

**The liminal transitions of Irish and Spanish necessity entrepreneurs<sup>1</sup>.**

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## **Abstract**

This paper explores the transition between unemployment, employment and entrepreneurship of Spanish and Irish necessity entrepreneurs to better understand the process of becoming an entrepreneur. Working with narratives, media articles, and policy documents, we illustrate how necessity entrepreneurs do not recognize themselves in the institutionalized entrepreneur narrative as empowered, creative and independent individuals. It is necessity, not opportunity that is pushing, not pulling, them to become entrepreneurial. The transition process is also experienced as more fragmented than official narratives outline. In exposing these liminal stories, the paper aims to expand our understanding of entrepreneurship, presenting a more nuanced view of both entrepreneurs and the entrepreneurial process.

### **1. Introduction.**

Despite increasing recognition of entrepreneurship as a diverse phenomenon (Shane and Venkataraman, 2000; Venkataraman, 2002), most research on this area still assumes that entrepreneurship is a positive behavioural quality or state to aspire to (Calás, Smircich and Bourne, 2009; Carland and Carland, 1991; 1992; Dey and Steyard, 2010; 2012). Thus, entrepreneurship is generally portrayed as that positive, elusive competence individuals need to develop, and organizations and institutions need to foster, to increase creativity, innovation and the possibilities of finding employment in times of economic instability (Druker, 1985; Perren and Jennings, 2005).

Recent research has attempted to critically assess the area of entrepreneurship studies (e.g., Imas and Weston, 2012; Ogbor, 2000; *Özkazanç-Pan, 2009*), providing alternative views on entrepreneurship that go beyond the wealth and business creation focus of much of the managerial literature. This type of research outlines a view of entrepreneurship more as a process than an ideal

state to be reached, thereby providing an alternative to the predominant ambition in much entrepreneurial research to describe the ideal 'entrepreneur' and to explain and predict individual entrepreneurial behaviour (Cornelissen et al., 2012; Steyaert and Bouwen, 1997). Our aim here is to contribute to this emerging, alternative tradition.

In this paper, we focus on a number of situated entrepreneurial stories of people in Spain and Ireland. We have used qualitative research methods to collect in-depth interviews, documents and digital narratives in the aforementioned countries. We have found that both the Spanish and Irish governments, as well as the media, are encouraging people --- through a particular type of narrative --- to become more entrepreneurial as a possible way out of unemployment. However, our interviewees do not recognize themselves in this institutionalized narrative of entrepreneurship as the empowered, creative and independent individuals who 'put an innovative product in the market'. It is necessity, rather than opportunity (Hessels et al., 2008), that is pushing, rather than pulling (Amit and Muller, 1995; Gilad and Levine, 1986; Storey, 1982), them to become self-employed. This paper aims to make explicit their experiences of that transition. By collecting these alternative stories of the entrepreneurship process, we hope to complement the dominant narrative of entrepreneurship present in most research, institutional and media contexts.

The paper is structured as follows: The first section explores the concept of entrepreneurship and the research being done on entrepreneurial narratives. The second section looks at the concept of liminality as a way to explain the transition experienced by necessity entrepreneurs in Ireland and Spain. The third section explains the methods of data gathering and analysis used to handle the data material. The fourth section describes the dominant narrative in entrepreneurship: that of the entrepreneur's journey into success. Section five looks into the untold stories that lead to that narrative and that get pushed aside as redundant or not fitting, but that show the struggle of the necessity entrepreneurs to find new anchors within a liminal situation.

## **2. How to become an entrepreneur: the public understanding.**

There does not seem to be a clear agreement among researchers about what ‘entrepreneurship’ is. The common definition, however, seems to revolve around wealth and business creation by motivated individuals and the factors that might support or enable that process (Gartner, 2010). For instance, Kirzner (1973) defined entrepreneurship as the ability to perceive new opportunities and to exploit them, whereas for Shane and Venkataraman (2000: 218) entrepreneurship is the study of “how, by whom, and with what effects opportunities to create future goods and services are discovered, evaluated, and exploited”. Intellectual capital is considered important and factors such as education and previous experience in work are seen as influencing the entrepreneur’s capacity to understand, interpret and apply new information in a way that others cannot (Shane and Venkataraman, 2000). Social capital and networks are also considered critical, as they provide and support the entrepreneur’s understanding of his ‘market’ (Cope et al., 2007; De Clercq and Voronov, 2009; Lin et al., 1981; Portes, 1998). Yet, the narrative tends to be very much about an individual, motivated to create wealth and able to discover and exploit new opportunities. Indeed, it was Schumpeter (1939) who first emphasized the role of entrepreneurs in economic theory, endowing them with a drive to power and an intuitive insight that he saw as instinctive.

