

Preparing for a Day that May Never Come: Venturing in Limbo

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ABSTRACT The new venture creation process is a central phenomenon in entrepreneurship research. Typically, scholarship has sought to identify common, linear stages of development in this process in pursuit of a sustained, growing venture. In contrast to this theory, this study reveals dynamic, non-linear venturing processes that allowed for venture persistence despite failing to ‘progress’ toward traditional outcomes. We generate these insights from qualitative data on Syrian refugee entrepreneurs seeking to create and sustain ventures in Lebanon while living in a state of limbo – a precarious situation where the future is unknown and unknowable. We organize our findings in a model of venturing in limbo, which explains why and how entrepreneurs persist in venture creation practices despite experiencing repeated and significant setbacks that return them ‘to square one’. We reveal dynamic venture creation processes that allow for adaptive responses to erratic environmental shifts by producing entrepreneurial readiness, which consists of behavioural, cognitive, and psychological/emotional capabilities. Entrepreneurial readiness enables persistence of venturing efforts in the face of chronic precarity. Our study contributes to theory on new venture creation in entrepreneurship and organizational liminality.

Keywords: entrepreneurship, limbo, liminality, new venture creation

INTRODUCTION

Understanding the new venture creation (NVC) process is critical for developing theory on entrepreneurship (Davidsson and Gruenhagen, 2021; Dimov, 2020; McMullen and Dimov, 2013). Traditionally, the NVC process has been construed in terms of gestation

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activities that unfold in stages (or phases) which successfully conclude with the realization of a new venture (Baron, 2007; Reynolds and Miller, 1992; Van de Ven, 1992). This disaggregated, sequential stage view of NVC processes is a helpful metaphor for describing how new firms emerge and then grow (Gielnik et al., 2014; Klyver et al., 2018), but it clashes with how NVC processes play out in reality: they are diverse; they are dynamic; they simultaneously occur over time; and they are non-linear, meaning the distinctiveness of a 'stage' and the space between stages are frequently blurry (Bakker and Shepherd, 2017; Von Briel et al., 2018). This metaphorical representation has created a need for 'radical theoretical contributions' grounded in empirical examination of NVC process characteristics, such as diverse objectives, patterns, activities, and intermittent outcomes (Davidsson and Gruenhagen, 2021, p. 1100). Such contributions would allow for better accommodation of the wide range of goals pursued and achieved outside the 'straitjacket' of traditional, staged-model processes and outcomes (e.g., firm establishment then growth) (Levie and Lichtenstein, 2010; Von Briel et al., 2018). They would also promise to enable a better understanding of the broad variety of NVC processes (e.g., different pace, transitions, and sequences) involved in entrepreneurship outside of a venture capital-backed, high-growth context (Bakker and McMullen, 2023; Baron and Markman, 2004; Wu and Jung, 2008).

One literature that may be particularly suited to advance our understanding of NVC processes in less conventional settings is the emerging research on entrepreneurship in precarious contexts (Miller and Le Breton-Miller, 2017; Williams and Shepherd, 2021). This stream shows how entrepreneurs in conditions of precarity (e.g., refugees, stigmatized populations, impoverished individuals, and cultural minorities) seek to mitigate the extreme uncertainty they face in their daily lives (Alkhaled and Sasaki, 2022; Branzei and Fathallah, 2023; Shepherd et al., 2020; Sutter et al., 2019). The resulting vulnerability experienced inevitably shapes the goals, activities, and other characteristics of the NVC process (Bakker and McMullen, 2023; Thorgren and Williams, 2023) such that entrepreneurship often serves as an emotional, cognitive, or identity-based emancipatory mechanism for many vulnerable populations. Although NVC promises many entry into a 'conventional' life for themselves (Rindova et al., 2009) or for future generations of their families (Shepherd et al., 2020, 2021; Urban and Ndou, 2019), for others living in chronically precarious conditions, NVC's promise of a 'conventional' life with positive economic outcomes can be unrealistic (Sutter et al., 2023). Indeed, despite growing interest in 'unconventional' forms of entrepreneurship (Bakker and McMullen, 2023), we know surprisingly little about why and how vulnerable populations persist in NVC processes where there is little hope of exiting a state of precarity (see Williams and Fathallah, 2024). Thus, it is both theoretically and practically important to discover how the NVC process unfolds amid persistently adverse conditions where there is no clear hope of progress toward a stable and/or sustainable form of venture maintenance and growth. Consequently, we ask: *How do entrepreneurial venturing processes emerge and change over time under conditions of chronic precarity? And why do entrepreneurs persist with the process in the face of significant obstacles to venture development?*

To answer these questions, we draw from and extend theory on organizational liminality (Czarniawska and Mazza, 2003; Ibarra, 2005; Söderlund and Borg, 2018) and limbo (Bamber et al., 2017; Mimoun and Bardhi, 2022). Liminality is a state of

‘betwixt-and-betweenness,’ traditionally construed as a temporary condition between two known stages of an ongoing process – such as experiencing a rite of passage as part of an overall process of ‘coming of age’ (Van Gennep, 1908). In organizational scholarship, liminality similarly involves inhabiting an unknown space between projects (Czarniawska and Mazza, 2003), transitions in management careers (Ibarra, 2005), and new venture transitions from unknown to a stable state (Prashantham and Floyd, 2019). For its part, research on the concept of limbo (Bamber et al., 2017) seeks to extend organizational liminality theory to conditions in which transitions remain largely uncertain (as opposed to known), thereby potentially allowing the theory to apply to the characteristics and outcomes of NVC processes within a broader context of chronic precarity.

In hopes of developing theoretical insights grounded in data about NVC processes in a context of chronic precarity – a state of persistent uncertainty and insecurity regarding entrepreneurs’ legal status, professional possibilities, and operating privileges, we conducted an inductive, qualitative study of 61 Syrian refugee entrepreneurs operating in Lebanon.^[1] Our participants described a ‘feeling of limbo’, in which the future was unknown and unknowable as Lebanese authorities constantly threatened to indiscriminately terminate their ventures. According to Nassar and Stel (2019, p. 44), Lebanon’s approach to refugees sought, by design, to create a context of ‘persistent uncertainty and precariousness’, continuously shifting policies and enforcement practices to dissuade long-term settlement. Therefore, to develop our inductive, grounded theoretical model of *venturing in limbo* – the dynamic NVC process that enables adaptation to chronic and persistent uncertainty, we used private interviews and observational and secondary data and found that persistence in the entrepreneurial process while living in limbo is characterized by three different NVC patterns – *idling*, *fixing*, and *porting* – which unfold as entrepreneurs try to eliminate liminality and integrate new disruptions. How entrepreneurial ventures progress in and then move between these three different NVC patterns is what enables their persistence despite ongoing environmental uncertainty.

Our findings offer several theoretical contributions for research on entrepreneurship and liminality. Instead of sequential and progressive stages (Levie and Lichtenstein, 2010; Von Briel et al., 2018), we find that NVC processes under chronic precarity follow dynamic, non-linear patterns that unfold as entrepreneurs (re)interpret and accommodate new disruptions. These patterns involved re-interpretations of temporal, locational, and positional features of the venture, where entrepreneurs regularly returned to ‘square one’ in defining the future possibilities for their venture in response to the ever-shifting environmental constraints. Such regular returns to ‘square one’ as a means of coping with an unknown future are highly inconsistent with existing theory on new venture processes, suggesting theoretical revision is merited. Second, our study extends theory on unsuccessful venturing (Thorgren and Williams, 2023; Williams and Fathallah, 2024), observing that in the context of chronic precarity, achieving ‘traditional’ NVC outcomes may not always be possible or desirable. Instead, NVC patterns appear to produce a common outcome that we label entrepreneurial readiness, which consists of behavioural, cognitive, and psychological/emotional capabilities and which allows individuals to continue working on their ventures despite ever-changing precarious conditions. Third, our research refines theory on liminality by distinguishing venturing in limbo (Bamber et al., 2017)

from entrepreneurship in liminality. Indeed, given the uncertainty surrounding the ‘landing spot’ of the liminality phase and whether traditional NVC process stages (e.g., emergence, growth, diversification, etc.) are even possible, we conclude that the term ‘limbo’ may better characterize the venturing processes of marginalized individuals facing chronic precarity and more aptly describes the twists and turns they face.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

New Venture Creation Process

The new venture creation (NVC) process is a central phenomenon in entrepreneurship research (Davidsson and Gruenhagen, 2021; Dimov, 2020; McMullen and Dimov, 2013). NVC is understood as the entrepreneur’s journey into initiating a new and independent venture toward the completion of its creation (Davidsson and Gruenhagen, 2021). Despite this research, there is an ongoing effort to better understand the features of NVC processes and their frequently ‘blurry’ sequence over time (Baron, 2007; Davidsson and Gruenhagen, 2021; McMullen and Dimov, 2013). Furthermore, recent work has challenged what entails the ‘successful conclusion’ of the NVC process and when it occurs, given that it could be ‘imagined, when the complete venture has not yet been reached, or real, when [the venture] has been reached or the efforts to reach it have stopped’ (Dimov, 2020, p. 3).

Foundational research on NVC processes is broadly based on a lifecycle analogy (Davidsson and Gruenhagen, 2021), where new ventures emerge through sequential development stages until achieving some degree of self-sustaining stability (Levie and Lichtenstein, 2010; Powell and Baker, 2017; Von Briel et al., 2018). Typically, this research focuses on NVC processes and outcomes of ‘high end’ (i.e., VC-backed) or ‘conventional’ entrepreneurship (Bakker and McMullen, 2023; Davidsson and Gruenhagen, 2022). While this analogy is useful in broadly delineating milestones along the journey from venture emergence to growth (Gielnik et al., 2014; Klyver et al., 2018), it can prevent a more dynamic examination of the NVC process itself by erroneously assuming episodic progression. This is perhaps most evident when considering organizational process studies more broadly. Such studies highlight the dynamic nature of a process and present different styles of process theorizing (e.g., recursive, parallel, or conjunctive) that are more deeply embedded in process ontology (Cloutier and Langley, 2020).

This problem in NVC process theorizing has been noted by entrepreneurship scholars, leading some to argue that the NVC literature has ‘failed to capitalize on the main strength of process explanation, namely how things change and develop over time’ (McMullen and Dimov, 2013, p. 1485). This is understandable as the purpose of extant research has been to explain how and why actors persist in driving a venture along the emergence journey (Funken et al., 2020; Gielnik et al., 2014; Lomberg et al., 2019) toward achieving its pre-assumed goal of venture formation and persistence (Gimenez-Jimenez et al., 2022; Uy et al., 2017). In acknowledging these limitations, some research explores nested and sub-processes of NVC. For example,

scholars have examined how entrepreneurial competencies (Rasmussen et al., 2011), passion (Collewaert et al., 2016), and opportunities develop at different 'stages' of a venture (Mauer et al., 2009; Preller et al., 2020; Snihur et al., 2017). Others have explored pivoting processes as the creative revision of an idea (Grimes, 2018; Hampel et al., 2020) or as the accumulating strategic reorientation of a venture (Kirtley and O'Mahony, 2023). While these studies are helpful in diversifying a theoretical approach to entrepreneurial phenomena, there remains a need to improve our understanding of the twists and turns involved in the temporal journey of NVC processes more generally (Davidsson and Gruenhagen, 2022), including less structured (i.e., non-staged, nonlinear) process features and associated outcomes (Berglund, 2007; Dimov, 2020).

NVC processes and context. One particular limitation of the staged lifecycle analogy of NVC processes is its inability to account for how contextual and temporal differences likely alter the occurrence and/or sequence of NVC stages. A staged approach therefore not only assumes that progression through the certain NVC stages is the goal but that it is fundamentally possible in any given context. However, NVC processes are embedded in contexts (Dimov, 2020) that constrain or enable different objectives, patterns, activities, and intermittent outcomes (Welter, 2011). Emerging scholarship on entrepreneurs in conditions of precarity highlights the extreme uncertainty entrepreneurs face in their daily lives (Daou et al., 2019; Fathallah, 2023; Shepherd et al., 2021; Williams and Fathallah, 2024), the sense of vulnerability that results (Branzei and Fathallah, 2023), and the influence these conditions have on the entrepreneur's goals and activities, as well as other characteristics of the NVC process (Bakker and McMullen, 2023). Furthermore, the scope and purpose of NVC activities can change over time (McMullen and Dimov, 2013), suggesting the need for theory that explains the emergence, change, and flows of different processes (Van Burg et al., 2022).

In their review of NVC scholarship, Davidsson and Gruenhagen (2021, p. 1090) highlight the need for research to go beyond examining process situated events (something occurring in the process) and rather understanding process patterns such as 'the duration or varying intensity of the process; the timing, speed, and sequence of activities within the process'. Focusing on process patterns is important because within the NVC process there are many intermediate steps that are largely unaccounted for in empirical work and that result in 'outcome shifts over time, and at each point is simply a temporary halt in a constantly unfolding process' (McMullen and Dimov, 2013, p. 1490). These processes are important when actors face persistent adversity. For example, we know that in periods of crisis, NVC processes persist but at different degrees of intensity: some entrepreneurs slow down, while others increase their efforts (Davidsson and Gordon, 2016). However, numerous entrepreneurs launch NVC processes during crises across a wide range of national boundaries and contexts (Shepherd and Williams, 2014, 2023; Williams and Shepherd, 2021), and many of them persist with entrepreneurship, despite facing long-term adversity (Shepherd et al., 2020).

Taken together, while NVC process research continues to expand (Davidsson and Gruenhagen, 2021), there remains a need to better understand and unpack different

process patterns and associated outcomes. We argue that examining NVC processes of entrepreneurs in a context of chronic precarity offers a unique opportunity to expand extant theories. Specifically, in a penurious environment where entrepreneurs face persistent and unpredictable forms of adversity (McMullen and Kier, 2016; Shepherd et al., 2021; Sutter et al., 2023), NVC efforts are continuously thwarted from following a traditional lifecycle process, which impedes progress toward conventional outcomes. Therefore, explaining how actors persist with NVC processes and what outcomes they produce while being perpetually trapped in a state of developmental limbo could add novel insights to entrepreneurship theory.

Organizational Liminality

Research on organizational liminality could be useful in exploring the ‘fuzzy’ aspects surrounding NVC processes and outcomes (Davidsson and Gruenhagen, 2021, p. 1099) in ways that detach it from the staged lifecycle analogy. The concept of liminality stems from sociological literature on milestones in human development and refers to the ambiguity that occurs in-between critical life transition points when the individual has left a pre-transition state but not yet gained the post-transition status (Turner, 1967, 1987). Being in a state of liminality therefore involves being betwixt and between a known prior state (i.e., separation from the old) and a targeted and known future state (i.e., reincorporation of a new situation) (Van Gennep, 1908).

In building on the concept of liminal experiences, organization scholars have explored liminal phenomena across levels of analysis, with a particular focus on behaviours occurring within the context of unresolved change. People in organizations experience liminal professional identities when between jobs or career progression milestones (see Ibarra and Obodaru, 2016). Milestones are helpful in that they can allow individuals to enter a deliberative mindset that is more objective in its information processing – even if only temporary – as they move toward ambitious goals (McMullen and Kier, 2016). Similarly, liminality has been adopted as a lens to classify occupations (Czarniawska and Mazza, 2003), hierarchical roles (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2002), organizations (Tempest and Starkey, 2004), and events and spaces (Sturdy et al., 2006). Consistent with its foundations in sociology, the literature on liminality in organization studies contextualizes liminality as a temporary period of uncertainty between two known states and emphasizes the changeable nature of the liminal period where multiple meanings co-exist (Beech, 2011). The effects of liminality on individuals and organizations can be positive (e.g., creativity) and negative (e.g., psychological dysfunction) (Söderlund and Borg, 2018).

