

# Countering Indeterminate Temporariness: Sheltering work in refugee camps

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## Abstract

The experience of temporariness is increasingly prevalent across the world, both for transient populations such as refugees and in work life characterized by precarious employment relationships. In this article, we examine how local institutional work can shape people's experience of indeterminate temporariness and mitigate its pernicious effects. Our qualitative, inductive study is set in refugee camps in Lebanon, where indeterminate temporariness created an oppressive experience of time among Syrian refugees. We document the efforts of an NGO to help refugees rebuild meaningful lives by developing small-scale entrepreneurial ventures – efforts we conceptualize as 'sheltering work'. Our analysis points to the potential for sheltering work to alleviate the oppressive effects of temporariness by bounding, containing, and structuring individuals' day-to-day lives. Although sheltering work reshaped refugees' experience of time, it did not eradicate the oppressive effects of indeterminate temporariness; instead, oppressive and reclaimed experiences of time coexisted, with individuals shifting between them. Our study theorizes sheltering work as a potent form of modest, local institutional work in the face of immutable institutions, and elaborates how individual experiences of time influence embedded agency.

## Keywords

civil society, institutional work studies, non-profit organizations, time

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The condition of temporariness besets many marginalized social groups across the world: global refugee populations, asylum seekers and people in precarious employment relationships are often excluded from the societal structures that would provide them with predictability, continuity and control over their lives (Chacko & Price, 2021; Cook-Martin, 2019; Kalleberg, 2009). Consequently, these social groups often face ‘indeterminate temporariness’ – an unwelcome and uncertain state without a defined ending they can either foresee or control (Turner, 2016, p. 142). Indeterminate temporariness not only restricts social groups’ access to resources and opportunities, it also excludes them from ‘normal’ times and places of organized society (Kawash, 1998; Lawrence, 2018).

Indeterminate temporariness can be difficult to mitigate for several reasons. It is often rooted in diverse policies and practices enacted by governments, transnational entities and other powerful authorities that cannot be directly challenged (Chacko & Price, 2021; Vosko, Preston, & Latham, 2014). Indeterminate temporariness can also curtail the agency of affected individuals by restricting access to social, cultural and financial resources that might provide a basis for resisting the conditions that impose temporariness or for improvising alternative trajectories. Finally, temporariness can distort individuals’ sense of time (Griffiths, 2014; Turner, 2016) such that they are unable to conceive of a meaningful future for themselves. This can lead to passivity (Snow & Anderson, 1987), helplessness (Razer, Friedman, & Warshofsky, 2013) and apathy (Roepke & Seligman, 2016) which inhibit actively resisting or escaping the predicament. With the estimates of global refugee populations at an all-time high (UN Refugee Agency [UNHCR], 2022), there is a pressing societal need to understand how organizations might address and mitigate the pernicious consequences of indeterminate temporariness.

To explore this issue, we draw on the institutional work literature and particularly on recent studies that examine local efforts to shape and cope with institutions. This strand of institutional work research has emphasized the potential value of local institutional work in shaping the lived experience of individuals in relation to the institutions that structure their lives (Farny, Kibler, & Down, 2019; Martí & Fernández, 2013; Ruebottom & Auster, 2018), highlighting ‘the efforts of individuals and collective actors to cope with, keep up with, shore up, tear down, [and] tinker with . . . institutional structures’ (Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2011, p. 53). These more situated, less explored forms of institutional work may be especially important where large-scale mobilization or long-term solutions, such as access to formal jobs, residency rights, or citizenship, are precluded. Therefore, we ask how might local institutional work shape people’s experience of indeterminate temporariness and mitigate its pernicious effects?

Our study is set in Lebanon, where we examine the efforts of an NGO to support Syrian refugees who fled civil war between 2011 and 2019. Temporariness is particularly acute for refugees who often experience discontinuities with their past and live in a precarious present with radical uncertainty over their futures, imposed by powerful authorities (Griffiths, 2014). As Lebanon, a country of fewer than five million citizens, struggled to absorb the influx of Syrian refugees, it imposed indefinite temporary status upon Syrians, severely restricting their social and economic lives, constraining their movement, and foreclosing their future opportunities (Hultin, Introna, Göransson, & Mähring, 2022). We investigated how an entrepreneurship programme run by Basmeh & Zeitooneh (B&Z), a local NGO, helped refugees living in the Shatila and Burj Al-Barajneh refugee camps amid radical uncertainty and constant threats.

We found that while indeterminate temporariness created an oppressive experience of time among affected Syrian refugees, B&Z’s entrepreneurship programme acted as a form of ‘sheltering work’ that provided the basis for an alternative, reclaimed experience of time. This sheltering work involved bounding the refugees’ temporal horizon, fostering a local place and structuring their day-to-day activity. Yet, refugees’ reclaimed experience of time did not replace the oppressive one;

instead, the two coexisted in an ongoing uneasy tension, with refugees shifting from one to the other depending on the sense of progress and setbacks with their ventures.

Our findings provide the basis for two main contributions. First, we contribute to the study of institutional work by introducing ‘sheltering work’ as a means through which actors can mitigate the effects of indeterminate temporariness. We show how sheltering work can provide relief from oppressive temporalities by constructing a locally bounded and empowering experience of day-to-day life. More broadly, sheltering work represents a way of reshaping how individuals experience their institutional context: it may provide relatively immediate relief, in contrast to the longer-term processes that might be necessary to dismantle or disrupt oppressive institutions. Second, we contribute to the study of embedded agency by showing how it is tied to the subjective experience of time. Along with elaborating the enabling and constraining impact that individual experiences of time have on agency, we theorize how parallel subjective conceptions of time can empower marginalized individuals.

## Theoretical Background

### *Indeterminate temporariness and experience of time*

Involuntary temporariness is becoming a prevalent and normalized condition for a growing number of people across the world (Chacko & Price, 2021; Latham, Vosko, Preston, & Bretón, 2014). Past research has examined temporariness as both a passing condition (Garsten, 1999) and a permanent state (Bailey, Wright, Mountz, & Miyares, 2002). Yet, for some social groups, temporariness represents an indeterminate experience in which there exists a ‘profoundly uncertain sense of time’ (Griffiths, 2014, p. 2005). Akin to ‘indeterminate liminality’ (Alkhaled & Sasaki, 2021), indeterminate temporariness is characterized by uncertainty concerning continuities and discontinuities, representing neither a passing transitory episode nor a stable context. Whereas liminality describes the suspension of social structures such that people find themselves ‘caught between two states’ (Latham et al., 2014, p. 266), temporariness involves the suspension of ‘normal’ temporal structures such that people’s experience of the present is cut off from an orderly connection to the past and future.

The temporariness experienced by marginalized social groups, such as refugees, asylum seekers and people in precarious work relationships, is rooted in diverse formal and informal institutions, including laws, policies, practices and shared meanings that impose discontinuities on people’s lives and prevent them from establishing and maintaining permanent relationships in the society. These institutions tend to be enforced by powerful actors, including governments and employers, that police it through regular monitoring and more extreme measures, including deportations (Chacko & Price, 2021; Cook-Martín, 2019). Regulatory distinctions associated with temporariness can translate into social and symbolic boundaries that make ‘temporary’ individuals fundamentally different from ‘permanent’ members of society, with restricted rights and resources as well as lower status (Alamgir & Cairns, 2015; Kalleberg, 2009).