Yet, as Gartner (2008: 359) suggests, there is not “‘an’ entrepreneurial type. Variation is, inherently, a fundamental characteristic of entrepreneurship”. Mitchell (1997) also describes the shortcomings of this type of research: apparently no ‘typical’ entrepreneur exists. The array of contradictory studies only adds to the mythical status of entrepreneurs and to the consequent difficulties that non-entrepreneurs have in understanding the practitioners of this most unique profession (Mitchell, 1997: 123). And yet, most of the stories we hear about entrepreneurs focus on the exemplar individual who, as hero or jester (Anderson and Warren, 2011), achieves success and wealth. This can lead to a sense of failure when potential entrepreneurs struggle to live up to that ideal, especially in economically uncertain times (Tretheway, 2001).

There is, however, an emergent research tradition that sees entrepreneurship as a socially constructed process (Kenny and Scriver, 2012). For instance, Drakopoulou-Dodd and Anderson (2007: 343) strongly criticize the myth of the asocial individual entrepreneur, stressing that the very phenomenon of entrepreneurship is ‘socially constructed’. Radu and Redien-Collot (2008) have also illustrated how the public sphere, in the form of the French press, constructs images of French entrepreneurs and how these influence the perception of entrepreneurship’s social desirability (entrepreneurship as an attractive career option) and social feasibility (entrepreneurship as an accessible and realistic career option). A similar phenomenon is reported in the British press by Nicholson and Anderson (2005). All this research indicates a growing interest in the phenomenon of entrepreneurship as a collective process situated in particular historical and social contexts, rather than just dependant on individual motivations, cognitions or behaviours. As Holt and Macpherson (2010) argue, entrepreneurship is not a state, but a process based on the collaborative and on-going reconciliation of multiple views and voices. Going further, Jones and Spicer (2005:236) have described the ‘entrepreneur’ concept as an empty signifier, an ‘absent centre’, whose function is to be constantly articulated. Entrepreneurship might not even be an ideal condition to aspire to, as Marris (1986: 121) indicates, suggesting a different perspective on the process, as “no one would surely undertake so uncertain and stressful endeavour unless they were excluded from easier ways of realising themselves”. In line with this perspective, the following section outlines an understanding of entrepreneurship as a liminoid transitional process.

### **3. Necessity entrepreneurship as a liminoid process.**

The increasing amount of risk, uncertainty and fragmentation in our organizations and communities has been clearly described by a number of social scientists (Bauman, 2000; Beck, 2000; Sennett, 1998; 2006). When it comes to entrepreneurship, and in the context of the current European financial crisis, increasingly, as Bauman (2013) says, “state and society functions [have been]...

shifted sideways, to the market ... or dropped downwards, onto the shoulders of human individuals, now expected to divine individually, inspired and set in motion by their greed, what they did not manage to produce collectively, inspired and moved by communal spirit". This increasingly unstructured and individually suffered process seems to be especially acute in the case of necessity entrepreneurs, those individuals who are, in employment terms, liminal: "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremony" (Turner, 1995: 95).

Liminality is the concept forged by anthropologist Victor W. Turner (1967; 1969) to explain rites of passage performance in traditional societies. These rites are defined as processes in three stages: *separation*, *limen* (or *margin*) and *aggregation*. Individuals submitted to transition stay in the *limen*, that is inside-outside social institutionalized structures. In traditional contexts, *liminality* functions as mediation between *separation* and *aggregation*: a *locus* that is negatively related to any stable institutional *loci*. Turner (1977a) names it "antistructure" emphasizing its opposition to social structure.

*Limen* is threshold, "which may... cease to be a mere transition and become a set way of life, a state, [like] that of the achrite or monk." (Turner, 1977a: 37). *Liminal personae* are those in a condition of having no institutional position defined and recognized as such: they are *in between and betwixt*. Social invisibility is a central character of the liminal condition.

...we must regard the period of margin or 'liminality' as an interstructural situation.... We are not dealing with structural contradiction when discussing liminality, but with essentially unstructured (which is at once de-structured and pre-structured)... (Turner, 1967: 93-97).

A further structural characteristic of transitional beings is that they have ... no status, property, insignia, secular clothing, rank, kinship position, nothing to demarcate them structurally from their fellows. (Turner, 1967: 99)

Most necessity entrepreneurs seem to find themselves going through a period where the social and community structure they know is dissolving (Jahoda, 1982), where they are perceived as potentially dangerous or become invisible and are pushed to find 'structure' by themselves, since the institutions they used to rely on (e.g., government or employers) find it difficult to provide one for them. While this is a dangerous state, it is also the period where unlimited possibilities for a new structure might develop (Turner, 1995).

Turner however defines modern liminality as *liminoid*. In traditional societies, "liminal phenomena are centrally integrated into the total social process, forming with all its other aspects a complete whole" (Turner, 1977b: 44). Modern societies however tend to dislocate liminal phenomena to the margins of central economic and political process, this shift is signalled by a slightly modified notion.