Tagliaventi (2019) classifies types of liminal experiences in organizations into four main domains: cross-organizational boundaries (e.g., management consultants) (Czarniawska and Mazza, 2003); contingent work (e.g., temporary workers) (Garsten, 1999); within an organization (e.g., project managers) (Hodgson and Paton, 2016); and the pursuit of plural careers/occupations (e.g., lawyers and chefs) (Caza et al., 2018). Traditionally, this research bounds liminal experiences within a clearly defined organizational context. In contrast, other literature highlights permanent liminality as being theoretically distinct (Ellis and Ybema, 2010; Ybema

et al., 2011). Permanent liminality refers to a sense of enduring ‘betweenness’ (Ybema et al., 2011) where the period between two known life stages is ‘indeterminate and ambiguous’ (Johnsen and Sørensen, 2015, p. 323) such that one is ‘constantly crossing the threshold’ (Ellis and Ybema, 2010, p. 300).

Recently, two studies were published about conditions of ‘indeterminate liminality’ (e.g., Alkhaled and Sasaki, 2022, p. 1583; Shepherd et al., 2020) that deserve closer attention. Both are noteworthy because of their shared interest in how refugees cope with displacement, but they differ from the current study in important ways. Shepherd et al. (2020) examine Palestinian refugees who were born and raised in refugee camps in Lebanon, and Alkhaled and Sasaki (2022) examine Syrian women refugees in Jordan and the UK, but the similarities between their studies and ours largely end there. Our study develops theory about NVC processes among ventures launched by refugees recently displaced from Syria to Lebanon. As such, it is focused on the venturing processes of entrepreneurs, not the psychological health of refugees. In contrast, Shepherd et al. (2020) seek to explain how individuals use entrepreneurship to experience psychological resilience, and Alkhaled and Sasaki (2022) do not focus on entrepreneurship. Additionally, unlike Shepherd et al. (2020), which examines how individuals with multiple identities are more likely to be resilient to long-term adversity, or Alkhaled and Sasaki (2022), which examines how women refugees seek to maintain cognitive control over their sense of self through identity work, our study is not focused on identity at all, whether as a predictor or an outcome. Instead, our objective is to develop theory about NVC processes in contexts of ‘limbo’. Accordingly, we focus on how and why entrepreneurs persist at NVC given continuous and deliberate efforts by authorities to prevent them from transforming their temporary existence into something more permanent. Specifically, we examine how individuals, by engaging with different NVC processes, gain entrepreneurial readiness capabilities that might be deployed in future entrepreneurship scenarios. In doing so, we hope to provide clarity on (a) differences that occur in ‘permanently’ difficult contexts (i.e., limbo vs. indeterminate liminality) and (b) the variety and impact of NVC processes.

Beyond organizational scholarship on liminality in diverse contexts, liminality is especially relevant to entrepreneurship theory. Traditionally, theory on liminality and entrepreneurship have both assumed that actors are moving generatively through distinctive process steps in hopes of ‘landing’ at a specific, desired end-state (McMullen and Shepherd, 2006; Shane and Venkataraman, 2000). Despite these similarities, few studies on entrepreneurship have drawn upon the concept of liminality (see Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2018, 2020; Hayter et al., 2021; Henfridsson and Yoo, 2014; Kelly and McAdam, 2023; Muhr et al., 2019). Entrepreneurship studies that do incorporate liminality often focus on individual identity processes and outcomes, such as how entrepreneurs cope with professional identities that are in a state of ambiguous, ‘in-betweenness’ to ‘achieve their objectives’ (Henfridsson and Yoo, 2014, p. 933). Additionally, research that explores liminality in the NVC process frequently adopts the staged-lifecycle analogy (Anderson, 2005; Davidsson and Gruenhagen, 2021, 2022) examining phenomena between known stages of venture emergence that are conceived as progressing sequentially to culminate in a sustainable organization (Prashantham and Floyd, 2019).

Limbo as an extension of liminality. Emerging theory on ‘limbo’ as an extension of liminality (Bamber et al., 2017; Mimoun and Bardhi, 2022) may be better aligned with the processual features of the experience of being ‘betwixt and between’ (Howard-Grenville et al., 2011; Söderlund and Borg, 2018) and the organizing contexts of chronic precarity that are unfortunately all too common (Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2018; Shepherd et al., 2021; Sutter et al., 2023). Limbo is a useful extension of liminality in that it sheds a key assumption – the notion that liminality involves being trapped between two known states. Two known states imply a linear, staged transition that is progressive and developmental in nature. However, some life transitions involve going from one known state into the unknown – there is no clear post-liminal stage where one should land, and it is unclear if that ‘landing spot’ will involve progress. Bamber et al. (2017, p. 1521) argue that this type of liminal experience is a distinct form of being ‘in-between’ in that those in limbo are ‘trapped’ in an undecided state, which precludes ‘moving towards a threshold’ to enter the next stage. The difficulty of moving to the next stage is due to a lack of clarity regarding what the reincorporated state would involve and if or when it might be possible. Therefore, being in limbo is theoretically distinct from traditional conceptualizations of liminality and is likely more relevant to phenomena such as marginalized individuals who may be precluded from transitioning toward conventional stable and known states.

In summary, while scholarship has explored NVC process in entrepreneurship and organizational liminality, both bodies of research are inhibited by a common assumption that professional and personal life transitions involve progressing through sequential stages until arriving at a desired state. As such, it could be a useful lens for interpreting and explaining the twists and turns of NVC processes during situations of chronic precarity (i.e., being in limbo). Doing so could build upon the limited research in entrepreneurship directly invoking liminality (e.g., Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2018; Henfridsson and Yoo, 2014; Prashantham and Floyd, 2019). It could also help move liminality beyond its emphasis on the ‘in-between’ identity state involved in launching NVC processes (e.g., Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2020; Hayter et al., 2021; Kelly and McAdam, 2023) and toward examining the liminality of the NVC processes themselves.

METHODS

Research Context

Our empirical context is the venturing process of Syrian refugee entrepreneurs who started their business in Lebanon after the Syrian Civil War forced them to flee their homes (CFR, 2019). According to estimates by the United Nations, the Syrian civil war forced 6.8 million refugees to flee the country, many of whom relocated to neighbouring Lebanon, imposing significant strains on the nation’s already under-resourced infrastructure (ILO, 2013). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), at the peak of the crisis, Lebanon hosted up to 1.5 million Syrian refugees

(UNHCR, 2019), which was the highest number of refugees received per capita relative to other hosting countries. Despite accepting many refugees, Lebanon's migrant policy is explicitly designed to create ambiguity and hostility to deter individuals from settling and integrating (see Nassar and Stel, 2019). This Lebanese government approach has been called a 'policy of no policy,' and a 'policy of evasion and gaps' (Atallah and Mahdi, 2017, p. 9), and 'strangulation approach' to produce 'deliberate indignity' among refugees (Davies and Isakjee, 2015, p. 93). It succeeded in purposefully introducing uncertainty and 'remarkable degrees of ambiguity' (Nassar and Stel, 2019, p. 44) that included arbitrary changes of expectations as a tactic of 'instilling fear' (Bidinger et al., 2014, p. 42) in refugees. By formalizing ambiguity in this way, the Lebanese government created a 'constant situation of being in limbo' (Latham, 2010, p. 187), forcing refugees to leave or 'expose themselves to new risks as a result of being forced underground' (Nassar and Stel, 2019, p. 51).

As reviewed by Nassar and Stel (2019), Lebanon has a long history of infusing their policies with ambiguity and uncertainty as a strategy for dissuading the long-term settlement of refugees. The Lebanese government has many laws and orders that prevented previous Palestinian refugees from enjoying their basic rights such as the right to work, acquire citizenship, own real estate, and access health and educational services (Stel, 2016). Lebanon has upheld a 'politics of uncertainty' toward Palestinian refugees (Stel, 2021), which again defined its stance toward new refugees from Syria. Thus, the displaced Syrians in our data entered a context where refugees had long suffered harsh conditions, as demonstrated by the historical (and ongoing) ill-treatment of Palestinian refugees. This reality created a multiplicative effect of harsh conditions that is necessary to acknowledge in approaching our data and analysis.

More recently, Lebanon rejected outright the notion that refugees should be integrated into the nation, instead arguing that they should leave (Al Sayegh, 2018). The Lebanon Crisis Response Plan explicitly states that 'Lebanon is neither a country of asylum, nor a final destination for refugees, let alone a country of resettlement. Lebanon considers that it is being subject to a situation of mass influx and reserves its sovereign right to determine their [refugees'] status' (Janmyr, 2016; UNHCR, 2019).^[2] Despite these intentions, Lebanon did not systematically expel refugees due to the presence of international organizations and governmental actors. Rather, the response of Lebanon evolved from a 'no-policy-policy' (Ghaddar, 2017) to an ambivalent approach that reinforced informality of 'not-knowing', 'not-acting' and confusing regulations that are not properly communicated and characterized by regular changes, and arbitrary enforcement (Hamdan and Bou Kater, 2015; Nassar and Stel, 2019). What exacerbated the situation for refugees even further were additional crises facing Lebanon, including a huge national debt, financial crisis, COVID-19 pandemic, and the ramifications of a massive explosion at a key harbour. It is with this backdrop that we began exploring the role of entrepreneurship in helping individuals navigate the chronic uncertainty of their environment, where our participants had no official work authorization nor legal status, but still needed to find ways to support themselves and prepare for a future. In the [Online Supplemental Material](#) we provide additional details on our methodology including the research context (Section 1).

Sampling

Consistent with a grounded theory methodology (Strauss and Corbin, 1998), we identified our sample of Syrian entrepreneurs forced to relocate to Lebanon after the start of war in Syria in 2011, initially using the simplest, broadest possible definition of an entrepreneur: a self-employed individual (Caliendo et al., 2014) who pursues business opportunities without regard to the resources they currently control (McMullen and Shepherd, 2006; Stevenson and Jarillo, 1990). To identify participants, one author (based in the region) contacted several organizations, such as local and international NGOs and micro-finance organizations that support Syrian refugees in Lebanon and asked them to help with participant recruitment. In total, four organizations helped us in recruiting at total of 89 participants. Interviews were coordinated through the NGO managers and other community guides. In the online supplemental material (Section 2 and 3) we provide additional details on our sampling procedure and data sources.

Data Collection

We collected data using a mixture of data sources (Corbin and Strauss, 2015), including formal and informal interviews, field observations, research memos, and secondary data collection. We primarily drew upon the recorded, semi-structured interview material when conducting our analyses and developing our grounded theory, relying on other data for data validation (via triangulation) and to identify additional theoretical insights.

Semi-structured interviews. Our inductive interview process occurred in four primary rounds. We first conducted six exploratory interviews across multiple geographic sites as a way of inductively raising questions with study participants and evaluating the scope and relevance of our initial interview guide (Charmaz and Belgrave, 2012).^[3] From these preliminary interviews, we then adjusted our interview guide before seeking to interview a wider set of participants. We followed a semi-structured approach, where we invited participants to unfold their ‘story’ by giving them temporal ‘prompts’ about different phases of their experience over time (consistent with Glaser and Strauss, 2017). In this way, our interviews were open-ended, but also framed and focused on key processes of their experience: flight from Syria to Lebanon, entrepreneurship process experiences, interactions with the Lebanese government, and so forth. This interviewing approach also allowed for the temporal bracketing and visual mapping of major events and venturing experiences faced by our participants (Langley, 1999).

From our pilot interviews, we noted several interesting concepts that we sought to better understand in subsequent data collection. We were surprised to see that some of the Syrian refugee entrepreneurs appeared to have established ‘fully-fledged’ ventures seemingly designed to be ‘permanent’, in some cases operating multiple locations of their business. In contrast, others had ventures they described as ‘portable’ – capable of taking the business to another country if and when necessary. We found these developed entrepreneurial ventures to be surprising given the highly volatile conditions in which the

entrepreneurs operated. Therefore, we sought to identify additional participants through our own contacts as well as by asking participants to provide us with additional individuals to contact for the study.

Based on these initial interviews, we developed a complete interview guide (see online supplemental material Section 4), which we employed in our subsequent semi-structured interviews that occurred over three distinct ‘rounds’ of data collection. We conducted 22 interviews in March 2018 to gain a deeper understanding of our phenomenon. Next, we interviewed 61 entrepreneurs in August–November 2018; and followed up with 30 of them in June–August 2019. In Table I, we provide an overview of these 61 participants.

As we progressed in the study (within and between rounds of interviews), we iterated between interview data, research memos, and theory in ‘constant comparison’ to uncover our inductive insights (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). We conducted all our interviews in Arabic, the native language of our participants and our lead author. Our interviews lasted between 30 and 120 minutes, with an average length of 55 minutes. Each of the interviews were professionally transcribed and then translated to English. In total, we conducted 119 interviews with 89 Syrian refugee entrepreneurs, 30 of whom we interviewed multiple times.^[4] We also interviewed 11 community experts who work closely with Syrian refugees in Lebanon (e.g., NGO and micro-loan officers) who provided additional context on the entrepreneurs and their operations, and with five individuals from municipal offices and wider government agencies who offered opinions and insights on the presence of Syrian refugees, and their businesses. Consistent with good qualitative research practices (e.g., de Rond and Lok, 2016; Sala and Pratt, 2023), we captured informal conversations in field notes.

Field observations, research memos, and secondary data. We supplemented and triangulated our interview data with field observations, research memos, and secondary data (Charmaz, 2006). First, we observed our subjects ‘in action’, interacting with their customers, employees, suppliers, and partners, as well as aid workers. They explained how they manage complex aspects of their businesses (e.g., sourcing, managing money, and avoiding government officials). Second, we kept a detailed field diary during these encounters, and compiled research memos documenting our observations and insights following every discreet field visit (we conducted 26 field visits), including real-time observations of our participants’ experiences with the precarity of operating ventures. These were all written within 12 hours of leaving the field and captured in the field notes (including notes about informal conversations). Third, we collected 75 articles in the media and official reports that addressed the conditions of Syrian refugee entrepreneurs in Lebanon. We used these articles to validate some claims made by our participants about the conditions they were facing.