Indeterminate temporariness can profoundly affect individuals’ conceptions and experiences of time, or temporality (Bailey et al., 2002; Bourdieu, 2000; Hoy, 2009). In contrast to the modern actors who ‘colonize the future’ to extend their agency (Giddens, 1991), social groups subject to temporariness face radically curtailed agency (Bourdieu, 2000; Tavory & Eliasoph, 2013). The lack of a meaningful future can be profoundly debilitating (Boston, Bruce, & Schreiber, 2011), sapping people’s ability to conceive of themselves as coherent, purposeful agents (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Tavory & Eliasoph, 2013). Without a meaningful future to connect with, the present can lack purpose and meaning (Baumeister, Vohs, & Oettingen, 2016; Markus & Nurius, 1986),

leaving individuals ‘stranded in a meaningless present, an empty, dead time’ (Stewart, 2015, p. 12). Griffiths (2014, p. 1998), for example, describes how an asylum seeker ‘unable to plan or believe in a future’ experienced life as ‘an unproductive, endless present’. More dramatically, Bourdieu (1998, p. 82) argues that chronic uncertainty about the future can lead to ‘the deterioration of the whole relationship to the world, time and space’.

In sum, by denying people security in the present and the ability to plan ahead, indeterminate temporariness can curtail their sense of agency and marginalize them. Organizational research has only recently begun to examine how individuals cope with temporariness through identity work (Alkhaled & Sasaki, 2021; Atkinson, 2013; Petriglieri, Ashford, & Wrzesniewski, 2019), but the literature provides limited insights on ways organizations might alleviate indeterminate temporariness.

### *Local institutional work*

We draw on the concept of institutional work to explore organizational efforts to mitigate the effects of indeterminate temporariness. Research on institutional work examines how individual and collective actors engage in purposeful efforts to shape institutions and the social arrangements that support them (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). The bulk of institutional work research has focused on how actors intentionally create, disrupt and maintain institutions (Lawrence, Leca, & Zilber, 2013), focusing primarily on field-level institutions (Hampel, Lawrence, & Tracey, 2017). However, directly shaping or dismantling the societal causes of indeterminate temporariness may be impossible because they are often rooted in intransigent structures sponsored by powerful actors (Claus & Tracey, 2020; Frey-Heger, Gatzweiler, & Hinings, 2021).

The recent studies of ‘local’ instantiations of broader institutions and more ‘modest’ forms of institutional work that counter, rather than reshape, institutions (Creed, DeJordy, & Lok, 2010; Lawrence & Dover, 2015; Ruebottom & Auster, 2018) can help understand how temporariness may be alleviated. Martí and Fernández (2013, p. 1214), for example, illustrate how small-scale, mundane acts of resistance during the Holocaust ‘nibbled away’ at the effects of oppressive institutions. The possibility of modest forms of institutional work shaping the lived experience of individuals presents an opportunity for exploring the efforts of actors to mitigate rather than eliminate oppressive institutional structures. Thus, the question that guides our study asks how local institutional work can shape people’s experience of indeterminate temporariness and mitigate its pernicious effects.

## **Research Context: Syrian Refugees in Lebanon**

Lebanon was hit hard by the Syrian refugee crisis with approximately 1.5 million Syrian refugees entering Lebanon between 2011 and 2019, eventually constituting roughly 30% of the country’s resident population – the highest number of refugees per capita in the world (UN Refugee Agency [UNHCR] & Government of Lebanon, 2018). The Lebanese government showed little willingness to accommodate the displaced Syrians, but since international law prohibited deportation of refugees to dangerous conditions (Janmyr, 2016), refugees were instead excluded from social and economic life (UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2018).

Unable to deport the refugees, the Lebanese government imposed an indeterminate temporary status on the Syrians – depicting their departure as desirable and imminent, despite the ongoing conflict. Syrians were prohibited from working or investing, as well as from setting up formal refugee camps, even temporarily. The Syrians had no official status as refugees or asylum seekers because Lebanon had never signed the 1951 Refugee Convention or the 1967 Protocol (Dionigi, 2016), and

rejected international calls for integration of Syrian refugees (Janmyr, 2017). Consequently, most refugees lived in informal settlements, primarily in the Bekaa Valley (e.g. Hultin et al., 2022). Others settled into existing Palestinian refugee camps, such as the Shatila and Burj Al-Barajneh camps in Beirut – the sites for this study.

Over time, the response by the state and Lebanese society only hardened. The Lebanese government denied refugees legal residency, curtailing their movement (Human Rights Watch, 2016a). The labour market was largely off limits to Syrians: the state requested Syrians sign notarized pledges not to work in Lebanon and described opening the job market to Syrian refugees as neither ‘possible’ nor ‘appropriate’ (Armstrong, 2016; Haboush, 2018). These regulations effectively barred refugees from building a legitimate future in Lebanon, ‘making life impossible for them’ and ‘pushing them underground’ (Human Rights Watch, 2016b).

The temporariness that marked Syrian refugees’ lives was accentuated by constant threats of evictions and deportation orders (Frangieh, 2017). These episodic evictions created widespread fear and a growing sense of insecurity among Syrian refugees who expect to be forced out of the country at any moment (Shawaf & El Asmar, 2017; UNHCR, 2015). They faced a choice – to return to a ‘broken [and] unsafe’ country or remain in ‘a place that does not want them’ (Reidy, 2018).

### ***Basmeh & Zeitooneh***

In the absence of state support for the refugees, local NGOs stepped in. They developed practices and informal infrastructures to help refugees, while operating under the assumption that the Syrians’ stay in Lebanon was temporary. As one policy expert noted: ‘Even the refugees’ advocates aren’t calling for their long-term integration into Lebanese society. . . . We’re just saying, “Support them until they go back”’ (Reidy, 2018).

Basmeh & Zeitooneh (B&Z) was one such NGO. B&Z was founded in 2012 as a relief organization distributing food and clothes, and gradually expanded its services to include livelihood programmes. As one area manager recounted: ‘We did not know when the crisis would end, and the government response was inappropriate’ (interview, May 2017). Our study focuses on B&Z’s ‘Small Grants Program’, an entrepreneurial training programme helping refugees set up small businesses so they could ‘provide for themselves over the longer term and reduce their dependency on aid agencies’ (B&Z website). Programme participants received entrepreneurship training that qualified them to apply for a small business start-up grant from the organization.

We focused on the organization’s work to alleviate the suffering of refugees in the Shatila and Burj Al-Barajneh refugee camps in the southern suburbs of Beirut. While the camps were established in response to the influx of Palestinian refugees in 1948–49, they started attracting large numbers of Syrian refugees in 2011. The camps were severely overcrowded, lacked basic infrastructure, and exposed inhabitants to environmental health hazards (Al-Audhali, 2019). They were known as ‘lawless zone[s] that Lebanese security forces generally abstain from entering’ (Reidy, 2018). The former manager of the programme explained:

We are at the heart of the Shatila camp, a place where very few NGOs were able to settle. We hear horrific stories here every day. B&Z entered this camp at a time when no one was even trying. They took multiple risks in terms of security. There’s a legal vacuum at the camp. (interview, May 2017)

### **Methods**

We adopted an inductive, qualitative approach to explore how B&Z worked to counter the effects of indeterminate temporariness on Syrian refugees.