*"Liminoid phenomena develop most characteristically outside the central economic and political process, along their margins, on their interfaces, in their 'tacit dimensions' (though latter... may seep from these peripheries and cornices into the center). They are also, in contrast to liminal phenomena, plural, fragmentary and experimental..."* (Turner, 1977b: 44).

Thus, according to Turner in traditional societies there is an integrated totality in which *separation*, *limen* and *reintegration* compose a whole. Nowadays it is quite different since the economic and social crisis tends to push people to the margins making liminality a way of life rather than a finite transitional period. Integration seems to have lost its substance, subjects such as most of the necessity entrepreneurs we interviewed have been pushed to the *limen* and 'abandoned' to their own devices as Bauman indicates.

#### **4. Methodology.**

This section describes the research methods used to gather the data for the analysis of the necessity entrepreneur experiences. The research strategy involved a qualitative methodology to gather both personal entrepreneur narratives, as well as public sphere representations of entrepreneurs, both in Spain and Ireland.

In our research, we look for both the micro-interaction between the entrepreneurs and their situation (Cornelissen et al, 2012; Holt and MacPherson, 2010), as well as at the macro-representation of entrepreneurs in the institutional and public sphere (Anderson et al, 2009; Radu and Redien-Collot, 2008). As such, we have collected narratives from necessity entrepreneurs through 8 in-depth and face-to-face interviews, as well as employing digital blogs and media in what Murthy (2008) calls ‘digital ethnography’ to collect media stories illustrative of public understandings of entrepreneurship in Ireland and Spain. We have also used publicly available documents, such as government and international organization reports (e.g., Global Entrepreneurship Monitor) to gain an appreciation for the cultural understanding of entrepreneurship in both countries. Our aim is to straddle the micro-macro boundary, looking at the development of personal narratives of self and entrepreneurial identity within particular social and historical contexts that shape how the individual narratives are developed, told or kept implicit.

Several authors have stressed the importance of the media’s effects on entrepreneurial desirability and feasibility (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998; Swedberg, 2000). Through framing, exposure, and interpretation, the media tends to portray entrepreneurship as a desirable condition. At the same time, media renders entrepreneurship as feasible, due to its impact on i) the efficient dissemination of information about available institutional support and ii) portrayal of the personal skills required to become a successful entrepreneur. The stories we have collected in the media show positive portrayals of entrepreneurship, considered as vital to stimulating entrepreneurial career choices, as they convey perceptions that obstacles to success can be overcome, and failure can be transformed



into a learning opportunity (Nicholson and Anderson, 2005; Radu and Redien-Collot, 2008). The use of different methods enabled the inclusion of different viewpoints to refine our understanding of the phenomenon under study (Flick, 1992).

The narrative analysis followed Parker (2005) in looking for the different story elements (e.g. scene, purpose, actors etc.). The narrative analysis sought to capture the process of entrepreneurship as lived by the necessity entrepreneurs in both Ireland and Spain, as well as the representations of entrepreneurship in the public sphere.

The analysis of the data was accomplished in two different steps. The first step sought to identify the activities, experiences, and transition processes the necessity entrepreneurs go through from employment to unemployment to entrepreneurship. It consisted of multiple readings of the interview transcripts, field notes and documentation for the identification of everyday activities, experiences, and events. These were initially coded according to three main areas: the personal historical narrative of their transition between employment and creating their own job; their main activities as entrepreneurs; and their self and social identity as entrepreneurs.

The second step involved comparing these non-public narratives with the analysis of the public narratives on entrepreneurship. There was a clear 'success narrative' in the public narratives of entrepreneurship both in Ireland and Spain. While our analysis shows that the lived experience of necessity entrepreneurs in both countries is not yet as clearly structured or formulated, it also shows that many of the stories of that liminal phase seem to be either 'edited out' or suppressed in the final 'edited' public narrative of accomplishment. The consequence is that the narratives of entrepreneurship circulating in the public sphere, and being used to shape necessity entrepreneurs identity and experiences, represent an entrepreneurship ideal to be attained, rather than the real experience that is being lived. The next two sections contrast the public and private narratives.

