surrounding environment, and also that acts of emotional labor recognize status as an integral part of their expression. Hochschild writes: "complementarity is a common mask for inequality in what is presumed to be owing between people, both in display and in the deep acts that sustain it" (Hochschild, 1983:85). This dynamic highlights a mindset that unifies migrant beauticians in their usage of friendship and familiarity to maintain their business. In an attempt to define what this looks like, Hochschild presents the concepts of *surface acting* and *deep acting.* Surface acting is defined as a performance of emotion that is believable to the outside (e.g. clients), while the worker knows what he/she truly feels, creating

an uncomfortable state of "emotive dissonance" (Hochschild, 1983:85). Deep acting goes beyond facial expressions and conscious performances of professionalism. It's a process whereby organizational expectations of behavior intervene in one's system of reaction in interpersonal exchanges. While surface acting suppresses the *appearance* of emotions to fulfill a professional role, deep acting involves workers "taking over the levers of feeling production" (Hochschild, 1983:33) to conjure a "real feeling that has been self-induced" (Hochschild, 1983:35). From an organizational perspective, the value of deep acting pertains to the idea that it is not advantageous to simply provide service with a smile that is slapped on to perform the job. Instead, sincerity and authenticity are branded commodities. The rationale behind (and implications of) these processes change slightly in this case, since beauticians are representing themselves instead of companies.

Admittedly, it can be difficult to assess whether workers are engaging in any kind of "acting." The key in this analysis is understanding the limitations of what is visible and accessible in these exchanges. However, surface acting and deep acting do not need to be observed in real time. Beautician narratives are infused with admissions of both. Their own descriptions of their interpersonal roles and exchanges denote "exchange value," in the sense that beauticians know their emotional labor is worth money, and point to its role in the management of precarious working conditions. By reading their experiences through an emotional labor lens, we can see how migrant beauticians channel personal distance and connection as a strategy for navigating precarity.

1.2.3 Networks & Identities

Networks and identities serve as two empirical standpoints from which emotional labor is unpacked throughout the analytical chapters. Narrowing the definition of each is important, as to distinguish parameters of "networks," and "identities," which are otherwise vague.
While both terms are grounded in theory, networks and identities are used as empirical settings in which emotional labor plays out. On the network level, emotional labor is used to understand inter-communal and intra-communal exchanges. In the Vietnamese case, inter-communal emotional labor takes shape in beautician-client relationships, while intra-communal exchanges showcase internal hierarchies and dynamics related to the work they do. In the Brazilian case, inter and intra-communal circles overlap almost entirely, since their clientele are largely made up

of Brazilians living in Sweden. This dual identity entails delicate emotional work, balancing privacy and professionalism. On the level of identities, emotional labor is used as a tool to put a moral value on what "legitimate" or "authentic" beauty work is. Emotional labor at the individual level also negotiates valuable and vulnerable identities, responding to the aforementioned paradox of beauticians being needed, but also exploited.

Lastly, the distinction between networks and identities is not always straightforward, as network affiliation and status often intersect with identity and one's role in the industry. Therefore, some narratives discussed in networks might also be applicable in the identities section and vice versa. The narratives were organized based on their ability to answer the research question. However, there is some thematic overlap.

2. Methods

The following section outlines the overall methodological approach and research design of this project. This includes defining what counts as "data," how it was obtained, as well as ethical considerations and analytical advantages and limitations at stake, which relates to the ability of the chosen methods to answer the research question. Given the volume of research focusing on precarity and "informal" work in Sweden, methods of measuring said precarity rely on formal indicators. This approach could be argued to be counterproductive, since informal work is largely defined by its invisibility to state eyes. Thus, use of narrative interviews and participant observation presents an opportunity to see "informal" labor at an informal level.

2.1 Research Design

The methodological approach is based on two months of fieldwork in nail salons, where narrative interviews and participant observation were carried out in physical salons and domestic beauty visits in Landskrona, Sweden. Before an analytical focus emerged, I gained access to the salons and spent time there to see what themes arose during each visit. Rather than testing a specific set of theories and predictions, the basis of this project is derived from observations collected during fieldwork that were structured into generalized, thematic sections. Overall, the approach is inductive, taking inspiration from grounded theory methods, which "discovers theory from data" (Dunne, 2011). The non-linear collection of data and analysis was influenced by this

approach as well, since themes emerged through observations at the same time as previous themes were analyzed. The question of **how migrant beauty work is characterized by precarity and how beauticians navigate precarious work** refers to individual and collective lived experiences of precarity. Therefore, empirical richness was prioritized. The advantage of this small-picture methodological approach is its ability to reflect on broad concepts on the scale of everyday life. This is concerned with the construction of narratives, rather than truth. Additionally, the principle of not addressing contradicting points in narrative interviews was extremely useful in the case of migrant beauty work, which is charged with contradictory beliefs surrounding identity and power. Visibility and access were central determinants of the chosen methodological approach. Migrant beauty work is economically informal to a great extent, meaning that fostering trust is crucial in order to a meaningful discussion. When I texted beauticians to invite them for interviews or ask follow-up questions, they requested that we meet in person. Without inquiring about their work right away, beauticians could talk about their lives and experiences first, which allowed trust to be built on their terms. Finally, Vietnamese and Brazilian beauticians are represented together in this study. This is by no means a comparative analysis. However, their individual yet overlapping experiences produce various answers to the research question. Also, while offering the same services, they do not always consider themselves to work in the same industry, which has a lot to do with identity narratives and the moral value assigned to beauty work, such as social connection and therapy. Although they are not migrants, Swedish beauticians are a useful contribution to this research, since their perspectives illuminate negative space around the migrant beauty experience. The narratives that circulate around Swedish salons are widely held to be part of the formal beauty industry's set of standards about who can perform legitimate beauty services and where they should happen. What unites these three groups is the work of nails, which entail roughly the same techniques and skills, yet the practice of beauty work is animated by personal narratives and cultural understandings of what a manicure is. In the face of precarity, these distinctions become important to understand.

2.2 Data

The data collected for this project was gathered by conducting a series of qualitative, narrative interviews and participant observation. The procedure of narrative interviewing resembles

Martin W. Bauer's description of the use of storytelling in social inquiry (Bauer, 2000). Some key aspects of his approach resonate with the rationale of the interview approach taken throughout this project, such as chronological and non-chronological elements of narrative being needed in order to understand the plot. For this case, that meant understanding beauticians' migration and career trajectories, family history, etc. were equally as important as understanding the internal lexicon used by beauticians to describe their surroundings and refer to others in their stories (e.g. a "master" as an accomplished beautician, or "nagel byggare" for a nail technician who is not a real beautician). In Bauer's description of narrative interviews, language choice is central, as it denotes a worldview (Bauer, 2000). Importantly, the structure (or lack thereof) of narrative interviews allowed trust to build without a formal question-answer format. It was crucial that the interviews did not come off as an interrogation, as migrant beauticians are reluctant to share information that could potentially jeopardize their business.

Although the physical setting of this looked very different between Vietnamese and Brazilian contexts, the approach was essentially the same. In the Vietnamese salons, this looked like shadowing their work day and asking them questions about their lives and work. In the Brazilian case, interviews and participant observation took place in a private apartment-salon, a rented room in a hair salon, as well as clients' homes, where beauty treatments took place. All interviews were scheduled in accordance with field visits. In the Vietnamese case, this happened exclusively in the salons and connected areas. In the case of Brazilian domestic beauty services, I visited a home salon in Malmö, as well as meeting Diana at the room she rents in a salon in Lund, as well as private residences (my own and other clients). The timing of the interviews varied significantly, between one-hour visits and conversations spanning nail salon shifts. Direct quotes in this project were produced by manually writing their statements down in fieldnotes, which is why they tend to be shorter in length. Statements from the Vietnamese beauticians were translated from Swedish. The interviews took place in Swedish and English. A significant downfall of the lack of structure in narrative interviewing. While they are rich in elaborate stories that switch between space and time, topics of conversation tend to change rather quickly without too much intervention from the interviewer's side to steer the conversation. This meant that I had to rely on what I remembered about the visits or the notes I wrote by hand.

Participant observation captured many things that narrative interviewing didn't. Spending time in the salons or at domestic beauty services delivered context within which the narratives

are situated. For example, interesting contradictions arose when I was told by a Vietnamese beautician that she has no Vietnamese friends or close contacts, only to see her salon is a hub for the Vietnamese community and businesses. Such observations contributed to the process of understanding the interpersonal dynamics between beauticians and their social circles, which inspired the use of emotional labor as a lens through which we can understand precarity.

Aspects of James Spradley's descriptive observations inspired this approach. As I witnessed beauty treatments, I was an insider at the salon but an outsider to the client-practitioner relationship during the treatment. Depending on the structure of the beautician's work day, observations would be more passive (e.g. sitting in the lobby talking to customers), or moderate participation (e.g. sitting in on a treatment and helping prepare materials). Complete active participation was not possible for a few reasons. First, the Vietnamese salon owners politely insisted that my presence there was contingent on the fact that I would not touch anything and stay in the salon area. I was not permitted to help clean the salons or carry out their daily work with them, such as opening or closing the salon. As for domestic beauty services, active participation was more feasible, since both the beautician and I were guests in another residence.

2.3 Access

Having reached out to a few dozen brick-and-mortar Vietnamese salons, as well as independent Brazilian beauticians from Facebook ads, willingness to participate was extremely limited. Vietnamese beauticians often declined to participate due to fear their bosses would find out or they had "nothing to tell." Finding salons that would allow me to stay the length of a whole shift without being a paying customer was extremely difficult. On two occasions, nail technicians accepted my invitation for interviews, only to decline participation upon my arrival. Without an initial understanding of their network dynamics, I was unable to locate which salon(s) would be most promising.

My presence at the Brazilian home visits undoubtedly altered the dynamics of the conversations held, limiting the extent to which I had complete access to their environment. Likewise, Vietnamese beauticians were strict about when I could show up, and how long I could stay, even if they previously suggested otherwise. I tried to negotiate the timetable to make sure I sat in on shifts during different days and times. However, it was not always possible to choose. Since they could anticipate my arrival, I'm unaware of any accommodations made to their

environment or way of working as a result. Within the salons, my access was also somewhat restricted to being in the waiting areas/lobbies, as well as by treatment stations and behind the register. My presence was welcomed for brief, accompanied periods in shared kitchen areas, but never in cellars or private upstairs areas. Insisting on a full tour would have likely terminated the controlled access I had to the salons, which is a risk this project could not sustain.

2.4 Ethical Considerations

Recognizing the asymmetrical power imbalance at stake in practitioner-customer relationships in the service industry, I refrained from booking beauty treatments for the purpose of obtaining interview material. However, I initially met some of the women through booking beauty services. All interviewees' participation in the project was obtained via verbal consent. They were informed of their right to revoke participation at any time. To the extent possible, I limited spreading information between salons, as gossip could bear negative consequences in their tight-knit networks. In that vein, their names were changed to avoid similar effects. The beauticians were working most of the time, meaning clients were often within earshot of our discussions. Aware of the economic and personal stakes involved, I used time between clients and lunch breaks to engage in more detailed, personal interviews building from previous discussions.

Introduction to the Analytical Chapters

Chapter 3: Paradoxical Precarity in Migrant Beauty unfolds migrant precarity across two thematic subsections. The first covers trajectories of migrant beauticians into the Swedish labor market. In doing so, we see their routes into the beauty industry are highly individual, as are their placements in the "informal" sector and precarious work. Following that, the second subsection narrates their perceived relationships with the Swedish state, and the interactions they share. Such examples highlight that for alleged members of a global precariat with low trust in the state (Standing, 2011), their connections with the Swedish authorities are much more complex than simple distrust or avoidance. On some levels of interaction, government-funded subsidy programs provide a platform for precarity, aiding high turnover and the circulation of workers between salons. Overall, this chapter demonstrates the polarity of security reflected in migrant

beauty work, which can be extremely secure and lucrative at the same time as exploitative and risky. Observing how differently precarity is experienced within the same industry begs the question of the precariat's ability to capture precarity in a single industry, let alone an emerging class. It also exposes elements of dependency within migrant self-employment. Business ownership is "independent" in the sense that one can generate job and income security beyond conventional barriers to employment migrants face in the Swedish labor market. However, beauticians depend on intra-ethnic communities and networks as well as client relationships to sustain their businesses. Such insights lead to the conclusion that precariat logic and labor market characteristics can conceptualize some aspects of their precarity, they do not account for hierarchies and dynamics within networks or how the management of personal relationships serves as a strategy for coping with precarity. While the administrative facets of their precarity overlap (i.e. job insecurity), the social networks in which they are embedded vary greatly. Therefore, the sections within **Chapters 4: Networks** and **5: Identities** will address this through an emotional labor lens via networks and identities as empirical levels. These sections detail how precarity is characterized in beauty work via these levels, and how beauticians cope with the insecurity that follows.