## Data collection

The study builds on multiple rounds of data collection, each of which incorporated interviews, observations and document collection. Table 1 provides an overview of our data. The first author acted as the field researcher, collecting the interview and observational data during four visits in December 2016, May 2017, October 2017 and July 2019.

**Interviews.** Our primary data source is 109 interviews with 95 different informants. These included: societal actors – founders of local NGOs and members of international NGOs (10); B&Z members involved in designing, implementing and managing the Small Grants Program (16); and Syrian refugees (83 interviews with 69 individuals). Informants' names have been changed to maintain anonymity.

To understand refugees' experiences of temporariness in Lebanon and their engagement in B&Z's programme, we adopted continuum sampling, a purposeful strategy to collect data along the whole spectrum of variance (Patton, 2015, pp. 281–282); in our case, this meant interviewing refugees at various stages of involvement in the Small Grants Program. We interviewed nine individuals undergoing the training programme, 30 individuals who had completed it but not yet received a grant, and 13 refugees who had received the grant and set up their small business, as well as 5 refugees who were not associated with the programme. We conducted follow-up interviews with 14 refugees to gain insights into their evolving interpretations and experiences and trace the development of their entrepreneurial projects.

These interviews were conducted in three rounds: in May 2017, October 2017 and July 2019. In the first round, interviewees were chosen with the help of B&Z. We also held informal conversations with community members in the context of B&Z's training. In the second and third rounds, we selected informants independently of B&Z to avoid potential bias.

All interviews were conducted in Arabic, and followed the established practices for non-invasive, culturally sensitive, ethical interviewing (Eastmond, 2007; Pittaway, Bartolomei, & Hugman, 2010). The interviews typically lasted between 30 and 90 minutes and were all recorded and transcribed. The first author's familiarity with Syrian culture and idioms helped us attend to and interpret stories and cultural references and reduced the risk of engaging with culturally insensitive topics.

**Observation.** We conducted 14 days of observations during four field trips. The first exploratory trip, in December 2016, included visits to informal settlements in the Bekaa Valley, which provided an initial understanding of the local reality of refugees. The following three visits were to the Shatila and Burj Al-Barajneh camps in Beirut and focused on B&Z's community centres. These visits allowed us to observe the entrepreneurial training, refugees' interactions at B&Z's community centres, and newly founded small businesses at the camps. The harsh conditions at the Shatila and Burj Al-Barajneh camps, with rubble and garbage piles, dangling electric cables, and young men armed with assault rifles, were initially shocking to the field researcher. Visiting the community centres and attending the training provided a contrasting environment and mood where people were optimistic and cheerful.

**Documents.** We also gathered a range of documents, including national and international newspaper articles (e.g. *The Daily Star*, *Annahar*, *Al Diyar*, *Al Jazeera*), social media posts, reports by various NGOs and governmental entities (e.g. Legal Agenda, UNHCR, Human Rights Watch, European Commission, Norwegian Refugee Council) and B&Z materials. These documents enabled us to trace public discourse relating to Syrian refugees and develop a historically grounded understanding of their situation. The B&Z annual reports, market assessment reports and programme materials helped us understand the organization's activities and triangulate our interview data. Documentary data comprised more than 1700 pages in total.



**Table 1.** Data inventory.

Interviews		Observation		Archival documents	
Interviews at the societal level	Number	Site	Days	Key documents	Pages
International NGOs	5	Informal settlements, Bekaa Valley	2	National NGO reports	~150
Field experts: social worker, NGO founder, municipality representative, area coordinator, researcher	5	Shatila Camp businesses	1	Local and international NGOs (UNICEF, UNHCR, Human Rights Watch, Norwegian Refugee Council)	~700
<b>Interviews at B&amp;Z</b>					
Trainers	4	Burj Camp businesses	1	National governmental and legal reports	~150
		B&Z community centres	8	Press coverage	~400
Small Grants Program informants	7	B&Z training sessions	2	B&Z data: market assessments, livelihood studies, annual reports, social media	~300
B&Z managers	5				
<b>Interviews with refugees</b>					
Refugees not involved with B&Z	12				
Beneficiaries not involved with the Small Grants Program	5				
Beneficiaries undergoing training	9				
Beneficiaries who completed the training, awaiting grant decision	30				
Beneficiaries who received the grant and set up their businesses	13				
Follow-up interviews	14				
<b>Total</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>Observation days</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>Archival document pages</b>	<b>~1700</b>
<b>Interviews</b>					

## Data analysis

To analyse the data, we adopted a grounded theory-building approach (Spradley, 1979). Throughout the analysis, we went back and forth between analysing the data, developing theoretical constructs and connecting with relevant literature (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013).

We started by open coding our data with the aim of developing an initial set of concepts. We used Atlas.ti to systematically code our data, labelling terms and phrases to yield first-order codes. This initial coding focused on organizational activities and their intended effects, as well as refugees' accounts and experiences of these activities.

To understand B&Z's activities, we used interviews with B&Z members and programme participants, fieldnotes from observations at B&Z's community centre, and internal documents and social media posts, with particular focus on the Small Grants Program. This analysis surfaced a set of tools that the organization used as part of the entrepreneurial training, such as Gantt charts and Swot analysis. It also led us to identify various codes related to B&Z's efforts to shape refugees' day-to-day experience, including 'focus on reasonable plans', 'focus on the next six months', 'start now' and 'schedule daily tasks'.

We further analysed refugees' accounts by focusing primarily on interview data and fieldnotes, to better understand how they experienced and made sense of their situation (Patton, 2015, p. 573). As we went back and forth between the data, emerging codes and the literature, we sought to establish a reliable, triangulated account detailing how B&Z's practices shaped the refugees' 'qualitative and subjective experience of time' (Reinecke & Ansari, 2017, p. 413). Our initial set of first-order codes exhibited both strongly negative and positive perceptions of the present situation and future. We identified negative statements such as 'Tomorrow doesn't even exist for me; we only think of the day-to-day and I have no idea what will happen tomorrow' and 'I sit around waiting for something to happen', as well as contrasting positive statements such as 'The training and the grant application were filling my time; I felt that I suddenly had a purpose.'

Next, we sought to identify relationships between and among our first-order codes to group them into second-order categories. In the final stage of the analysis, we abstracted these second-order themes into five overarching theoretical dimensions that formed the basis of our theoretical model (Corbin & Strauss, 2014).

We worked to increase the trustworthiness of our analyses (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in two main ways. First, to confirm and improve the accuracy of our interpretations, we discussed emerging findings with our informants in the last round of interviews and sent a condensed version of our descriptive findings to B&Z's management. Second, we regularly compared alternative coding choices and examined possible refinements to the coding scheme. Disagreements over codes served to identify areas that required further data collection or re-conceptualizing key constructs.

## Sheltering Work to Mitigate the Effects of Temporariness

We present our findings in six subsections. The first describes how indeterminate temporariness led to an oppressive experience of time among affected refugees. The next three subsections document B&Z's efforts to counter the effects of temporariness through the Small Grants Program that facilitated small-scale entrepreneurship. We describe how B&Z sought to bound the temporal horizons of Syrian refugees, foster a local place and structure their daily lives. In the fifth subsection, we describe how B&Z's efforts helped instil a reclaimed experience of time. In the final subsection, we describe the limits of sheltering work, showing how it did not completely displace the effects of temporariness, but instead provided refugees with a parallel, competing experience of time.