**Table 1: The necessity entrepreneur's journey: Complete framework for narrative composition.**

<i>Transition over time / Story elements</i>	<b>[Un]Finishing employment</b>	<b>Disorientation</b>	<b>Seeking alternatives</b>	<b>The on-going construction of employment position</b>
<b>Scene and purpose</b> (where and why)	Becoming unemployed and initiating the search for paid employment	Trying to understand the recurrent unemployment situation	Looking for possible work alternatives	Working within the unstructured job situation
<b>Who</b> (actors)	The (ex) employee Organizations and institutions	The unemployed	The unemployed/entrepreneur, family, friends and institutions	The 'necessity entrepreneur' and his/her stakeholder community
<b>Act/Actions</b> (what and how)	Job search in the same area/industry Use of contacts and networks	Continued job search Looking for viable alternatives	Accepting odd jobs Developing a job idea Looking for financial/social support	Generating own jobs Maintaining the network of stakeholders Supporting other with similar needs
<b>Transition</b>	Fighting to maintain the status quo	In betwixt	In betwixt	On-going construction of new employment condition

## 5. The entrepreneurial narrative in the public sphere.

When it comes to unemployment, the critical economic and social situation of southern Europe, as well as Ireland, has been widely publicized (Standing, 2013). One of the solutions suggested to come out of the crisis is the encouragement of entrepreneurial activity among the unemployed. As the most recent Global Entrepreneurship Monitor report for Spain (Hernández et al., 2013: 20) declares, “a quarter of the [entrepreneurial] activity continues to be driven by necessity and the high level of unemployment in Spain”, yet this type of entrepreneurship is still considered of lesser value, resulting in the “composition of the entrepreneurial initiatives [being] more heterogeneous than before the crisis in terms of quality”. This perspective reinforces the narrative of the entrepreneur as a developer of initiatives. Indeed, for the Spanish press, the ‘entrepreneur’ is seen as

a person who perceives the opportunity, has confidence in her/his idea, has a higher than average ability to gather and convince people around her/him, knows how to sell ideas and, overall, has the ability to offer results. Entrepreneurial spirit is synonymous with innovation, change, company start-ups and risk taking. (Marketing Partners, 2013)

Even when traditional portrayals of entrepreneurship are not valid, the press actively transforms the characters into standard entrepreneurial heroes, who, on top of fighting economic adversity, have to overcome cultural defamation and family rejection:

Sitting at the bar, with their jeans and long hair, no one would guess that Pepita Marín and Alberto Bravo are two ruthless businessmen. In full economic wastelands, these two 25 year-olds have achieved €150,000 in funding for their brand “We are knitters”. ... It was 2010. The crisis had already hit Spain. And the families of these two economists could not believe they were about to leave their promising careers to become “grandmother weavers”. Especially because they had never picked up a needle. “We had to learn on YouTube. In Spain there is no entrepreneurship culture. In the States we would be heroes, but here, they just saw us as crazy or wayward brats”. (Mañana, 2013)

The press works hard to adapt the entrepreneurial language to reflect the cultural repertoire of Catholic Spain. Headlines, such as “Seeking angels to launch businesses” (Fernández, 2013), introduce entrepreneurial activities as short of miraculous deeds in need of divine intervention:

One of the things that is needed is the professionalization of this activity. Most business angels are unaware that they are [angels] and are investing in friends and families’ projects, often pressured by the future entrepreneurs themselves. They are unsure they chose the best project to allocate their savings, as they act following emotional ties without analysing the feasibility of the project. (Fernández, 2013)

Becoming an entrepreneur is presented not only as a story of bravery and success, but also as the only way “From the dole to self-employment: The guide out of hell”:

Nearly 12,000 professionals each month are in transit through the uncertain path leading from unemployment to self-employed. Four hundred unemployed people every day are trying to find their own autonomy. It is not easy. When you are burned out, there are two options: resign or start a difficult and arduous journey, passing through the hell of unemployment, but exploring a hypothetical path to exit the tunnel...The only way out of the Spanish labour market debacle. (Mármol, 2013)

Thus, the entrepreneur is portrayed as someone with an innate drive to wealth and power, and an almost intuitive insight to identify ‘opportunity’. It is through this journey that the unemployed person becomes an adventurer who challenges a bad situation and a negative personal status quo, and, despite setbacks, ultimately achieves the goal of job creation, achieving freedom. Governmental institutions are expected to support this ‘great adventure’ through a series of financial

backings. The Spanish government, for instance, has recently passed the “Law of Entrepreneurs”, taking some steps to increase the ability of Spanish nationals (and foreigners who could be granted nationality) to take the uncertain road of labour emancipation and entrepreneurship.

The public narrative in Ireland presents entrepreneurship as the new frontier in the country’s economic development, for the country can no longer rely on foreign direct investment alone, nor on the folly of home-grown property bubbles (*Irish Times*, 2009; O’Keefe, 2013; Ward, 2008): Thus, “it is necessary to promote indigenous entrepreneurial skills; without entrepreneurs who have the motivation, capacity and resources to establish businesses and who have the courage to take necessary business risks, there can be no economically sustainable long-term jobs” (Power, 2009). Indeed, with one headline heralding “Irish entrepreneurs: Your country needs you” (Hancock, 2013), entrepreneurs are the “heroes” of the hour (*Irish Times*, 2010). Further, according to Ireland’s Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, “[e]ntrepreneurs are the heroes of the economy, creating businesses, jobs and growth from which the rest of us benefit” and, while the country “has some amazing entrepreneurs, [there are] not nearly enough” (Newenham, 2014).