Data Analysis

We analysed our data using an inductive grounded theory approach (Corbin and Strauss, 2015; Locke, 2001), following guidelines for constant comparison (Corbin and Strauss, 2015) by simultaneously collecting, coding, and analysing data. In addition, we analysed our data with a focus on key events, processes, and stages in striving to capture changes over time (Langley, 1999). To do this, we mapped out different timelines that emerged from our data for each venture, identifying temporally bracketed segments of the data in hopes

Table I. Details of entrepreneurs and their ventures

<i>Name</i>	<i>Entrepreneur information</i>					<i>Venture information</i>		
	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Marital status</i>	<i>Children</i>	<i>Arrival to Lebanon</i>	<i>Business type</i>	<i>Launch date</i>	<i>Employee count</i>
Ali	Male	25–30	Married	—	2011	Household Shop	2012	1
Mohamad	Male	30–35	Married	4	2011	Minimarket	2012	1
Naji	Male	25–30	Single	—	2014	Clothing Shop	2015	1
Fadi	Male	25–30	Married	2	2015	Cell phone Shop	2016	—
Abir ^a	Female	40–45	Divorced	1	2015	Clothing Shop	2015	1
Jad	Male	40–45	Married	4	2012	Minimarket	2015	3
Shadi ^a	Male	30–35	Married	3	2011	Barber Shop	2017	4
Sanaa ^a	Female	45–50	Married	3	2014	Perfume and Clothing Shop	2016	2
Yam	Male	25–30	Single	—	2014	Clothing Store	2015	1
Abed	Male	25–30	Married	2	2013	Water Shop	2015	4
Sara ^a	Female	25–30	Married	2	2014	Tailor	2015	1
Hussein ^a	Male	30–35	Married	2	2013	Tailor	2014	2
Hasan	Male	40–45	Married	3	2012	Restaurant	2013	10+
Rida ^a	Male	25–30	Married	4	2016	Car wash/Stores	2017	6
Mira ^a	Female	40–45	Married	3	2011	Tailor	2017	1
Ahmad	Male	30–35	Married	3	2014	Minimarket	2015	1
Doaa	Female	30–35	Married	4	2011	Hairdresser	2012	1
Firas ^a	Male	30–35	Married	—	2011	Dollar Shop	2017	—
Hamza	Male	25–30	Married	2	2012	Clothing Store	2012	1
Amin ^a	Male	25–30	Married	1	2012	Dollar shop	2017	1
Rim ^a	Female	40–45	Widowed	1	2013	Tailor	2016	1
Alaa ^a	Male	25–30	Single	—	2014	Hairdresser	2017	3
Layal ^a	Female	30–35	Married	1	2011	Hairdresser	2011	3
Hiba ^a	Female	40–45	Married	2	2015	Tailor	2015	2
Sami ^a	Male	30–35	Married	4	2011	Minimarket	2012	—
Lara	Female	40–45	Married	3	2012	Minimarket	2013	—
Fouad	Male	40–45	Married	3	2013	Contractor	2016	1
Nazim	Male	20–25	Married	—	2012	Dairy Shop	2013	1
Bilal ^a	Male	20–25	Single	—	2011	Dairy Shop	2016	1
Hadi ^a	Male	30–35	Married	4	2011	Coffee Shop	2014	—
Ghadi ^a	Male	30–35	Married	8	2011	Bakery	2014	—
Abdalla	Male	25–30	Single	—	2014	Pastry Shop	2016	5
Moubarak	Male	35–40	Married	4	2012	A/C Shop and Maintenance	2016	2

(Continues)

Table I. (Continued)

Name	Entrepreneur information					Venture information		
	Gender	Age	Marital status	Children	Arrival to Lebanon	Business type	Launch date	Employee count
Khalid	Male	25–30	Single	–	2016	Barbershop	2016	–
Salah ^a	Male	50–55	Married	5	2013	Restaurant	2014	1
Mustafa ^a	Male	25–30	Single	–	2011	Coffee Shop	2013	4
Jawad	Male	20–25	Single	–	2016	Shoes Shop	2016	–
Mahmoud	Male	50–55	Married	3	2012	Bakery	2015	1
Amir	Male	40–45	Married	4	2011	Bakery	2015	4
Malik ^a	Male	25–30	Single	–	2016	Upcycling	2017	3
Naser ^a	Male	35–40	Married	2	2017	Chicken Shop	2017	1
Khalil	Male	25–30	Married	6	2014	Sandwich Shop	2014	1
Salim	Male	30–35	Married	2	2011	Supermarket	2013	2
Yassin ^a	Male	35–40	Married	2	2013	Curtain Shop	2016	1
Imad ^a	Male	35–40	Married	–	2011	Laundry Shop	2011	6
Farouk ^a	Male	25–30	Single	–	2013	Chef – Restaurant	2015	4
Fadel	Male	20–25	Married	1	2011	Contractor	2012	1
Dalal	Female	40–45	Married	2	2011	Bakery	2013	2
Omar ^a	Male	35–40	Married	2	2012	Carwash and Shop	2016	5
Qais	Male	35–40	Married	3	2012	Car repair Shop	2012	4
Anas	Male	25–30	Married	2	2014	Bakery	2015	5
Hisham ^a	Male	25–30	Divorced	1	2011	Shop	2011	–
Laith	Male	25–30	Married	2	2012	Clothing Shop	2013	2
Adnan ^a	Male	35–40	Married	2	2013	Mini Market	2013	4
Osman ^a	Male	30–35	Single	–	2016	Ready Chef frozen Pastry	2016	–
Samar ^a	Female	30–35	Married	5	2012	Tailor Shop	2012	3
Zahraa ^a	Female	30–35	Married	3	2013	Clothes Shop	2014	–
Saad	Male	30–35	Married	–	2011	Retail	2015	1
Louay	Male	50–55	Married	2	2013	Small Restaurant	2015	1
Samir	Male	30–35	Married	1	2012	Clothing Store	2013	1
Walid	Male	30–35	Married	2	2012	Car repair Shop	2013	1

^aEntrepreneurs with follow-up interviews.

of discerning ‘what happened and who did what when’ (Langley, 1999, p. 692). While our coding process was inherently iterative throughout, it played out in three distinct phases.

Open coding. First, we used open coding to capture meaning in the language our participants employed, drawing primarily on interview data and field notes. To glean

a general sense of trends in our data, we examined similarities and differences across participants (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). We generated codes from the raw data, adding, modifying, and/or eliminating codes each of the multiple times we reviewed it (Locke, 2001). We developed a preliminary list of descriptive codes reflecting participants' language, then consolidated first-order codes into broader categories based upon phrasal descriptors to derive a more manageable number of categories. Beyond capturing thematic elements of emerging concepts, we particularly focused on process, event, and/or temporal features of the data that might impinge on our overall exploration (Lerman et al., 2022). In doing so, we noticed that participants differed in how they interpreted time and place of their ventures, which appeared to affect individuals' actions and orientations toward the future in seemingly consistent ways. We iteratively named and compared ideas in the data and examined similarities and differences among participants until we finally settled on a general list of initial codes (Locke, 2001) that were then organized temporally across stages and/or processes (Langley, 1999). It was during open coding that we began identifying different patterns of venturing (by processual structures, activities, and practices) that the entrepreneurs had developed.

Axial coding. We then performed a round of axial coding, with the intention of identifying similarities and differences between our first-order codes, both in terms of kind and of the sorts of apparent interactions between them (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). By so doing, we categorized our first-order codes into abstract second-order themes. We engaged in constant comparison between our emergent theories and data. For example, we recognized commonly observed conceptual categories (e.g., perceptions of time, perceptions of location), but also identified differences between how individuals' ventures were organized in anticipation of ongoing changes – relating to time (when a change might occur) and location (where the venture might continue to operate if Lebanon was no longer possible). Finally, we began separating our data into thematic groups – coding specific themes for each entrepreneur/venture – where we labelled experiences of a certain process in different ways, continuing until we refined categories into a data structure (see Figure 1). The data structure represents a static 'snapshot' of our core concepts which had been captured (i.e., via 'temporal bracketing') at different periods of time. Our next step involved exploring the dynamic features of these constructs and their process-based relationships.

Theoretical coding. In a final round of theoretical coding (Pratt et al., 2006), we developed a dynamic, theoretical explanation for how our axial codes affected, or did not affect, each other. Consistent with Strauss and Corbin (1998), we attempted to write the 'story' of our theory by making diagrams and models, sorting memos, reviewing our themes for internal consistency, and more. Combined with this activity, we also mapped out trajectories and processes articulated in our data, creating a variety of visual maps and temporally sequenced processes through which we could compare our emergent findings (Langley, 1999). In doing so, we identified different patterns (Langley and Tsoukas, 2016) of what we came to call *process patterns of venturing in limbo*. These patterns revealed distinct processual responses (manifest at

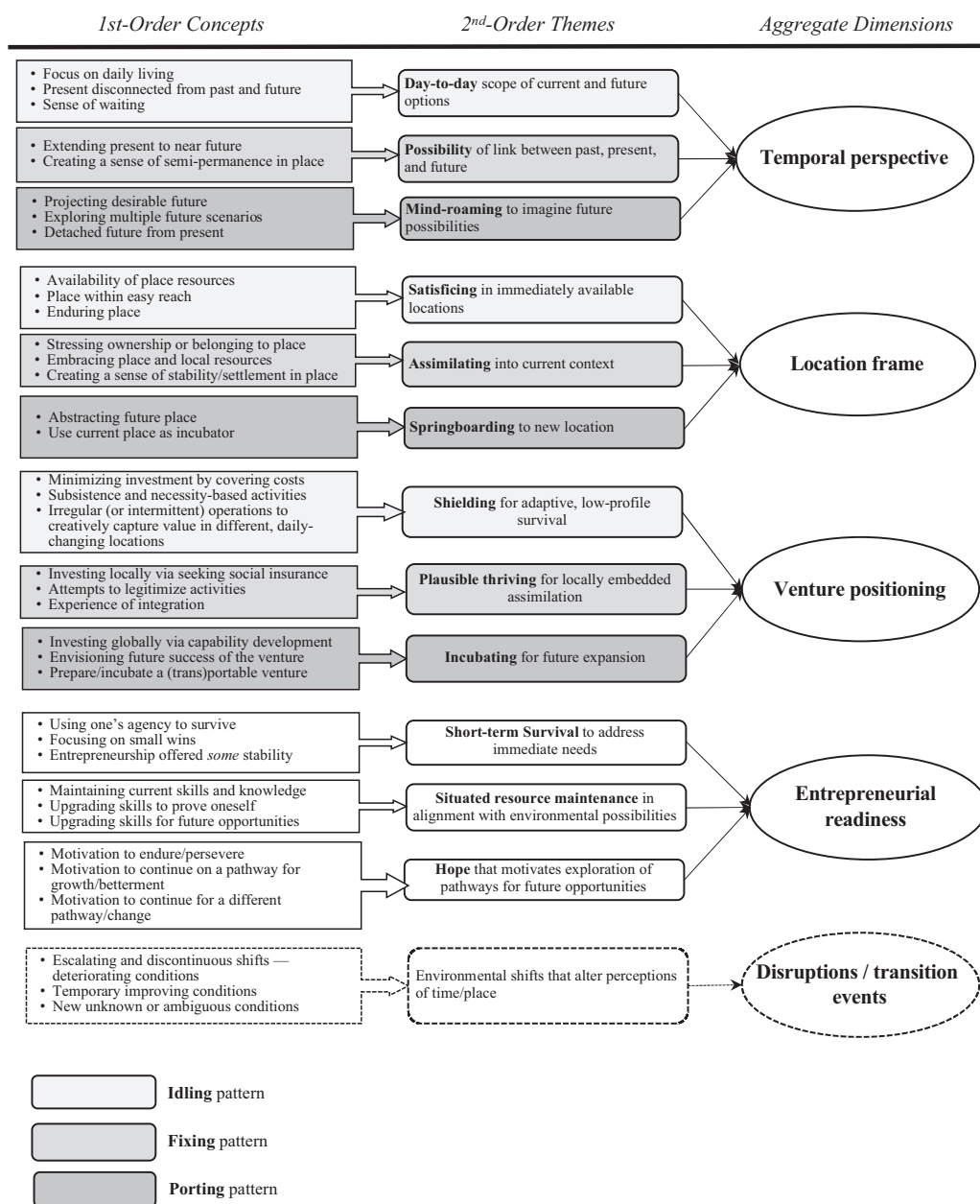


Figure 1. Data structure

the venture level), with each reflecting differences in organizations activities. Our exploration of these differences led us to identify two mechanisms that seemed to shape our observed patterns: (1) entrepreneur's interpretation of the potential temporal duration of venture and (2) entrepreneur's interpretation of current and future location circumstances that would influence the trajectory of venture. We called these two mechanisms *temporal perspective* and *location frame*. This result from this

coding procedure helped us systematically identify differences in the processes and outcomes of venturing in limbo.

At this stage, we still had not identified a set of driving forces (i.e., mechanisms) explaining why those in our data did, or did not, switch between different patterns, or turning points that explained how and when they made these transitions. Our participants generally seemed to start from a common baseline pattern, but ultimately diverged significantly in their processes. To understand these differences, we went back to our data and focused on the narratives within their explanations for when and why they changed their framing of time and location of venture, as well as how they adapted over time. We identified an external mechanism (disruption/transition event) and an internal mechanism (efforts to control temporal or location liminality) as the key drivers of differences in our data. We found that, due to ongoing changes in the external conditions of their context, the entrepreneurs in our data continuously re-evaluated their context, and those re-evaluations in turn reinforced or revised their interpretations. Furthermore, we identified what venturing in limbo appeared to produce for individuals despite so much uncertainty. In exploring our data across patterns, we noted evidence of what we came to call ‘entrepreneurial readiness’ as a distinctive outcome of venturing in limbo.

FINDINGS

Our findings build insight into the diverse characteristics and outcomes of entrepreneurship processes. We summarize our findings in Figure 2, which depicts our grounded theoretical model of venturing in limbo, which refers to the dynamic NVC process that enables adaptation to chronic and persistent uncertainty. Our findings demonstrate how different patterns of NVC process facilitated a sense of professional readiness that could be deployed across temporal (i.e., imagined in the future) and physical (i.e., to be deployed in a different location) boundaries. The various NVC processes we found in our data did not follow traditional, staged-progression steps in moving toward a stable, conventionalized high-growth organization as this was not a realistic outcome given context-based constraints. Our inductive model reveals how in the face of an ever-shifting context that triggered losses and clouded future possibilities, entrepreneurs persisted in NVC process by dynamically iterating among three different patterns, which we labelled *idling*, *fixing*, and *porting*. These three different sub-processes of venturing in limbo functioned as a robust ‘holding ground’ in which entrepreneurs could cultivate entrepreneurial readiness: a state of standby in which they developed capabilities, tested ideas, and prepared to seize opportunities in an imagined future. In our inductive findings we unfold each processual pattern including the twists, turns, and transitions that occurred among and between them. Before discussing each, we first describe what the patterns produced, namely: survival, resource maintenance, and hope.

