



DOCTORAL THESIS NO. 2025:90
FACULTY OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES

Entrepreneuring in structurally constrained context

Nuancing agency and privilege in poverty

HINA HASHIM

Entrepreneuring in structurally constrained context

Nuancing agency and privilege in poverty

Hina Hashim

Faculty of Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences
Department of Economics
Uppsala



SWEDISH UNIVERSITY
OF AGRICULTURAL
SCIENCES

DOCTORAL THESIS

Uppsala 2025

Acta Universitatis Agriculturae Sueciae
2025:90

ISSN 1652-6880

ISBN (print version) 978-91-8124-074-0

ISBN (electronic version) 978-91-8124-120-4

<https://doi.org/10.54612/a.5jnj12grj5>

© 2025 Hina Hashim, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0181-6186>

Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Department of Economics, Uppsala, Sweden

The summary chapter is licensed under CC BY 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>. Other licences or copyright may apply to illustrations and attached articles.

Print: SLU Grafisk service, Uppsala 2025

Entrepreneurship in structurally constrained context: Nuancing agency and privilege in poverty

Abstract

This thesis explores entrepreneurial agency in the context of structural constraint. While entrepreneurship is often framed as a pathway to empowerment and mobility, such framings obscure how entrepreneurial processes unfold when multidimensional poverty, patriarchy, and institutional fragility shape everyday possibilities. The thesis examines how entrepreneurial agency is enacted, negotiated, and sustained when legitimacy and resources are uncertain, and how context itself is co-produced through these everyday practices.

The research builds on an interpretive and practice-oriented design, grounded in narrative fieldwork from Pakistan. Drawing on several rounds of field engagement between 2017 and 2021, the thesis investigates how individuals sustain their emerging enterprises within the moral and social context of poverty. The role of structural constraint in entrepreneurship is discussed across four interconnected papers that I) explore how individuals in poverty engage in entrepreneurship and construct value within constrained conditions; II) examine how entrepreneurs narrate and give meaning to the social aspects of their work, showing how legitimacy is negotiated through storytelling; III) investigate how women act within the combined conditions of poverty and patriarchy, tracing the practices that allow them to continue and subtly reshape local norms; and IV) develop understanding of relational privilege, showing how education, family support, gendered positioning, economic capital, and social networks shape entrepreneurial possibilities and sustain certain forms of legitimacy within poverty.

The thesis develops the concept of nuanced agency to describe how entrepreneurship unfolds through small, adaptive, and relational acts that sustain entrepreneurial life within constraint while gradually reshaping it. It also develops the concept of relational privilege to explain how uneven access to legitimacy and support differentiates entrepreneurial agency within poverty. Together, these ideas advance contextual and practice-based understandings of entrepreneurship by showing that context is not a backdrop but a co-produced field of relationships, expectations, and moral orders.

Keywords: Contextual entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurship, Multidimensional poverty, Nuanced agency, Practice, Patriarchy, Privilege, Structural constraint

Entreprenörskap i en strukturellt begränsad kontext: nyanserad handlingsförmåga och privilegier i fattigdom

Sammanfattning

Den här avhandlingen undersöker entreprenöriell handlingsförmåga i ett sammanhang präglad av strukturella begränsningar. Trots att entreprenörskap ofta framställs som en väg till egenmakt och social rörlighet, bortser sådana framställningar från hur entreprenöriella processer faktiskt utvecklas när flerdimensionell fattigdom, patriarkala strukturer och institutionell bräcklighet formar vardagens möjligheter. Avhandlingen analyserar hur entreprenöriell handlingsförmåga utövas, förhandlas och upprätthålls när legitimitet och resurser är osäkra, samt hur själva kontexten samskapas genom dessa vardagliga handlingar.

Forskningen bygger på en tolkande och praktikorienterad forskningsdesign, grundad i narrativt fältarbete i Pakistan. Baserat på flera fältbesök mellan 2017 och 2021 undersöker avhandlingen hur individer upprätthåller sina framväxande företag inom fattigdomens moraliska och sociala kontext. Strukturella begränsningarnas roll i entreprenörskapet diskuteras genom fyra sammanlänkade artiklar som: I) utforskar hur individer i fattigdom engagerar sig i entreprenörskap och skapar värde under begränsade förhållanden; II) analyserar hur entreprenörer berättar och ger mening åt de sociala aspekterna av sitt arbete, och visar hur legitimitet förhandlas genom berättelser; III) undersöker hur kvinnor agerar inom de kombinerade villkoren av fattigdom och patriarkat, och följer de praktiker som möjliggör fortsatt handlande och subtil omformning av lokala normer; samt IV) utvecklar förståelsen av relationellt privilegium (relational privilege) genom att visa hur utbildning, familjens stöd, könspositionering, ekonomiskt kapital och sociala nätverk formar entreprenöriella möjligheter och upprätthåller vissa former av legitimitet inom fattigdom.

Avhandlingen utvecklar begreppet nyanserad handlingsförmåga för att beskriva hur entreprenörskap tar form genom små, adaptiva och relationella handlingar som upprätthåller entreprenöriellt liv under begränsad struktur samtidigt som de gradvis omformar dessa. Den utvecklar också begreppet relationell privilegium (relational privilege) för att förklara hur ojämlik tillgång till legitimitet och stöd differentierar entreprenöriell handlingsförmåga inom fattigdom. Tillsammans bidrar dessa idéer till en kontextuell och praktikbaserad förståelse av entreprenörskap genom att visa att kontext inte är något i bakgrunden, utan ett samskapat fält av relationer, förväntningar och moraliska ordningar.