Thus it is that promoting entrepreneurship and creating an environment that is “entrepreneur-centric” (Horn, 2010) is high on the government’s agenda (Department of the Taoiseach, 2010; Hancock, 2013; O’Keefe, 2013). In championing entrepreneurship as the country’s potential ‘saviour’, the government is positioning itself as the driver and supporter in chief of this very saviour (Kenny and Scriver, 2012: 623). Its first Action Plan for Jobs (Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, 2012: 39) asserts:

Creating an indigenous engine of economic growth is central to revitalisation of the Irish economy. Entrepreneurship, and the start-up companies that emerge as a result, provides the feed-stock for future exports and employment. Start-ups are one of the means by which new sectors take root in Ireland. They are the lifeblood of local economies and make an important contribution to regional development. ... In these more challenging times... It is critical that we create an environment that supports entrepreneurs and small businesses in every way possible to ...contribute to our economic growth.

Indeed, as stated by the Taoiseach (Prime Minister), the aim of the government's annual jobs action plan is "that by 2016 we can make Ireland the best small country in the world in which to do business" (Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, 2012: 3). It is interesting that this aim coincides, and is explicitly linked, with the centenary of the country's 1916 Easter Rising (Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, 2012: 7), which aim was to end British rule in Ireland and establish an independent Irish Republic. Thus, entrepreneurs are cast as the patriots of the present, being called to action to regain the country's economic independence, and articulated with the patriots and the nationalist fervour of a century earlier, when the fight was for independence from the British.

Notwithstanding this public narrative, the crisis has dented the public's view of entrepreneurship. While successful entrepreneurs continue to be well regarded in Irish society, the past decade has seen entrepreneurship as a good career choice consistently fall from a high of 70 per cent in 2006 to 45 per cent in 2012 (Fitzsimons and O'Gorman, 2012). This trend has translated into the proportion of the population aspiring to be entrepreneurs falling from a high of 12.6 per cent in 2005 to 8 per cent in 2012, which is lower than the average for the OECD (14.4 per cent) and EU (14.8 per cent) (Fitzsimons and O'Gorman, 2012).

Equally, the perception of media coverage of entrepreneurs being supportive has fallen from a high of 84 per cent in 2006 to 61 per cent in 2012, albeit this is an increase over 2011 and it is higher than the average across the OECD (52 per cent) and EU (50 per cent) (Fitzsimons and O'Gorman, 2012). Paradoxically, the death of the Celtic Tiger coincided with *Dragon's Den* (where budding entrepreneurs pitch their ideas to a panel of potential investors) appearing on national television and capturing the public's imagination, while giving entrepreneurs an increased media profile and making celebrities of the team of 'dragon' investors (*Irish Times*, 2010).

The media narrative largely focuses on the opportunity entrepreneur and on stories of success, albeit there is recognition that "becoming an entrepreneur has always been difficult" (Lynch, 2012) and

that the journey involves “self-doubt, failures, successes, self-questioning and more than a few dark nights of the soul” (O’Brien, 2011a). Despite the perception that there are fewer opportunities to start a business in a recession (Fitzsimons and O’Gorman, 2012), “a vibrant entrepreneurial culture is thriving beneath the tough economic reality” (Lynch, 2012), so much so that there are “Celtic Tiger orphans” whose undiminished “entrepreneurial spirit” has them on a quest to go from “bust to boom” (Cunningham, 2009).

The media narrative addresses the “born or made” argument and declares that entrepreneurs are both, thereby suggesting that anyone can be an entrepreneur (Ahlstrom, 2009; *Irish Times*, 2009; Ward, 2008); all that is needed is “passion” (O’Brien, 2011b). Hence, there are some stories of people who, following redundancy, “see the crisis as an opportunity to reinvent themselves and start new enterprises” (Holmquist, 2010), but these are few and far between. The majority of stories are about people who always seemed destined to start their own business and who are always motivated by opportunity.

Despite necessity being the principal motivator of a sizeable minority of early stage entrepreneurs in recent years – with 28 per cent of those starting a new business in 2012 motivated by perceived necessity, compared with six per cent in 2007, higher than average across the OECD and EU, including Spain (Fitzsimons and O’Gorman, 2012) – necessity entrepreneurs remain relatively invisible in the national narrative. For the few Irish media articles that tell the stories of necessity entrepreneurs (e.g., Kerr, 2013), the narrative is very much one of overcoming adversity, typically linked with redundancy, to carve out one’s own success story as the owner of one’s own business and future.