## *Effects of indeterminate temporariness: An oppressive experience of time*

Temporariness dramatically shaped Syrian refugees' temporality, leaving them with an oppressive experience of time that involved a bleak, uncertain future and an empty, meaningless present.

**Bleak uncertain future.** The refugees we interviewed described their futures in Lebanon in negative terms, as uncertain, scary and unstable. Zainab, for instance, told us:

There is no stability whatsoever. It's been four years since I arrived here. . . . I thought I would have a better life, but I was shocked. I struggled to see what was ahead, how my life would unfold. (interview, July 2019)

The refugees consistently emphasized living with arbitrary, impending threats – of evictions, detention or deportation back to Syria, where war was still raging and they could be conscripted into the army, imprisoned, tortured or even killed. One Syrian refugee told a journalist: 'I am expecting to be forced to leave the country at any moment, but the only place I could go is Syria, and the second I cross the border I will be arrested or shot' (Alabaster, 2016).

Our informants frequently talked about their inability to influence their futures in Lebanon. Omar, who lives in a settlement in the Bekaa Valley, described it this way:

Normally, you would look into the future and think I need to improve my situation and be in a better position. But our situation here does not allow us to think of tomorrow. Tomorrow doesn't even exist for me. (interview, December 2016)

**Empty meaningless present.** Refugees recounted negative experiences of the present, particularly prior to participating in the Small Grants program. Oumayma, who ran a rental shop for bridal dresses, recalled: 'before the training, I was sitting at home all day, wondering when things would improve' (interview, October 2017). Ilham echoed the sentiment:

It gets to you. Without anything to do, you are on the verge of falling apart. You start asking yourself if life under rockets [amid the Syrian civil war] is not better than just waiting and not doing anything at all. (interview, May 2017)

This sense of meaninglessness was connected to the temporariness imposed by the institutional context; without a stable and predictable existence, many informants were unable to give meaning to the present moment or to take meaningful actions. Safia, who was finishing the training, described the collective experience of Syrian refugees: 'We were all passive, unable to apply our minds to anything, unable to think one step ahead' (July 2019).

Next, we document B&Z's efforts to support Syrian refugees and help them escape the grip of apathy and lack of future. In the context of the Small Grants Program, B&Z engaged in three forms of sheltering work.

### *Sheltering work 1: Bounding the temporal horizon*

The first form of sheltering work involved redefining the temporal horizon for refugees in an effort to focus their attention on the near future and to cushion them from unexpected events. This work created a more plausible way forward and helped bracket the threats associated with indeterminate temporariness. B&Z's officers were cognizant of the inherent uncertainty and temporariness that the context imposed on the Syrian refugees:

They're looking at their stay here in Lebanon as a transitory phase. They don't know if they're going back home or they're just waiting for resettlement in another country. It gets in the way of making any effort into investing or making any sustainable or long-term investment. (interview, May 2017)

***Orienting towards proximate feasible goals.*** B&Z officers worked to help refugees construct short-term goals that would be feasible within the confines of their lives in the camp. One trainer explained: 'We will not follow you for years, so you need to have a sturdy and reasonable plan' (interview, July 2019). Another officer noted:

We cannot make any long-term promises. But what we can do is empower these individuals and these community members and groups, as long as they are here, so that they can take care of their families on their own because we are not sure how long we're going to stay here. (interview, May 2017)

B&Z trainers directed refugees to pursue proximate goals by showing them how to develop concrete, relatively short-term plans, for example by using Gantt charts to set monthly goals. One trainer explained: 'We get them to think about the next six months because this is a more certain horizon' (interview, July 2019).

This emphasis on the near future was echoed in the accounts of refugees. Malak explained:

B&Z trainers encouraged us to make estimates for the next six months. I am planning to set up a home-based shop for now. . . After six months, if sales pick up, I will start looking for a shop in the camp. (interview, July 2019)

Zainab elaborated how a short-term focus motivated her: 'I don't know if I am still going to be here in a year, or two. This is why I need to act now and build something' (interview, July 2019).

Informants also described how the training pushed them to focus on concrete and feasible goals. Hiba explained how the trainer helped her rescale her ambitions: 'He asked me, "what is your business idea, clothes for men, for women, for children?". . . I said, "I want everything" so he told me not to do this [. . .] and he was right [. . .] and I focused on getting exactly what less privileged people in the camp might need' (interview, May 2017).

***Fostering adaptability and preparedness.*** The trainers further sought to bound the refugees' temporal horizons by fostering flexibility and preparedness to adapt their business ideas to unexpected events. As Aida put it:

The teacher explained that in case of failure we can think of another idea to support our existing business. For example, I want to set up a sewing business. If it doesn't work immediately, he suggested I purchase ready-made children's clothes and start selling them until sewing takes off. (interview, July 2019)

Similarly, Ilham, a participant in the programme, described how participants were trained 'to be prepared to deal with unexpected things. Like if there were any threats to our project, or any issues in terms of accounting or budgeting. I felt that the training provided good tools to deal with the unexpected' (interview, May 2017).

To instil flexibility and increase participants' faith in their short-term goals, the trainers invited alumni of the Small Grants Program to meet with them. This made more concrete the possibility of positive entrepreneurial outcomes:

We brought people from the previous round who succeeded. . . . They talked about how they were able to withstand potential threats and cope with their reality and how their businesses endured . . . I feel this was

really useful because it gave the participants hope that if they pursue their goals, they might also succeed. (interview, B&Z trainer, July 2019)

The shorter planning horizon and attention paid to different contingencies were meant to provide refugees with confidence to pursue their goals and combat apathy and hopelessness by envisioning and working to improve the immediate future.

### *Sheltering work 2: Fostering a local place*

We noted, somewhat unexpectedly, that sheltering work mitigated temporariness in part by constructing the informal refugee camp as a stable and welcoming place for the refugees. B&Z worked to confine refugees' activities to the insulated social and spatial context of the refugee camp, minimizing their interactions with the mainstream society that could accentuate the unpredictability associated with the refugees' indeterminate temporariness.

*Repurposing spatial boundaries.* B&Z worked to construct the camps as sites where refugees could engage in entrepreneurial activities that had been officially prohibited. The camps where B&Z operates are unofficial and informal spaces that Lebanese security forces and police do not enter (Cornish, 2018). A law trainer explained:

The regulations are the same everywhere, but the difference is they are largely ignored and barely enforced in the camps. The camp is effectively acting as a shelter for undocumented individuals because security forces [. . .] do not enter the camp. (interview, July 2019)

B&Z worked to establish the camps as predictable and supportive economic contexts for refugee entrepreneurship. Prior to each round of the Small Grants Program, B&Z conducted market assessments to form a better understanding of the business context in the camps and identify potential unmet needs as well as business ideas to avoid (e.g. Burj El Barajneh Market Assessment, February 2019). A former manager explained:

We think a lot about the community and how we can contribute to it. So, we buy the material for every new business from within the camp. We don't buy outside the camp. By this we contribute to the local economy. All businesses should open inside the camp and all the material should be purchased from shops inside the camp. (interview, May 2017)

B&Z encouraged programme participants to locate their businesses inside the camps. Safia, for example, described how the trainer instructed her to reject her initial ideas and instead 'focus on the project you will develop here in the camp' (July 2019). This was aimed at minimizing refugees' exposure to unpredictable problems. Although the camps were somewhat unsafe environments, they provided the refugees with a relative sense of predictability. Faisal, who was finishing the training, told us: 'If your work is inside the camp, you're fine. [. . .] You live in the camp, you work in the camp, there's no need to go outside and put yourself at risk of getting arrested or deported' (July 2019).