Venturing in Limbo Intermittent Outcome – Entrepreneurial Readiness

Broadly speaking, our participants described their conditions living in a state of limbo – or a context that was extremely uncertain, volatile, and lacking in ‘psychological

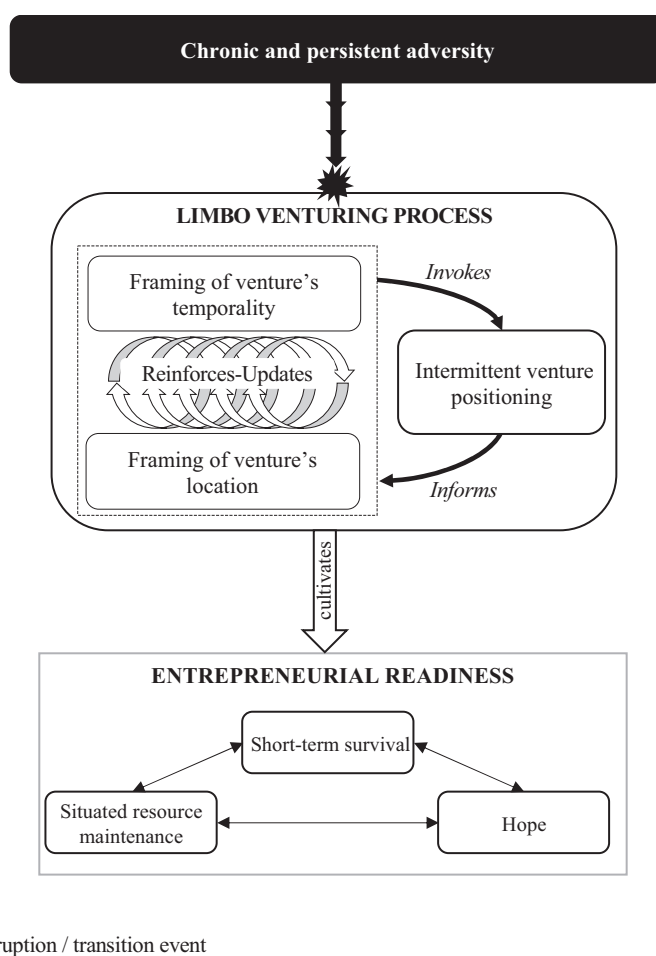


Figure 2. Grounded model of venturing in limbo

stability' (Hussein) creating a sense of 'feeling lost. [Actually], more than lost' (Firas). We described this situation that induced a sense of 'limbo' as *chronic precarity* because our participants had to adapt continuously to an evolving state of betwixt and betweenness regarding the location and temporal duration of their entrepreneurial endeavours. One of our participants, Sanaa, explained the situation: 'Every day there is a new change. We sleep on one thing; we wake up [with] another'. Others described feeling 'stuck and lost' because they did not know when their temporary situation as refugees would end and how the conditions would evolve moment to moment. This was disorienting and made the identification of, and progress toward, meaningful milestones extremely difficult. One individual, Alaa, explained, 'I've heard that the municipality wants to shut down Syrian shops. That is what people are saying! I'm not sure [if this is true]'. Similarly, Rida explained, 'One day [The Lebanese officials] arrived and took all my IDs ... I can't go to town to buy supplies; I'm scared to get arrested'. The constant uncertainty regarding local policies on entrepreneurship

activities was a common theme across all our interviews and led to a sense of feeling constant flux with seemingly no ‘landing spot’ available (Field Notes). [We refer to our field notes to document needed contextual information, and to share important insights, through illustrative quotes, from our informal conversations with informants]. Yassin shared that authorities were constantly changing the ‘rules of the game’ and ‘tomorrow could never be predicted in this country. I could not be able to work tomorrow ... Some things are out of your control. Your environment is limiting you all the time’, he said. Rim described this situation as ‘torture,’ producing a sense of being ‘lost’ all the time. Hisham similarly explained that government decisions just ‘appeared’ daily, making it difficult to know how to progress. Hisham said, ‘A new decision was made which states that Syrians are not allowed to have their own businesses or stores ... such decisions may be executed on all Syrians or some They came out of nowhere and shut my business. I panicked! What can I do? Where can I go?’.

Despite enduring chronic precarity, our data revealed that our participants persisted with their efforts of venturing in limbo and that the primary outcome of these efforts is what we call *entrepreneurial readiness*. Entrepreneurial readiness refers to a state of standby in which individuals developed capabilities that would enable them to seize upon potential opportunities when available *and* for as long as possible. Our data reveal that entrepreneurial readiness in the face of chronic precarity involved three key mechanisms (1) short-term survival: actions to address immediate physical needs; (2) situated resource maintenance: maintenance/updating of knowledge and skills based on one’s cognitive interpretation of the environment; and (3) hope: motivational emotion focused on future pathways to implement current ideas. Together, these mechanisms helped actors equip themselves with experience and tools to be ‘ready’ when one finally could encounter an opportunity (i.e., in conducive environmental conditions). Thus, while many refugees such as Hamza ‘opened a business to survive’ or like Naji to ‘live out [their] life while paying for [their] expenses’, these entrepreneurs also used the experience to cultivate hope that at some point opportunity would present itself. Therefore, venturing provided an ideal activity to prepare themselves for that scenario; as Mohamad said, in the moment he did not know ‘what [would] happen. The future is not clear!’. Osman explained, ‘I know business and how to work and I sell really well – the opportunity will eventually come’. Similarly, Rim noted, ‘with our talent, we can create work anywhere – we are just waiting for that moment’. Farouk said that his current efforts helped him to ‘get trained and to explore opportunities to be explored abroad’. In the following sections, we reveal our findings that explain how different patterns of venturing in limbo cultivated entrepreneurial readiness.

Venturing in Limbo – Process Patterns

‘Even when you decide on a business you can’t guarantee being able to implement it ... You always have to wait for external conditions. It’s very hard working like that. Harder than you think’, said Yassin.

As indicated in the opening quote of this section, engaging in venturing when in a state of ‘limbo’ (i.e., venturing in limbo) presented unique challenges as individuals lacked

certainty about the possibility of achieving ‘traditional’ venturing milestones (e.g., opportunity development, venture launch, and growth). In place of major milestones triggering shifts in information processing and organizational practices, our participants responded to ever-changing environmental factors that disrupted their ability to plan for the timing, place, and function of their ventures. For these participants, venturing in limbo was ‘harder than you think’ as it involved persisting with the goal of venturing despite an environmental reality that inhibited the full realization (or even realistic imagination) of venturing goals. We found that the persistence in venturing was achieved by actors moving between three process patterns of venturing in limbo – idling, fixing, and porting. Differences across these patterns were shaped by actors’ framing of their venture’s temporality (i.e., perceived progression from past into the present and future) and location (i.e., framing of the place where the venture would reside) which together invoked a perception of the venture’s positioning (i.e., the function of the venture). Together, these mechanisms facilitated a degree (if fleeting) of structure to facilitate readiness for future opportunities – if ever encountered. In the remainder of our findings, we detail our findings describing differences that emerged across patterns of venturing in limbo, including how our participants incorporated continual shifts in their environment, and why these patterns cultivated entrepreneurial readiness that explains why the entrepreneurs persisted.^[5]

Idling Process Pattern

The first pattern of the venturing in limbo process we identified in our data is idling. Idling occurs when an entity (i.e., a vehicle or machine) is running but is not in motion. This idea captures the baseline approach to venturing we found in our data – as refugees arrived in Lebanon, they began by initiating business activities (i.e., turning on their ventures) to prepare for eventual motion (i.e., moving the venture toward formalization) (Field notes). The primary objectives of idling as venturing in limbo were to learn ‘how things operated in the country’, what the boundaries might be for future growth, and how to survive until better options could be secured (Field notes). For example, many bought items from suppliers and resold them (e.g., Mohamad, Naji, Saad, Sami, and Zahraa). Others provided services such as hair dressing (e.g., Doaa, Jad, and Layal), tailoring (e.g., Hiba, Hussein, and Rim), or food and beverage (e.g., Khalil, Mustafa, Nasser, and Osman). All these businesses offered products and services ‘at very cheap prices, because people will haggle with you over everything just because you are a Syrian refugee’, said Mohamad. While our overall model is cyclical and dynamic, we consider idling to be the ‘baseline’ or starting pattern that emerged from our data.

There were three notable components of the idling process pattern we observed, namely entrepreneurs’ day-to-day scope of current and future options, satisficing in immediately available locations, and shielding for adaptive, low-profile survival. Table A in the appendix provides representative quotations illustrating these components. Next, we describe each component in detail to better understand the nature of idling.

Temporal perspective: Day-to-day scope of current and future options. This temporal perspective refers to the entrepreneur's view that the future is unknowable, and the past is irrelevant, which necessitates an immediate present focus for decision-making. As such, it inhibits efforts to make tangible long-term venturing plans. Those engaging in idling responses (individuals we call *idlers*) could not conceptualize a bridge from their present contexts to their futures given the chronic precarity (Field notes) so they focused on daily living. One idler, Mira explained, 'I live day-to-day God knows what will happen [in the future]'. This narrow focus on the here and now led individuals to launch ventures reselling basic items and moving locations frequently, sometimes daily 'going around stores to get customers and sell my cheese', said Omar.

Our findings suggest that an intense focus on the present appeared to functionally disconnect entrepreneurs from their past as well as their future, trapping them in a state of unresolved 'limbo' that caused distress. Louay explained, 'I have intense mental stress ... I am not thinking about the future or searching for extra profit'. The present was experienced as an extended duration of basic similar daily activities, 'everyday it's the same, the same, the same ... I'm working all the time', said Shadi. While repetitive, daily activities were not meaningless, but rather provided experience for individuals to prepare while in a 'holding pattern' awaiting shifts in the environment. Omar said, '[We're working] waiting for something to happen, [as we] thought it would only be two months for the war in Syria to end'. By constraining the temporality of the business venture efforts to each day, idlers were limited in the location in which they could operate. In this way, the temporal perspective influenced decisions about where to engage in venturing.

Location frame: Satisficing in immediately available locations. Idlers perceived the place for their business as wherever was convenient for daily activities, where the place is transient and identified through a location satisficing frame. That is, entrepreneurs occupy and operate in a given location primarily due to its availability at a particular moment in time as determined by circumstances experienced day-to-day. For example, our participants did not launch ventures by finding locations where one's business would most likely succeed, but rather had to 'take what was available', said Khalil. Relying on a satisficing heuristic, entrepreneurs were focused on finding the quickest and nearest location to survive rather than more traditional entrepreneurial place selections such as co-locating with suppliers (e.g., Rida could not co-locate given his fear of getting arrested), among customers (e.g., Yassin was forced to open his venture 'not [in] a commercial area' otherwise he could be arrested), and so forth. While a satisficing location frame facilitated some degree of stability (in the day-to-day), this approach was highly limiting for the progression and maturity of new ventures. Ahmad shared, 'I looked at different shops [that are good for my business] to rent. But [landlords] wouldn't accept to have me as a tenant because I'm [a] Syrian refugee'. Despite this limitation, idlers persisted as they anticipated that at some point 'conditions will change' and they wanted to be prepared (Field notes). For example, Hiba explained that she operated in different locations (as a tailor) in hopes of eventually finding a stable location. In moving from place to place, she could gather and test information

on the most current environmental situation while not exposing her fully to a risk of closure.

Limbo venture positioning: Shielding for adaptive, low-profile survival. As a result of the temporal and location frames, idlers framed their venturing in limbo activities as shielding. This positioning provided some degree of stability regarding the current state of the venture, what it accomplished, and why it should be maintained, all of which were needed to encourage persistence. The idler played the defensive shielding function to preserve capital and shield itself as much as possible from the constant threat of hostile institutional conditions. It involved agile, low-profile entrepreneurial activities designed to operate through ever evolving hardship by limiting scale, experimenting with irregular products and markets, to produce necessary returns for basic day-to-day survival. Shadi said, ‘I cannot plan ahead for my venture. I just want to feed my family’. Similarly, idlers noted that they did ‘the best possible’ thing they could when it comes to launching sustainable ventures given that they are, as Jad and Fouad noted, ‘refugees without resources’; as Mohamad described, ‘victims’; and as Fadel and Ali described, ‘helpless’. While a shielding positioning helped prepare, it was difficult to endure, as one entrepreneur, Abir, noted: ‘[This Lebanese] family harasses the entire neighborhood. They threaten all Syrian [entrepreneurs] here. They asked us to close our shops, or they will burn them’.

As a result of their temporal and of location frames described above, idlers bought supplies daily to combine or resell items (as Moubarak said, ‘I go to the houses and fix the machines there’) and alter the physical location of their business based on whatever was most convenient. For example, they began organizing and operating small businesses in low-visibility areas (e.g., secluded alleys [Bilal], rooftops [Hussein] or in their homes [Rima]) to shield themselves from governmental scrutiny and/or ‘community harassment’ problems (Field notes). We were told of one example (captured in our Field Notes) of a tailor who ‘opens his shop in a new location every two weeks. He closes and opens a new location as a pop-up shop, looking for opportunities to sell while avoiding police’. Individuals engaged in irregular (or intermittent) operations to creatively capture value in different, daily changing locations. Zahraa explained, ‘Sometimes we close the shop and run away. If you haven’t spoken to me over the phone and told me you were coming, I wouldn’t have opened’. This transience limited idlers’ abilities – and reflected a limited will – to scale up their businesses. ‘This business could end at any moment’, explained Amin. However, idling provided a near constant pathway for remaining ready should new opportunities present themselves.

Idler Process and Entrepreneurial Readiness

Our findings show that the venturing process of idling, despite all the challenges and precarious conditions, was important to entrepreneurs because it cultivated a sense of entrepreneurial readiness. Adnan explained, ‘[After escaping Syria and moving to Lebanon], I started thinking about what to do I started to think about how to compensate for what I’m consuming. So, I opened a business’. While some indicated these actions were for survival (Moubarak, Layal, Khalil, and Salim), we note that their efforts contrasted with

other options they had – such as relying on international donations to survive in Lebanon. Beyond survival, our participants used their agency to develop and maintain their resources for future deployment. Rida shared, ‘I’m not like other refugees. I made something out of myself. I know business, and how to work and sell well’. Sara explained why she persisted with idling despite its difficulties in this way: ‘I am an excellent tailor. I love what I do. I want to make my job last despite the difficulties’. Idling helped entrepreneurs maintain their current skills, knowledge, and resources. ‘We were mistreated a lot and it has affected us negatively, but it has not stopped us from working. I don’t know anything for my future plans. I will keep working for sure’, said Amir. Finally, idling provided hope and a motivation to endure. Ghadi explained, ‘We are slaves of reality ... I try my best to think of the present and focus on what is important. I don’t want to look at the empty half of glass. I’m an optimistic person, but I hope things go well and God has good things hidden for us’. Amir similarly explained that idling taught him ‘patience’ and that ‘everyone’s suffering’. ‘But all we want is to live and raise our kids. Hoping for a better life’, he said.

Transition – Efforts to Control the Liminality of Location

As idlers persisted, they saw new opportunities to transition from waiting for the future to come to making it happen in the here-and-now. This involved efforts to control (i.e., exit) the liminality of their location. For example, Hiba, the tailor mentioned previously, learned during her idling activities that authorities were ‘less strict’ in enforcing rules. She opened a formal shop in a fixed location, as she believed that ‘municipalities are ignoring the matter [shutting down illegal Syrian businesses] for now I hope they don’t come and close my venture down.’ As in this example, shifts in environmental circumstances triggered a re-evaluation of what could be done through venturing in limbo, initiating re-interpretations of temporal and location perspectives. The most prominent shift away from idling involved a move toward permanently establishing a venture in Lebanon. For example, after one idler realized the war in Syria was escalating and people there were struggling even more, he attempted to exert control over the liminality he faced regarding his location, viewing Lebanon as a potential long-term, rather than a temporary, place to operate. Similarly, after Hassan noticed that ‘there was less bullying’ from government officials and ‘the municipality decided to let us open’, he opened a physical restaurant and started to operate ‘out in the open’ during regular business hours – all of which he had avoided when ‘idling’ for fear of getting shut down. A decision to stay, in Lebanon was also motivated by dire conditions elsewhere. Nasser said: ‘Now, with the situation [in Syria] the way it is, no, I would not return to Syria ... I am thinking about improving my situation here [in Lebanon] despite the uncertainty’.