Nyckelord: kontextuellt entreprenörskap, entreprenörskap, multidimensionell fattigdom, nyanserad handlingsförmåga, handling, patriarkat, privilegium, strukturell begränsning

Preface

“I’ll find a way to make it through.”

That’s what I kept telling myself in the early months of this PhD, when nothing seemed to connect, not the ideas, not the writing, not even the weather. What you are about to read carries my name, but it holds the efforts, laughter, and conversations of many people who walked parts of this road with me.

This thesis grew in a community that believes research can make a difference, that ideas matter, that kindness and critique can go hand in hand, and that a good fika can solve almost anything. Over these years, I have learned, unlearned, written, rewritten, and occasionally stared at my screen, wondering how anyone finishes a PhD. But somehow, through patience and the encouragement of those around me, it came together.

Between conferences, fieldwork, and long writing nights, I found pieces of myself in the stories I studied and in the people who shared them. The process made me humbler, more curious, and occasionally funnier. It also taught me that research, like life, is rarely neat. What follows is the best version I could build out of many imperfect drafts, conversations, and moments of stubborn hope.

If you find traces of warmth in these pages, they belong to all those who stood beside me, friends, colleagues, and mentors, who reminded me that nothing worthwhile is ever done alone.

Dedication

To my parents,
to Shahab,
And to Rayan—love in its many forms.

Contents

List of publications.....	13
List of tables	15
List of figures.....	17
Abbreviations	19
1. Introducing the topic.....	21
1.1 Framing the research problem.....	22
1.2 Thesis aim and questions	23
1.2.1 Empirical setting	24
1.3 Overview of the papers and thesis structure.....	25
1.4 Relevance and contribution	26
1.4.1 Theoretical contribution.	26
1.4.2 Methodological contribution.....	27
1.4.3 Empirical and practical contribution.....	27
1.5 Positionality.....	27
1.6 Areas of focus.....	29
1.7 Structure of the thesis	30
2. Introducing the setting.....	33
2.1 Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan	33
2.2 My relation to KP.....	34
2.3 Historical legacies of constraint	35
2.4 KP today	36
2.5 Starting and running ventures in KP	37
3. What the literature tells us (and what it doesn't).....	41
3.1 Entrepreneurship as Practice	42
3.2 Context as lived and contested.....	44
3.3 Agency under constraint	45
3.4 Intersectional and relational view of agency	47
3.5 Synthesis: Towards a relational theory of agency under constraint	
49	
3.5.1 Context	49

3.5.2	Agency.....	50
3.5.3	Intersectionality and relational view of agency	50
3.5.4	Toward a relational theory of agency under structural constraint	51
4.	Approaching the matter of methodology.....	55
4.1	Research approach.....	55
4.2	Research design	57
4.3	Methodological orientation	58
4.4	Methodological coherence	61
4.5	Context and access to the field.....	62
4.5.1	The research context.....	62
4.5.2	Entering the field.....	62
4.5.3	Cultural and ethical sensitivity	64
4.5.4	Empirical material and analysis	64
4.5.5	Analysis	66
4.6	Empirical material in the four papers	67
4.7	Quality, credibility, and ethical considerations	69
4.7.1	Credibility.....	69
4.7.2	Transparency and reflexivity.....	70
4.7.3	Ethical considerations.....	70
4.7.4	Trustworthiness	71
5.	Paper presentations I-IV	73
5.1	Overview of the papers	73
5.2	Paper I	74
5.3	Paper II	75
5.4	Paper III	76
5.5	Paper IV	77
5.6	Summary of the papers.....	78
6.	Discussion and conclusion.....	81
6.1	Narratives as meaning making	82
6.2	Relational legitimacy	83
6.3	Entrepreneurial practices under constraint	85
6.3.1	Hiding.....	85
6.3.2	Masking	85
6.3.3	Negotiating	86
6.3.4	Rule-Breaking.....	86

6.4	Co-Producing context	87
6.5	Towards a view of nuanced agency.....	90
6.5.1	Context as lived and relational	90
6.5.2	Nuanced agency under constraint.....	90
6.5.3	Entrepreneuring as practice and process.....	91
6.5.4	Intersectionality, positionality, and relational privilege.....	91
6.6	Contributions.....	92
6.6.1	Theoretical contribution	92
6.6.2	Methodological contribution.....	93
6.6.3	Practical contribution	94
6.7	Limitations and future research.....	95
6.8	Concluding remarks	97
References.....		99
Popular science summary		111
Populärvetenskaplig sammanfattning		115
Acknowledgements		119

List of publications

This thesis is based on the work contained in the following papers, referred to by Roman numerals in the text:

- I. Hashim, H. and Gaddefors, J. (2023). The value of entrepreneuring in the context of multidimensional poverty. *The International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation*, 24(2), 88–104. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14657503231156338>
- II. Cunningham, J., Xiong, L., Hashim, H. and Yunis, M. S. (2022). Narrating the ‘social’: The evolving stories of Pakistan’s social entrepreneurs. *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development*, 34(7–8), 668–685. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08985626.2022.2077990>
- III. Hashim, H. (revised manuscript, second round of review). Quiet acts and bold shifts — Women’s entrepreneurial practices in patriarchal poverty. *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development*.
- IV. Hashim, H. (under review). Privilege in poverty — Exploring entrepreneurship at the margins. *Organization Studies*.

All published papers are reproduced with the permission of the publisher or are published open access.