## **6. The untold liminal transition: The on-going co-construction of an employment situation.**

The narrative analysis of the Irish and Spanish necessity entrepreneur material presents some clear commonalities with the existing media analysis. Those respondents who engage in the entrepreneurial public narrative take on similar institutional/organizational discursive elements: they do relate a story of strife and struggle. However, as table 1 shows, when they describe their journey as necessity entrepreneurs, the tale becomes less linear, more ambiguous, and less full of hope than the public narratives presented so far.

Furthermore, these stories are difficult to elicit. They come on the ‘asides’, that is, breaks in the talk or interview, or at the end once the recorder is switched off, which is not surprising, as these stories tend to be suppressed and reluctantly told because they generate feelings of shame or ‘difference’.

### ***[Un]finishing employment***

The narrative of the necessity entrepreneur’s journey rarely starts with a ‘call’ or a bright idea that needs implementation. It tends to start with a tale of *separation*, sorrow and regret, with a break down that becomes the unemployment condition. In some cases, this separation comes as a surprise, in some others it is presented as expected. Yet, the stories tell of a separation from the previous condition of full employment due to external circumstances, generally outside the teller control, e.g., the crisis, the market:

My husband ... had his own business and when the crisis came, he was the first to go... A lot of debts and there is no way of finding a job, especially in his area...the building sector [was the first to go], and on top of it ... lots of foreign competition. (Marisa, Spain)

Well, now [there] are ... more consultants... a dentist... solicitors... people that we’ve never had [asking for support to start their own business] in the last 15 years; they’re coming in now from the crash... They find it very hard, very difficult. (Geraldine, Ireland)

In some cases, there is talk of a ‘wrong doing’, a personalization of the reasons that lead to the separation:

So, the family business was started by my dad when he was very young (...) and that was going well... But, we made the mistake of joining with other partners, and then trouble began. (...) My father still thinks that it was his fault, and he wants to start all over again, but we don't let him. He is very old, we don't have money, and, obviously, we were just unlucky with the partners... (Javier, Spain)

There are, however, a number of similar elements in these stories: there is a great deal of suffering and strife due to the separation with some hope of success and a potential comeback due to hard work: the journey as ‘salaried employee’ is still unfinished. There is a desire to retake the path, to somehow come back and recuperate a previous clearly structured condition and, therefore, the tale starts recounting the strategies that need to be followed in order to do so --- job searches, activating business networks, and seeking institutional support to be back where they left. Disbelief and pity are the emotions associated with this part of the narrative.

### ***Disorientation***

For those who have lost their safe employment and cannot find a similar employment situation, this is a moment of disorientation, as the old structures do not seem to hold, but no new alternatives can be found or thought of. To frame life differently, with a new employment condition and new social and institutional relationships, becomes too disturbing a task to undertake. As Marris (1986:104) says, “our instinct of survival pulls us the other way, to protect our sense of identity and the setting which has moulded it” thus, to keep on searching for secure, stable employment. It is in this stage of the journey that necessity entrepreneurs start becoming fully aware of their potential change in circumstances and express the loss of a secure situation of full employment. Yet, the next step, becoming an entrepreneur is still not seen as ‘real’:

I had a year or two in the wilderness [before becoming an entrepreneur]...18 months with no money. (Tony, Ireland)



We are now trying to get sorted by starting our own company, which right now is not happening – so far I’m just knocking on doors, but no one is answering. ... This thing of being an entrepreneur is not real. Everything is already thought up... (Espe, Spain)

The reaction is to go back to employment, any kind:

People around me would tell me not to even try to work on what I want as a psychologist because there is nothing ... my colleagues who were in the same situation have gone to work on anything... I started to work as a shop assistant; I wanted a salary, to get a paycheck, frankly, with anxiety and shame ... but you need the payslip every month to feel you are OK. (Ines, Spain)

The common themes in this stage of the narrative are the dreams of returning to full employment, while at the same time there is a slow acceptance of the condition of unemployment and the difficulty of finding a job that might maintain the previous status quo. Self-questioning regarding alternatives and considering other people’s views starts, but there is difficulty in seeing beyond the ‘full employment’ possibility.

### ***Seeking alternatives***

This is very much the betwixt stage in the journey, when one is not yet an ‘entrepreneur’, but more ‘odd jobs’ are being accepted as the only way to survive. There is a common element to how the respondents construct and make sense of their struggles in finding a way to gain resources to keep living. They are still in between searching for salaried employment, but also engaging in the entrepreneur journey. As such, most of them struggle when trying to make sense of their position in society. They report feelings of vulnerability, define themselves as being cheated by ‘the system’ or see themselves outside of ‘the normal social expectations’:

I feel alone. I have my family... But, in terms of support, something or somebody to help us out... because if there are no jobs, you go to the social worker at the town hall and she just says, “there is nothing for you”. So, yes, in that sense, I feel alone, at risk... unprotected, that’s the word. (Desiré, Spain)