Fixing Process Pattern

Fixing refers to a process of venturing in limbo, where actors seek location-based stability by mimicking prototypical local ventures. The primary desired outcome of fixing is to demonstrate local legitimacy and to achieve long-term belonging. After seeing a possibility that he could operate ‘out in the open’, Adnan said, ‘I decided to try to make myself feel that I’m from this area and that my business is not a foreign one’. Importantly,

fixing is different from the idea of seeking ‘permanent residence’ or simply settling into the new context – as all the fixers (individuals who engaged in the fixing process) in our data noted that they had to be ready at a moment’s notice to shut down or dramatically alter their business should the authorities arrive. Thus, fixing is still operating in a state of limbo, albeit with the intended goal of reducing the degree of liminality regarding one’s location. Hiba explained, ‘If I have the opportunity to open another shop, I wouldn’t hesitate, because I have gained a reputation among customers ... but I’m still worried that they would close my shop’.

We observed three key components of the fixing process pattern: possibility of link between past, present, and future; assimilating into current context; and plausible thriving for locally embedded assimilation. Table B in the appendix includes representative quotations. We will explain next each component of fixing.

Temporal perspective: Possibility of link between past, present, and future. This temporal perspective refers to the entrepreneur’s view that while the future is full of uncertainty, it could potentially be contained within a discrete place (i.e., in Lebanon). Thus, fixers believed it was possible to maintain operations across the past, present, and future as they were now believed to be tenuously linked. Hiba said, ‘If my work continues as good as [it is] now, I can live with dignity, and I will stay here in Lebanon’. Fixers sought to move beyond the uncertainty of idling by projecting plans into a future they felt could be maintained. Hisham said: ‘I am going to expand my business ... I want to build a house here [in this neighborhood]. I’m aware that any second, a war might happen here, and I’m considered a foreigner at the end of the day, but I’m still going to go for it!’. As indicated by this quote, the arrangements for imagining long-term stability were still unusual. However, fixers believed they were possible and began creatively imagining future possibilities.

Fixers framed their temporal circumstances in terms of a present that could continue, despite clear knowledge of their precarity in Lebanon. Yassin said, ‘My goal is to make this business larger and focus on wholesale, but we don’t know what would happen or how things would change in Lebanon’. However, to accomplish this they had to engage several organizational workarounds because, as refugees, they could not legally own or operate businesses in Lebanon. Indeed, a possibility temporal perspective continued to acknowledge the limbo in which entrepreneurs operated yet cleared the path for creative and resourcefulness activities designed to sustain their ventures. For example, some (e.g., Hiba, Jaafar, Rida, and Yassin) established their shops using Lebanese-owned storefronts as a façade to hide their identities, conducting business ‘in secret from their apartments’ above or within those Lebanese ‘stores’ (e.g., Dalal, Samar, and Sara). These efforts demonstrated a commitment to residing in Lebanon long-term and indicated a shift away from the ‘day-to-day’ perspective in idling. Similarly, Rida explained that he would ‘constantly go back and forth during the day to check on [his] second shop, which was operated by a Lebanese employee. That way, if the police go in for a sudden and random inspection, they will find him and he can say that the shop is his. If they go while I’m there, I can say he is my boss and I work there’. This degree of operational ‘creativity’ was deemed ‘worth it’ as fixers imagined future opportunities.

Location frame: Assimilating into current context. This location frame refers to a perspective that entrepreneurs could assimilate themselves into a specific location. Our data revealed that this was achieved by entrepreneurs attempting to mimic prototypical firms, where actors actively sought out and imitated cues from the local environment on what was ‘acceptable’, said Khalid. For example, Alaa proclaimed, ‘I understand the people here ... I want to rely mostly on Lebanese clients. My purpose is to establish my business with Lebanese clients, befriend Lebanese people, to stay here and continue to work!’. Hiba similarly said, ‘We are working and living at a level like the Lebanese’. As some entrepreneurs experienced success (e.g., Rida’s expansion of operations to multiple locations or Hasan’s increased ability to operate out in the open rather than hidden behind local businesses), they sought to model their expanded operations on existing Lebanese firms. Indeed, we found that some of our participants believed that the current location had a potential to become a place of settlement rather than just a temporary waystation – implying a sense of belonging. For example, Alaa noted, ‘I have nothing left in Syria. My work is here ... I see that my future could be here ... I just hope the situation will not get worse, but I understand it could’.

Fixers experimented with creative forms of entrepreneurship that they believed might help to facilitate the process of assimilating to their desired location. This included identifying and working with ‘legitimate’ local partners. Rida said: ‘I chose a Lebanese [partner] because I don’t want any issues with the General Security when opening the second shop’. Others sought to exclusively serve Lebanese rather than migrant clients to further demonstrate their legitimacy (e.g., Abir; Alaa, Adnan, Samar, and Hiba). These efforts to assimilate also involved adopting the local cultural and national identity. One entrepreneur, Khalid explained, ‘Lebanon is like my country in many ways, even though sometimes I face some problems’. This change in perspective was surprising, given that the ‘Lebanese treated Syrians worse than dogs’, according to Zahraa. Fixers acknowledged support of some local neighbours and business partners. Firas said, ‘Being here [for some time] we made relations with people, suppliers, customers, and many friends who made us feel like we belong to this community and town ... I feel like I’m home’.

Limbo venture positioning: Plausible thriving for locally embedded assimilation. Our findings show that fixers’ temporal maintenance toward a more prosperous near future and location assimilating – while more aspirational than real – invoked a certain venture positioning that we call *plausible thriving*. Thus, despite continuing to live in limbo and relying on resourceful activities to expand operations, fixers positioned their venturing activities as more durable than those of idlers. This positioning was expressed by entrepreneurs expanding entrepreneurial activities designed to continue and develop/sustain a current version (or existing model) of the venture toward a growth and expansion trajectory. Similarly, this positioning includes the investing in a business in a targeted place for future growth, expansion, and viability. Fixer activities largely sought to make their ventures appear more plausible to sustain and more acceptable to their host communities by emphasizing (rather than masking) their highly visible and scalable operations. Anas explained, ‘Everyone knows my business and comes to buy from me. The customers won’t stop and ask you if the business is yours or not [Syrian

or Lebanese-owned]. In general, they don't mind, the customer comes for the value you're providing as a business'.

To make their businesses more plausible, the entrepreneurs often acted as if they could freely organize 'out in the open' and expand 'just like someone from Lebanon' (Field notes) despite their knowledge that they could still risk rapid and/or arbitrary shutdowns for organizing or expanding too openly. Despite the risks of getting shut down, Omar explained: 'I [want] to have a big project – a big shop. I have Lebanese and Syrian employees. I bought machines and wheels and made it the best place for wheels'. The most aggressive fixers went so far as seeking to legally register their ventures with the Lebanese government – which would create a more 'official' signal that they could belong (Field notes). That they would pursue these efforts demonstrated their belief that they were being truly accepted, despite ongoing situations where they felt stigmatized – such as Lebanese customers and suppliers calling Adnan and Hisham 'the Syrians' (rather than by first names). Despite this promise, legal incorporation was never a reality. A representative from a local refugee advocacy group explained: 'Even if they have enough money to legally open their own businesses, Syrian refugees are adopting illegal methods [i.e., the resourceful methods described above] to sustain their businesses because of the difficult steps they should follow to make their business formally recognized'. While progress toward legal registration was constantly blocked, fixers persisted as they saw evidence that their businesses were becoming 'affixed' in Lebanese society (Field notes). Farouk explained, 'Lebanese and Syrian customers come and ask about me and my business success', in response to questions of if he could make it over time. Whereas Rida exclaimed, 'Of course I am not leaving this country, I have three successful businesses now here!'.

Fixer process and entrepreneurial readiness. While chronic precarity persisted, the fixing process of venturing in limbo facilitated a sense of readiness to launch a successful venture in Lebanon. Entrepreneurs emphasized how their venturing activities, while not always ideal, helped them to improve their livelihood – moving beyond short-term survival (Field notes). Imad explained, 'When I developed my laundry shop, it felt like I was improving. I was able to build a bigger business and pay for my children's school'. Similarly, Hisham explained that fixing 'offered me stability – mental and financial stability'. As suggested in these quotes, fixers were able to focus on developing and enhancing their skills and personal resources, as they believed they had agency to enact changes shaping their futures (albeit with options to 'shift' if they were suddenly shut down by authorities). Samar explained, 'I have been introduced to new equipment and learned to work on new machines'. Similarly, Adnan said, 'I learned a lot. I didn't establish this easily. They were tough years. My ambition now is to rent a third store. This is why the word refugee doesn't include me ... I decided not to register with the UNHCR as I don't need aid, and I don't want to keep thinking of traveling. I'm settling here!'. Fixing provided a sense of personal progress and thriving, which fuelled hope for the future that venturing in limbo activities would continue to produce 'returns' by helping refugees prepare for what lies ahead. Amir explained, 'When you start a business, you start from zero, but once you begin, there's no dead end'. Sara said, 'My ambition is to open a shop. We have a lot of hope. I did

not start this to stop it, I have so much more to offer'. She continued, 'Everyone is looking for what is best for them. I'm ambitious. I don't have the 'feed me today and kill me tomorrow mentality'. I'm thinking ahead'.

Transition: Efforts to Control Temporal Liminality

While refugee entrepreneurs who transitioned from idling to fixing attempted to eliminate liminality of location (to varying degrees), these efforts were often stunted when ventures were suddenly shut down despite significant expansion. For example, Farouk has expanded to two locations, assuming to have been 'accepted', only to have all of them suddenly closed without warning. These individuals (e.g., former fixers) were joined by other idlers who, upon realizing the unlikelihood of ever gaining legitimacy in Lebanon as a legal member of society, sought instead to control their temporal liminality by engaging in venturing in limbo efforts that could be transitioned to other locations (i.e., ported). These entrepreneurs believed that they could not survive nor continue in their current place given ongoing environmental threats, yet this did not preclude them from planning their futures. Malek explained, 'I need to search for safety and security. Here there is always uncertainty. There are different opinions about our work and settlements [as Syrian refugees] in Lebanon'. Alaa, a former fixer, was finally overcome by the constant environmental disruptions and proclaimed: 'I can't endure here anymore. There are always new problems!'. Farouk similarly said, 'I am very afraid honestly of the situation. If I expand my business, people will become more aware of me and my activities. I will draw more problems to me'. Hiba said, 'I don't want to continue here. Wherever I open [my shop] they'll close it. And no one knows why, when, and how'. Surprisingly, this shift in perspective on the liminality of location did not cause individuals to cease entrepreneurial efforts. Rather, upon realizing their path was blocked, these individuals then sought to control temporal liminality by planning and preparing for their futures through ventures that would be fully realized in some yet-to-be-determined place.

Porting Process Pattern

We define porting as a process of venturing in limbo, where actors organize ventures in hopes of transporting them to some other to-be-determined location at an unknown point in the future. In a follow-up interview, Bilal explained this approach: 'I'm one of those who is working but still considering leaving. I would like to do the same business outside [of Lebanon], as they are closing Syrian businesses here'. Ongoing uncertainty surrounding the status of Syrian refugees in Lebanon motivated some entrepreneurs from our data to prepare to move themselves and their ventures 'at a moment's notice'. In a follow-up interview, Sara explained: 'I am preparing my business here to eventually go [somewhere] in Europe'. We call those who engage in the porting process *porters* and theorize that they seek to control aspects of their temporal experience (i.e., the future implementation) by working on a business in the present.

We noted three key components of the porting process pattern: entrepreneurs' mind-roaming to imagine future possibilities, springboarding to new location, and incubating for future expansion. Table C in the appendix provides representative quotations

illustrating these components. We describe next each component in detail to better understand the nature of porting.

Temporal perspective: Mind roaming to imagine future possibilities. Mind roaming refers to a view that the future is imagined or invented through multiple and desirable scenarios where entrepreneurial ventures can thrive. Mind roaming provides individuals with the mental scaffolding for venturing regardless of whether, when, and where his/her future transition occurs. One entrepreneur, Rim, explained her mind roaming in this way: ‘I can’t stay like this. I want to travel. I want to have [my venture] there. I want to go to Switzerland or Germany ... and expand my venture there. I will make a partnership with some friends [who live there]’. Similarly, Osman described many business scenarios he had begun imagining, all of which were focused on ‘future locations’ outside Lebanon. We theorize that mind roaming specifically involves imagining future scenarios in which an entrepreneur does not have to contend with the current type and/or level of precarity. This offered an escape, but also provided a framework that gave meaning to ongoing business efforts. Thus, porters claimed that some saw their efforts as meaningless attempts to just ‘get through’ the difficulty in Lebanon, but they saw their own activities as ‘laying the foundation’ for their future lives (Field notes). For example, Malek explained this structure using a mapping analogy. He said, ‘Honestly, my whole life has become like maps. Seriously, if you open my brain, you’d see – if I go this way, I have these options; if I go that way, I have those options ... and I always change. All of these options in my map are better than staying here’. Similarly, Farouk said, ‘I have been [in Lebanon] for almost five years and nothing got better, it only got worse ... So, I began imagining future scenarios for me and my venture, this included many possibilities’. Interestingly, exerting control over one’s future did not require specifying a timeline for when, where, and how the venture would be ported. Rather, porters exerted control over the long-term trajectories of their ventures. Jad explained that his efforts would set himself up well for porting his venture, regardless of the timing. He said, ‘If I get a chance, I’ll go tomorrow, or next month, or next year’.

Location frame: Springboarding to new location. This location frame refers to a perspective that venturing activities in a current location were useful as a springboard for future successes. While porters were never clear on the specifics, they unanimously viewed their limbo-venturing activities as ‘critical’ and ‘developmental’ for ‘paving the way for the future’ (Field notes). Sara explained how her efforts would help her: ‘I built my strong personality and self-confidence from working here. My model became much more advanced, and I can apply it in the new location’. Beyond building generic business skills that could be ported elsewhere, porters also saw Lebanon as a location where future ideas could be incubated.

‘Lebanon is the incubator place that, during the war [in Syria] accepted me and developed my personality [and skills], and although I was suddenly forced to close my small venture, my new project came from a pain, and this is what I want to focus on in Sweden to get everyone’s attention ... Everyone cooks, but I want to start from the pain ... That

I was suddenly unemployed and without a residency – it allowed me to think that I must do an entrepreneurship project that transcends [place] boundaries’ said Farouk.

A springboard frame provided meaning to the current location (e.g., development stage) while not requiring anything meaningful from that location other than a context for experience. This made the chronic precarity regarding one’s status (i.e., ‘Am I going to be deported?’ or ‘Can I stay?’) tolerable as it was construed as developmental. Similarly, it helped with a future-focused orientation about planning for big dreams, as individuals had already accepted that those dreams would not be realized in the current place. This allowed for an abstract framing of future location opportunities, for example, in a follow-up interview, Rim noted: ‘I will go anywhere [for my venture] to succeed’. Bilal explained that he now had ‘no hope in Lebanon’, which was echoed by Amir who said that after so much disruption, ‘I can’t do anything here ... I see myself in a year from now in Australia or anywhere outside Lebanon’. Omar said, ‘God willing, I am ready and prepared to start again from scratch. I know now what it takes to start and run a successful [venture]’.