The contribution of Hina Hashim to the papers included in this thesis was as follows:

- I. This is a co-authored paper in which I served as the lead author. I was responsible for the overall design and development of the study, collected and analysed the empirical material, and took the lead in writing the manuscript.
- II. This is a co-authored paper in which I played a central role throughout the development of the study. I was responsible for designing the research instrument and conducting the qualitative fieldwork in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. I collected and initially interpreted the empirical material, presenting preliminary analyses to the research team and helping shape the theoretical direction of the paper. I contributed to the conceptual framing and writing through several rounds of revision, including preparation for conference presentation and journal submission, leading to its publication in *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development*. Together with my co-author Lin Xiong, I discussed the paper and its findings in a podcast for the journal following its publication.
- III. I am the sole author of this paper. I designed the study, collected and analysed the empirical material, and wrote the manuscript. The paper has undergone two rounds of peer review and is currently in its second revision for *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development*.
- IV. I am the sole author of this paper. I designed the study, collected and analysed the empirical material, and wrote the manuscript. The paper is currently under review at *Organization Studies*.

List of tables

Table 1. Positioning the thesis within the wider research field.....	29
Table 2. Areas of focus across the four papers.....	30
Table 3. Structure of the thesis	31
Table 4. KP's structural conditions and its Implications for sustaining ventures	38
Table 5. Key insights and remaining gaps in entrepreneurship scholarship: toward a relational understanding of agency under structural constraint...	52
Table 6. Empirical material in Papers I–IV	68
Table 7. Summary of the papers	79
Table 8. Overview of Chapter 6.....	81

List of figures

Figure 1. The co-production of context..... 88

Abbreviations

KP Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, a province in northern Pakistan and the empirical setting of this research.

1. Introducing the topic

In one of my field encounters, a woman running a tailoring business described how she kept her sewing machine hidden in a back room. She explained that visibility invited questions she could not afford, from relatives who might judge her respectability, from neighbours who might question her priorities, and from officials who might demand licences she could not secure. The business survived not by expanding or scaling, but by remaining discreet, continuously adjusting to the shifting expectations of those around her.

Her account was echoed in different ways by others I met. Some spoke of starting small activities in the home and presenting them as part of domestic responsibility, rather than as independent businesses. Others described quietly gathering resources through informal means, selling household items or drawing on social favours, because formal support was unavailable or unsafe to access. A few mentioned how the spaces in which they worked, like a room in their home or a kitchen corner, became both workshop and shield, allowing them to continue their activities without inviting unwanted attention. These stories did not describe a straightforward path to building firms or scaling ventures, but rather a continual negotiation of what could be done, when, and under what conditions.

Such accounts bring into view a form of entrepreneurship that cannot be understood through universal models of autonomy, opportunity or resistance. They show how entrepreneurial processes in poverty are deeply entangled with context, where legitimacy is fragile and action is continuously worked out within moral and social norms. What appear as small adjustments or cautious manoeuvres are in fact practices through which agency is sustained under constraint. This raises the central question for this thesis: how can we understand entrepreneurial practice when poverty is not a backdrop to be overcome, but a constitutive condition that shapes what entrepreneurs do and how they do it?

Thus, this thesis focuses on entrepreneuring under structural constraints, with particular attention to how entrepreneurial agency unfolds in contexts of multidimensional poverty. Drawing on empirical studies in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, the research examines how individuals navigate scarcity, patriarchy and uneven access to privilege. It asks how entrepreneurship is practised and made meaningful when access to

legitimacy, resources and institutional support cannot be taken for granted. Rather than treating entrepreneurship as a fixed category or a linear pathway to mobility, the research foregrounds entrepreneurship as a contextual and relational process, embedded in everyday social and cultural life.

1.1 Framing the research problem

Entrepreneurship has long been hailed as a vehicle for economic growth, innovation and upward mobility (Schumpeter, 1934; Drucker, 1985). Over the past decade, scholarship has continued to reinforce this narrative, positioning entrepreneurship as central to solving societal and economic problems such as employment, inclusion and regional development (Audretsch and Link, 2019; Acs, Szerb, and Lafuente, 2018). In both academic and policy discourse, particularly in the Global South, entrepreneurship is promoted as a key instrument for poverty alleviation and social inclusion (Bruton, Ketchen, and Ireland, 2013; George et al., 2012; Zhao and Wry, 2021).

Within these narratives, the entrepreneur is typically imagined as a self-reliant, opportunity-seeking individual who mobilises scarce resources to create transformation and value, whether by recognising and exploiting opportunities under uncertainty (McMullen and Shepherd, 2006), creating new market possibilities (Alvarez and Barney, 2007), applying effectual logics (Sarasvathy, 2001), or assembling capabilities to capture emerging opportunities (Davidsson, 2015; Autio et al., 2014; Du and Kim, 2021). Yet such representations do not account for the lived realities of those entrepreneuring in poverty. Instead, they risk obscuring the contextual, relational and morally negotiated practices through which entrepreneurship is sustained under conditions of scarcity (Lee et al., 2019; Martinez Dy, 2020; Refai et al., 2024; Korsgaard, Müller, and Tanvig, 2021; Welter, Baker, and Wirsching, 2019; Dey and Teasdale, 2016).

This observation points towards two unresolved issues in entrepreneurship research. First, while the field increasingly recognises the importance of context (Welter, 2011; Zahra et al., 2014), the analytical treatment of poverty remains limited. Poverty is often positioned as a backdrop to be “overcome”, rather than as a condition that actively shapes entrepreneurial practice (Bruton et al., 2013; Webb et al., 2013; George et al., 2012). Recent reviews emphasise that poverty does not simply constrain

entrepreneurship but actively shapes the possibilities and forms of agency that emerge within it (Sutter, Bruton and Chen, 2019; Galloway et al, 2019). This raises a pressing question: how might our understanding of entrepreneurship change if poverty is approached not as an external hurdle, but as part of the very terrain that shapes what entrepreneurs can do and how?