Chapter 4: Networks looks at precarity at the network level to further unpack interactions on inter-community and intra-community levels. In the Brazilian case, these categories overlap nearly entirely, since their clientele consists mostly of fellow Brazilians. The emotional labor involved in managing this dual role in solo self-employment is unpacked. In the Vietnamese case, internal hierarchies within and across salons show power dynamics in a hierarchy of exploitation in which intra-network connections are essential, yet exploitative. Inter-communal interactions with clients are highlighted in this section in order to demonstrate how emotional labor is used as a tactic to secure resources and valuable social objectives. After addressing this on the collective level of networks, such dynamics are explored on an individual level on the basis of identity work.

Chapter 5: Identities focuses on how identity work is used to sustain precarity, as well as overcome it. Beauty work is one of the only industries in Sweden for which some form of formal qualifications are not needed. However, Swedish beauticians cite ideas about culture, moral norms and Swedishness to assert that Vietnamese and Swedish beauticians do not work in the same field. The implications of this are that skilled migrant beauticians are categorically

rejected from seeking work in Swedish salons on the basis of the impression that their beauty work is unhygienic and unprofessional, even when they do have Swedish qualifications. However, certain exceptions arise in cases where cultural influence can be wielded to overcome such barriers. For example, while Swedish beauticians reject the idea of allowing migrant beauticians to work in their salons, Brazilian migrants performing waxes is viewed as an "authentic" service, and is therefore allowed. This dynamic points to the ways in which one's identity has influence over opportunities. Overall, the narratives across the three analytical chapters deliver insights into the paradoxical (and varied) experiences of precarity experienced by migrants in the Swedish labor market, and how elements of precarity can be exacerbated or overcome through emotional labor.

3. Paradoxical Precarity in Migrant Beauty Work

By illustrating the paradoxical qualities of precarity observed in migrant beauty work, the chapter below highlights how various conceptualizations of precarity and related concepts fall short of explaining the lived realities of migrant beauticians, concluding that the concept of emotional labor contributes important insights in the objective to understand how migrant beauty work is characterized by precarity, and how beauticians navigate precarity. **Section 3.1** provides a brief background on the position of migrants in the Swedish labor market to contextualize how precarity is shaped through its shifting priorities, since Sweden's neoliberal policy development over the past decades has run parallel alongside global trends of growing precarity. Precarious work is not experienced in a vacuum, meaning national contexts and conditions mediate the experience of precarity at a national level, in unison with overall global shifts discussed in mainstream precarity literature. **Section 3.2** traces migrant trajectories into the beauty industry and their subsequent entrance into the Swedish labor market. After that, **section 3.3** contemplates precarity on the basis of migrant beauticians' interactions with the Swedish state. The latter part does not aim to involve itself in a discussion of Sweden's welfare state politics. Rather, the Swedish state will be discussed from the beauticians' perspectives and how they experience their interactions with Swedish authorities, such as the tax agency *Skatteverket* and the Swedish employment service *Arbetsförmedlingen.* Overall, this chapter serves as a foundation for chapters 3 and 4, which will further expand on the idea of precarious beauty work to illustrate

how migrant beauticians use emotional labor to manage precarity on the levels of networks and identities.

3.1 Migrants in The Swedish Labor Market

Picturing what it means to be a migrant in the Swedish labor market helps contextualize further observations of precarity throughout the analytical chapters. In the context of this case study, migrant beauticians navigate precarity against the backdrop of Sweden's shifting policy priorities from full employment to individualism. Crucially, the unique employment situation of migrant beauticians interviewed in this project are not reflected in the literature landscape. However, explaining precarity's emergence as an area of concern in Sweden establishes a contextual basis for migrant beauticians' presence and participation in the labor market.

The Swedish system is said to be the "quintessential expression of Keynesian economic institutions" (Neergaard and Woolfson, 2017:200). Even so, Swedish policy developments over the past few decades have reflected global trends toward precarious, flexible work with vanishing protections. Contemporary changes have introduced heavy decreases in unionization and the disintegration of a historically Fordist economy through informal work that offers poor wages and working conditions (Neergaard and Woolfson, 2017). Such effects have an oversized reach on youth and women, but especially migrants and minority ethnic Swedes (ibid). These shifts in Swedish priorities have been said to "underpin the adaptation of a marginalized reserve army, exposed to the market-driven discipline of low-wage niche employment" (Schierup and Ålund, 2011:50). As a result, an increased volume of migrants and minority ethnic Swedes have been pushed to the margins of the welfare system, into a "casualised labor market and a degraded informal sector" (ibid).

Despite gaining a reputation for its tolerance and provision of labor and welfare rights for migrants (Lobo and Melender, 2020, Newlands, 2022), the Swedish labor market is one of the most segregated in all of Europe, within which a "racialized underclass" is said to have emerged (Gauffin, 2020:283). Over the past thirty years, core tenets of the Swedish model have been radically changed, with the most rapid transformations occurring during the financial crisis of the early 1990s (Dahlstedt and Neergaard, 2016:124). Following broader European trends, Sweden's welfare model has shifted towards favoring individuality and freedom in an effort to minimize federal micromanagement and government control. Flexibility and competitiveness in the labor

market were prioritized toward these developments, and welfare spending became devalued as a way to redistribute resources. Throughout the shift in priorities from full employment to price stability, the collective right to work was eclipsed by one's own competitive edge in the labor market (Dahlstedt and Neergaard, 2016).

The emergence of neoliberal values and ensuing welfare state transformation has been connected to current class struggles (Skyrman et al, 2023). Such paradigm shifts coincide with the fact that Sweden has the widest employment gap between native and foreign-born populations in Europe, with foreign-born workers disproportionately engaging in unskilled labor (Newlands, 2020:6). High unemployment among youth as well as the foreign-born populations increased significantly since the 2008 financial crisis (Anxo, 2011:456). This prompted deteriorating working conditions and security, as seen by the growing prevalence of temporary contracts and concentration of workers in the service and manufacturing industries. As a result, these factors are said to represent migrants' "weak embedding in the Swedish labor market" (Anxo, 2011:456).

Amidst the growing influx of migrants, Swedish labor policies have been aimed toward the goal of migrant self-sufficiency in a "managed migration" approach, in an "active management of the economic integration of migrants, rendering them more self-sufficient" (Newlands, 2020:6). This contemporary version of self-sufficiency varies greatly from that of the multicultural 1970s. In fact, the Swedish government promoted migrant self-employment and entrepreneurship as an "integration measure" (Gauffin, 2020) to reduce migrant unemployment. The full rationale of that approach is not clearly defined. However, self-employment can be seen as a means of bypassing obstacles migrant employees face. Such factors include rampant ethnic discrimination in the Swedish job market (often in the form of name discrimination, in which male Arabic names fare worst) (Bursell, 2014, Rydgren, 2004, Arai, 2016), high demand for formal qualifications in the workplace (Newlands, 2022), as well as "minority stress" (Akay and Ahmadi, 2022), referring to discrimination and lack of support migrants face in Swedish workplaces. Furthermore, findings on migrant decisions to enter into self-employment suggest Middle Eastern immigrants are disproportionately likely to turn to self-employment as a response to local unemployment rates in Sweden (Miao, 2020), which might correspond to their disproportionate discrimination in the labor market. Aside from seeking employment, recent findings show that preconceived ideas about migrants among welfare workers influence their

interactions, questioning the quality of service provision migrants receive in a system designed to provide universal social benefits (Schütze, 2020). Together, these findings portray a series of disadvantages for migrants, and demonstrate the weakening of the welfare state's social contract of labor in exchange for universal access to state benefits.

The struggles migrants experience accessing the labor market could urge them to choose business ownership as an alternative. The increasing endorsement of individuality, innovation and entrepreneurship can be seen as a part of freedom and flexibility-forward, neoliberal policies that have developed since the 1970s. Such questions are discussed in the emergence of platform work, "dependent self-employment" and related arrangements, such as "bogus" or "false" self-employment (similar concept of "gray" area work) reaching Sweden's highly regulated labor market (Selberg, 2023). These work arrangements, which refer to "employment disguised as self-employment in order to circumvent collective agreements, labor laws, payroll tax and other employer duties implied in a regular contract of employment" (Thörnquist, 2013:1) have emerged in Sweden within construction (Thörnquist, 2013), road freight transportation (Thörnquist, 2019), and food courier services, such as Foodora (Newlands, 2020). Recent developments have led to unionization of some gig workers, which was marked by the January 2021 arrival of the first collective bargaining agreement for food courier workers (Selberg, 2023:610). While these styles of work are characterized by precarious conditions of their own, migrant beauticians face precarity outside the gig economy, as they are often entirely self-employed. In the Nordic countries, solo-self employment has been identified as particularly insecure (Rasmussen, 2019:22). Based on job and income insecurity indicators, solo self-employment is disproportionately insecure on both counts compared to those in permanent employment situations (Rasmussen, 2019:22).

Furthermore, the encouragement of self-employment by government bodies as an approach to integration shifts the responsibility of employment to the hands of individuals, after decades of prioritizing full employment through a government-driven demand for labor (Dahlstedt and Neergaard, 2016). To be sure, the work-line system was a feature of Swedish migration policy for decades, in which one's rights in the state were tied to the obligation to work, prioritizing self-sufficiency. Universal access for full employment (Borevi, 2014:711). However, the transformation of Sweden's policies meant that work has become an "issue of the individual's own qualifications and characteristics, and ambitions and abilities" (Dahlstedt and

Neergaard, 2016:126). This development can be interpreted within a broader trend of "responsibilization," a principle of precarity in which the "instruments of public authority are no longer laws and regulations but various normative "guidelines," relying on self-reflexive regulation and normative prescriptions" (Styhre, 2017:132). Additionally, compared with other countries such as Germany (which also has had a large migrant influx), migrants in Sweden are more likely to choose self-employment for reasons connected to discrimination (Zalkat et al, 2023). Entrepreneurship can be seen as the pinnacle of independence and freedom neoliberal policies and Swedish integration logic celebrate, but such freedom and flexibility is a double-edged sword in the case of beauty work. The narratives below demonstrate precarity in beauticians' trajectories into the industry as well as their (perceived) relationship with the Swedish state. Together, these subsections relate to the first part of the research question about how beauty work is characterized by precarity, and demonstrates how the structure of precarity beauticians face, contradicting the notion that precarity is centered largely around employment.

3.2 Precarious Trajectories into Beauty Work

3.2.1 The Beauty Bar

My invitation to The Beauty Bar came from visits to another nail salon owned by the self-proclaimed godmother of the Vietnamese nail community in town. Over 20 years ago, she was one of the first Vietnamese beauticians in town and helped shape the same network that still hosts potlucks, exchanges nail glue and rotates nail technicians to this day. As I helped her weed out dried up nail polish from her display, we discussed my trouble gaining access to Vietnamese salons. She told me that she'd connect me with a salon in town. In fact, she said that once asked, the salon had "no choice," as they owed her a favor. Picking up on the first ring, they had a brief call in Vietnamese. Tracy said that they were expecting me, and they are happy to participate. I wondered what kind of favors the other salon owner owed Tracy that granted me access to the salon without hesitation.