Limbo venture positioning: Incubating for future expansion. Porters engaged in future-focused entrepreneurial activities prepared for an unknown future by building the organizational scaffolding and related, portable resources. They did this to produce mobile ventures that laid the groundwork for desired future ventures. In this way, porters used venturing in limbo as a way of incubating future opportunities. Osman explained, ‘My goal is to contact these companies [potential clients]. I can get trained on their devices here, so that I can open a venture and become their exclusive distributor in the new country [when I travel]’. Jad also said, ‘I’m learning English and earning experience in dealing with merchants, customers, companies, banks, and expenses. I think I’m ready to open in a new country, take risks, and succeed’. In hopes of achieving their most desired dreams from their limbo ventures, porters were extremely creative in identifying available resources that could be applied to their efforts. For example, they accessed resources designed by providers to help refugees settle in Lebanon, to instead prepare their ventures to move elsewhere (e.g., Farouk, Malek, and Osman). Farouk confessed, ‘I’m using this NGO [program] to be able to get a visa to Sweden’. This manoeuvring demonstrates entrepreneurial refugees’ ability to (1) imagine a future time and/or place for the business and (2) identify fungible resources for that business. Sara’s plan illustrates these abilities. She explained,

[An unnamed NGO] gave me a scholarship that’s worth \$1800 to do a course in business accounting. I took a business plan course. I learned a lot about how to run a business ... I’m also teaching my husband my skills, so that we can both benefit abroad. I also met a foreigner who liked my designs and wanted me to design her wedding dress.

As explored in this section of our findings, the chronic precarity facing ventures in limbo did not eliminate entrepreneurial efforts. Rather, porters leveraged the idea that they could transport their efforts to motivate persistence in pursuit of a more desirable future. Osman explained, ‘I feel these [current challenges] are all temporary. It does not bother

me I can see the image [of me and my venture] in front of me.’ Rim noted, ‘One day you’ll hear about me ... from a European country’.

Porter process and entrepreneurial readiness. Our data suggest that the primary benefits of porting process were its ability to support one’s sense of entrepreneurial readiness and hope. Thus, while also providing means for survival (i.e., some income) this shift to the porting process led these entrepreneurs, such as Amir, to see themselves and their ventures as ‘in-transit’ Lebanon, with the hope and intention of eventually relocating to a context where they can grow the venture into something better. Yassin said, ‘My future is immigration. I will go abroad and in five years have a growing business there’.

Porting was psychologically appealing for the entrepreneurs as it entailed a process of temporarily surviving in current conditions and adapting to or enduring the current challenges with the purpose of creating a venture that would persist and thrive in the future – albeit in a different place. Amir explained: ‘I’m leaving for Australia ... I’m going to try to live there. I’m going solo. I will be staying with my friend. But my bakery will remain open here. I will see what happens. If it goes well, my family must follow me’. Similarly, Hiba explained: ‘Even though I have some clients here, I want more. A human being always wants more. One wants greatness and money.’ Farouk was questioning how much he would be missing. He said, ‘I sometimes say if I were still in Syria, I would have been a teacher, my goals would have been so little ... but now I want to go bigger not [in Lebanon], but in Europe’. Farouk continued, ‘I’m not bothered by anything anymore as long as I will get the visa (to travel) soon. [UNHCR] is still studying our resettlement file. We are [in limbo]: Canada or Europe’. Similarly, Imad shared, ‘I am thinking about what impact I will leave on the country I will eventually move to. I want it to be a good, beneficial impact’.

Porters explained that their perhaps unorthodox venturing strategies (i.e., incubating ‘here’ to go ‘somewhere’) were necessary, given the conditions Syrian refugee entrepreneurs face in Lebanon. Amir explained: ‘[The government] might kick the Syrians out’. With this in mind, Amir and others decided that exploiting resources for porting outside of Lebanon was both acceptable and necessary. These refugee entrepreneurs were preparing a (trans) portable venture. Another entrepreneur, Bilal explained: ‘I worked at [many] different places to get experience, and people were annoyed, but I did not care. I wanted to learn a business – to master it so I can make it anywhere’. The sense of entrepreneurial readiness was evident in how porters developed more broadly applicable skills, resource connections, and/or other valuable venture features that could be transplanted to a new context, when the opportunity arrives. For example, porters often got involved with programs to improve their entrepreneurial skills and develop their business models. Omar explained: ‘I get to know about all cars, from the oldest to the newest, [so I can open the same car-focused business in any country]. I worked on my English. My English is good ... I can debate with an expert’. Similarly, Osman explained, ‘I applied to [an NGO] that supports small business projects. They trained us. They teach us how to develop our ideas and other stuff. I created an online platform/hub for this work, that I can manage from anywhere ... I’m drawing upon these resources to learn how to scale up my business [when I am in a new location]. I’m learning English to be more competent’.

Iterative Transitions: Revisiting Location or Temporal Liminality

As indicated throughout our findings, our data revealed distinct process patterns of venturing in limbo to adapt to chronic precarity. Consistent with these findings, our data also revealed other transitions – or additional shifts in entrepreneurial venturing that occurred in response to ever-changing environmental conditions. As previously argued (e.g., that some porters were formerly fixers), we noted additional cycles where, in response to ongoing environmental challenges, entrepreneurs re-adjusted their framing of temporal and location constraints. These revised framings in turn shaped shifts entrepreneurial positioning as entrepreneurs sought to align their actions with the changes in the environment. We captured these shifts in follow-up interviews. For example, Alaa, whom we identified as a fixer, shifted to a porter. He explained: ‘It’s something I made a lot of effort for [in Lebanon], and it was gone from my hands in one day – like something you had no idea you were going to lose. I became sad and depressed about so many things. So, I want to [do this in the future], travel somewhere and operate my venture there’. In other cases, sudden and adverse environmental shifts led fixers and porters to revert to idling process because they failed to exert control over temporal or location liminality (with no clear re-attempts to control one’s liminality in the near future). For example, Sara, whom we identified as a porter, shifted to an idler. She explained in a follow-up interview:

‘Yes, I have a different perspective compared to the last time we spoke. I was doing much better when you first met me. [She was anticipating a visa that would help her to relocate her venture and family]. We got rejected by the Canadian embassy. The UNHCR may not be able to help us leave. Yesterday, the General Security [officers] came to us and asked me many questions, like, ‘Who you work for and what you do’. Our situation is worse now. How are we going to continue our life? We now live day-by-day. I don’t know about the future now. I don’t think that much of the future. I am so tired’.

We found that under conditions of chronic precarity, any venturing process pattern was functionally transitional, where the duration and eventual disruption of an entrepreneurial position is unknown. Alaa, who shifted from fixer-to-idler-to-porter-to-idler, described this predicament as follows: ‘Psychologically, ever since I expanded my shop here [in Lebanon], I was relieved. I felt comfortable and I considered myself a part of this community. Eventually my goal was to make a name in Lebanon ... but my thinking changed now, after they closed my shop. Now I think that I only want to find a way to live.’ We confirmed many of our participants’ statements during field visits, observing how some of these ventures were closed with official red wax stamps (the Lebanese government signalling a ‘condemned’ business for failure to operate properly) on their doors. We found that these sudden changes resulted in a state of ‘limbo’ (Field notes) for these entrepreneurs, which led to revised efforts. In Figure 3, we summarize the theoretical insights generated in our findings that capture both the primary relationships we modelled and the secondary feedback loops representing iterative transitions. Figure 3 presents our complete model of venturing in limbo. We provide additional data on the entrepreneurial readiness and transitions in Tables D and E in the appendix.

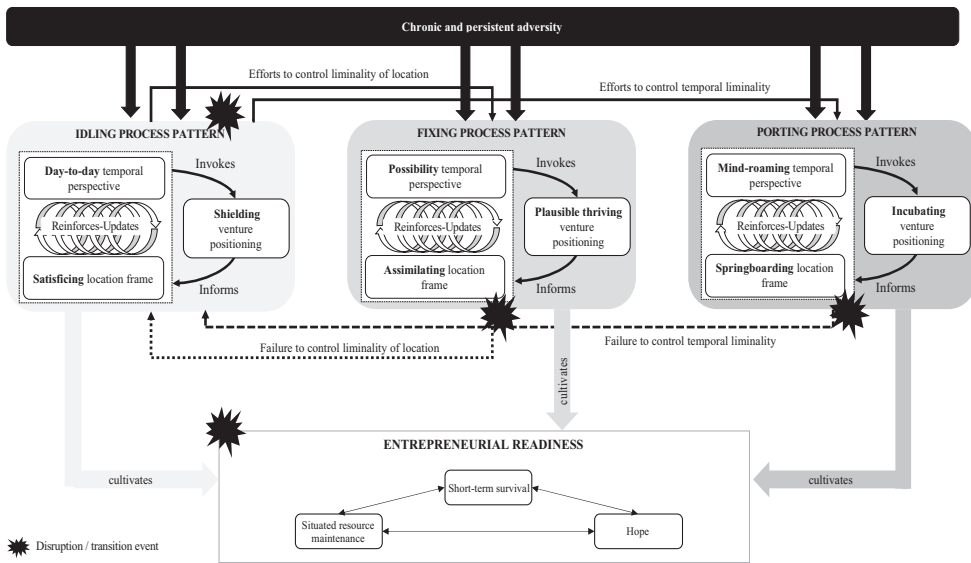


Figure 3. Venturing in limbo process patterns

DISCUSSION

Our findings reveal a process model of venturing in limbo, which describes how different NVC processes emerge and change to enable the persistence of entrepreneurial venturing despite chronic precarity. Our findings stand in contrast to the bulk of NVC research, which predominantly draws on a staged development analogy in theorizing entrepreneurial processes as a linear progression from emergence to growth and conventionalization. We find that NVC processes under chronic precarity occur in different, non-linear patterns (labelled *idling*, *fixing*, and *porting*) that unfold as individuals seek to eliminate liminality (location or temporal) of their ventures and then (re)interpret and accommodate new disruptions into subsequent actions. As is likely to be expected under conditions of chronic precarity, we show how ongoing changes in one's context led some entrepreneurs to update and alter their venturing processes, with some almost continuously updating their framing of their circumstances and, as a result, their entrepreneurial pursuits in precarious contexts. Our findings reveal that entrepreneurs persist with venturing in limbo because it helps them cultivate entrepreneurial readiness, a state of being in which one has developed the capabilities needed to take advantage of circumstances one hopes to encounter in an imagined place and time outside the boundaries of liminality and precarity. These findings provide novel insights into processes and outcomes of NVC even when the longer-term possibilities for the venture (where and how long it will be allowed to operate) are unknowable.

Contributions to Literature on the NVC Process

The primary contribution of our study is to the entrepreneurship literature on NVC processes. Specifically, we heed calls to develop theory that breaks free from the theoretical 'straitjacket' of staged models of NVC (Levie and Lichtenstein, 2010; Von Briel et al., 2018) by relaxing the common assumption that NVC occurs in sequential,

progressive phases (Gielnik et al., 2014; Klyver et al., 2018). Our theorizing shows how ventures are created when NVC efforts are continuously thwarted from following a traditional lifecycle process, revealing how this process still creates value (i.e., entrepreneurial readiness) despite largely failing to develop into a mature and stable organization. We find that the process is diverse, dynamic, and iterative because the positioning and goals of the venture are blurry and not predetermined (Davidsson and Gruenhagen, 2021; Dimov, 2020; Thorgren and Williams, 2023).

While we recognize the value of a staged process in guiding what could be labelled as the ‘ideal’ new venture creation scenario (Levie and Lichtenstein, 2010; Von Briel et al., 2018), our study captures variations of a process that is perhaps the most common of entrepreneurial phenomena – most ventures do not emerge and then grow into highly profitable firms. In doing so, we address an oversight in process-based theories on NVC that have overlooked more ‘routine’ or ‘unconventional’ entrepreneurial phenomena (Bakker and McMullen, 2023), where unconventional refers to ventures that fall outside the venture capital-backed, high-end, high-growth entrepreneurial ventures (Baron and Markman, 2004; Wu and Jung, 2008). By empirically identifying and then theorizing these unconventional NVC processes, we open new pathways for theories that are more generalizable to a wide range of entrepreneurial phenomena.

In relaxing the assumption of linear, staged progression, we identify dynamic, non-linear relationships among three different NVC process patterns. While all our entrepreneurs started with *idling* pattern, some of them tried to eliminate liminality and adopted a different pattern, such as *fixing* or *porting*. These patterns were dynamic as they kept pushing the entrepreneurs to continue working on their ventures in such a precarious context. However, the most surprising finding was that these entrepreneurs iterated back and forth between these quite different patterns without losing hope to continue their venturing endeavours. Thus, we acknowledge the presence of different stages, but our findings reveal that the movement between stages is perhaps more dynamic than traditionally theorized (Baron, 2007; McMullen et al., 2021). While prior theory has acknowledged the need for revision and/or pivots of business models, we show that in some situations, entrepreneurs continuously return to ‘zero’ and yet persist as they still obtain value for future efforts. Indeed, our findings of three patterns set up a non-linear overall process of entrepreneurial venturing because individuals must continuously revise their entrepreneurial efforts and objectives as disruptive events take them back and forth – multiple times – in their undefined journey. Thus, our study helps explain the twists and turns (Davidsson and Gruenhagen, 2022) of the NVC process that go far beyond the conventional stream of high-end entrepreneurship scholarship examining the sub-process of pivoting to revise venture ideas (Grimes, 2018; Hampel et al., 2020) or the strategic reorientation of the venture over time (Kirtley and O’Mahony, 2023). Our study describes different patterns of the NVC process based on location frame and temporal perspective of the venture as the founder adapts one’s venture to continuous disruptions and adversity. Thus, we uncover the fluid features of the entrepreneurial process (Davidsson and Gruenhagen, 2021; McMullen and Dimov, 2013) and how it interacts with a

dynamic environment (Baron, 2007; Cloutier and Langley, 2020; Davidsson and Gruenhagen, 2021) of unfolding adversity.

In addition, our theorizing highlights the importance of context in shaping NVC processes. We demonstrate that, in certain conditions (i.e., when entrepreneurial actors are in limbo), ventures cannot transition toward an end or predetermined state (i.e., commonly assumed when exiting liminality) because they get stuck moving between different processes of entrepreneurial organizing as they adapt to recurrent and unfolding adversity. Importantly, we show how individuals may still seize opportunities within such a challenging state to develop successful entrepreneurial endeavours, where success and the venture's trajectory differ substantially from traditional conceptualizations. Transitioning into a fixed venture role or entrepreneurial position may not always be possible or even desirable in a context that is constantly shifting because the venture goal is changing. Thus, individuals in transition achieve entrepreneurial ventures that do not adhere to traditional scholarly notions of a venture lifecycle (Davidsson and Gruenhagen, 2021).