I’m 45, then there’s nobody going to give you a job, and if they do it’ll be €9 an hour, and if I have, please God, 30 years left in me, I want to have a decent holiday once a year, have a half decent car, nothing extravagant... (Tony, Ireland)

Some of the respondents react by using the small, remaining social benefits they might have as a sort of basic income to start something new within a parallel system of accountability. To explain these endeavours as business or entrepreneurial activities within the black market would be misguided, as the respondents perceive themselves as marginal to a social system that has clearly failed them. Instead of expressing guilt for the violation of widely held norms, respondents express their distrust for institutional and organizational bodies. They are not 'free-riding', but creatively engaging in activities to be able to feed their family or pay their debts. In a social climate where political corruption is becoming visible, the respondents feel empowered by playing outside the system:

Since I finished my degree as an architect... I've been job pecking, here and there. If something as an architect comes out, I take it. If it is as a teacher, or in an association, let's do it... the thing is to keep on moving, never stopping ... Instead of a fixed job, as it does not come out, so I have to look for anything, small jobs through different places. Alone or with others as a company (...) Sometimes they take too long to pay me back, but I know they...are going through a bad patch and... like a nursery school I did up – there are so many illegal nurseries that they are really struggling. To become legal, they have to pay a lot of taxes, and so they have higher fees, so they don't get enough students... so yes, they are a little tight and they are paying little by little. So, well, I just have to wait a bit, no? (Osset, Spain)

And engaging in creative initiatives to overcome fragmentation:

So, at the beginning, I made up a business that was... called Divine-Divine. So, you come because you have an event to go to. I dress you up, you give me some money, go with the clothes and, eventually, you return it. It was a good idea (...) the business had the underlying philosophy of responsible consumerism and I started working with Mercedes, a very honest and hard working person. (...) and then I started another business. See, so from one idea, many others start coming. So, I thought I could start a private cooking school with local products, organic products. I tried to get a space through the town hall, and, well, I was just shooting in the dark, going around and around... but always learning...because there was no other alternative, I have a €1,200 mortgage. (Pilar, Spain)

Yes, I did 33 years of working for 'the man'. So, I thought, "That's it. No more excuses". ... I was laid off on October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2009 ... in 2008 I was one of only three employees who were awarded the highest level bonus ... then not 12 months later I'm suddenly surplus to requirements. So, I'd look at P&L for profits and go: "Why I am I doing this for Mr. [company]? Why am I not doing it for me?" ... So, I decided to go [for it]. (John, Ireland)

And, ultimately, being able to put some food on the table:

The only time that I have asked for food, it's been through the bartering page – I kind of cook meals and keep half of it. So, that is the only thing that I published in the webpage. And then, two ladies brought me one day some food, as a surprise. Because they were surprised that I've offered the service, that I wasn't asking for money or anything, but food – or not even, just my

services in exchange for keeping half of it (...) so I cook, I make meals and keep half for my family, that way I have something good to give my kids. (Marisa, Spain)

One of the very strong themes coming out of the stories in this phase of the journey is the lack of 'structural' frameworks and support from both society and institutions. Indeed, the stories of entrepreneurship we have uncovered tell of an increasing heavy burden on those with the fewest social and economic resources (Marris, 1996), who are at once marginalized and constrained. Thus, their tales are about a brutal meta-narrative of struggle in an unprotected and extremely uncertain environment.

### ***The on-going construction of a new 'employment' condition***

Another common theme in the necessity entrepreneurs' narratives regarding the transition between employment and entrepreneurship is the sense of 'incessant becoming' (McKenna et al, 2010); necessity entrepreneurs seem to be dealing with the constant struggle to define their self and their new 'employment conditions'. The questions are constant: Who am I? What are my skills? What can I sell that makes me different from the rest? These are common questions among all necessity entrepreneurs we interviewed. As Paula says:

When I started to think about setting up my own company, I realized that I had to go to my core, to what makes me different, to my own expertise and my experience. I had to reach there and have a clear plan based on that, building on that. You have to reinvent yourself ...to understand what is it that you can provide... what kind of value can you add? And check that constantly to see if you are able to provide that. (Paula, Spain)

It is what Miller and Rose (1990) call the rise of the 'enterprising self', in which the self has to invest in itself in order to improve its self constantly. For the necessity entrepreneurs, this takes the form of a brutal and constant process of self-evaluation and appraisal:

... the selection process did not come through, so what now? And then I asked myself, "OK, so what do I have? Which path shall I take? Right?" (...) it was then a moment of looking inside myself and saying, "Come on, Pilarita, what do you have, my dear? What do you have, on top of need and want?" So then I started working on the house I have at the beach. I did it up, a beautiful house in front of the beach, and I put it on the Internet. But it is always: can I do it? Will it work? Am I good enough? (Pili, Spain)