When I arrived, the owner was wearing a puffer jacket and hat, sitting in the lobby next to an empty gumball machine and one of those ubiquitous waving lucky cat statues, greeting the empty waiting room. Two women emerged from the cellar behind a fake bamboo screen. After a short discussion and a few glances in my direction, the owner turned around and smiled. She told

me I could come and go as I please, and Olivia would be my point of contact since she speaks English. Olivia just graduated from Swedish high school the year before, but had already been enrolled in university in Ukraine. Both of her parents are Vietnamese, but moved to Kiev for work sometime in the 1990s. She majored in linguistics back in Ukraine, mastering English and German for a career in translation. When the war erupted in 2022, Olivia's family lived in a small town just a short drive from the Russian border. Having already attended some courses in nail design for fun, manicures took on a new purpose as they helped pass the time spent in bunkers with friends and family. Her mother's brother was already living in Sweden, giving them a clear path to seek asylum and settle in Landskrona. Upon their arrival, Olivia's uncle connected her with the owner of The Beauty Bar. She started working full time at seventeen, seeing clients in half-hour intervals, six days per week. Olivia brought a unique skillset to the salon, as her background in Ukraine taught her the art of the newly popularized Russian manicure, an extremely detail-oriented beauty procedure that focuses on carefully removing cuticles and caring for the nailbed. Olivia's idea of a manicure conflicted with her supervisor's demand that she double book clients to get more people through the door and paint over customers' fungus when it appeared. It was a change of pace from her last weeks in Ukraine, where long manicures sped up time. Olivia's starting wage at The Beauty Bar was one hundred Swedish kronor per hour, which was only adjusted after her mother noticed and confronted the owner. I visited her over several shifts, where I found her making charm bracelets with a bead kit spread over the empty pedicure chairs. During a whole shift, no clients came in. The other ladies came up from the cellar and put on their coats. Olivia said that they were going to "splash come cash." The meaning of that was never fully explained to me, but Olivia was routinely left alone in the salon for entire shifts while her boss and colleagues went shopping, returning empty handed. I asked Olivia why she never accompanies them, or why they don't alternate staff in the salon during their afternoon shopping sprees. She was the only skilled beautician in the salon aside from the owner, who doesn't see clients anymore. The other ladies receive the same salary as Olivia, but spend their time taking naps on the eyelash extension beds and scrolling through their phones, popping in and out of the basement. It seemed that Olivia's high skill set sealed her role as the primary nail technician, responsible for training the others, taking clients and managing the salon alone with little economic or professional benefits in return. If clients come in and need a pedicure or a simple polish removal, the recently arrived staff from Vietnam can do that, but not

much more. I thought it was strange that the least experienced beauticians would be assigned pedicures. Olivia explained that customers don't complain after getting a bad pedicure, but they will notice a bad manicure. She dreams of opening her own salon, where customers would be prioritized and time would allow for utensils to be cleaned between each client, which brought her colleague to mind, who showed me the rice cooker in the bathroom that supposedly sterilized their nail clippers. She described her displacement to Sweden as a blessing in disguise, since she got to leave university to work with her real passion of doing nails without her parents pressuring her to return to the linguistics program.

Olivia's skill set and time are the only things that make The Beauty Bar a functioning nail salon. Even so, nearly all aspects of her position are precarious. She does not have a contract and clearly scheduled working hours, or the ability to make full use of her skill set, making work security and skill reproduction security lacking. In practice, Olivia is getting the professional experience of a salon owner with an unclear path to making that actually happen. Her family ties helped her get into The Beauty Bar, which is also the reason why she can't leave. According to other staff members at the salon, getting a job as a manicurist at The Beauty Bar involved simply reaching out in Vietnamese on Facebook or via mutual friends and starting the very next day. Securing employment is easy, but the path out is less clear. With a few clicks of a keyboard, beauticians can be blacklisted from the group chat used to hire and recommend technicians to Vietnamese salons.

3.2.2 Reenacting Domestic Brazilian Beauty Services in Sweden

I met Diana on a Facebook page where Brazilian expats ask each other questions and seek advice on navigating life in Sweden. I joined their page to find Brazilians in my area who might want to meet up for coffee and speak Portuguese. Scrolling through the page, I came across posts asking fellow Brazilians where to find cassava flour to make their beloved *farofa,* a sandy condiment they sprinkle over beans. Other posts featured newcomers inquiring about the job market in various sectors, with members tagging contacts to put people in touch. Dozens of photos popped up with advertisements of "traditional Brazilian-style" beauty services. Carried out in clients' homes, domestic beauty services are a popular alternative to visiting a physical salon in Brazil, where haircuts are done over kitchen sinks, nails at the dining room table, and bikini waxes in the client's own bed.

Scrolling in the group, I saw an ad from a beautician who covered the Landskrona area. I messaged Diana for a quote, agreeing that she'd come to my apartment at eight o'clock on Saturday morning for a pedicure. Upon arrival, she set her nail kit on the floor and moved a chair from the dining room into the living room to set up. I sat on the couch with my feet in her lap as we exchanged our stories about how we ended up in Sweden. With a smirk, she unraveled the tale of infidelity that led her to her current husband, whom she met in the Netherlands. Growing up in her mother's beauty salon in São Paulo, Diana never planned on becoming a beautician. Her aunts, cousins and nieces on both sides of her family worked in the beauty industry, with Diana's mother having a well-known salon in their South Zone neighborhood. Her training consisted of her trying manicure techniques on herself before offering services to her mother's best friends: "I destroyed my feet and hands. I got ingrown nails because I didn't know how to cut them. When I stopped bleeding my Mom said "ok–now you can offer your services to the customers if you want." From Diana's perspective, this gave her technical skills to never be unemployed, but also provided a way for her to spend time with her mother as a child.

Her mother was a rumored psychic medium, drawing in clients with her talent in spirituality as well as beauty. Diana praised homemade health and beauty remedies that could come off as "witchy" to non-Brazilians, as her husband points out when he sees her concoct homemade treatments. By the time she was 8 years old, she took the overflow from her mother's hair and nail appointments, charging full price by the age of 12. In her early teen years, Diana worked part-time as an accountant for a private company on an intern contract. On weekends and evenings, she took the bus around the city, offering at-home beauty services. Around this time, Diana's mother insisted that formal beauty school was a good idea, as it'd secure dependable work that is in high demand in Brazil especially, where beauty has transformed from a luxury to being a right. One Summer, she completed the course to get a certificate for skills she already had from growing up around salon work: "she asked me to do the course because of the certificate and I didn't want to do it because I hated to listen and it was a lot worse when I was listening to what I already knew." Eventually, she helped develop an app, which connects residents to traveling beauticians who do home services, such as massage, waxing, nails, and hair.

When the opportunity to move to Europe presented itself, Diana left with her Brazilian ex-boyfriend to the Netherlands, where she started working in Dutch Brazilian beauty parlors

doing mostly waxing. She waxed men and women, but stopped offering men's waxing after some time. She explained that the men aren't secure enough in their own sexuality to hold themselves in a position that is easy for the waxer to access, leading to disasters like buttcracks waxed shut. Waxing in the Brazilian salons offered a way for her to gain experience abroad while earning some money and working in Portuguese. Most of her customers came through referrals, which is fairly common within informal beauty work. On referrals, Diana has a mantra: "It's easier to lose four clients than it is to gain one." After some years doing a mixture of waxing in salons and domestic beauty service, Diana had a bustling beauty business. Upon moving to Sweden, she restarted from the ground up, working exclusively in clients' homes again. Occasionally, she finds work cleaning customers' houses. She explained that she had always worked for her own money, and there was no shame in cleaning bathrooms if she could pay her bills, despite her mother's outrage that her daughter would move to Europe to scrub toilets. For a short time, she cut hair at a large salon chain, where she mostly offered haircuts. After what Diana termed a mutual agreement on dismissal, she focused her time solely on growing her domestic beauty business and renting space in an established salon.

Like Diana, Magda grew up in São Paulo at her mother's beauty salon, shadowing her work in nails, hair, waxing and massage. She didn't plan on becoming a full time beautician, but doing nails on evenings and weekends helped sustain her career as she opened clothing boutiques in Brazil. When she moved to Sweden, she could no longer work in sales or store management due to the language barrier. Nails weren't only a profession, but something Magda always liked to do. Magda's arrival in Sweden in the mid-2000s coincided with growing demands for flashy, professional manicures, or "konst naglar." She was interested in this cultural trend, as it was similar to services women in Brazil had been getting every two weeks for generations. When I asked her why she chose to move to Sweden, she laughed: "I didn't choose. It wasn't anything I ever considered doing. You know, I'm very Brazilian. Now, not so much anymore, actually, but I love my country." Magda's sister was already living in Sweden for many years, since meeting her Swedish husband in Brazil. She didn't want to visit her sister in Sweden, let alone move there since hearing her sister's perception that Swedes are socially awkward and cold. When she developed a fatal medical condition, Magda came to help raise her niece. Recently divorced, she moved to Sweden with her son, Lucas: "It's not like I needed to move here for money. I wasn't rich, but I worked my whole life in Brazil. My plan was always to move back…but then I met a

Swedish man." She contemplated whether he was a psychopath or if he just "loved too much." After spending two years in Sweden, her worries about the relationship came to a head when he showed up at her Swedish class and made a scene, representing a turning point in her life in Sweden. She was placed in protective housing with her son, even though she didn't believe the situation was so severe, remarking that the room could have been saved for a woman in a more "extreme" situation who might have needed it more than she did. In retrospect, she is thankful that outsiders saw the situation and moved her family to a new place, where she could think about making her next move. It became her goal to move out of the housing facility as soon as possible, deciding that doing nails would be the way forward. She took a Swedish beauty course in English and Swedish, focusing on manicures and pedicures.

Both Diana and Magda remarked on how their professions changed when they moved to Sweden. In Brazil, domestic beauty services transform the client's home into an extension of the salon through the presence of the beautician: she might raid your cabinets for tin foil or cotton balls, or use your own bathroom towels in the service. The line between personal and professional is blurred through materials, space and conversation. Beauty is a strong form of social currency in Brazil, and the nail lady's position in society follows that trend. Domestic beauty service is what keeps them relevant in Brazil, but it alienates them in Sweden because their ability to use emotional labor to secure their client portfolio is compromised. For example, Diana's part time work at the Swedish salon brings her more business, but the clients come to the salon–not to Diana. To Brazilian beauticians, this makes all the difference. The experience of engaging in a domestic beauty treatment involves levels of familiarity that are difficult to obtain in Sweden, turning formerly lucrative, flexible work into precarious, insecure work. In terms of (in)formality, beauty workers in Brazil rarely work on contracts. However, the value of social contracts between clients and beauticians change when the value of the treatments are not perceived as a crucial therapeutic outlet as described by Magda and Diana. Additionally, social cues govern how beauticians take up space in her client's home. In Brazil, accepting a beer on the job in a middle class neighborhood means your beautician is friendly. In an upper class area, accepting the offered coffee is impolite. Knowing how to navigate unspoken rules to satisfy customer expectations takes on a new meaning as Brazilian beauty is reenacted in Sweden. Even if they see mostly Brazilian customers, the context of mobility distorts beauticians' ability to cues that prompt "appropriate" behavior.

3.3 The Swedish State

3.3.1 “Ni Lurar ju Staten/You Know, You’re Tricking The State!”

Lauren reluctantly followed her mother’s path as a high school history teacher in Vietnam. As a young adult, she met a Vietnamese Swede and came to Sweden on a marriage visa. They divorced some years later, after which Lauren lived with Tracy, the self-proclaimed godmother of Vietnamese nail salons in Landskrona. Tracy’s husband was Lauren’s ex-husband’s family friend for decades, and Lauren stayed with them for a few years following the birth of her daughter, Emma. Tracy trained Lauren in basic manicure techniques well enough to rent a table at a few hair salons in town, as she practiced Swedish and developed her gel nail techniques. As a longtime customer of Lauren’s, I visited her salon on a weekday afternoon to catch her between clients. She quickly accepted my invitation to participate in this project, and offered to put me in touch with a few other Vietnamese salons. Holding back laughter, she explained that they probably wouldn’t talk to me because they don’t pay taxes. I didn’t understand why Lauren would find that amusing until I heard the story of how she learned the business of nails. Lauren’s ex-husband put her in touch with the owner of an express nail salon in a busy Malmö mall, where she found a role model and mentor–a glamorous, middle-aged Vietnamese woman who openly cheated the system and got away with it. Bubbling over with pride, Lauren told the story across her manicure table, where we sat with a client. Her mentor trained dozens of Vietnamese nail technicians throughout her decades-long career in the beauty industry. Between giving lessons in acrylic tips and gel polish application, she taught the ladies how to make money. Struggling to talk through laughter, Lauren set down her file mid-manicure to share that her mentor/boss had a giant, laminated sign that said “Cash is King” over the register, spreading her arms out to show how large the sign was. It was understood by the team of ten manicurists working there to symbolize the salon’s blatant disregard for the Swedish tax agency and celebrated the work-hard-play-hard mentality of their boss, who now owns a sushi restaurant: “She didn’t care about Skatteverket. We stole a lot of money in that place” (meaning the salon “stole” money from the government by evading taxes).