Repurposing spatial boundaries helped construe the camp as a safe site for entrepreneurial activity. Keeping these activities within the camp, outside the view of the authorities, helped shield the refugees from the threats of the institutional context and increased their confidence in their short-term goals.

*Embedding in a local community.* B&Z sought to turn the camp into a supportive social context for the refugees. The organization ran a community centre that provided diverse services and served as

a social space. It connected people and facilitated the formation of social ties through the training programme, thus reshaping their day-to-day experience. As a trainer explained: ‘When we started the training, most participants were really struggling . . . We explain to them that the only way forward is to start building ties in their new environment’ (interview, October 2017).

The Small Grants Program was deliberately designed to give the participants ‘a sense of community and belonging that can be elusive to many people displaced in Lebanon’ (B&Z website, January 2015). One programme manager noted:

The training opens up new interaction opportunities for participants. It does not only provide new skills but also the opportunity to meet new people, build relationships, become more interactive with the society. (interview, October 2017)

Social relationships were instrumental in building in-group solidarity in the face of adversity. As one programme manager emphasized: ‘Them being together, it created this [positive] environment. They are all of the same background, facing the same situation. They are going through similar things, so they connected, and it was a beneficial environment for them’ (interview, July 2019). Many informants expressed how building social relationships helped them overcome the prolonged apathy they experienced before enrolling in the Small Grants Program. Nisrine, for example, explained that:

I started building social relationships at the workshop. The workshop felt like my second home. I come here a lot, there’s a great positive energy, lots of laughter, and joking around, but also sharing our sorrows. I used to come every day for two hours and take the embroidery piece with me back home to finish it. Initially I did not know anybody and I really felt like a stranger. Now I know everyone. (interview, May 2017)

While repurposing spatial boundaries confined refugees’ activities to a safe self-contained place, embedding them in a community helped cultivate a sense of belonging that enhanced meaning in their day-to-day lives. Together, these practices helped keep out disruptive events and uncertainties, and provided a container for stable relationships and activities within familiar places, thus reshaping refugees’ experience of the present and the future.

### *Sheltering work 3: Structuring day-to-day activity*

The third form of sheltering work involved providing refugees with regular, meaningful activity to fill their everyday present: this included cultivating routines to structure their day-to-day lives and plotting incremental steps.

*Cultivating daily routines.* B&Z organized diverse regular activities that filled refugees’ daily schedules, including recurring training events that refugees looked forward to. Aya explained:

The training structured my time. I started telling myself: tomorrow I have a session in the morning, therefore I need to anticipate dinner. . . . I go to the training, I make sure my daughter is safe at home and when I finish the training, I pick up the water and the bread and then go back to my family. (interview, July 2019)

Nahed echoed this sentiment, describing how structured routines helped her combat the grip of idleness and the feeling of ‘waiting for things’ to happen:

They taught us how to organize our lives. I had no established routines. It was a bit random and chaotic. I started better organizing my routines, scheduling my time, and better planning ahead for the future. This is something that I wasn't aware of before the training. Until we are able to return, we cannot be just refugees waiting for things to happen, counting the days and regretting the past. (interview, May 2017)

The regimen of events and schedules countered refugees' apathy and directed their focus to the here and now. A law teacher noted: 'We are here to support them and get them out of the negative atmosphere they live in' (interview, July 2019). Another officer reflected: 'The feedback we hear all the time is that now. . . I'm happy because I'm doing something, I'm waking up in the morning and I have something to do, to go to' (interview, May 2017).

*Plotting incremental steps.* B&Z promoted gradual accomplishments, tying day-to-day activities together in support of future goals, 'one step after another, one day at a time' (interview, B&Z trainer, October 2017). The emphasis on gradual steps and regular progress was embedded in the structure of the Small Grants Program. All participants went through a predetermined sequence of activities and milestones, including a fixed schedule of compulsory training sessions, grant application submissions, graduation ceremonies and application decisions. Participants were required to develop a timeline for setting up their businesses, including finding a suitable location and purchasing materials with the help of B&Z. After receiving the grant, participants could expect regular check-up visits after three, six and 12 months.

B&Z consistently celebrated the achievements of participants in order to highlight their steps forward. For example, Hanadi proudly shared with us a photo of her degree, explaining how this inspired and motivated her to pursue her activities. In the classroom, the trainers guided refugees' focus towards small wins and everyday progress.

Interviews with refugees showed how they conceived their projects in terms of incremental steps. Warda, for example, told us:

Now I will get the grant and purchase my own sewing machine, and then I can probably think of getting another machine. And get somebody to help me with running the business. Maybe a third person as well. Little by little, one step at a time. (interview, July 2019)

Similarly, Khalaf explained: 'I will start small and buy one tile polisher with the grant, and then see where I can go from there, how many customers I will have' (interview, July 2019).

While cultivating daily routines helped infuse everyday activities with meaning and structure, plotting incremental steps was meant to create a sense of progress and continuity between present experience and the future. Together, these practices contributed to reshaping the way refugees experienced their present and the immediate future.

### *Effects of sheltering work: A reclaimed experience of time*

The sheltering work of B&Z significantly reshaped the refugees' lived experience of time. Although it did not rid the refugees of uncertainty, it offered a distinctive 'reclaimed experience of time': a sense of control over the near future and a meaningful and extended present. Rather than reviving the past, a reclaimed experience of time involves regaining an agentic relationship to time under adverse conditions.

*Sense of control over the near future.* Participants described how receiving training and small grants helped them construct a positive future they could influence, despite the uncertainty they faced.

They talked about their projects in hopeful terms, detailing steps to be taken and mistakes to be avoided. These hopeful accounts of the future often referred to B&Z's activities. Aida, who was about to start a tailoring business, told us:

The training changed my life. Before that, I was depressed, stuck at home with my sick daughter and isolated. [ . . . ] Now it's different. I think of tomorrow, and the day after, and six months from now. [ . . . ] I want to grow my project and expand it. I don't want to be just a tailor, but eventually work with a group of tailors, and create a sewing workshop where I can hire four or five tailors [ . . . ] I want my customers to find everything they need in my shop in terms of fabrics and canvas and become loyal. [ . . . ] the project gave me great hope in life. (interview, July 2019)

Salma explained how B&Z instilled a 'newfound hope that things could turn around'. She was feeling 'totally depressed, broken, and desperate' before she applied for the grant and was looking forward to setting up her shoes and leather accessories shop upon receiving it (interview, May 2017). Shamsa, who runs a detergent and cleaning products business, explained how before the grant, she was feeling trapped. In her own words, 'All we could provide for our 7 children was just food and water. Nothing else. [ . . . ] I got very ambitious thinking if I set up my own business, I can do more for my children [ . . . ] So I got really enthusiastic about the project and the prospect of being able to offer my children a better life. (interview, May 2017).