Secondly, critical and feminist perspectives have advanced the field by challenging universalist assumptions, yet many still preserve a binary in which entrepreneurs appear either as autonomous individuals making free choices or as subjects resisting oppressive structures (Calás, Smircich and Bourne, 2009; Verduijn and Essers, 2013). What remains significantly underexplored are the situated forms of agency that lie between these extremes, where entrepreneurs navigate shifting expectations, constraints and relationships without fully breaking free from them, yet without simply reproducing dominant structures. Recent work on poverty and agency underscores that poverty is not a simple void of available resources but rather a complex social structure that shapes the possibilities for agency itself (Martinez Dy, 2020; Salvi, Belz and Bacq, 2022). At the same time, contemporary feminist scholarship signals a deepening and expansion of feminist entrepreneurship discourse, moving beyond the earlier focus on gender difference toward more intersectional, material, and postcolonial analyses that foreground context, affect, and everyday practice (Jones, Al-Dajani, Harrison and Swail, 2025).

This thesis begins from the understanding that entrepreneurship in poverty is neither a straightforward path to empowerment nor merely the reproduction of constraint. Rather, it unfolds as a situated process in which individuals negotiate how to act, gain legitimacy and remain visible or invisible within embedded moral and social norms. By asking how entrepreneurial practice is enacted when power and recognition are scarce, this research turns observation into inquiry, treating entrepreneurship not as a settled pathway but as a lived question, contextual, relational and embedded.

1.2 Thesis aim and questions

This thesis aims to explore entrepreneurial agency in the context of structural constraints. Specifically, the research investigates how agency is enacted in everyday entrepreneurial processes when legitimacy, resources, and

institutional power are unevenly distributed or altogether absent. It takes a practice-based, contextual lens, emphasising the lived experiences of entrepreneurs whose actions do not fit conventional models of innovation, scale, or growth.

The overarching research question guiding this thesis is:

- How entrepreneurial agency unfolds in the context of multidimensional poverty?

To address this overarching question, the thesis draws on four empirical studies, each shedding light on distinct yet interconnected dimensions of this broader inquiry. These studies give rise to the following sub-questions:

- How do individuals in poverty engage in entrepreneurship to create and sustain value in their everyday lives?
- How do entrepreneurs narrate and make sense of the ‘social’ dimensions of their work, and how do these stories reflect their interactions with a changing social context?
- How is agency enacted and sustained within overlapping structures of poverty and patriarchy?
- How is context co-produced through entrepreneurial actions and interactions in settings marked by poverty?

Together, these questions enable a layered exploration of entrepreneurship as a contextually situated, relationally negotiated and socially embedded phenomenon. Rather than pursuing generalised claims or universal laws, this thesis aims to offer theoretical insights into how entrepreneurial agency is enacted through subtle, everyday practices, how contexts are actively co-produced by entrepreneurs, and how legitimacy is continuously negotiated in settings where structural resources and recognition are limited or uncertain.

1.2.1 Empirical setting

The empirical setting of this thesis is Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), a province in the north of Pakistan. KP is characterised by poverty, entrenched gender norms, and widespread informality, making it a particularly relevant

site for examining entrepreneurial agency in the context of structural constraints. A detailed account of the historical, social, and economic context of KP is provided in Chapter 2.

1.3 Overview of the papers and thesis structure

This thesis includes four empirical papers, each of which explores different but interrelated dimensions of entrepreneurial agency in contexts of poverty. Together, the papers form a cumulative inquiry into how entrepreneurship is practised, narrated, and situated within everyday life when structural constraints are pronounced and legitimacy is contested. This cumulative theorising (Van Burg et al., 2020; Cornelissen and Clarke, 2010) reflects how qualitative research builds knowledge iteratively, with each paper extending and deepening the insights of the others.

The four papers are not stand-alone investigations; they speak to each other both thematically and analytically. They share an empirical context and each adds a distinct perspective to the broader research problem. The sequencing of the papers reflects both analytical depth and conceptual build-up. Early papers (I and II) establish the contextual landscape and examine how entrepreneurs narrate and frame their actions, while later papers (III and IV) turn to the practices through which agency is enacted and the conditions that shape these practices.

Taken together, the studies provide the empirical foundation for the theoretical development advanced in this thesis. In particular, they inform the articulation of nuanced agency as the overarching contribution of the thesis, a way of conceptualising entrepreneurial agency that resists dichotomies of autonomy versus constraint and instead foregrounds how agency is enacted in contextual, relational and embedded ways.

- Paper 1 explores how individuals living in poverty engage in entrepreneuring and what motivates them to do so. It shows that value is constructed in ways that extend beyond economic outcomes, revealing how entrepreneuring becomes meaningful in contexts of constraint.
- Paper 2 investigates how individuals narrate and give meaning to the ‘social’ aspects of their work, showing how these meanings evolve in interaction with local context.

- Paper 3 examines how women entrepreneurs act within the intersecting context of poverty and patriarchy. It asks how entrepreneurship plays out under these constraints, and what practices allow women to alter and reshape aspects of their local context to continue entrepreneuring.
- Paper 4 investigates how privilege, even in small and subtle forms, operates in the context of poverty. It explores how advantages are enacted and made meaningful in entrepreneurial practice, raising questions about how such privilege shapes possibilities for action.

Across these papers, a shared empirical base and interpretive stance enable cumulative theorising, building not just parallel insights but an interconnected, multi-dimensional picture of entrepreneurial processes in constrained contexts, from narrative sensemaking and contextual framing to everyday practices and relational privilege. These contributions are revisited in Chapter 4, where the findings from the four studies are synthesised in relation to the overarching research question.