They worked 12-hour shifts for weeks on end, without breaks, seeing eight to ten customers per day. No contracts were offered, and benefit-related agreements were usually settled over handshake deals and seniority-based hierarchies. Despite working in such

exploitative conditions, the mall salon offered a way for incoming Vietnamese beauticians to see a high volume of clientele, which enabled them to practice Swedish and become skillful manicurists. Lauren's colorful depiction of her former workplace came to a screeching halt when her customer cut her off: "You know, you guys are tricking the state!" Lauren explained that Vietnamese migrants always have work and therefore contribute to Swedish society. Her customer criticized that point, insisting that anyone who doesn't pay taxes in Sweden doesn't contribute, even if they work since the money doesn't flow through communal welfare state coffers. After some minutes of awkward silence, she paid for the manicure in cash.

Lauren sees her work in the mall salon as the position that prepared her for opening her own place, where she recently hired a mutual friend. Having just returned from a year-long deportation to Vietnam, the woman and her three kids spent time in Lauren's nail salon, learning how to apply gel polish. Since Lauren had told me that she refuses to work with other Vietnamese people, I inquired about her hiring decision. She explained that she had Vietnamese employees before, but they treated her as a stepping stone to open their own place. This woman would be different, since she had been deported once before and is eager to start from the bottom. Since a government-issued salary subsidy would call attention to an additional person working in the salon, Lauren resorted to offering a "beginner's" salary of an unstated amount. She was already a skilled nail technician, making the thought of a "beginner's" salary sound even more exploitative. Her new hire would not receive a contract, making the duration of her employment status unclear. Aside from the obvious benefits of cheap labor, I asked why a skilled nail technician would be offered what was essentially an internship. Lauren explained that even a skilled Vietnamese manicurist can't work in the industry if they don't know how to navigate the Swedish system and authorities. The work that goes into managing interactions with the tax agency as well as climate and hygiene authorities is as fundamental to their business as gel application.

3.3.2 Encounters with the Swedish Public Employment Service

Perhaps the clearest empirical example of how migrant beauty work interacts with the Swedish state is through subsidies offered through the Swedish Public Employment Service (Arbetsförmedlingen). Before being able to open her own place, Magda decided to work with the Vietnamese "nagel byggare." According to Lauren and Tracy, Vietnamese salons complain about

the drama and complications that arise from working with other Vietnamese people, yet rarely hire outside the Vietnamese community. Occasionally, Arbestförmedligen puts the salons in touch with people who are ready to work on the spot, and they subsidize the salaries for a limited time on a case-by-case basis. Magda was connected to a Vietnamese salon in Malmö where she worked as an unpaid intern. The agreement was that following an unpaid trial period, the salon was meant to pay. After months of working full time, the boss noticed that Arbetsförmedlingen was not sending the proper amounts of money to help cover Magda's salary. They called a meeting with her case worker at the unemployment office to see what was going on. They received news that Arbetsförmedligen would only pay 20% of her salary instead of the predicted 50% for 6 months, after which the salon would pay the full salary. When the Vietnamese salon owner realized they wouldn't get the expected subsidy, their positive evaluation of Magda's work flipped. Imitating a Vietnamese accent in Swedish, Magda mimicked the salon owner's words to the caseworker "Oh, no! She wasn't that good!"

The salon owner called Magda some weeks after the meeting, with a business proposal. She offered to pay her under the table for nail service, paying 50% for each treatment and taking the other 50% as rent for the table. Alternatively, she proposed a follow-up meeting with Arbetsförmedligen to get the 50-50 subsidy deal back, on the condition that the salon would skim Magda's portion of the money based on performance. Convinced that the Vietnamese salons were full of untrustworthy money grubbers, Magda decided that Brazilian beauty treatments would be her path into the beauty industry. Once she finished Swedish classes, she received some support from the Swedish government to continue her formal studies in beauty care, where she became licensed as a medical foot therapist. This meant that she could legally offer the same services they do in standard beauty salons in Brazil, where health and beauty go hand in hand.

I found out about Magda's business through asking Brazilian women in Sweden to put me in touch with their nail ladies. I reached out to her on Facebook messenger, and she agreed to give me a tour of her salon and an interview. Upon arrival at the address she gave me, I was confused. She sent me to a large apartment building in Malmö with no signs indicating a salon was nearby. I rang the doorbell, when an enthusiastic, Brazilian "Oi!" came through the speaker. Supposedly, I was in the right place. On the door to their balcony, there was an A4 piece of printer paper taped to the window that said "Magda's Beauty Service." The smell of espresso and bleach hit my face as I walked into their open floor plan apartment, which doubles as the

manicure area. Magda's trajectory into the beauty industry led her to the decision to transform her living room into a beauty salon, where family members pop in and out of their rooms and the lobby is her kitchen table.

Additionally, "informal" workers interact with the state beyond the basis of escaping its gaze: they also seek their services. Their encounters with the Swedish state are inconsistent with Standing's view that a central characteristic of the precariat is its minimal trust relationships to the state (Standing, 2011:22). These narratives show that beauticians' lack of moral obligation to the state is not only a product of precarity, but also a driver. In the Vietnamese case, Lauren's trajectory into the beauty industry demonstrates how relationships to state authorities are reproduced in a professional network as manicurists are trained and bring new hires into the mix.

The parameters of precarity set out by Standing's precariat allow us to locate a number of important dimensions of precarity across Brazilian and Vietnamese contexts. However, it falls short, as it cannot explain the relevance of interpersonal exchanges in the struggles faced and strategies employed that relate to hierarchies of exploitation that exist alongside visible manifestations of precarity, such as lack of formal contracts and long working hours. The question of how migrant beauty work is characterized by precarity cannot be fully discussed using a precariat-based understanding of their experiences. As shown above, the vulnerabilities they face are (to a large extent) mediated by relationships. In this sense, migrant beauty work is characterized by the influence others have over their trajectories, despite narratives that doing nails is the key to independence. In that vein, the next chapter, *Networks,* will explore how the navigation of relationships and emotional labor play a central role in sustaining precarity, as well as providing a means through which beauticians challenge precarious working conditions.

4. Networks

"I run away from Brazilians here in Sweden. They give me a lot of business, but they pay what they think I'm worth back home." *-Diana, on Brazilian Clients*

Various constellations of networks are present in both Vietnamese and Brazilian contexts, whose dynamics provide beauticians with a basis for survival as well as exploitation. Understanding how their networks operate demonstrates how relationships reproduce precarity, as well as provide opportunities for beauticians to navigate it. Salon work and domestic beauty services are

carried out in spaces and networks that are at once professional and private, where the emotional management of relationships can tarnish the perception of beauty work being entirely independent and flexible (whether via business ownership, renting a manicure table, or being employed by a salon). This chapter will explore how precarious work is handled on a collective level via network relations, which often provide economic opportunities alongside hierarchies of control.

While an extensive conceptual overview of networks is beyond the scope of this project, it is useful to ground the discussion in theory to define what a network is, and what it does for the context of this analysis. In *The Networked Character of Migration and Transnationalism,* Bilecen and Lubber identify two main conceptual frameworks that pertain to resources moving through social networks formed in the post-migration phase: social capital and social support (Bilecen and Lubber, 2019:842). Social capital has been explored in contexts of immigrant network formation beyond one's ethnic group (Chuatico and Haan, 2022), how migrants try to cope with inequality (Cederberg, 2012), and constructing relationships post-migration (Ryan, 2011) among others. Scholars such as Peter Li point out the limitations of social capital, which is "defined by its positive consequence" (Li, 2004:174). This makes sense, as social capital is often invoked to discuss how migrant social ties prompt upward mobility. The case of migrant beauty work complicates that logic, since their networks not only contain the potential to provide and sustain social capital, but also contain mechanisms of exploitation. This perspective detangles social ties from social capital, whose relationship is often framed in a positive light. The second way in which migration and networks have been conceptualized are through the framework of social support, which fosters a sense of belonging or kinship and access to resources, material or otherwise (Bilicen and Lubber, 2019:843). This has been explored in the context of migrant health (Záleksá et.al, 2014), social integration and quality of life (Foroughi et. al, 2001), as well as transnational family relations (Boccagni, 2015), among others. Broadly defined, social support refers to networks which act as a coping mechanism for migrants in day to day life. As Louise Ryan (2011) points out, there is a tendency for migration literature to portray social ties between migrants as a force that counteracts disadvantages faced in their countries of destination. This oversimplification calls for a more nuanced outlook on the nature of relationships within the network. In the case of beauty work, network interactions produce as well as curb precarity through displays of solidarity and friendship as well as authority. For the purposes of this

analysis, networks will be divided into two levels, which aim to capture the multidirectional network politics in beauty work. Networks will be defined on the basis of inter- and intra-communal relationships. Making sense of the meanings ascribed to inter- and intra-communal networks sheds light on how relationships alleviate as well as deepen precarity, and how actors can abuse their authority while being exploited themselves.

In the Vietnamese case, intra-communal networks include client-beautician relationships, which are often held between a Vietnamese nail technician and a non-Vietnamese (typically, but not always ethnically Swedish) client. Inter-communal networks refer to internal (i.e. colleague) relationships throughout the salon, as well as community members who are regular fixtures of the community outside the realm of beauty work (Vietnamese fish salesmen, contractors, etc). The case of Brazilian beauty work presents a caveat to the inter/intra network categorization, since their work is mainly independent and largely serves Brazilian clients, resulting in a blurred line between inter/intra-communal groups. Framing their networks through an emotional labor lens allows us to identify dynamics of precarity that are not captured in widely discussed conceptual tools regarding precarity and flexible/informal work. Below, this is demonstrated through training and hiring practices in the beauty industry, as well as the exchange of favors that characterize their network relations. Visualizing precarity as an emotional labor experience emphasizes the role of social connections in maintaining job security and professional advantages, which helps answer the research question by providing an understanding of how migrant beauty work is characterized by precarity.

4.1 Intra-Communal Exchanges

4.1.1 Training to be Masters

During one of The Beauty Bar's afternoon staff outings, Olivia spun in a swivel chair behind her manicure table. The salon had been empty all morning. I took a look at the gel nail display case in the window. To pass time, Olivia asked me if I wanted a manicure. We decided on a sparkly, reflective set of red gel nails with no tips. With surprising precision, she carefully applied the polish in a few swipes. I asked about her plans to open her own nail salon, as she mentioned it during a previous visit. She explained to me that it would take time, and she had not become a master yet. I figured that was an expression, referring to a highly skilled, "masterful" manicurist.

She repeated it: “once I become a master,”;“I’m not a master yet.” Finally, I asked her what she meant by “master.” She explained that her boss is a “master,” meaning that she can do any manicure or pedicure a customer asks for, as well as lash extensions. This includes classics like French tips and basic gel and acrylic work, in addition to more customized, festive designs. Not only was her boss a “master,” but she decided the point at which her employees reached that level, which entitled them to promising, yet unclear professional advantages. No employee in living memory of The Beauty Bar has reached that status. Olivia’s dream is to become a “master,” which (she thought) might help her secure the salon owner’s support to open her own place. The salon has no formal structure to evaluate skills that translate into tangible benefits, despite there being a vague promise of advancement dangling over the beauty workers’ heads. The “master’s” own work is an invisible standard, as she no longer takes clients. Olivia does beautiful nail work, but goes largely unseen by management. She has become responsible for teaching two colleagues how to do nails. From her perspective, she relates to them on a migrant-to-migrant level as they’re all new to Sweden. She grew up speaking only a little Vietnamese in Ukraine, which presents a language barrier between herself and the women, who recently arrived from Vietnam. All of the employees at the salon secured their positions through the Vietnamese community and mutual friends within. Their skills in beauty are considered to be a plus, but not necessary, as they train on the job.

One day, the ladies returned from their afternoon outing. The owner and Lola descended into the mysterious cellar behind the bamboo screen. Natalie, a newly arrived employee from Vietnam, plopped into a swivel chair behind a manicure table with no UV lamps. She took out a plastic mannequin hand with crooked acrylic nails pasted to it, each nail a different color. With a used file, she grazed one nail at a time, with a few specks of dust falling to the floor. Throwing the doll hand aside after some minutes, she left her station and locked herself into the bathroom for what seemed like an eternity. I asked Olivia what she was doing with the hand. She explained that Natalie had just finished school in Vietnam and knew no English or Swedish. Before she can have her own manicure table, she has to learn the basics. Training at The Beauty Bar is independent, with no official training pertaining to hygiene or technical skills. She also provides training to Lola, a Vietnamese woman who married a Vietnamese-Swedish man and moved to Landskrona some years ago. She speaks some Swedish, and used to work in an Asian restaurant, washing dishes. I asked her how she jumped from dishes to doing nails, and she said most people

find nail salon work on Facebook. She knew the salon owner through a mutual friend, and they had a meeting at the salon. The owner liked her, so Lola stayed from that day forward. Having no background in beauty, Lola only sees customers to remove gel polish or prepare the footbath for pedicures. Once the treatment reaches the limit of her technical knowledge, Olivia comes in to finish it. Olivia's biggest incentive to train Lola is not having to jump from client to client, finishing half-completed beauty treatments. Olivia explained that it breaks the "rhythm" of the treatment, meaning she doesn't bond with the customers.