At a broader level, our study and findings help explain what is in limbo in certain contexts – namely certainty about the location and temporality of a venture. This highlights the importance of temporal perspective and location frame when studying NVC processes. Indeed, entrepreneurs revise the temporal perspectives and location frames of their ventures as they adapt to continuous disruptions, making visible the multiple types and venture positions of the NVC process. We theorize that temporal and location dimensions of the venture, and actors' framing of them, are not static but continuously updated and (re)combined to generate a gestalt understanding of a venture and shape approaches toward and/or within it. In doing so, we show the potential versatility of place and temporal framing of the venture and how these frames evolve as external conditions, and interpretations of those conditions, change. We propose that location and temporal perspectives of entrepreneurial organizing could be non-permanent and not predetermined, yet conducive to venture creation. Indeed, these perspectives shaped different positionings of the same venture. What the venture could do for the entrepreneur kept changing while preserving a value for the individual to continue in the entrepreneurial process. Transitioning to a fixed venture's role may not always be feasible or preferable in constantly shifting contexts, where venture goals evolve. For example, we show that some ventures in our data were based on the founder's ability to 'mind travel' in both place and time (the category of individuals we call porters), which helped them cope with current challenges (e.g., Patzelt et al., 2014) and take concrete entrepreneurial actions that could bear fruits at different times and in varied different location, without even knowing the specific times and locations to prepare for. These temporal mind journeys play a key role in how ventures were organized in the present. We also extend our understanding of limbo beyond entrepreneurship by highlighting the dynamic nature of limbo and what individuals could do in this context by continuously adapting to disruptions and to the experience of 'being stuck' (Derakhshan et al., 2024; Fraher and Gabriel, 2014; Petriglieri et al., 2019).

Finally, we identify types of venture positioning in context of chronic precarity that are generative despite not producing sustainable economic returns – namely,

plausible thriving and incubating. The plausible thriving venture positioning – depicted through fixing process – builds on an effort to grow the business in the most feasible (yet not necessarily desirable) circumstances for the entrepreneur despite adversity. On the other hand, incubating – depicted through the porting process – refers to re-imagining one's venture under more ideal conditions despite its unfeasibility in the near future.

Entrepreneurial Readiness

Our findings also contribute to the literature exploring outcomes of NVC processes (Dimov, 2020; McMullen and Dimov, 2013). Prior literature notes how 'outcomes' or 'end states' of NVC processes are not always straightforward. The end could be when a firm is established, when it fails, when a firm is economically profitable, and so forth (Dimov, 2020). Despite acknowledging these differences, most research generally assumes that the NVC process ends successfully when a firm is established and generates revenue (Davidsson and Gruenhagen, 2021). However, we found that engaging in NVC processes while in limbo provided entrepreneurs with a mechanism to cope with chronic precarity by developing their entrepreneurial readiness. Of particular interest here are instances where venturing oscillated between different patterns because of continuous disruptions. Despite shifting to different patterns, entrepreneurs could still cultivate entrepreneurial readiness for hitherto undetermined future professional situations and locations.

We contribute to theory by conceptualizing entrepreneurial readiness as involving three components: (1) behavioural: it gives individuals short-term satisfaction as entrepreneurial actions address their basic needs; (2) cognitive: individuals maintain and update their skills, knowledge, and resources based on one's cognitive interpretation of the environment; and (3) psychological/emotional: through entrepreneurial readiness individuals can still hold on to hope that motivates explorations of pathways for future opportunities. We find that all three aspects of readiness are important together for the entrepreneur to persist in chronic precarity. Thus, we contribute to the literature by explaining why individuals in such context of high precarity continue to work on their ventures. We complement studies that examined identity work (Alkhaled and Sasaki, 2022), resilience (Shepherd et al., 2021), and emancipation (Ruebottom and Toubiana, 2021) in contexts of precarity and adversity by understanding how cyclical or recursive venture creation process stimulates or cultivates multiple aspects of entrepreneurial readiness.

Entrepreneurial readiness represents the broader concept of an individual's perceived readiness to engage in entrepreneurial ventures (Schillo et al., 2016). Our findings provide a different perspective on entrepreneurial readiness that extends prior work. Historically, scholars have usually adopted an institutional perspective to understand entrepreneurial readiness by examining how institutional support helps people become ready for entrepreneurship (Schillo et al., 2016). Our findings demonstrate that entrepreneurial readiness can be cultivated not only in the absence of this support but also despite opposition from institutional actors seeking to disrupt entrepreneurial and other economic activities of refugees. Thus, our study offers a novel stream of

new research exploring the phenomenon of entrepreneurial readiness and how it is achieved in the context of chronic precarity. Our study reveals how individuals persisted with creating ventures because it gave them a sense of stability and readiness to seize future opportunities. While this stability was temporary – or even a bit delusional – entrepreneurial venturing provided a coherent structure for individuals to imagine future scenarios that involved personal (e.g., family life) and professional success through an imagined hope of future business growth. This value created through venturing proved to be quite durable, as individuals' efforts and dreams were repeatedly knocked down (i.e., relinquishing their efforts to control temporal or location liminality), yet they persisted in attempting other forms of venturing (i.e., porting and then returning to idling) rather than simply relying on aid organizations or wage work for their basic needs. Indeed, the three patterns of NVC process we induced from our data show different ways how entrepreneurship can temporarily help (and positively impact) individuals under these conditions.

Contributions to Literature on Entrepreneurship and Liminality

We introduce the concept of venturing in limbo to extend the limited but growing literature on entrepreneurship and liminality. In contrast to previous studies that examined entrepreneurship as a stage of transitional liminality between known stages of venture emergence (Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2018, 2020; Henfridsson and Yoo, 2014; Prashantham and Floyd, 2019) or studies on how individuals cope with prolonged liminality (Alkhaled and Sasaki, 2022), our paper shows that venturing in limbo is a distinct form of entrepreneurship in liminality. First, limbo is a special form of liminality in which entrepreneurs do not know what, when, and where the end state (i.e., landing spot) of the liminality phase is and entrepreneurs feel trapped within their disadvantaged situation. We argue that limbo situations of liminality more accurately describe venturing processes of marginalized individuals in states of chronic precarity. Second, the literature has emphasized the 'in-between' identity state involved in launching NVC processes (e.g., Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2020; Kelly and McAdam, 2023; Muhr et al., 2019), and overlooked to examine the liminality of the NVC processes themselves. Differentiating between venturing in limbo and venturing in liminality is important, not least because it can help identify the 'twists and turns' of different venturing processes, and thus facilitate our understanding of entrepreneurship's generative role, despite this challenging state. Therefore, while the venturing process patterns did not result in high-growth, long-term entrepreneurial firms as is typically construed as a successful outcome of the entrepreneurship process (Baron, 2007; McMullen et al., 2021), they did provide other, significant benefits in the face of adversity. We show that entrepreneurs navigate the limbo situation by trying to exert control over time and location of their ventures. Hence, we argue that patterns of NVC process in a limbo context are defined by the time and location frames of the ventures.

Our research also sheds light on under-appreciated aspects of liminality and entrepreneurship, specifically, how liminality arises from the time and place uncertainty of venturing and the core mechanism around entrepreneurs' efforts to control some aspects of this

liminality. We theorized that different patterns of venturing were employed to minimize location (e.g., fixing) and temporal (e.g., porting) liminality, demonstrating a systematic effort to impose one's agentic will on a significantly disrupted environment. Such elaboration reveals the extent to which individuals seek to minimize liminality for their ventures – even when those ventures face repeated failure – and provides opportunities for future scholarship to better conceptualize and measure the influence of different forms of liminality on entrepreneurial processes and outcomes.

Although being trapped 'with no route to aggregation is frustrating, unsettling and disruptive' (Bamber et al., 2017, p. 1531) for individuals in limbo, we show that entrepreneurs took the agency to create something out of nothing and that their venturing processes were generative to an extent. Some of their ventures were closed and their ambitions stalled, but they persisted in venturing while cultivating entrepreneurial readiness, which compensated for the lack of a tangible means of conventionalizing their entrepreneurial endeavours and the NVC process. Research on organizational liminality emphasizes transition between milestones (see Ibarra and Obodaru, 2016) because milestones allow individuals to enter a deliberative mindset, which processes information more objectively – even if only temporary – as they move toward ambitious goals (McMullen and Kier, 2016). Milestones are needed to protect entrepreneurs from being stuck in a perpetual state of liminality where one is susceptible to escalation of commitment owing to the implemental mindset, which exhibits a self-serving bias when processing information (McMullen and Kier, 2016). Rather than ventures' milestones, we find that the salient changes in the limbo context helped individuals revise their temporal and location frames and adapt their venturing processes. Thus, they could persist by changing their venturing pattern processes without falling victim to the escalation of commitment encouraged by the implemental mindset. Although entrepreneurs struggled with the lack of a clear end point to their liminal experiences, their venturing patterns allowed them to perpetually (re)create temporary 'landing spots' for venturing. These landing spots were in turn continually reshaped by shocks to the entrepreneurs' overall environment that allowed the entrepreneurs to adapt and run their ventures, despite their unmoored context.

CONCLUSION

This study explored NVC processes under conditions of chronic precarity. In doing so, we advanced theory relating to entrepreneurship and liminal organizing literatures. We found different patterns of NVC processes that were non-linear, iterative, and constantly disrupted, yet still produced a positive outcome in the form of entrepreneurial readiness. This study provides a novel foray into important theoretical, phenomenological, and empirical concepts relevant to millions of entrepreneurs across the globe.

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NOTES

- [1] We adopt a commonly accepted definition of entrepreneurship as the process of pursuing an opportunity (i.e., ‘future situation which is deemed desirable and feasible’) without regard to the resources individuals currently control (Stevenson and Jarillo, 1990, p. 23). This broad-yet-commonly employed definition allowed us to study entrepreneurial processes in a novel context in hopes of revealing new insights about the process and outcomes of entrepreneurial venturing. While there are various definitions of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs (see McMullen and Shepherd, 2006), we specifically sought to identify individuals who mobilized resources to pursue opportunities within their host communities (in Lebanon), and who are refugees—individuals who are fleeing from armed conflict or persecution and under international law are entitled to specific rights (Shepherd et al., 2020). While other studies have explored refugee entrepreneur efforts in refugee camps (e.g., Abushaikh et al., 2021; de la Chaux and Haugh, 2020), we sought to identify and study entrepreneurial processes (including new venture creation) by refugee actors who sought to engage in more ‘traditional’ entrepreneurial activities, such as pursuing opportunities that addressed needs of Lebanese, refugee, and other customers interested in their products and/or services.
- [2] UNHCR and the Syrian refugee response: negotiating status and registration in Lebanon, *The International Journal of Human Rights*, **22**, 393–419 – UNHCR and Government of Lebanon, ‘Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2015–2016’ (2014), <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-crisis-response-plan-2015-2016>. 31. Ibid., LCRP (2017–2020).
- [3] The initial interview questions in conducting grounded theory are meant to serve as ‘probes’ that are ‘sufficiently general to cover a wide range of experiences and narrow enough to elicit and explore the participants specific experience’ (Charmaz and Belgrave, 2012, p. 351). For this reason, it is often advised to conduct a preliminary round of interviews to explore the interview guides effectiveness in drawing out participant perspectives rather than imposing our own assumptions (Gubrium and Koro-Ljungberg, 2005).
- [4] We were not able to follow up with all the Syrian refugee entrepreneurs we spoke to in earlier rounds for two key reasons: (1) Multiple random raids by municipal and national-level government forces on businesses had been conducted on informal Syrian business owners and operators as of the start of our third round of data collection. Many of these raids involved or precipitated violent altercations between Lebanese officials and Syrian refugees, or threats of violence. Our contacts in the country advised us to cancel our third field trip multiple times, and many individuals were unable or unwilling to speak to us in this hostile context. (2) Some of our participants had moved to new countries or were in Syria checking on their homes and/or families still based in the country. Nevertheless, we followed up with a representative number of individuals from each of the subgroups we identify in our findings section.
- [5] See Appendix for additional evidence.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher's web site.

APPENDIX A
REPRESENTATIVE QUOTATIONS

Table A. Additional representative quotes - Idling process pattern

<i>Idling</i>	
Second-order theme: Day-to-day scope of current and future options	
Focus on daily living	‘I try my best to think of the present now and focus on what is important. I do feel stuck, but I try my best not to think about it that way’. [Amin] ‘I live on a day-by-day basis because there is really no other choice’. [Firas] ‘This is what I’m doing right now ... but I don’t know what will happen in the future. Sometimes I think I should consider turning back the rented shop and return to Syria, sometimes I think I should stay and run the business here. I’m stuck in between’. [Sanaa]
Present disconnected from past and future	‘I can’t do anything about [my situation]. There’s no future ... I forgot about the past. I’m thinking now only about the present. I can’t think of anything else’. [Omar]. ‘I don’t know anything for my future plans. I will keep working for sure, but I cannot tell you if I have any short term or long terms plans. I really do not know what I will do or if I will go back’. [Hussein] ‘I gave up to this present reality. There’s no future’. [Khalil]
Sense of waiting	‘We were waiting for things to get better in Syria’. [Hasan] ‘Rather than borrowing money from other people, I started making my own money and covering my expenses, while we’re waiting’. [Fadel] ‘I don’t think about expanding the business [in scale or geographic scope]. All I think about is returning to Syria’. [Salah]
Second-order theme: Satisficing in immediately available locations	
Availability of place resources	‘Lebanon offered “safety”, a place to “survive” – that is how the business location was chosen’. [Amin] ‘If our country was safe, we would not have left it. We came here running for our lives, looking for a shelter – to save ourselves to get to a safe harbour ... But against my will. It’s not something I want’. [Lara] ‘I would not go to Syria now because I can’t live somewhere where I would be surrounded by destruction. Here it is safer. And I’m able to do some work’. [Amin]
Place within easy reach	‘This place [means] nothing [noteworthy] for me. Other than it was close’. [Fouad] ‘I forcibly came here due to war. It was convenient. Otherwise, I would still be in Syria living in my house and running my business’. [Naji] ‘A Lebanese person offered me a place to stay – without any legal residency, [the authorities] would arrest me and possibly deport me. That’s why I cannot leave the immediate area at all [and I operate the venture only here]’. [Fouad] ‘We came [to Lebanon] running for our lives, looking for a nearby shelter, which is where we ended up operating our business’. [Omar]
Enduring place	‘I suffered but kept trying ... to make [Lebanon] good for me [and the business]’. [Imad] ‘We are stuck in [here], we cannot go back nor forth’. [Ali] ‘We are afraid to go back [to Syria], afraid to get kicked out of Lebanon’. [Hadi] ‘I can’t move freely here. [I’m restricted]’. [Hamza]

(Continues)

Table A. (Continued)

<i>Idling</i>	
Second-order theme: Shielding for adaptive, low-profile survival	
Minimizing investments by covering costs	‘I’m exhausted ... I don’t want to change anything in this shop. I want to keep it as is’. [Shadi] ‘It is better like this: small, and just enough to survive’. [Field Notes] ‘I don’t want to expand. I keep my shop closed most of the time because the police can come in at any time and confiscate my inventory ... I work on [phone] calls and don’t go to the shop’. [Moubarak]
Subsistence purpose and necessity-based activities	‘I felt that I would need a lot of time and to put in a lot of effort [working for somebody else], but I would not be compensated fairly. So, I started with the smallest project possible on the planet’. [Imad] ‘I opened a business not to make money but to live out of it and pay expenses. I sell only to Syrians who can’t afford buying from Lebanese stores’. [Naji] ‘I had to look after myself, because the daily money we get from the UN was not sufficient to support a family and pay the house rent. So, I wanted to establish my own business’. [Hamza]
Irregular (or intermittent) operations to creatively capture value in different, daily changing locations	‘I jump from one gig to the other to work’. [Firas] ‘I’m still not sure about this business, I feel insecure about it although I have experience’. [Amin] ‘They would open and close “at a moment’s notice” to avoid harassment or trouble from officials’. [Field Notes] ‘Bilal had his workshop in a secluded alley and kept the store front shut all the time. He only opened the door for people he knew’. [Field Notes]