1.4 Relevance and contribution

Entrepreneurship is widely promoted in policy and academic discourse as a solution to poverty, inequality and underdevelopment. Yet these framings often rely on universal models that privilege growth, innovation and individual autonomy, and so risk overlooking how entrepreneuring actually unfolds under structural constraint. By grounding the analysis in multidimensional poverty, this thesis brings the lived, situated and morally negotiated character of entrepreneurial practice into view.

1.4.1 Theoretical contribution.

The thesis advances the contextual and practice-based turn by treating context not as backdrop but as something that is co-produced through entrepreneurial action. Building cumulatively across the four studies, it develops nuanced agency as the overarching theoretical contribution: a way of conceptualising entrepreneurial agency that moves beyond the autonomy–resistance binary and foregrounds how and instead foregrounds how agency

is enacted in contextual, relational and embedded ways. This contribution is articulated in the synthesis and discussion chapters.

1.4.2 Methodological contribution.

The research mobilises a practice-oriented, narrative approach, informed by a reflexive insider positionality. This design treats life narratives as windows onto practice, allowing exploration of how meaning-making and action intertwine in everyday entrepreneuring. An autoethnographic understanding supports the interpretation of tacit cultural codes, legitimacy negotiations, and context co-production, while a constructionist, interpretive stance foregrounds how entrepreneurial agency is situated and relational within structural constraint.

1.4.3 Empirical and practical contribution.

Empirically, the thesis provides a fine-grained account of entrepreneuring in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan, showing how people sustain livelihoods and make sense of their actions when legitimacy, resources, and institutional support cannot be assumed.

Practically, it challenges the linear view of entrepreneurship as a straightforward route out of poverty and invites development actors to recognise the relational, moral, and situated nature of entrepreneurial life. The research highlights how support that prioritises autonomy and formalisation can overlook the need for safe visibility, legitimacy, and mutual responsibility. It calls for approaches that strengthen trust and relational continuity, respecting local moral expectations and the interdependence that sustains everyday entrepreneuring.

1.5 Positionality

In qualitative, interpretive research, particularly when working with narratives, the position of the researcher is not peripheral but constitutive of the research process (Holmes, 2020). This thesis is grounded in a research journey shaped by proximity: I share a social, cultural, and geographical background with the individuals whose narratives and practices are central to this work.

Rather than attempting to distance myself from this connection, I treat it as a methodological and analytical resource. This resonates with calls for

research that acknowledges the inevitability of situated knowledge and the impossibility of a neutral “view from nowhere” (Goundar, 2025; Haraway, 1988). By drawing on what Holmes (2020) describes as the “reflexive positionality” of the researcher, I adopt an autoethnographic gaze that recognises how understanding is filtered through lived experience. Because I grew up in a similar context, with cultural familiarity, I bring both an insider’s sensitivity and an outsider’s academic framing to the research (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011).

This dual positioning is both enabling and problematic. On one hand, it grants access to tacit “common-sense” knowledge, cultural codes, and unspoken practices that might remain opaque to an outsider. On the other hand, as Goundar (2025) notes, closeness can blur critical distance and introduce blind spots, as familiarity risks normalising or overlooking certain dynamics. The challenge, then, is not to erase this positionality, but to remain reflexive about its role in shaping access, interpretation, and analysis (Finlay, 2002).

During interviews, participants often assumed I would understand without needing long explanations. This allowed for openness in some cases, and strategic concealment in others. Such dynamics highlight what Holmes (2020) calls the “ambivalence of positionality,” where the researcher is not simply inside or outside but occupies shifting positions in relation to participants. My presence was shaped by the fact that I was “from here, but also not entirely”, a researcher being educated abroad, asking questions not often asked in everyday life. I was not a peer, nor a stranger, and this in-betweenness shaped rapport, power relations, and the direction interviews would take (Berger, 2015).

In the analysis, I made a deliberate choice to centre participants’ narratives, while also acknowledging how my interpretation was shaped by shared cultural reference points and by academic training. This required balancing empathic understanding with critical distance, an exercise in what Goundar (2025) frames as “reflexive self-positioning.” The analytic categories that emerged, such as legitimacy and privilege, are therefore filtered through a dual lens: rooted in empirical encounter but shaped by my interpretive stance.

My positionality also influenced what I was able to see and not see. There are likely moments where I overlooked dynamics that might have stood out to an outsider, just as there are insights I was able to grasp because of a shared

background. This potential insider bias was challenged and balanced in the analysis process throughout by my supervisors and academic colleagues. Acknowledging this aligns with Holmes’ (2020) argument that positionality is not a bias to be eliminated but a constitutive condition of qualitative inquiry. Similarly, Goundar (2025) stresses that transparency about the researcher’s embeddedness enriches rather than weakens validity, provided reflexivity is sustained throughout the research process.

This reflexive approach is consistent with the broader epistemological stance of the thesis: that entrepreneurship is not a fixed object to be studied from a distance, but a socially embedded phenomenon that must be interpreted from within. Just as entrepreneurial agency is shaped by relationships, norms, and local codes, so too is research itself. Positionality is not a limitation to be overcome; it is a constitutive condition of this work.

1.6 Areas of focus

The aim of exploring entrepreneurial agency in contexts of structural constraint opens up many possible avenues of investigation. To ensure the contribution of the thesis remains clear and coherent, delimitations and well-defined areas of focus are necessary. This thesis is situated within the wider discipline of business administration, and more specifically within the field of entrepreneurship. The phenomenon in focus is entrepreneurial agency under structural constraints, and the empirical material is drawn from small-scale entrepreneurs in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan (Table 1).