If a job at The Beauty Bar leads to becoming a "master," with all unsaid advantages attached, why wasn't it in the salon's interest to train Natalie and Lola more consistently? When Lola removed a gel set from a walk-in client's nails, Olivia jumped in to shape and polish. Instead of staying nearby to take note of how Olivia does it, Lola joined Natalie behind the register, where they chatted in Vietnamese. Olivia finds it frustrating that they take no pride in what they do, which results in both more salon work as well prolonging her training responsibilities. She fears that the tight friendship between Lola, Natalie and the owner prevents her from raising this as a concern. Olivia's description of her role at the salon reflects a state of employment purgatory, in which she can stay at The Beauty Bar indefinitely, but sees no immediate opportunities for advancement. Customers request Olivia by name and it's her technical and social skills that transform the owner's bamboo-adorned clubhouse into a nail salon. Despite this, it's her role in the network that prevents her from asking management for clarification. Furthermore, the structure of their working arrangement limits Olivia's attempts to foster meaningful client relationships, an essential element of starting her own salon.

As seen in Lauren's story from the mall salon, training in Vietnamese salons often takes place within internal networks, with a top-down, carrot-stick reinforcement system. At the same time as women can quickly gain employment through this arrangement, their ability to advance through the industry is marked by arbitrary measurement of skills and abstract promises. Furthermore, navigating this uncertainty requires nail technicians to thoroughly reflect on their position in the network before they make decisions for their careers. While social ties in the network spread resources and information, the networks also contain hierarchies of exploitation and precarity. For example, the salon owner's seemingly unquestionable authority in The Beauty Bar was quickly overturned by Tracy's request to have me visit the salon, stating that they "had no choice." After that point, Tracy stopped inviting me to her own salon. It had become clear that

her position in the network allowed her to politely whisk me away to another salon if she did not want to participate. The next subsection of this chapter will focus on another element of intra-communal network relations: favors.

4.1.2 One (Managed) Hand Washes the Other

The first thing Lauren wanted me to know during this project is that she had no Vietnamese friends. She had been running the salon alone for about a year, and got used to working independently after two employees conspired to quit behind her back. Without a contract, they left at a moment's notice. After training at Lauren's salon, the two young women opened The Beauty Bar, which is now owned and managed by Olivia's supervisor. Lauren told me about them losing the business with a smirk. Anyone who frequents a Vietnamese nail salon in Landskrona might notice that staff turnover is nothing unusual. I asked Lauren why there seems to be a different woman doing my nails each time I book, even at the same place. She laughed. According to Lauren, salons take on new nail technicians with subsidies from the Swedish state. Once the deals expire, the nail technician would have gained enough experience to open their own salon, make contacts to open one together, or seek work in a bigger place. While lack of contracts benefit salon supervisors in several ways, employees can leave without notice. Nail salon owners across town share a group chat, where they warn about visits from the tax authorities, mock annoying customers, introduce newly arrived women looking for work, and even advertise other Vietnamese-run businesses like cleaning, as well as homemade Vietnamese food boxes (a popular choice for newly arrived Vietnamese women in Sweden). Nail technicians circulate throughout the chat, where new beauticians can be recommended to salon owners–if they remain in their supervisor's good graces.

In practice, this somewhat resembles a transfer from one department of the same company to another, rather than an entirely new employment situation. Whether Vietnamese women entering the beauty industry come to Sweden on a work permit or a marriage visa, Lauren said that the main motivation for women seeking out opportunities in nails is freedom. For Vietnamese nail technicians, the flexibility and freedom the beauty industry promises upon arrival is complicated by their reliance on intra-communal professional networks. Even for independent salon owners like Lauren, one's role in the greater salon network requires a delicate balance between maintaining a positive relationship and becoming immersed in a constant

exchange of favors. Lauren wanted “nothing to do” with the Vietnamese community, as they were “obsessed with status”: if someone moves to Sweden and enjoys and flaunts their success, they’re a show-off, and thus alienated. However, if they dress too casually and don’t show off enough, they might become a subject of gossip and ridicule.

Despite Lauren’s vow to keep the Vietnamese community at arm’s length, her nail salon is a hub for many types of Vietnamese-run businesses. One day, an elderly Vietnamese woman ran straight to the back of the salon with a bag of groceries, stepping into the private threshold of the salon’s kitchen area. Lauren hires her every few weeks to help out with cleaning as a favor to her family, as they are in need of money. Two Vietnamese boys stopped by for tea, as did the family that had just returned from their deportation back to Vietnam. Lauren was assisting them in getting settled in Landskrona, as they flipped through a sea of paperwork on the coffee table in the lobby. A Vietnamese-run seafood delivery service hits most nail salons on its route, selling tens of thousands of Swedish kronor worth of crabs and fish at a time. Lauren’s tacit acceptance and outward rejection of the Vietnamese community can be seen as a form of deep acting, in which she believes portraying herself as an outsider in the Vietnamese circle brings her closer to being an insider in a Swedish social circle. One day, a Vietnamese man called Lauren during a manicure. They laughed and talked for a few minutes. Lauren rolled her eyes before hanging up. I asked if it was dating drama, a staple of Lauren’s nail salon gossip. With raised eyebrows, she made two points. First, she would never date another Vietnamese man again (Swedish men only), and second, it was a Vietnamese builder who helped her put together the salon. He put together the manicure tables, built shelves for the polish and glitter, the neon sign above the register, and a few walls that separated the salon from the back rooms. He did it for free, knowing that she needed a break after spending her savings on securing the new location. She described him to me, and reminded me that I met him days before when he was hanging out in the lobby. He called to ask Lauren for a favor. Since he essentially built her nail salon free of charge, he expected Lauren to train his daughter how to do nails and eyelash extensions. She explained that she had to say yes to not seem ungrateful, despite not wanting to be involved. In other words, it was emotionally inappropriate of her to deny his request. Deals like these have the potential and tendency to expand, and Lauren feared that she would be expected to hire his daughter after training. Measuring when a favor is paid back in full is a murky process. However,

it is clear that a complex system of reciprocity and emotional management factors into how professional trajectories are built and sustained throughout the salon.

Finally, I asked Lauren if she could recommend some other nail salons who might accept my request to participate in the project. She said she didn't know anyone in town, despite just telling me about the group chat they shared. Without calling out her contradiction, I told her I might ask Tracy if I could sit in her salon, since I had gotten my nails done there a few times and she likely remembered me. Inadvertently, I struck a nerve. Lauren demanded that I don't tell Tracy any of her business. When I arrived at Tracy's place, it was clear that she didn't need any of my help to be in the loop. Without indicating I had been at Lauren's salon, Tracy knew I had been there. Limited access to the salons makes the span and depth of the network unknowable. However, these interactions demonstrate that internal hierarchies (and the emotional labor involved in managing them) represent the beauticians' struggle to work independently while benefiting from and being beholden to the network.

The consequences of not appearing grateful and helpful in the network makes beauty work precarious for salon owners and employees alike, since they rely on social ties for information, resources and opportunities within their cohort that are perceived to be unmatched outside the group. Being excluded from the network is an omnipresent threat that keeps beauticians in a cycle of reciprocity and indebtedness, which shifts power around in a way that transcends simple employer/employee relations. Exchanges of emotional labor and the maintenance of relationships that necessitate the appearance (or surface acting) of accommodation and flexibility to ensure that favors come through when needed. This type of professional uncertainty is not discussed in precarity frameworks, despite having a tangible effect on the way salon owners and workers make decisions in their daily work.

4.2 Inter-Communal Exchanges

4.2.1 The Regulars

Every time I came to Lauren's salon, she pulled a swivel chair up to the manicure table, inviting me to take part in the treatments, introducing me to clients. Many of them had known her since her early days renting tables at hair salons in Landskrona. Some had been coming to see her every two weeks for a decade. Aside from being a hub for the Vietnamese community, Lauren

formed a network of clients who she called “stamkunder,” or regulars. They are always greeted on a first name basis, their nail polish preferences and holiday plans memorized. As if reading from a script, Lauren made a point of following up on each client’s lives with impressive detail. They talked about the upcoming sports break, their children, and the weather. Each conversation she had with the regulars followed a similar pattern: polite conversation with long pauses in between. She described how having different customers from various occupational backgrounds helps her navigate Swedish society. Some were school principals and administrators, who gave her tips on hiring tutors for her daughter, Emma. Others worked as nurses, who would advise her on how to contact specialists. One client who was a police officer helped her file a report about a man who stalked her after a date. Another was a realtor who guided Lauren through buying her apartment.

Lauren’s narrative about the regulars changed over the duration of the project. In the beginning, she described them as a web of strong social ties, bound by loyalty and friendship. Her regulars were “close,” and “real friendships.” Contradictions to that narrative started to emerge, as she discussed being able to save money to travel but not going anywhere. She was afraid that being unavailable to her regulars would result in losing customers to other salons. From the customers’ perspectives, they chose Lauren because she had a flexible schedule and does good gel work for a cheap price. Some said she was the only Vietnamese nail technician who speaks Swedish. Their portrayal of their relationships to Lauren centered around attributes that could easily be replaced by another salon. One day over lunch, Lauren admitted that while she puts a lot of work into fostering meaningful friendships with customers, they would switch salons at a moment’s notice if she raised her prices or reduced her working hours to take a vacation. While regulars played a role in helping Lauren navigate some aspects of Swedish society, the emotional labor involved in maintaining the narrative of the regulars seemed like full time work. Lauren described the need to be excited about customers’ upcoming plans or remembering details about their children’s lives and milestone events. From Lauren’s perspective, that is what distinguishes her service from other Vietnamese salons. This doesn’t imply that Lauren doesn’t take genuine interest in the lives of her clients. However, the feeling that the wellbeing of her business depends on a series of deliberate emotional exchanges puts emotional labor at the forefront of her approach to handling insecurity. Seen from an emotional exchange perspective, the commercialization of Lauren’s effort to maintain a sense of familiarity

is done in an effort to distinguish her service from others. Moreover, the performance and display of these relationships to others showcases a shift from personal to commercialized displays of emotion, a dynamic described by Hochschild as "a private act of emotion management" that is "now sold as labor in public-contact jobs" (Hochschild,1983:186). The performative value of Lauren's initial description of the regulars and its development into being designated as a chore is a classic example of deep acting. From this perspective, Lauren navigates precarity between the dissonance of promoting an exaggerated narrative about regulars being "real friends" while understanding that upholding this friendship narrative lasts only as long as the manicure.

4.2.2 Brazilian Beauty Work: A Clash of Inter/Intra Relationships

In Sweden, Brazilian beauty work is largely invisible to those outside the Brazilian community. Without a presence on mainstream beauty services booking sites such as Bokadirekt, beauticians advertise their services in expat Facebook groups. Here, they post photos of nails done using "authentic" or "traditional" Brazilian techniques, a commodity that is hugely sought after by Brazilians who find beauty services in Sweden to be lacking. Throughout fieldwork, not a single person beyond the Brazilian community even knew that Brazilian beauty services were offered, except for the occasional "Brazilian" themed waxes advertised in Swedish salons. A recent trend in the Brazilian nail business in Sweden is to make a Facebook profile that is private and sharing the link in the expat page so only clients can see the content. By having a page that is not openly advertising a business, the beauticians can safely post promotions and check messages to book appointments, becoming just visible enough to get business yet not too visible to invite attention from the authorities. Several posts advertise "newbie in Sweden" promotions, offering 50% off the first service. Most first-hand clients are found through this approach, and the business gains momentum through friends and partners in the Brazilian community. In both Diana and Magda's experiences, the Brazilian community is helpful in sharing information and recommending their services to potential customers. Citing issues of trust, Brazilians often seek out not only Brazilian beauty, but also medical treatments, therapy and catering services, stating that Brazilians have an "MBA in life."

Since the role of the nail lady takes on a therapeutic characteristic in Brazilian society, the value of the services they offer are as social as they are material. In this sense, clients describe recreating Brazilian beauty rituals in Sweden as a cure for homesickness (something I related to

myself as an American in Asian nail salons). Brazilian beauticians work intergenerationally, but also see generations of clients. Many beauticians will visit the same homes throughout generations, doing their mother's nails, then their daughter's nails a generation later. According to Diana, once Brazilian beauticians "know you and you know them, you become a part of the family, and they never go anywhere anymore." From that point on, seeing another beautician is a betrayal: "They come back and say oh, I'm sorry I cheated on you. They literally say that!"