Refugees' accounts show the potentially dramatic impact of B&Z's programmes on their relationship to the future. A proximate, improved future that actors felt they could, at least partly, control was not just as an abstract idea; it was vividly experienced as a concrete reality.

*Meaningful and extended present.* A reclaimed temporality also involved a revised experience of the present as meaningful and extending towards the future. Informants described how following the training and plans they developed kept them busy and engaged in thinking about their ventures. Refugees gained a sense of busyness from the structured activities and schedules imposed by B&Z. Zahira explained:

The training and project keep you busy and you tend to think less of your issues and struggles. They help change your mood and mindset. You start thinking more about how you will move forward, how to expand, and change things, how you will become productive. It keeps you busy. (interview, July 2019)

Interviewees contrasted their meaningful present fostered by B&Z's training with the empty time prior to the training. Khaira, a grant applicant, explained: 'The training and the grant application were filling my time. I felt that I suddenly had a purpose' (interview, May 2017). Faisal, who was eager to receive a grant to set up his dairy products business, told us:

It feels like a different life. You feel you are doing something meaningful, that you are productive. [ . . . ] I really dislike being idle with nothing to do. Now there's movement, there's life, there's interaction. . . . I had to do a market study, find out supplier prices, it's a different life. (interview, July 2019)

While interviewees acknowledged the constant threats and uncertainty, participation in the B&Z training seemed to loosen the grip of temporariness. Faisal further explained: 'I don't necessarily feel much pressure, I am coping, and I am looking forward to starting the business and working' (interview, July 2019).

Refugees' sense of control over the near future and their experience of a meaningful present reinforced each other. Aida's account illustrates how the positive future gave purpose to her day to day:



The two months of the training have made me feel stability that I had not experienced for three years since I got here. . . Day and night when I don't have anything to do, I start planning and thinking, how I will get the sewing machines, how I will arrange the shop, I think of the customers, I look at YouTube videos of the latest trends. . . I think of it day in, day out.' (interview, July 2019)

Naila, who runs a home-based spice business, described how meaningful participation in the training programme helped her project a positive future:

The training gave me confidence in the steps I laid out for my project . . . it taught me that no matter how solid and promising my project looks now, it will become even more solid . . . and I will start thinking of the longer term. (interview, October 2017)

For these refugees, the present activities were leading meaningfully to a plausible future: the focus on a more concrete and credible future shaped their present pursuits, which in turn, reinforced their ability to imagine better futures.

### *The limits of sheltering work*

Despite the relief that sheltering work provided in the face of indeterminate temporariness, it was no panacea for the refugees. The refugees remained deeply affected by indeterminate temporariness, with most informants describing both oppressive and reclaimed experiences of time, and sometimes shifting between the two within a single interview. We also observed differences in the effectiveness of sheltering work, evident in informants' relative emphasis on oppressive and reclaimed experiences of time.

*Coexisting temporalities.* We observed refugees move back and forth between oppressive and reclaimed experiences of time. To illustrate these shifts, we describe our interactions with Safwan, a Syrian refugee who escaped from Syria in 2013 with his wife and daughters. When we interviewed him in July 2019, he had just finished three months of business training.

Discussing the institutional context and his life in Lebanon more broadly, Safwan emphasized uncertainty and a lack of control over his future:

I feel threatened all the time. I feel that any minute, I can get arrested and not go back home to my family. So, when I go out, I try to be alone, because if anything happens to me, then at least my wife is safe home with the kids. [. . .] We were forced to leave Syria, I really wasn't planning on coming to Lebanon and I don't want to settle here. . . . I have expertise in curtain tailoring and stitching. Yet, I have not installed curtains in my own apartment. Why invest in my apartment if I am at risk of deportation any second? (interview, July 2019)

Safwan repeatedly expressed his wish to resettle in Europe. He told us how his 10-year-old daughter had asked him, 'Dad, could we go to a different country? Like my aunt did? If we make it, we make it, if we don't then at least we have tried.'

In contrast, when Safwan talked about the Small Grants Program and his own venture, he provided a markedly more positive account of his experience of time:

I heard about B&Z's grants, and I thought this is my chance to improve my life and start my own business based on my own expertise. So, I applied and they called me and said that I was accepted in the program. [. . .] Until the last minute I couldn't believe that I was accepted in the program, it felt like a dream come true. (interview, July 2019)

In the same interview, Safwan's account of his application to and acceptance into the programme prompted a satisfied, optimistic description of the present and future:

I have become an expert. . . . The most useful thing they taught us was how to plan ahead and pursue our goals. You cannot just receive the grant and expect things to happen. The grant sets the project in motion. Once you receive it you need to start thinking ahead, making adjustments, expanding, and use it to create something big. I want the business to be durable. I want to build something sturdy and worthy of the teachers' efforts. (interview, July 2019)

Safwan's shifts between descriptions of oppressive and reclaimed temporalities exemplify how B&Z was unable to rid refugees of the effects of temporariness but succeeded in providing them with an alternative conception of their present situation and possible futures.

*Variation in the effectiveness of sheltering work.* We also observed variation in the effectiveness of sheltering work across informants, often related to their involvement in training and the status of their ventures. Analysing the variation across individuals, we observed the sense of progress or lack thereof to shape the relative prevalence of oppressive and reclaimed temporalities. Refugees in the training programme or running a successful business tended to express reclaimed experiences of time and a sense of progress. In contrast, those who had gone through the training but struggled because of setbacks and disruptions were the most likely to express oppressive experiences and a sense of stagnation.

Experiences of a meaningful present and a sense of control over the near future were most consistently emphasized by those who had received a grant from B&Z and succeeded in setting up their businesses. For these refugees, the hopeful outlook seemed to derive from the feeling of 'movement', the present was leading to a better future. Occasionally, though rarely, a positive present seemed to completely erase thoughts of a bleak future, as in Khaira's case:

I have settled here, I have my kiosk, I also do embroidery work in the women's workshop and I am following a vocational food training three times a week. I don't consider myself a refugee here, I consider myself like any other person in this country because I am not dependent on anyone. (interview, October 2017)

In contrast, refugees who faced setbacks and disruptions, including concerns related to violence and safety in the camp, health issues, arbitrary arrests, and setbacks in their ventures, tended to emphasize oppressive temporalities. Any deviation from the projected improvements in their standing could trigger the experience of emptiness and purposelessness and create disillusionment in their future plans. For these people, the improvements envisioned in the immediate future failed to materialize and remained disconnected from the present reality; and the sense that the present was slowly improving was compromised.