Table 1. Positioning the thesis within the wider research field

Discipline	Sub-discipline	Phenomenon	Empirical material
Business Administration	Entrepreneurship	Entrepreneurial agency under structural constraints	Individuals in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

Each of the four papers addresses a distinct but interconnected area of focus. Table 2 positions the papers in relation to three dimensions: topicality, conceptual framework, and conceptualisation of agency. Topicality refers to the scholarly conversation each paper engages with. The conceptual framework outlines the theoretical lenses applied. The conceptualisation of agency indicates how entrepreneurial agency is understood within the paper.

Table 2. Areas of focus across the four papers

	Paper I	Paper II	Paper III	Paper IV
Topicality	Value of entrepreneurship in poverty	Narratives of the “social” in entrepreneurship	Women’s entrepreneurship under patriarchy and poverty	Privilege and entrepreneurship in poverty
Conceptual framework	Practice-based and contextual views	Narrative and discourse perspectives	Feminist Contextual entrepreneurship: practice lens	Relational and contextual perspectives
Conceptualisation of agency	Agency as value-creating practice	Agency as narrated and negotiated	Agency as situated practices in constrained settings	Agency as shaped by relational privilege
	Paper I	Paper II	Paper III	Paper IV
Topicality	Value of entrepreneurship in poverty	Narratives of the “social” in entrepreneurship	Women’s entrepreneurship under patriarchy and poverty	Privilege and entrepreneurship in poverty

1.7 Structure of the thesis

The introduction chapter outlined the research problem and aims of the thesis. Table 3 below presents the structure of the thesis.

Table 3. Structure of the thesis

Chapter	Title / Focus	Content and Purpose
1	Introduction	Outlines the research problem, aims, and overarching questions of the thesis.
2	Research Context	Introduces Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan, sets the empirical stage by situating the study historically, socially, and economically. Explains why KP provides an analytically relevant setting for examining entrepreneurial agency under constraint.
3	Literature Review	Reviews existing scholarship and positions the study within contextual, practice-based, and agency-focused approaches to entrepreneurship.
4	Methodology	Describes the epistemological orientation, research design, empirical work, and analytical strategy employed in the thesis.
5	Empirical Papers	Summarises the four empirical papers and synthesises their insights in relation to the overarching research question.
6	Discussion and Conclusion	Provides a deeper theoretical discussion of the findings and outlines the academic, methodological, and practical contributions of the thesis. Concludes with reflections on limitations and directions for future research.

2. Introducing the setting

The previous chapter outlined the research problem and questions guiding this thesis. To address them, it is necessary to situate the study within its empirical setting. This chapter introduces Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), a province in the north of Pakistan where the fieldwork for this thesis was conducted. KP is not only the geographical site of the research but also an analytically significant context: its history of marginalisation, entrenched poverty, and restrictive gender norms create conditions where entrepreneurial agency is both highly constrained and continuously negotiated. By tracing KP's historical legacies, present socio-economic conditions, and patterns of entrepreneurship, this chapter provides the contextual grounding for the analysis that follows.

2.1 Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan

This thesis is situated in KP, where I conducted fieldwork between 2018 and 2021. KP provides a particularly relevant setting for exploring entrepreneurial agency under structural constraint. The province is marked by poverty, weak institutional infrastructures, and entrenched patriarchal norms, making it one of the most disadvantaged regions in the country (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2023; Mumtaz and Salway, 2009). Economic life is heavily informalised and shaped by kinship, religion, and gendered expectations, while women's labour force participation remains among the lowest in South Asia (Roomi and Harrison, 2010; Roomi, Rehman and Henry, 2018). At the same time, KP has been subject to distinctive historical and political legacies: its frontier identity, colonial rule under the Frontier Crimes Regulation, and proximity to the Afghan conflict have produced enduring dynamics of marginalisation, insecurity, and underdevelopment (Ahmad, 1996; Siddique, 2014).

For entrepreneurship research, these conditions make KP analytically significant. The region foregrounds the very issues that remain underexplored in the literature: how agency is enacted in contexts where legitimacy is fragile, resources are scarce, and institutional recognition is uncertain. Studying entrepreneurship in KP thus allows an examination of context not as a static backdrop but as something lived, negotiated, and co-produced through practice (Welter, 2011; Baker and Welter, 2018). In this

sense, KP is not merely the site of data collection but a vantage point from which to interrogate and extend debates on agency, context, and practice in entrepreneurship.

2.2 My relation to KP

I was born and raised in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and my own experiences reflect many of the dynamics that shape entrepreneurial life in the province. The women in my family before me were not formally educated; my mother, for instance, was married at the age of 14 in rural KP. At that time, early marriage was considered a normal part of women's lives, reflecting broader patriarchal norms and expectations (Kandiyoti, 1988; Roomi and Parrott, 2008). My father's career in the military meant that our family moved frequently across Pakistan. This mobility gave my mother exposure to different environments, where she encountered educated women with greater autonomy. Although she believed it was too late to change her own path, she became determined to secure different opportunities for her children, particularly her daughter.

In Pakistan, education is not free, and decisions about schooling are often collective, shaped by extended families rather than nuclear households (Ali, 2013; Mumtaz and Salway, 2009). For my mother, advocating for my education meant negotiating with kin, challenging established expectations, and creating new possibilities within a system not designed to accommodate them. This experience reflects a broader pattern in KP, where agency often takes relational and negotiated forms rather than being exercised individually.

My own trajectory into higher education was shaped by these dynamics. Studying Human Resource Management at a local university was less a matter of individual choice than a reflection of the gendered limitations surrounding what subjects were considered appropriate for women (Khattak, 2014). During my master's thesis, I began assisting with a project on entrepreneurship and encountered, for the first time, the stories of local entrepreneurs. These early encounters revealed the tensions between constraint and agency that later became central to this doctoral research.