Aside from the delicate cuticle work and waxing techniques inherent to Brazilian beauty work, the opportunity to have a beautician come to clients' residence to carry out the treatment makes the experience complete. I asked Diana why domestic beauty services are viewed as a luxury, as opposed to visiting a salon. She explained that São Paulo traffic is so awful, especially during evening rush hour. Clients weigh out their time sitting in traffic versus the money spent on domestic beauty services. The burden of sitting in traffic or enduring rush hour public transit is transferred to the beautician, who arrives at the customers' doorstep, nail kit in hand. This concept is foreign to Swedish society, which has no tradition of domestic beauty treatments. Diana has tried to convince some clients from her part-time work in the Salon, advertising domestic beauty as a luxury. She has not managed to convince any clients to take her up on the offer, stating that Swedish customers don't find home beauty service relevant. As a recognized tradition, nails and waxing are very marketable in the Brazilian community, but have heard rumors of no-shows and delays making Vietnamese salons a more popular choice. The competition with the Vietnamese nail salons on every corner is a significant concern, given their low prices.

The informal booking system lacks features that ensure security in other platforms, such as fees for short notice cancellations or changing the time. I asked Diana to invite me the next time she was going on a house visit to do nails so I could sit in on the procedure. On a weekday morning, she called at 9am, unexpectedly. Apparently, we were doing a mani-pedi today. I rushed to get ready and left at a moment's notice. The client was Claudia, Diana's first customer in Sweden. They have an agreement whereby Diana comes back every 15 days to do a mani-pedi at a reduced price, given the appointments are guaranteed. On the car ride there, she explained that Claudia was "a little crazy," flipping the dates and times of appointments constantly. On that day, Diana knew that she would be working at Claudia's house just a few minutes before I did. Without knocking, Diana jiggled the locked door handle before Claudia opened it. She greeted

Diana in Portuguese, with a long hug, inviting us into her dining room. We sat at the table, where Diana cleared space for her UV lamps for the gel manicure. Claudia sat in her pajamas and told Diana the latest about the fungus under her toenails, which Diana would later identify as blood trapped under the surface from a samba dancing-induced wound. As Diana carefully removed the polish, Claudia turned to me and said "Diana knows everything about my life. No secrets. I've never been this open before, not even in Brazil. She knows about it all—my dates, we share opinions on life." She wondered where she would turn for treatments, since Diana will give birth to a baby girl in the Fall: "She does it the Brazilian way. It's important. It feels clean. I had Vietnamese ladies do my nails for a while, but I always felt dirty." It was clear that the perception that her services were genuinely Brazilian had provided Diana with some guarantee of business, but she was expected to be ready at a moment's notice to show up at her door. Two weeks later, Diana visited my apartment for a mani-pedi after leaving Claudia's house. She told me that Claudia threatened to go to the Vietnamese place again because Diana's travel plans clashed with their 15-day treatment cycle. It struck me that something as trivial as a scheduling conflict could undermine the vast personal and professional resources Diana put into providing home beauty services for Claudia. Even if Diana says she "doesn't give a shit" because more clients will come, I thought of her mantra: "it's easier to lose four customers than to gain one."

Perhaps the most vulnerable part of reenacting Brazilian beauty in Sweden is that the logic of pricing follows Brazilian beauticians to Sweden. As grateful as she is for the opportunities and business the Brazilian community offers, she is trying to recenter her client base beyond the Brazilian community. She says "Brazilians come here and think they can pay what they do in Brazil…but this isn't Brazil. I pay bills here. If I formalize my business here, I will be the one paying taxes and they will have to pay more. I run away from Brazilians here in Sweden. They give me a lot of business, but they pay what they think I'm worth back home." Additionally, Brazilian clients often do their nails in groups, meaning that Diana can lose three manicures in a single session if the party decides to not rebook. Unlike the Vietnamese beauty workers, the Brazilian migrant community and customer base are a single group. This pairing has intense implications for the emotional management of Brazilian beauty work, which already straddles the line between personal and professional. One would think that the high value Brazilians place on "authentic" treatments paired with reduced competition would mean that Brazilian beauticians might enjoy more secure business. This is true to some extent, but

maintaining their client base requires careful and rigorous management of emotions. Not only do they accept the alternative payment suggestions from clients, but they do it with a smile because first, they want to be invited back, and second, giving a client (and fellow community member) a reason to circulate negative gossip in their direction would be fatal to their business. This surface acting and limitation to working within the Brazilian community makes each customer interaction more significant, and their loss more substantial. Furthermore, the intergenerational networks that make Brazilian women beauticians from childhood are unrecognized by Swedish salons, which favor formal, Swedish licenses for employees. As seen in Magda's case, Vietnamese salons are an unlikely employment opportunity for Brazilian nail technicians, given their closed network loop. Without domestic beauty services, intergenerational client structures also tend to disappear. When done at home, Brazilian beauty work inserts itself into the middle of domestic life, and the beautician's role in the family secures business in the short term and long term. In Sweden, one must always be on call to gain or to lose a client at a moment's notice–and with a smile.

5. Identities

"How are they going to tell me I'm not a beautician? I've been doing this since I was a child."

*-**Magda**, on her encounters with the employment office.*

This chapter will use an emotional labor perspective to understand how beauty work is characterized by precarity at the level of individuals, and explore how migrant beauticians navigate it. Essentially, emotional labor entails managing feelings in the pursuit of a professional goal. Beauticians use moral language to talk about the beauty industry and the (il)legitimate representatives of it. In that sense, emotional labor is not just about the depth or dynamics of relationships described in the previous chapter. In this analysis, emotive identity construction is about storytelling with a plot that achieves a particular effect. This involves self-proclaimed identities, as well as narratives individuals create or perpetuate about others. Specifically, this chapter focuses on beauticians' expressions of identity and discusses how these narratives relate to conditions and navigation of precarity in migrant beauty work. Returning to Pugh's ideas on emotional labor, the active presentation of identities represents both an emotional tool to further relationship goals, or a commodity that has exchange value. Identity is a conscious part of beauty

work, as discussed in previous sections. Emotional labor and identity overlap in instances of "self-stereotyping" at work (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993: 98), whereby individuals represent a particular group (and its traits) in a process similar to deep acting, adding a layer of pressure to one's professional lives.

In the case of Brazilian and Vietnamese beauty work, narratives of (un)professional beauty work, kinship, criminality, and beauticians as therapists depict an additional layer of precarity beneath that of the social networks described in the previous chapter, as they portray obstacles migrant beauticians face as well as identity formation as a strategy for stifling precarity through the construction of positions such as "model immigrants" or "authentic beauticians." Commercialized displays of emotion in an entrepreneurial setting can be seen as a form of identity work itself, since the workers represent themselves and the company simultaneously (versus Hochschild's description of flight attendants representing airlines, for example). Therefore, identity construction is a window into how personal roles are displayed, but also how they are enacted as a strategy of establishing their businesses. Viewing emotional labor as a strategy recognizes the agency migrant beauticians have in furthering their own objectives. Therefore, emotional labor in this case is more complex than being for "the benefit of others at the expense of the self" (Guan et al, 2011: 520). To be sure, care *is* a part of migrant beauty work in this case, but it is largely nestled in exchanges that beauticians consider necessary to keep customers. Admittedly, labeling the exchanges below as "strategic" calls into question the extent to which those engaged in it are doing so deliberately, even if they indicate as much.

Relationships between identity and precarious work have been identified through the concept of enhancing employability via "identity work" (2010) and identity as career capital (Mao and Shen, 2019). The basic premise of both concepts refer to individual responses to declining job security and organizational responsibility, whereby employees must be adaptable and learn a variety of skills to remain relevant in their field. While the concept of employability could explain the connection between maintaining norms through identity work to secure employment (see Smith, 2010), literature addressing employability as a tactic to counteract precarity mostly applies to standard, formal sectors (see Farashah et.al, 2022). Social identity theory is a helpful tool which can be used to make sense of the shifting identities at play within beauty work. Since the concept of "identity" is vague, this chapter defines identity work through social identity theory, which describes the psychological experience of defining membership to

certain groups, and distinguishing their own groups with others. This theory aptly captures the shifting nature of identities in beauty work, which highlights roles that respond to "contextual factors and situations" (Guan et al, 2011: 526).

The first section covers (un)professional identities, where the voices of Swedish beauticians are incorporated to demonstrate how they take ownership of the industry in Sweden. This perspective shows how various narratives depicting migrant beauty work reinforce precarity through exclusionary narratives. The second subsection shows how beauticians distinguish identities and invoke stereotypes to achieve professional goals. Lastly, Brazilian beauty work will be covered from an identity formation perspective to demonstrate how the performance of authenticity (emotional therapy and "traditional" techniques) define how Brazilian beauticians respond to expectations to fulfill certain professional roles. Together, these narratives further locate aspects of uncertainty in migrant beauty work and show how the emotive work of identity construction presents obstacles and opportunities for migrant beauticians, shedding light on how they navigate precarity.

5.1 (Un)professional Identities

"If you have 150,000 Swedish kronor, then you have a nail salon. Then you're a beautician, and you start to make money fast." *-Lauren, on how to become a beautician in Sweden*

As tricky as it is to define beauty work, defining what it means to be a beautician is even less clear. Answers within Vietnamese salons were practical, equating materials and start-up capital with professional identity. In Lauren's words, if you have 150,000 Swedish kronor, then you have a nail salon. Then you're a beautician, and you start to make money fast. In the Brazilian case, their intergenerational training guided their logic of professionalism. Although one can be born outside the industry and become a beautician through training, it is the lifelong presence of beauty work in their lives that defines the experience of being a beautician for Diana and Magda. Before Magda was officially trained in Swedish beauty school, her lack of formal qualifications barred her from employment opportunities. Describing her interactions with the Swedish employment office, she said "Who are they to tell me I'm not a beautician? I've been doing this since I was a child." For Swedish beauticians, formal education and certificates dictate who gets to become a beautician and rightfully offer beauty services to the public. In interviews,

Vietnamese beauticians tend to view beauty work as a job, Swedes as a career, and Brazilians as a way of life and sense of self.

This section will address the negotiation of professional beauty work through the construction of identities that claim it. Here, the input of Swedish beauticians is a useful contribution. Unpacking how Swedish beauticians distinguish their role in the industry reveals further obstacles migrant beauticians face as they shape their professional trajectories, since they hold information about how the formal beauty industry works in Sweden. In this case, the categorization of professional/unprofessional beauty portrays migrant beauty work as dirty, uninformed, ethically compromised and aesthetically unpleasing. It is important to note that the Swedish beauticians interviewed in this project have been clients in Vietnamese beauty salons, but were unaware that Brazilians offered beauty services in Sweden. Overall, the depth and detail of their criticism for migrant beauty work is puzzling, given their minimal exposure to it. A major deviation from the beauty work that is done in Swedish salons is that emotional labor is downplayed by their staff, who associate "professional" beauty care with being "unemotional" and "calm." Ironically, their desire to make clients feel "calm" or "at home" through remaining silent *is* a form of emotional labor through Hochschild's definition. The "exchange value" of their interactions are just slightly different from migrant salons, as are their objectives.

What appears to be a small store-front boutique spa in the center of Landskrona doubles as a fully equipped beauty school, offering professional certificates in nails, waxing and skincare treatments. I was invited by Åsa, the owner of the salon, for a tour of the beauty school. Together, we looked over training materials and had coffee in the back room. Åsa has been running the beauty school alongside the salon itself for several years. The certificates issued in these programs entitle beauticians to use salon-grade gel, polish and other materials that are unavailable to average consumers, such as Lily Nails. Having seen that brand in several salons in town, I asked Åsa if any of her students come from Vietnamese salons. Vietnamese students at the beauty school were extremely rare, which Åsa attributed to lack of resources as well as pride in their work. The most basic nail course package starts at 30,000 Swedish kronor per student, which includes textbooks in English or Swedish as well as classes at the salon. I tried to imagine salons like The Beauty Bar investing (or "splashing cash" in their lingo) on this program for their newly arrived salon workers, who currently turn to internal networks for training. Aside from the courses being a financial investment some salons cannot afford, Åsa emphasized that any

investment would be too big if they didn't take their role and responsibility as beauticians seriously. This is a constant subject of debate within Swedish salons, which recognize that their business is threatened if customers can pay half the price for a set of gel nails. In her view, the Swedes who give Vietnamese salons business are to be blamed, since they "should know better." This statement not only makes a clear distinction between groups, but is also charged with assumptions about a breach of loyalty to favor migrant business that carry out their work secretively and unprofessionally.