Table B. Additional representative quotes - Fixing process pattern

<i>Fixing</i>	
Second-order theme: Possibility of link between past, present, and future	
Extending present to near future	‘When I came here at first, I thought it will be 2 months until the war in Syria will be sorted, but the 2 months became 4 years. You start to think about the continuity here’. [Omar] ‘I feel now like I want to rent another shop and get more products ... it will all serve me well in the near future’. [Dalal] ‘We saw opening a business here is better than just waiting [till things get better in Syria] we wanted to have a continuity’. [Hasan]
Creating a sense of semi-permanence in place	‘I don’t think of going back to Syria, things have changed [there] for the worse – I could see my future here’. [Hisham] ‘I have a family I need to think of my family. I need to have ambition to build something and leave something for them ... I thought I had the ability to keep going here’. [Omar] ‘When things get a little better, I will start to repair my [shop] here. I’m hopeful that I will be able to buy a land’. [Field Notes]
Second-order theme: Assimilating into current context	
Stressing ownership or belonging to place	‘Of course, I am not leaving this country, there is no way. Where would I go? I want to stay in Lebanon, I have a life and almost three businesses here’. [Rida] ‘I want to stay here. I would rather build a house and live here’. [Samar] ‘I have put in a lot of efforts to make a business here and I built a successful business as well’. [Abed]
Embracing place and local resources	‘We were able to adapt [here] and depend less on others. Now, we live here without the help of anyone. On the other hand, you find other Syrians who are always waiting for the UN aid’. [Hasan] ‘I have nothing left in Syria ... I started to have a good income [here] and we were able to buy a car’. [Sara] ‘I am working and [acquiring resources] for my business here, not relying on anyone [i.e., charity] now’. [Abir]
Creating a sense of stability (settlement) in place	‘I went to Turkey, but I was not comfortable there and I could not understand Turks, so I returned here because it is an Arab country. In the end no matter our differences [with Lebanese] it will still be more familiar than a foreign country’. [Khalid] ‘The shop is owned by a very influential political party member. So, no one dares to cross his tenants’. [Field Notes] ‘So, in case war in Syria was over, the Syrians would go back, but my Lebanese clients would always stay here’. [Alaa] ‘We moved from [the old place] to this [new area] as it is better for my business and family – we thought we could succeed here and try to make it home’. [Sara]
Second-order theme: Plausible thriving for locally embedded assimilation	
(Continues)	

Table B. (Continued)

<i>Fixing</i>	
Investing locally via seeking social insurance	‘I came to an agreement with a Lebanese person. He is like a silent partner [...] I do all my work, of course, without him, but he is the owner on the paper’. [Anas] They imitated locals by creating a business directly above their counterpart (i.e., on the second floor of a two-store building), where they could offer their services that were masked by the “legitimate” local venture on the ground floor (Hussein; Farouk; Alaa; Layal). [Field notes] ‘This striving to imitate and work with locals even extended to national and cultural identity, as they also sought ways to stress common cultural figures in their past Syrian and current Lebanese contexts to create a sense of cohesion and “fit” in the local environment’. [Field notes] ‘I interact more with Lebanese. I have customers, suppliers, friends I trust and can speak with’. [Anas]
Attempts to legitimize activities	‘I used to wear a niqab that covered my face, but now I wear it differently so that I can expand my business ... I just removed my niqab for the sake of attracting more customers. Some customers were intimidated at first’. [Sara] ‘While it’s true that I’m benefiting [from living in Lebanon] I’m also providing a benefit. My service is one of the best and I’m paying for all Lebanese supplies’. [Omar] ‘I want to benefit the Lebanese economy and open 10 branches’. [Imad]
Experience of integration	‘When I first came, people would feel sorry for me. I no longer consider myself a refugee here, just a person focusing on her business and succeeding in what I do’. [Abir] ‘When I worked alone, my work increased and got better, and I had more experience than before. This thing was mine. I was doing something for myself, a name. Eventually my goal was to make a name in Lebanon and integrate’. [Alaa] ‘I became “the best dressmaker in [this town]”; everyone knows me’. [Sara]

Table C. Additional representative quotes - Porting process pattern

<i>Porting</i>	
Second-order theme: Mind-roaming to imagine future possibilities	
Projecting desirable future	‘I want to go to Switzerland or Germany or ... and make my venture there. I will make a partnership with some friends [who live there].’ [Rim] ‘I hope that one day I will get the opportunity to leave. I’m dreaming of feeling settled in and having a successful venture ... where they won’t call me: “a Syrian refugee”’. [Yassin] ‘I hope that soon I can go anywhere else where I can start my venture’. [Bilal] ‘All I wish for is immigration. Finding stability. Because I’ve seen people who were able to go abroad, they settled and they’re happy. Everything is provided. And five years later you’ll get the European nationality’. [Yassin]
Exploring multiple future scenarios	‘I asked myself this question years ago, when I left Syria. I was seeing the people with the same situation as mine, what are they thinking? They are thinking of immigrating ... That was the best option, and the most successful one. Honestly, I’m looking for any option outside here’. [Osman] ‘Now, we’re going backward, not forward. So, I decided with my husband to look at options to travel or do something else for the future’. [Hiba] ‘There’s my uncle in Turkey. He’s telling me, “Come here to work”. And there’s my brother-in-law in Germany. He’s trying to figure it out for me. My other uncle went to Canada, so he’s also trying to help me. I don’t know whether to go forward or backward. I don’t know. I’m standing on a crossroad, not knowing whether I should go forward or backward’. [Alaa]
Detached future from present	‘I’m going to Australia but would leave my family and business running here ... I will see what happens. If it goes well and my business works there, my family has to follow me. And we will forget all about Lebanon’. [Amir] ‘I’m doing this [running my business] here in Lebanon temporarily ... I would take any opportunity to go abroad whenever it should come ... I don’t want to stay here’. [Malek] ‘I’m thinking of a better future. Now I’m looking for a way to smuggle, through the sea, through air, anything just to get out [of here]’. [Imad]
Second-order theme: Springboarding to new location	
Abstracting future place	‘He told me if I get the chance to immigrate to Europe and take my family and open my own business there, it would be better. Here, they do not offer you any help. For them, we are a burden. However, in Germany, Sweden, or The Netherlands, they will support you’. [Jad] ‘So now I think, I must consider America, Canada, Britain ... Because I have a good background in English language’. [Osman] ‘I want to travel, and I promise you if they tell me to go to the land of apes, I will go there instead of staying in this country that sucked our blood’. [Rim] ‘My ambition is to go to a place where there are stability and safety. I want a future for my business’. [Imad]

(Continues)

Table C. (Continued)

<i>Porting</i>	
Use current place as incubator	'I learned here and saw how things work. This experience motivated me to consider leaving. I want to achieve this goal elsewhere'. [Jad] 'I can't achieve my goals in Lebanon ... I'm just trying some ideas here, but I would like to go abroad [anywhere] and try there and achieve my goals there'. [Alaa] 'At the beginning I used to have negative thoughts. I used to think I'm staying here because I'm running away from my country ... If I continue thinking like this I will suffocate in Lebanon or elsewhere ... you can't keep thinking I will be back in 2 to 3 months. You will fail in the end and won't get anywhere ... so I thought I need to benefit myself ... so, I took the decision to find something for the future. I thought it's ok if I hopefully end up going somewhere else in these coming months. I would have benefitted in something'. [Osman]
Second-order theme: Incubating for future expansion	
Investing globally via capability development	'I was asking myself, what have I achieved in my life till now? Just moving from a country to another and there are good ideas but up till now, there is nothing to prove what I have done. I know business and how to work and I sell really well'. [Osman] 'I applied everywhere to many organizations and places here to get trained and explore opportunities [for abroad]'. [Farouk] 'I have an Instagram account and keep myself updated. I want to connect to what's happening in the Western world'. [Sara]
Envisioning future success of the venture	'I want to expand this business anywhere else. What I'm creating is innovative'. [Malek] 'Homemade [products] are not available much [in Europe]. So, it is a very good idea either for Europe or Canada. It is a very successful idea'. [Osman] 'I have been [in Lebanon] for almost five years and nothing got better, it only got worse ... So, I began imagining future scenarios for me and my venture, this included many possibilities'. [Farouk]
Prepare/incubate a (trans) portable venture	'To me, [Lebanon] is a station for something better. I get trained periodically on these devices, especially the new ones, and I would establish the same business there in other countries or the countries around me'. [Osman] 'I have a flexible business venture and I'm active on social media ... I would go along any opportunity that comes my way'. [Malik] 'Now I'm temporary, maybe more like momentary. I might leave any day. I would do this business elsewhere – <i>that's how I designed it</i>'. [Osman] 'The same system and the same business but I turn the business model to wholesale. I can use the network and system from anywhere'. [Jad]

Table D. Additional representative quotes - Entrepreneurial readiness

<i>Entrepreneurial readiness</i>	
Second-order theme: Short-term survival to address immediate needs	
Using one's agency to survive	'I keep looking for any opportunity or any job on the side that will help me make more money'. [Firas] 'I tried to find jobs, but the pay was so low. I couldn't even pay my rent. So, I decided to open my own business'. [Moubarak] 'Our informants described it as a state of: "Living [and working] each day and relying on God" (Khalil, Salim)'. [Field Notes]
Focusing on small wins	'I try to make myself feel that I'm from this area and that my business is not a foreign one'. [Adnan] 'I know almost everyone ... and how to succeed here'. [Omar] 'No one knows what will happen here in the near future. Life hides so many things from us, but we can only hope for the best. I am facing many difficulties in my work here, but I know that God will make things better for us [here]. And we can celebrate those small blessings'. [Abir]
Entrepreneurship offered some stability	'[The venture] made me feel I'm well-placed here ... Almost all the women in this neighbourhood buy from my shop now'. [Abir] '[The venture is] something just to survive'. [Layal] 'I open at 6am and work hard but I'm able to feed my kids'. [Mohamad]
Second-order theme: Situated resource maintenance in alignment with environmental possibilities	
Maintaining current skills and knowledge	'Maybe I will be forced to leave; but I will keep my shop open here [for now]'. [Abir] 'I am worried that the municipality might close [my shop] again ... but [some friends] told me to open now. They are saying that municipalities are ignoring the matter [shutting down illegal Syrian businesses] for now ... I hope they don't come again because closing for 6 months [the first time] set me back 10 years'. [Hiba] 'They not only planned to leave but worked to actively prepare themselves to "hit the ground running" whenever their chance should come'. [Field Notes]
Upgrading skills to prove oneself	'I want to continue expanding, but the landlords are exploiting us here'. [Mohamed] 'I'm taking more loans to expand the business'. [Samar] 'I know how to do business like locals and even better than them. I keep expanding and I want to expand more'. [Rida]
Upgrading skills for future opportunities	'I [want to] expand my business ... there's nothing I would've loved more than having a house here ... but I'm aware that at any second, a war might happen here ... you're considered a foreigner; at the end of the day, but I'm still going to go for it'. [Hisham] 'I got a scholarship to study English. "I also applied for another scholarship to study design ... My customers could be young single Syrians who live in Europe", providing a natural progression from the context in Lebanon'. [Farouk] 'I'm learning and getting experience ... I don't have a problem - [I'll go] to any country'. [Jad]
Second-order theme: Hope that motivates exploration of pathways for future opportunities	
(Continues)	

Table D. (Continued)

<i>Entrepreneurial readiness</i>	
Motivation to endure/persevere	‘[Despite all difficulties], I want to continue with my venture!’. [Yassin]. ‘I continue working here because I have other plans [for my venture]’. [Farouk] ‘It’s very important to me to stay here in this country. It’s important to me to continue my work here’. [Alaa]
Motivation to continue on a pathway for growth/betterment	‘When Anas recognized that the situation in Syria was “getting worse by the day”, he decided that “my work is here [in Lebanon] and I felt my future could possibly be here”’. [Field Notes] ‘I would like to go abroad. I’m preparing myself for the future abroad and so on. But, if I find a way [to get back to my business] here, I will stay and bring back my clients’. [Alaa] ‘I am frustrated. I want something fast to come my way to travel. But maybe if it works with the shop here [i.e., reopening it], I might change my mind. I will continue and expand here’. [Omar]
Motivation to continue for a different pathway/change	‘It became clear to me that I need to think differently now. There are limited opportunities [in Lebanon]. You feel you aren’t living in safety. So, I began focusing on the future location for the survival of my venture’. [Osman] ‘I was making a living when suddenly, and without warning, the Lebanese officials closed everything. All my money was in that business. Imagine that you are working ... and then someone burns your stuff’ after you put the final touches. Imagine that!’. [Omar] ‘I’m sad now [due to the police shutting down his venture] but I’m excited to travel and pursue my entrepreneurial goals. Of course, I can do [this business] there and succeed ... I’m waiting till I’m done with this shop, and I’ll travel’. [Alaa] ‘I’m leaving the country soon (and I am bringing my venture), maybe to Dubai, maybe elsewhere, the situation <i>will</i> be better, and I will be prepared for it’. [Malek]

Table E. Additional representative quotes - Disruptions/transition event

<i>Disruptions/transition event</i>	
Second-order theme: Environmental shifts that alter perceptions of time/place	
Escalating and dis-continuous shifts – deteriorating conditions	‘The General Security is not allowing us to breathe or work properly and the Lebanese locals are being horrible to us ... And what are we in Lebanon? Nobody ... Everything has changed. This country sucked our blood’. [Rim] ‘The country’s situation is getting worse, every day, every day, especially with the regulations they’re coming up with regarding the Syrians: expulsion, closing stores, closing restaurants and I don’t know what’. [Shadi] ‘Business has changed for the worse with all these problems. I don’t feel safe anymore and I’m afraid to move around’. [Bilal]
Temporary improving conditions	‘We didn’t have [then] many obstacles anymore. Only the problem of having a Lebanese partner, but we got over this ... They let us to have our small business’. [Hasan] ‘When I first came here, I suffered so much ... But I would say that my situation is a lot better now. I got a scholarship from [this NGO] and I bought many things for my work. Simple things, but they made my work a lot better. I am my own boss, and my situation is much better than it was before ... We had a good life back in Syria but now things have changed there’. [Abir] ‘Lebanon is a democratic country, so I acquired something I was deprived of in Syria. You realize that you are allowed to speak up ... And I can make more money here than in Syria’. [Mustafa]
New unknown or ambiguous conditions	‘My situation was improving. I decided I wanted to continue and grow, but then out of nowhere situation changed and they would not allow me to continue’. [Imad] ‘I was making a living and they closed my shop, the wash, changing tires, and oil, my business was very successful in that area. I don’t know why they did this! Will I be able to re-open it? What will happen? No one knows’. [Omar] ‘Every time they come with new laws and regulations. No one know what is next’. [Malek] ‘I’m very confused. Are we staying? Are we leaving by the end of this month? Or are we going to a foreign country? Are we staying here forever? I don’t know’. [Hussein]