I share this personal narrative not to centre myself, but because it reflects an important part of this thesis: that I understand the constraints and negotiations that shape lives in KP not only as a researcher, but as someone

who has lived within them. My position resonates with what Sutter et al. (2019) describe as essential: researchers embedded in contexts of deprivation are uniquely placed to contribute perspectives that are often absent in dominant entrepreneurship research. Being from KP gives me access to the cultural nuances, silences, and rhythms of the context, while later experiences abroad provided distance and a critical perspective. Together, these vantage points allow me to situate entrepreneurial practice in KP both as lived experience and as an analytically significant case of how poverty, patriarchy, and informality shape agency.

2.3 Historical legacies of constraint

The structural conditions of KP today cannot be understood without attention to its historical legacies. As a province bordering Afghanistan, KP has long been defined by its frontier identity, strategic location, and cultural conservatism. During British colonial rule, the region was governed through indirect rule and the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR), which allowed the state to bypass formal institutions and administer through tribal intermediaries and patriarchal authority structures (Siddique, 2014). This created a legacy of weak state institutions, reliance on informal governance, and the embedding of patriarchal power into the political order.

KP's proximity to conflict further shaped its development trajectory. During the 1980s and 1990s, the province absorbed large numbers of Afghan refugees, while also becoming a base for militarisation and the spread of conservative ideologies (Ahmad, 1996). These dynamics tightened restrictions on women's mobility and visibility, while simultaneously informalising much of the local economy. Over time, this contributed to widespread mistrust of state authority and reinforced the role of kinship, religious, and tribal structures as dominant forms of regulation (Shinwari, 2011).

After Pakistan's independence in 1947, KP remained underdeveloped compared to other provinces. Federal policy often prioritised KP's security function as a buffer zone over its socio-economic development, reinforcing its peripheral position within the national political economy (Irshad and Waqar, 2025). The result is a region historically marked by marginalisation, where state neglect, conflict, and entrenched patriarchal systems intersect.

These legacies continue to shape KP's institutional and social landscape. Weak public infrastructures, reliance on informal authority, and restrictive gender norms are not recent phenomena but the product of a long historical trajectory. Indeed, KP was long one of the least educated regions in British India and post-independence Pakistan, a legacy that constrains the capacity of local institutions and narrows the space for civic participation (Ali, 2023). Simultaneously, the gendered political order of KP shows how patriarchal norms and institutional barriers persistently limit women's participation in formal leadership roles (Gul, Taj and Zaman, 2023). As Roos (2021) shows, historical legacies of place and power deeply structure how gender and entrepreneurship are reproduced in everyday life. Similarly, Tunberg (2017) and Welter, Baker and Wirsching (2019) highlight that context is not a neutral backdrop but a historically sedimented terrain. In KP, the convergence of colonial indirect rule, systemic neglect, and patriarchal governance produces enduring institutional fragilities (Sutter, Bruton and Chen, 2019). This makes KP a particularly telling site for examining entrepreneurship under constraint, since today's entrepreneurial practices are embedded in structural conditions that are both contemporary and historically reproduced.

2.4 KP today

Today, KP remains one of the most disadvantaged provinces in Pakistan across multiple dimensions of development. On indicators such as literacy, health, gender equality, and employment, KP consistently falls below national averages. According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2023), the literacy rate for women in KP is 35.6 per cent compared to 71.2 per cent for men, and female labour force participation remains below 10 per cent. In rural areas, these disparities are even wider, reflecting how educational and economic opportunities are strongly mediated by gender.

Social norms around honour (*izzat*) and shame (*sharam*) regulate everyday life for both women and men (Roomi, Rehman and Henry, 2018). For women, these norms restrict mobility and public visibility. For men, they reinforce breadwinner expectations and "respectable provision," producing pressures to secure income through socially sanctioned routes and to act as gatekeepers of family reputation (Mumtaz and Salway, 2009; Kandiyoti, 1988). Men who cannot meet these obligations may face stigma or loss of

status, which in turn shapes household decision-making and what forms of women's work are permissible. In this sense, gendered constraints are differentiated but interconnected: women's options are often mediated by men's positioning, while men's status is tied to how they enable, contain, or publicly represent household income strategies.

Economically, KP is dominated by informality. local employment opportunities remain scarce, especially for young men and women. Microenterprises, frequently home-based, seasonal, and reliant on kinship, represent one of the few viable avenues for income generation (Haq, Junaid and Khan, 2024). Yet these activities are rarely recognised or supported by formal institutions, leaving entrepreneurs dependent on reciprocity, moral legitimacy, and reputational capital within their communities (Mumtaz and Salway, 2009).

At the same time, KP is not static. The spread of social media has enabled some men and women to pursue small-scale online trading; NGO initiatives have created new but fragile openings for women's economic participation; and modest legal reforms have slightly expanded women's rights to property and mobility (Haq, Junaid and Khan, 2024). These shifts do not erase entrenched inequalities, but they create narrow channels in which entrepreneurial activity can take root and through which gender roles are sometimes renegotiated.

In sum, KP today is shaped by entrenched poverty, gendered norms, and reliance on informal economies, but also by emerging spaces of negotiation and change. These conditions make it a particularly relevant context for studying entrepreneurial agency as a relational, situated practice—where legitimacy, visibility, and provision are continuously worked out within households and communities (Kandiyoti, 1988; Mumtaz and Salway, 2009).

2.5 Starting and running ventures in KP

As mentioned above, ventures in KP cannot be understood without reference to informality and to the gendered entanglements of kinship, religion, and respectability. Unlike textbook models that emphasise innovation, risk-taking, or growth, ventures in KP are often oriented toward survival, risk management, and legitimacy (Lent et al., 2019). They are shaped not only by market logics but also by what is morally and socially permissible within local codes.