Even when migrant beauticians jump through financial and bureaucratic hoops to become certified to use Swedish products and display diplomas on their walls, Vietnamese salons are characterized as a single force which threatens Swedish salons without the rightful professional expertise to do so. I mentioned that a few Vietnamese salons carry Lily Nails, a primary professional brand issued through Swedish licensing. Shaking her head, she said "If you know where they get those products, let me know and I can try to cut their access. Maybe they buy it second hand from a qualified beautician." Lauren proudly displayed her Lily Nails products to her customers, alongside her gel application diploma with the Lily Nails logo, which, ironically, was issued by Hudvård. After visiting Åsa, I asked Lauren about her training experience at Hudvård. Her face lit up. Mentioning Åsa by name, she recalled her positive training experience. She only needed the most basic package to use the professional products, so she decided further investment was unnecessary. Despite Vietnamese salons competing with Hudvård for customers, Swedish staff don't define Vietnamese work as professional beauty since they "don't even know what they're working with." She continued, "Beauty work is about hygiene, following standards and guidelines they know nothing about. They teach each other. That isn't a real education." While admitting that some are skilled artists and work quickly, she explained that their businesses only thrive because they cut corners, have open schedules and provide services for a fraction of the cost. From her perspective, education and theoretical knowledge makes a beautician responsible for upholding standards of hygiene and care that cannot be obtained elsewhere. I brought up an example of Brazilian beauticians learning how to safely boil utensils in a big pot over a gas stove between clients. Without commenting on the efficacy of that approach, she responded "Well, that's Brazil." This comment represents the characterization of formal education as a set of specifically Swedish standards. This idea questions the universality

of body and beauty work, which is perceived by migrants to be an accessible profession for precisely that reason.

After touring the beauty school and Hudvård salon, I reached out to Helena, a fully licensed Swedish esthetician and former salon owner. She quit the beauty business because it was not as lucrative as she thought it would be, and cited Vietnamese salons as one of the barriers Swedish beauticians face, since "legitimate" beauty care cannot compete with their prices. She now works as a salesperson at a cosmetics counter in a mall in Malmö. I met her through mutual friends at a former workplace, who recommended her skin care services. I reached out on Facebook to introduce the project and ask if she would be interested in having an interview.

During her time working in her own salon, she was often criticized for using a manual file and acetone for removing gel polish, rather than the speedy, electric nail files seen elsewhere. Filing and soaking off a gel manicure manually takes much longer than using the electric files, but it is less damaging to the nail bed. She explained that customers "don't care about quality" because Vietnamese salons circulated the idea that electric files are an appropriate method for gel removal. At Helena's salon, gel manicures take a longer time, there are fewer color options, and the price is nearly double that of Vietnamese salons a few streets away. From Helena's perspective, the vast availability of informal beauty licenses are to blame. While one must have a two-year education in Sweden to become a licensed esthetician, acquiring the title of a "beautician," "skin therapist," or "nail technician" can follow a weekend or online course offered by popular cosmetic stores and beauty suppliers. This means that certain beauty treatments, such as eyelash extensions, manicures and pedicures, and spray tans can be done with minimal or no certification needed. Helena defines herself as a legitimate beautician because her knowledge is not "superficial," meaning that she knows the theory behind what ingredients products contain. She recalled a time when a client had some to her from a Vietnamese salon, asking her to fix botched lash extensions that were done using adhesive that was not suitable for topical use. Since one does not need a license to buy professional grade eyelash glue, Helena emphasized that Vietnamese beauticians "don't care about their work" and "just do it for the money."

Helena pointed out that Swedish salons could do more to hire skilled Vietnamese beauticians. I asked her if she would consider hiring a Vietnamese nail technician if they had

Swedish credentials. While not opposed to the idea, she expressed concerns over shared understandings of taste. She recounted an experience of being a customer in a Vietnamese salon, where concepts like "natural" for short nails and "Springy" for light polish had to be explained. In a Swedish salon, she claimed that there is a shared understanding of taste that allows customers to trust that they share the same vision. Regardless of the extent to which concerns and comments expressed by Swedish beauticians are based in real experience, the narrative of legitimate and illegitimate beauty work is exclusionary. To say that migrant beauticians face complications entering the labor market due to recognition of qualifications would be an understatement and an oversimplification. The distinctions that Swedish beauticians make between their own work and migrant beauty work runs deeper than formal licenses and qualifications, since these ideas go hand in hand with intangible concepts of taste, morality and pride in one's profession.

Overall, ideas about (un)professional beauty work are centered around a set of ideals connected to behavior, materials and moral standpoints that are discussed in terms of who delivers legitimate beauty work. In doing so, the narrative of Vietnamese and (and to some extent Brazilian) beauty service as harmful, tasteless and unprofessional, suggests that migrant beauticians face barriers in seeking employment in Swedish salons, no matter their education. However, some Brazilian beauticians can counteract degrees of the precarity they face by using cultural leverage to substitute for formal education. In Diana's case, she was offered a generous deal on a room in an established Swedish salon, partly due to an uptick in popularity for Brazilian waxes. While Diana is a talented beautician, the appeal of her identity as an authentic *depiladora* or Brazilian "waxer" granted her opportunities despite not having Swedish qualifications. Vietnamese beauticians in Sweden don't wield the same cultural leverage, since their identities are not recognized fixtures of beauty culture. In this sense, narratives of professionalism are infused with cultural identifications of competence. In terms of precarity, this dynamic shows the shifting definition of beauty work, and how cultural identities have the power to overcome barriers put in place by Swedish narratives of professional, legitimate beauty work.

Lastly, the portrayal of Vietnamese beauty workers as tax-evading, corner-cutting opportunists can be observed as a force used by both Swedish and Brazilian beauticians to reinforce their own expertise and roles as legitimate beauty workers. Ironically, Brazilian beauticians pointed out that Vietnamese beauty work is "shady" and "hidden," while working

under the table in clients' homes themselves. From a social identity standpoint, the construction of hierarchies of professional identities portray Vietnamese beauty work as not only unprofessional, but also illegal. During her unpaid internship in a Vietnamese salon, Magda observed that they had eight pedicure chairs, each valued at over 30,000 Swedish kronor: "They launder money. There is no other way. I don't make that kind of money, and I am a real beautician. I have one chair–one! They opened with eight. That's just the cost of the chairs alone. Do you think they cover that with manicures for 300 kronor?" Likewise, Swedish beauticians like Åsa call their work *svart*, "black," meaning under the table: "What they're doing is illegal. They offer manicures to teen girls who are not old enough to get a set of false nails." On several occasions, both Swedish and Brazilian beauticians brought up narratives of money laundering, human trafficking, unlawful working conditions and tax evasion to describe how Vietnamese beauty services are run in Sweden. Regardless of the extent to which their accusations are based in reality, the construction of this narrative is an expression of identity which is used to negotiate the definition of professional beauty work. The implications of this is that defining a "real" beautician is a moving target. For example, Swedish beauticians argue that migrant beauticians are not professional beauty workers because their education is not recognized by the Swedish system. When they *do* obtain Swedish credentials and display their products, it is assumed they were obtained dishonestly.

5.2 Valuable and Vulnerable Identities

Gratitude comprises much of Lauren's self-proclaimed identity as an immigrant in Sweden. She often recites "When you come here, you have to give and take in equal measure." Within this belief system, she describes her ability to weed out "ungrateful" clients, which gives her power to decide who to work with. This work is done by ensuring that her ethnically Swedish clients are aware of her disdain of Middle Eastern migrants in Sweden, and her ability to deter them from her business. On two occasions, Lauren engaged in one-sided discussions with clients to let them know about which clientele were not welcome in her salon. One client was a captive audience in a footbath, who listened to Lauren's harangue about ungrateful refugees and migrants. By distinguishing between grateful and ungrateful migrants, Lauren elevates the status of her role and the contributions she makes to Swedish society. The desired effect of her

approach is not entirely clear, but it can be understood as an attempt to foster a sense of kinship with clients over a perceived mutual enemy.

Later, I questioned whether she thought expressing those sentiments could result in customers deciding to go elsewhere. Unconcerned, she said that she was only telling the truth, and her Swedish clients knew as much. Next, I asked if they both considered that to be reality, why does it need to be discussed? Lauren explained the importance of letting Swedish customers know that Vietnamese migrants are here to work and contribute to society, and part of that is showing that they aren't affiliated with groups that "cause problems in Sweden." When a woman with a headscarf seeks services in Lauren's salon, she politely redirects them elsewhere or lies about having a packed schedule, with no regard for financial loss. From Lauren's perspective, the presence of customers in headscarves is bad optics, and will result in her salon being marked as a place for migrants. Lauren estimates that 95% of Middle Eastern clients complain and demand their money back after a session, citing that as an example of how they are entitled.

Some Middle Eastern clients slip through Lauren's system, for example, when people call the salon and speak Swedish. In such a case, a Lebanese client overheard Lauren talking to a Swedish customer about a room in the back of the salon that would soon be available to rent. As an experienced beautician from Beirut, she was looking for space to start up her beauty bar. The room was fully equipped with a sink, lighting and mirrors, and had access to a shared kitchen, bathroom and lobby with Lauren's salon. Lauren declined her offer. Later, she reflected on her decision, telling me that it "would have been a nightmare" having that woman rent a room in the salon. I asked for further clarification. After her client left, she turned her manicure lamp off and rolled her swivel chair to the center of the room, facing me. She explained that people "from that area of the world cannot accept difference. They want things their way. I can't work like that here. It's not about black or white. It's their culture. They are ungrateful." She went on to describe Vietnamese migrants in Sweden as productive, hard working and grateful to be in a "rich country."

This version of Lauren's narrative about Vietnamese migrants changed intensely from her earlier description of them in the context of their network relations. By positioning herself (and Vietnamese migrants as a group) above Middle Eastern migrants, she displays qualities that might boost her status in Swedish society's estimation, according to her perspective. Lauren's shifting portrayal of Vietnamese migrant identities in Sweden demonstrates how identity

construction is mobilized to achieve various goals related to cementing her business and promoting her own business through moral ideals. From an emotional labor perspective, Lauren's identity construction work is displayed to her clients in order to produce a desired effect that holds strategic importance to her business. The concept of social identity theory can explain Lauren's hierarchy of identities on display in various contexts, through the idea of the malleability of self-presentation, meaning the "significance of social identity salience is in the mobilization of group performance to achieve certain goals" (Willetts and Clarke, 2012: 166). By considering these exchanges from social identity and emotional labor perspectives, we access strategies of combating precarity that are unaddressed elsewhere. Another element of precarity that is often overlooked is one's own estimation of precarity, which is revealed by the social identity perspective. Lauren connects her performance of exclusion to the success of her business. This brings forward a striking example of how one's internalized understanding of a social context drives the perspective of one's subjective condition of precarity, as well as coping mechanisms that ensue. Whether Lauren's open discriminatory practices helps or hurts her business is unknown. Regardless, her understanding of her own social standing and that of others informs a strategy that she links to the health of her business and personal brand.

Just as Lauren portrayed her elevated status as a migrant through displaying an assumed mutual disdain of Middle Eastern clients, the maintenance of identities also relates to those which are hidden. Lauren had just greeted a regular, who had come in for a gel refill. She had come to Lauren every few weeks for half a decade, since she was "quick and cheap." While Lauren was filing her old gel away, a white van parallel parked outside the salon's door. Recognizing it instantly, Lauren asked her customer if she would wait. She said that she really couldn't wait, as she was in a hurry to pick her son up from a friend's house. Lauren glanced back and forth between the manicure table and the truck. Snatching her jacket as she sprinted to the door, she said she'd be back in just a minute. The client rolled her eyes and looked back at the clock above the pedicure chair. Outside the door, we saw Lauren giving cash to a Vietnamese man with a clipboard outside the salon. With a triumphant strut, Lauren reentered the salon, displaying a clear plastic bag filled with giant, live crabs. Asking her customer to wait again, she darted to the kitchen to store them. Furious that she had been asked to wait a second time, her client began to complain that Lauren shouldn't have left, and that maybe she didn't understand

what she told her about having to pick her son up after the appointment. She said that her Swedish was “not that good,” and that “people have to learn Swedish if they want to work here.”