This dynamic is illustrated by our interviews with Hiba: in our first interview in May 2017, she explained that after receiving a grant from B&Z to open a clothing shop, she was 'full of hope. It was a new chapter in our life,' and used the grant to stock her shop with clothes. Soon, however, she realized that her shop 'lacked most of the items customers were looking for' and she had no resources to expand:

I felt totally deflated. I started thinking that the whole initiative was a failure and told my husband maybe we should close down the shop. There were some dreadful weeks when we did not sell enough and were not able to make ends meet. It was depressing. (interview, May 2017)

In a follow-up interview, we learned that Hiba had experienced roadblocks that forced her to close the shop and start a home-based clothing business that was also struggling:

The shop was in a risky neighborhood – guns and drugs. After the Eid, somebody got shot. . . two people died and two are in the hospital. We closed the shop. . . and my husband got all his papers stolen. The police did not want to hear about it so they just issued a deportation order against him. . . . We are all so frustrated because it's not his fault his papers were stolen. So now he has until the end of this month. . . . When the shop was running at some point, I was more confident and independent. I did not worry about whether I would have enough money the next day or not. I did not worry about debt. . . . Now it's been difficult since the shop closed down and I moved to a home-based business . . . I have no more ambition here. (interview, October 2017)

Our interviews with Hanadi echo a similar sense of broken progress. Hanadi was full of 'hope' and 'enthusiasm' when she received her grant. Eager to set up her home-based business of making and selling small decorative rugs, she bought all the rug materials including wool, cotton and fibers. While her venture helped her 'escape the difficult reality' and focus on potential improvements in the immediate future, the day-to-day struggles and unexpected disruptions soon took over and Hanadi felt hopeless again. She explained: 'My husband was detained for working in a bakery, they fined him over lack of papers. . . since then it has been very difficult' (interview, October 2017).

Looking across the differences within and among individuals' lived experiences of time refines our understanding of sheltering work in response to indeterminate temporariness. B&Z did not disrupt or dismantle the institutional structures imposing temporariness and oppressive temporalities; instead, the organization sheltered refugees from these negative effects by fostering an alternative, reclaimed temporality. This alternative temporality was, however, only an offering: it did not overwhelm or replace the oppressive temporality, but rather coexisted with it in the lived experience of individuals.

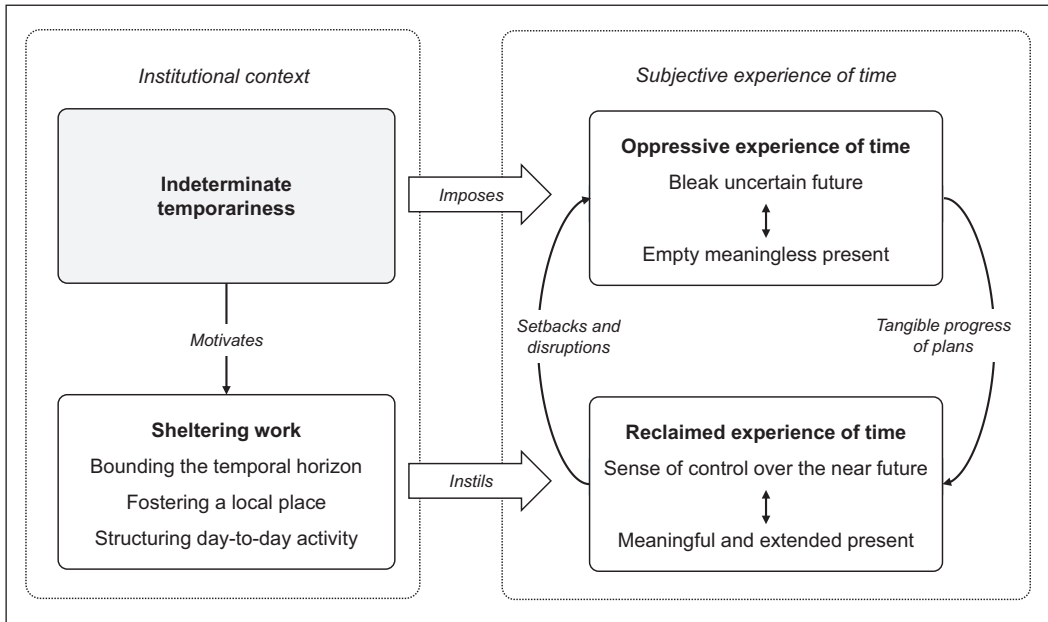
## Discussion

The work of B&Z provides an enlightening and encouraging illustration of how local institutional work can shape people's experience of temporariness and potentially mitigate its effects. We draw on this study to first propose a grounded model of sheltering work in response to indeterminate temporariness and then explore its implications for research on institutional work and the relationship between embedded agency and the subjective experience of time.

### *A model of sheltering work in response to indeterminate temporariness*

Our study suggests that sheltering work responds to indeterminate temporariness not by disrupting its effects but by providing an alternative reclaimed experience of time that is likely to exist in an ongoing state of tension with the oppressive experience of time (see Figure 1). Indeterminate temporariness induces an oppressive experience of time, characterized in our study by an uncertain, bleak future and an empty, meaningless present. Sheltering work, in contrast, instils a reclaimed experience of time, constituted in our study by a sense of control over the near future and a meaningful, extended present.

Figure 1 highlights two key dynamics. First, sheltering work operates at the local level by shaping individuals' subjective experiences rather than the institutional structures underpinning indeterminate temporariness. Consequently, our model does not 'resolve' in the way many process models of institutional work do, where efforts to create or disrupt institutions result in institutional change



**Figure 1.** A Model of Sheltering Work in Response to Indeterminate Temporariness.

(e.g. Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). Second, and relatedly, reclaimed and oppressive experiences of time coexist in an uneasy tension in the minds of affected individuals. A reclaimed experience of time is undermined by setbacks and disruptions that interfere with a sense of progress and control, forming a rift between the present and projected futures and thus foregrounding the oppressive temporality (depicted by the curved upward arrow in Figure 1). In contrast, tangible progress on individuals' projects engenders a more positive sense of the future and present, reducing the salience of the oppressive experience of time (depicted by the curved downward arrow in Figure 1).

### Sheltering work

We identified 'sheltering work' as a key strategy to counter the pernicious effects of indeterminate temporariness. Sheltering work represents a form of institutional work that establishes local conditions that shield individuals and communities, at least partially, from the oppressive effects of institutions. Sheltering work thus enriches existing conceptions of institutional work, which have focused primarily on creating, maintaining and disrupting societal or field-level institutions (Hampel et al., 2017) and contributes to recent interest in the potential for actors to shape how other individuals experience their institutional context (Creed et al., 2010; Lawrence & Dover, 2015; Ruebottom & Auster, 2018).

The first form of sheltering work involves efforts to bound the temporal horizon to enable a social group to construct a more controllable and predictable future. Temporal bounding helps individuals faced with indeterminate temporariness 'rescale their goals toward more a feasible range' (Mische, 2009, p. 700) and avoid escaping to 'fantastical' projects that tend to induce passivity rather than motivation (Oettingen, 2012). In our context, B&Z worked to orient the refugees towards proximate goals and foster adaptability and preparedness, thus providing them with an improved sense of control over their near future. Orienting towards proximate goals enabled

the refugees to construct more feasible personal projects. The development of contingency plans aimed to mitigate the social group's vulnerability to uncontrollable disruptions. These efforts worked to contract the time horizon of the refugees, shielding them from long-term uncertainties. The dynamics associated with this form of sheltering work resonate with prior observations that a short-term focus can help marginalized groups avoid the paralysing trade-offs associated with long-term planning in unpredictable and resource-constrained contexts (Kim, Bansal, & Haugh, 2019).