During this period, in which most of the necessity entrepreneurs we interviewed were situated, the struggle is to keep on generating jobs and money, to maintain a business network of stakeholders, as well as to support others that have joined the new company or have similar needs. There is no sense of *integration*, or of a ‘goal’ achieved, or sense of ‘epiphany or dawning’ (Beech, 2010); rather, there is a sense of constantly having to reinvent oneself. The integration is elusive and the journey continues:

The problem we have now, we’ve grown to ten employees, we’ve now reached the threshold for the County Enterprise Boards, so, theoretically, our next point of contact is Enterprise Ireland, and frankly, they are just not interested. We’re not sexy... [not] what they call the ‘high potential start-up’, which can be the next this or that, they get sucked into that ‘high potential’, whereas I was a bit more, let’s be honest, ‘plodding’, really, by nature, just getting there. We’ve tried ... [but Enterprise Ireland] are more trouble than they’re worth. (John, Ireland)

Look, we have been working for already like three years and I call potential clients and I say we are a company...we even have a name and a website... but we are still getting to become a limited society, etc. ... It is hard. There is not enough volume of businesses to make sense for us to start paying all those taxes. It is coming, but not yet... so it is better to remain as self-employed almost... I don’t know. It is a constant conversation among us.... and Kika has a small girl now. I don’t know, we’ll see.... so, maybe we are not a company yet, but an association? (Patty, Spain)

As in the example above, the classical ‘liminal transition’ is not completed, as there is no sense of recognition by the ‘outside’, as Beech (2010:64) outlines. The necessity entrepreneurs find themselves trapped in a constant transition with very few social structures recognising them as entrepreneurs. As Turner indicates, in modern society the transition is more liminoid than liminal.

## **7. Concluding remarks.**

The paper has looked into the stories of necessity entrepreneurs in Spain and Ireland, those that are in the public domain and those that relate experiences of uncertainty and transition, and that are, to a certain degree, unexplored.

The interest driving this research is to generate greater insight and understanding into both necessity entrepreneurs and the entrepreneurial process from an empirical perspective, while at the same time contributing to advance theory in the areas of entrepreneurship and work transitions. The paper

contributes to this endeavour in three different ways.

First, necessity entrepreneurs are very much under-researched in academic literature, not to mention practically ignored by the media and policy-makers. We have, through exploring the stories and experiences of those engaging in entrepreneurship out of necessity, tackled an area of study that has remained at the margins of academic research.

Second, in moving away from a focus on static aspects of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship, this paper has engaged with the problem of representation in extant literature, starting to question the dominant view inherent in the 'holy trinity' of the entrepreneur (Weiskopf and Steyaert, 2009): the strong figure of the entrepreneur and the entrepreneurial self; scientific methods to uncover the secret to success; and optimistic policy-making grounded in the entrepreneur's role in economic success. Such questioning opens up further the study of the entrepreneur and the entrepreneurship process, while at the same time allowing for the possibility of re-balancing the interpretation of 'who is an entrepreneur' (Imas, Wilson and Weston, 2012) and how to study the phenomenon.

Third, despite the small sample, methodologically, the research has looked at both the micro-interaction between the entrepreneurs and their situation, as well as at their macro-representation in the institutional and public sphere. Our aim was to straddle the micro-macro boundary, looking at the development of personal narratives of self and entrepreneurial identity within particular social and historical contexts, rather than just focus on individual motivations, cognitions or behaviours.

At the same time, we have seen how story lines are powerful frames of reference by which individuals come to rationalize or legitimize what goes on in their work related lives. The media and government narratives provide a clear outline of what an entrepreneur should be. These narratives, however, are not only ways to make sense of the employment-unemployment journey. These are also narratives told with a performative aim, especially in the case of the institutional narratives, so that others might learn from someone else's experience (Garcia-Lorenzo et al, 2007). Thus, they are told to 'educate' becoming a 'vocabulary' of power (Linstead et al, 2004: 31). The

descriptions of entrepreneurship distributed by institutions and the media, for instance, become a discursive resource or capability that ensures the potential entrepreneurs fit the role. Those who do not conform run the risk of being excluded from the narrative of success.

Our research on necessity entrepreneurs complements mainstream entrepreneurial research focused mainly on business development, adding a narrative/storytelling dimension that enables a richer, fuller understanding of how entrepreneurs experience the journey. With these liminal narratives about becoming an entrepreneur (out of necessity), we aim to expand our understanding of a complex and non-linear process. As such, entrepreneurship needs to be explored from a variety of angles and perspectives. Indeed, with governments seeking to encourage unemployed people to become entrepreneurs, and with policy based on the entrepreneur-as-hero trope, we are in need of a more nuanced view of both entrepreneurs and the entrepreneurial process.

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