Lauren understood her client’s time restraints. However, she ordered special crabs through a Vietnamese supplier to make a soup, which were delivered to the salon. She assured us that the crabs wouldn’t have the energy to escape their plastic enclosure, as they are “weak from having no oxygen.” The thought of crabs suffocating in a bag in the back of the salon horrified Lauren’s client. She explained that they wouldn’t fit in the fridge, they'd die just in time for her to take them home to boil straight away. As Lauren continued to discuss the soup, her client took out her phone, ducking out of the conversation. After what seemed like the longest manicure I ever sat through, she paid and left in silence.

This exchange represents a rare moment of Lauren sharing Vietnamese culture with her clients. It also frames how the client-beautician relationship shifts when Lauren replaces her identity as a speedy, efficient nail technician with her own personal life and Vietnamese culture. The client’s central complaint shifted from time constraints to her perception that Lauren was unable to understand what she said, and would need to fix that if she wants to continue working in Sweden. Lauren decoupled her own identity from that of being a manicurist. As a result, the client questioned Lauren’s place in Swedish society. This exchange demonstrates the fragility of relationships built in this context, and the stakes involved in maintaining the (dis)appearance of certain characteristics, as well as a fracture in the contract of *display rules.* In light of the previous narrative about Lauren’s self-identification as a grateful migrant, certain display rules make some characteristics opportune to share during specific times. In other words, Lauren’s confident construction of Vietnameseness as a badge of gratitude is a deliberate display of identity hierarchies. On the other hand, the client’s interpretation of the crab delivery demonstrates that other displays of Vietnameseness “break character” with Lauren’s role. The client questioned her place in Swedish society, reducing her status in a hierarchy that allows Lauren’s roles as a manicurist to be valued, but on the condition that her personal life is set aside.

5.3 “We Talk Like Normal People”: Therapy and the Performance of Authentic Brazilian Beauty Work

Invisibility and resulting lack of exposure to Brazilian beauty services makes expanding one’s customer base beyond the Brazilian community a difficult task. Emotional labor is a

double-edged sword: the provision of "traditional" Brazilian beauty services provides a basis for employment, but it also holds the beauticians to a standard of authenticity and sincerity. Performing simultaneous roles as beauticians and emotional therapists transforms into a driver of precarity in Sweden. This subsection will demonstrate this process through narratives of emotional labor and the performance of authentic Brazilian beauty work.

Magda has her own salon, but it's inside her living room, which classifies it as domestic beauty work to some extent. Throughout the years, it was not uncommon for Brazilian clients to expect flexible payment systems accepted in Brazil, such as paying when the client receives a paycheck rather than on the day or splitting the bill in installments. She grew frustrated with the volume of expectations "traditional" beauty brought relative to the profits it drew in. From Magda's perspective, the emotional therapy part of beauty treatments is less sustainable in a diaspora setting because the Brazilian community in Skåne know each other. Mainstays of beauty treatment talk, such as relationship and family drama, gossip, and other personal issues were difficult for Magda to maintain in a small community, where she recognized the characters in her clients' stories from the church services, samba parties or even saw some of them as clients. She had to pay close attention to not divulge information across clients or let on that she knew of other stories in fear of losing clients' trust. Her clients came to her because, according to Magda, "nobody does beauty like Brazilians." I asked Magda whether her clients might continue to come for the treatments, even if emotional therapy is not as heavily prioritized. She said that once a bond is formed with clients, breaking the friendship bond *also* severs the customer bond, as per Diana's motto "In Brazil, we don't make customers from friends, but friends from customers." Magda's customer base is partially sustained through reluctant engagement in an emotional therapy role, as is expected during beauty treatments. Magda described Brazilian salons as places where women could share and be vulnerable in space that prioritized women. Providing this service to the homesick customers who long for that experience comes at a price. Magda is regularly concerned about clients linking gossip within the tight-knit community back to her salon. Recognizing the importance of the emotional therapy role in beauty work resembles *surface acting,* in which her emotional engagement is altered by professional expectations.

These exchanges bring forth new understandings of the relationship between migration and precarity, and how the role of maintaining identities factors in. What is taken for granted as a societal norm in Brazil became an explicit obligation. The way emotional labor can

conceptualize this experience is that the exchange value of Magda's emotional labor changes through being reproduced in Sweden. Given the nature of intergenerational beauty work in Brazil, beauticians invest time (literally, generations) in getting to know families and being a part of their lives. Performing the role of the emotional therapist in beauty treatments in Sweden accelerates that process because it is being used to replace what Brazilians expect to get in Brazil. Taking this into consideration, the precarious nature of Magda's work not only refers to mainstream understandings of informality or insecurity. It is tethered to a cultural expectation of the beautician's identity as a source of emotional support.

In Diana's case, she had hoped that exposing Brazilian beauty to clients at Salong4 would result in more home visits, where she could be paid directly. Moving her career to Sweden has changed the way Diana thinks about her identity in relation to her ability to attract clients. For example, it is not uncommon for businesses in Brazil to hire a manicurist as a perk for employees. In Brazil, Diana sat in boardrooms across São Paulo, where she recruited clients from visiting large companies. The domestic quality and informality of Brazilian beauty work in Sweden renders it mostly invisible to those not actively seeking it out on Facebook or Bokadirekt platforms. The implications of this struggle are twofold. First, being restricted to the Brazilian community is accompanied by the expectation of "authentic" beauty work. Secondly, it is difficult for Brazilian beauticians to recruit non-Brazilian clients, since domestic services don't have an established history in Sweden. If customers want a deal, they might go to one of many Vietnamese places in town. If they have more money and want what is perceived to be a "luxury" experience in Sweden, they might go to a place like Hudvård to see a Swedish beautician in a day spa setting.

Brazilian beauty services treat necessity and luxury as inseparable: they represent indulgence and everyday life, alternating between pampering and conversation. As Diana puts it, "We don't ask how you are. We talk like normal people." From her perspective, the question of her identity as a beautician doesn't relate to a specific set of skills–she simply *is* a beautician by birth and trade. To her clients, her role as a "real" or "traditional" beautician is crucial. Diana explained her need to be "traditionally" Brazilian through the concept of "touching someone's wound," a translated Portuguese expression that entails seeing what people need and delivering it. In the context of offering Brazilian beauty treatments in Sweden, the "wound" Diana touches contains a series of expectations surrounding what a "traditional" beauty service should offer, in

terms of aesthetics, but also conversation. On one hand, Diana's authenticity as a beautician is derived from her being born into a family of beauty care workers. On the other hand, she describes the need for her image of authenticity to be reinforced through beauty service techniques and providing emotional therapy.

During a home beauty visit, Diana told me that she wanted to learn a trendy bikini waxing technique that removes all the hair in a single swipe, rather than using multiple strips during her next trip to Brazil. I asked her why she would need to learn the technique while in Brazil, since there are probably online resources that could show her how it works. Aside from visiting family, she explained that the value of her credentials come from her experience, which "cannot be done over a computer." If she started offering the service, customers might ask how she learned it, as a test to see whether her services fit their notions of a "traditional" or "authentic" Brazilian beauty service that observes trends back home. Aside from waxing, Diana highlighted other beauty techniques that are stages of negotiation over what counts as "authentically Brazilian" or beauty work *de verdade,* meaning "truthfully," or "real." She described the "nightmare" of having to explain to customers why new gel techniques cannot be slathered all over the finger and cleaned up with an acetone-soaked orange stick, as it cures in a UV light, unlike conventional nail polish. I noticed during our manicures with non-gel polish, she never doused my whole nail bed in polish. I asked her whether she stopped doing it that way altogether. She explained that she can relax a bit more with her technique, since I am not Brazilian. If she skipped that step with a Brazilian client, they would have complained. From Diana's perspective as a beautician, the quality of the treatment doesn't suffer if that step is bypassed. The performance of authenticity can be described as a strategy for Diana to obtain and maintain her clients on the basis that she is a "real" beautician. Honoring the expectations from her clients not only adorns her work with a seal of marketable Brazilian authenticity; it also relates to certain display rules set out by clients that Diana meets in order to provide a service they recognize as one they'd get back home, both in technical skill and emotional disposition.

As long as her domestic beauty business is limited to advertising within the Brazilian community, her professional reputation depends on the performance of "real" Brazilian beauty. Another way this dynamic plays out is in the expectation of the beautician performing an emotional support role. Similar to Magda's case, Diana's role as a beautician with Brazilian clients is accompanied by the expectation that the environment she creates is one of emotional

support as well as physical transformation. By the second visit, she claims that she "will know everything about your life." Cultivating close relationships with her clients has proven to be a reliable way for Diana to get more business. She defines her role as a "listener," who "lets her clients talk." Admitting that she often loses focus on the elaborate drama-packed details of clients' lives, she says that her responses are not important. As long as her clients *feel* supported and listened to, Diana considers her job complete. She repeated "women just want to be heard." In this sense, one way in which Brazilian beauticians navigate precarity is by maintaining an image of Brazilian authenticity and offering sincere emotional support, at least in appearance.

6. Conclusion & Discussion

In conclusion, the original intention of this thesis was to answer the question of **how migrant beauty work is characterized by precarity, and how migrant beauticians navigate it**. In brief, the response to the first part of the question is that migrant beauty work is characterized by an intricate web of network relations and identity politics which produce and sustain precarity. Transnational ties reproduce inequality in a country of destination, and network relations impede conventional employment opportunities by the dual threat of being blacklisted by community members with little to no alternative of working in the formal beauty sector. Even though they live in Sweden, some beauticians are metaphorically stuck in Brazil because their job conditions and clientele mirror the emotional and structural essence of precarious beauty work in São Paulo. Flexibility and uncertainty follows them. This sheds light on the connection between precarity and migration to say that network relations (and in this case, the emotional labor they entail) distort the experience of migration by having cultural expectations from Brazil casted onto their careers. In the Vietnamese case, migrant beauticians' entrance into nails as a job rather than a career is interpreted by Swedish beauticians to render their services undesirable, no matter their technical skill. This says something about the way identity influences opportunities. Migrant beauticians navigate this by wielding soft power and cultural identities to find opportunities, but also taking on new identities in an attempt to show gratitude or solidarity with Swedish society. Sometimes they use stereotypes of other ethnic groups to highlight their own desirability in an attempt to redraw social boundaries. By understanding migrant beauticians' condition of precarity and the way they navigate it, we can return to Schierup and Jørgensen's ideas about the duality of value and exploitation. The narratives in this case bring life and nuance to this notion,

along with the assertion that emotional labor is used to manage the line between being valuable and vulnerable.

Gauffin's (2020) study on precarity in the Swedish labor market represents a single attempt in which precarious workers are located through the population register. He admits that this approach limits visibility of workers who never entered formal employment, as is the case of migrant beauty workers. Analyzing precarity in Sweden's gray zones which straddle formal/informal employment addresses important layers of precarity. However, no studies cover precarity among those who barely access the formal labor market in Sweden. Through attempting to locate emerging areas of precarity in Sweden, Gauffin recognizes that foreign-born entrepreneurship is of "particular concern," as struggles in the Swedish labor market might play a role in pushing people into precarious self-employment, "especially on digital platforms" (Gauffin, 2020: 284). The process of answering the research question this thesis poses started out about (navigation of) precarity in beauty work, but it results in a closer look at the complications that arise from the idea that self-employment leads to self-sufficient integration. In this sense, the broader value of these findings contribute to emerging research on migrant work and growing precarity in Sweden, of which migrants are particularly affected. The insights found throughout the process of this project highlighted undiscussed conditions of precarity, especially beyond a gig economy context. This project contributes insights into how the dynamic of precarious self employment persists beyond the gig economy. Furthermore, it challenges the notion that migrant entrepreneurship as an integration measure fosters self-sufficiency, as suggested by the Swedish government and reinforced by groups such as Svensk Näringsliv and the Swedish Entrepreneurship Forum.

The limitations throughout this thesis (and results that follow) are derived from the recognition that emotional labor is just one way to discuss what beauticians experience. Therefore, the question of how beauty work is characterized by precarity could be given a more varied answer than network relations and identity politics. For example, their role as women is not discussed at length in this work, despite gender being a central component of the beauty industry. Despite briefly touching on beauty as therapy and womanhood, themes of gender could have been more rigorously explored. Another theme that would have been more prevalent under another theoretical framing would have been ethnic discrimination and the role it plays in shaping the industry of beauty work. This is referenced throughout the Identities chapter,

however further exploration of narratives of ethnicity and rightful beauty work (especially in relation to aesthetics and hygiene) might have delivered more specific insights into the identity work that shapes precarious beauty work.

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