The second form of sheltering work involves the construction of local physical and social places that embed groups in familiar surroundings, interactions and social reality. Local places mediate the effects of societal and field-level institutions (Lawrence & Dover, 2015) and thus provide a powerful means to shape how individuals experience their institutional contexts. In our study, the contained physical place shielded the refugees' entrepreneurial activity from disruptions and discontinuities emanating from outside the camp and thus made the immediate future appear more predictable. The camp as a social place facilitated social ties, shared sensemaking and even moments of fun, thus contributing to a more benign experience of the present.

These observations point to a somewhat surprising role that local places can play in shaping individuals' experience of time. By insulating individuals from the societal context and containing their experiences within familiar spaces, local places support a more bounded and meaningful experience of time that is disconnected from broader uncertainties. The potential significance of local places in institutional work has been highlighted by concepts such as 'bubbles of freedom' (Rodner, Roulet, Kerrigan, & vom Lehn, 2019) and 'free spaces' (Rao & Dutta, 2012) that enable actors to form networks and accumulate resources needed for collective action and institutional change (see also Lawrence & Dover, 2015). Our study complements these observations by showing how local places and their contained temporality can shield actors from the oppressive institutional context and help them cope with, rather than change, their situation.

The third form of sheltering work is focused on structuring the local day-to-day activities of a social group to shape their experience of the present. It involves the formation of temporal structures that create predictability and familiarity (Orlikowski & Yates, 2002) and thereby bolster the meaningfulness of the present. Structuring addresses the debilitating void of meaningful activities and the discontinuity between the present and the future associated with temporariness (Goffman, 1961; Stewart, 2015). Such structuring helps actors establish a 'long present' (Kim et al., 2019), where the current moment expands to the immediate future and beyond. In our context, this was achieved by cultivating daily routines and plotting incremental steps. Recurring routines can offset the arbitrariness of temporary existence by helping people anticipate their immediate future through a process called protention (Tavory & Eliasoph, 2013). Plotting incremental steps helps connect the actors' present situation with realistic goals in the immediate future. Together, routines and incremental steps create an energizing sense of 'busyness' or 'fullness' of the present.

While our emphasis has been on identifying how each form of sheltering work contributes to reshaping individuals' experience of time, their effects appear to be mutually supportive. The first form of sheltering work – bounding the temporal horizon – enhances individuals' sense of control by focusing their attention on the near future and also makes the present more tractable and filled with meaningful pursuits of short-term goals. The second form – work to contain and infuse local places with social value – amplifies this sense of control by reinforcing attention to proximate relationships and activities. Finally, the structuring of day-to-day activities makes people's experience of the present meaningful, which energizes actors and facilitates new social relationships. Together the three forms of sheltering work constitute a cohesive response to indeterminate temporariness, not by overcoming it, but by collectively establishing an alternative, more hopeful life-world, where individuals feel they can exert agency.

Despite providing empowering experiences under continuous adversity, sheltering work remains an imperfect solution. Not only are the experiences it provides inherently precarious and vulnerable to environmental disruptions, but sheltering work may also inadvertently normalize oppressive institutional structures and thwart systemic resistance. Arguably, by shifting refugees' attention to short-term actions and away from long-term uncertainties, B&Z accommodated the structures underpinning indeterminate temporariness. While these are important concerns, challenging or dismantling societal structures may at times be impossible and efforts to do so futile. In such cases, sheltering work may represent a 'next best' response by effectively shielding marginalized groups from oppressive structures and helping them take control of their lives.

### *Individual experiences of time and embedded agency*

Our study contributes to research on time and embedded agency by showing how individuals' oppressive and reclaimed experiences of time are rooted in both societal institutions and local contexts, and how these experiences in turn shape individual agency. We build on scholarship linking temporality and agency (Battilana & D'Aunno, 2009; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Reinecke & Lawrence, in press) by showing how the subjective experiences of time can both facilitate and inhibit agency. More specifically, our findings contribute to how we understand subjective experiences of time and their impact on the agency of marginalized people.

A key finding of our study is showing how marginalized actors can simultaneously hold oppressive and reclaimed experiences of time, much like the experience of holding multiple seemingly conflicting identities. The idea of coexisting experiences of time resonates broadly with narrative accounts of temporality (Ricoeur, 1979; Tavory & Eliasoph, 2013). Our study suggests that subjective time can be conceived of as parallel stories – some hopeful and some hopeless – vying for attention in the minds of the individuals. These narratives provide interconnected beliefs about the past, present and future that act as sensemaking resources (Kaplan & Orlikowski, 2013; Kim et al., 2019) and fuel energizing or deflating emotions (Augustine, Soderstrom, Milner, & Weber, 2019; Seligman, Railton, Baumeister, & Sripada, 2016).

In contrast to previous work that has focused on the importance of overcoming oppressive conditions through reframing and reflexivity, our study suggests the value of parallel experiences of time in helping actors expand their agency in the face of immutable challenges. Whereas Alkhaled and Sasaki (2021, p. 14) suggest that refugees may cope with difficult conditions by envisioning a narrative of 'an alternative, yet unknown future', we show that concrete narratives of a proximate future can provide a powerful means of reclaiming agency on a more immediate basis and within a continuously oppressive context. Similarly, our findings contrast with those of Reinecke and Ansari (2015) who emphasize the degree to which reflexivity can integrate competing temporal orientations. In our case, while indeterminate temporariness curtailed refugees' agency by breaking down the connection between the present moment and desirable futures, sheltering work instilled a competing, agentic relationship to time by helping refugees reconnect their present more meaningfully to plausible futures. We suggest that holding parallel conceptions of time may represent a practical and immediate route to agency in the face of oppressive conditions that defy disruption.

Finally, our study highlights the limits of theorizing embedded agency through the study of relatively affluent individuals (Amis, Brickson, Haack, & Hernandez, 2021). Studying disenfranchised refugees can reveal the taken-for-granted institutional and temporal scaffoldings that provide us with our agency: time is for most of our research subjects a relatively familiar and friendly territory that serves as a backdrop to and a source of resources for agency. The muscular agency of individualized Western actors may be premised on temporalities that instil confidence, promise a steady



supply of opportunities to improve one's life, and are tied to a surplus of material resources. For many of us, the Covid-19 pandemic represented a rare experience of indeterminate temporariness (see also Alkhaled & Sasaki, 2021, p. 19), providing a glimpse into the stasis and uncertainties commonly experienced by refugees and other marginalized groups. The lockdowns robbed our present of meaning and disconnected it from desirable futures, while the initial uncertainty over the duration of restrictions and availability of vaccinations sapped our ability to predict and control our futures. Our understanding of embedded agency is refined if we better capture the distinct and often debilitating temporalities that marginalized communities commonly experience.

## Conclusion

In engaging with the Syrian refugees in Lebanon, we witnessed how hopelessness and passivity crept into the lives of refugees lacking in stability and predictability. Yet, our analysis revealed how entrepreneurial pursuits enabled by sheltering work could fill them with hope and tenacity. Local organizational efforts may be vital in helping marginalized individuals cope with intractable problems that derive from oppressive institutional structures.

The present study has tragic timeliness, as Russia's invasion of Ukraine has created the largest wave of refugees in Europe since the Second World War. Our findings suggest the potential for small local organizations to play important roles in the current refugee crisis by making the upended lives of refugees more meaningful and providing them with confidence to rebuild new lives in their host countries. We hope future research and practice can draw on these insights and provide inspiration as a foundation for further investigating how local institutional work helps marginalized individuals cope with the current upheavals.

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