For women, this often involves presenting income-generating activity as an extension of domestic roles, charitable service, or community contribution, ways of sustaining respectability while earning (Roomi & Harrison, 2010; Ahmad, 2011). For men, decisions are filtered through breadwinner ideals and the obligation to uphold household honour; choices about sector, partners, visibility, and debt are evaluated against expectations of respectable provision and risk containment (Mumtaz & Salway, 2009). In many households, men act as gatekeepers and guarantors of women's ventures, providing cover, contacts, or transport, while women's economic contributions can enhance men's provider status when framed appropriately.

Thus, enterprising possibilities are not simply individual; they are co-produced through gender relations within households and wider kinship networks (Kandiyoti, 1988). These dynamics highlight that entrepreneurial possibilities are unevenly distributed and relationally enacted, shaped by gender, status, and social positioning.

To synthesise these dynamics, Table 4 summarises the relationship between KP's structural conditions and its implications for starting and running ventures:

Table 4. KP's structural conditions and its Implications for sustaining ventures

Structural Dimension	Condition in KP	Implications for starting and running ventures
Gender norms	Patriarchal, honour-bound; men as providers, women as guardians of respectability	Women must frame ventures within accepted roles; men manage "respectable provision" and act as gatekeepers/guarantors
Economic structure	Predominantly informal; scarce local jobs; remittance dependency	Home-based, low-capital, kin-supported businesses dominate; young men and women crowd into the informal sector
Institutional infrastructure	Weak public support; legal ambiguity; limited market access	Reliance on informal networks, moral legitimacy, and patronage to transact and resolve disputes
Education and literacy	Low female literacy; uneven male educational pathways	Study and vocational choices are gender-coded; credentials and language skills stratify opportunity

This chapter illustrates how agency unfolds within conditions of poverty, fragile legitimacy, and uneven relational access. Positioning the study in this context allows the thesis to engage directly with the gaps outlined in the introduction, showing how entrepreneurial agency takes shape as a situated, relational, and continually negotiated process under structural constraint.

The next chapter reviews the literature that underpins this study. It positions the research within contextual, practice-based, and agency-focused perspectives in entrepreneurship and identifies the conceptual gaps that guide the thesis's analytical focus.

3. What the literature tells us (and what it doesn't)

Entrepreneurship research has long been shaped by a rational and individualist way of thinking, where the entrepreneur is cast as an independent, opportunity-seeking figure. Classic accounts, such as those by Shane and Venkataraman (2000) and Casson (1982), focus on personal traits, cognition, and decision-making. The underlying assumption is that markets are open and neutral spaces and that anyone with the right abilities can enter, compete, and succeed. Within this frame, structural conditions and social relations are overlooked, while the entrepreneur appears as a self-contained actor whose progress is mainly a result of personal effort (Bruton, Ahlstrom and Li, 2010). As Omran and Yousafzai (2024) note, these success-oriented framings continue to shape entrepreneurship research, reflecting Western ideals of autonomy and control that obscure how the patterned limits of context, i-e, economic, institutional, moral and social, structure what can be imagined and achieved. Such limits, or constraints, are not merely barriers but constitutive features of entrepreneurial processes, shaping how legitimacy and recognition are unevenly negotiated within them.

Over time, this portrayal has been questioned for what it leaves out. A growing body of work points out that such universal models detach entrepreneurship from the social and institutional context in which it actually unfolds. By treating all entrepreneurs as equally empowered to act, such models exclude the historical and structural inequalities that shape access to resources, legitimacy, and even the imagination of what is possible (Calás, Smircich and Bourne, 2009; Welter, 2011; Korsgaard et al., 2021). The result is an image of the heroic, self-made entrepreneur that fits only a few and hides the relational and moral work that sustains most entrepreneurial lives (Anderson and Ronteau, 2017; Down, 2006). For those operating within poverty, fragile institutions, or gendered expectations, the assumptions of autonomy and choice are not only unrealistic but also distortive (Ahl and Marlow, 2012; Sutter, Bruton and Chen, 2019).

In response to these limitations, scholarship has increasingly turned toward contextual perspectives. This “contextual turn” reframes entrepreneurship as a moral and social accomplishment negotiated within specific environments rather than a universal formula for success (Steyaert,

2007; Johannisson, 2011; Welter, 2011). Here, context is understood as the economic, social, institutional, and moral environment in which entrepreneurial practice unfolds (Anderson and Gaddefors, 2016; Korsgaard, Müller and Tanvig, 2021). It marks a shift from asking “who the entrepreneur is” to asking “what entrepreneurs do, with whom, and under what conditions.” Yet even within this broader understanding, important gaps remain. Much of the literature still assumes relatively free actors working in environments that, while complex, are broadly supportive (Dana, 1995; Zahra et al., 2014; Omran and Yousafzai 2024). We know less about what entrepreneurship looks like when those enabling structures are weak or absent, when legitimacy, recognition, and even the right to act must be earned and re-earned. In such settings, entrepreneurship is woven through the moral and social relationships that allow people to make a living and make sense of what they do (Calás, Smircich and Bourne, 2009; Baker and Nelson, 2005; Anderson and Gaddefors, 2016; Sayer, 2005). Understanding entrepreneurship under these conditions requires looking more closely at how it is practised and legitimised within the relational and ethical textures of everyday life.

3.1 Entrepreneuring as Practice

Building on this contextual turn, the practice perspective focuses on entrepreneurship as something people do rather than something they are. Instead of treating entrepreneurship as a set of functional steps, i-e, recognising opportunities, assembling resources, and launching ventures, the practice lens examines how people create, sustain, and make sense of their work in context (Steyaert, 2007; Johannisson, 2011; Hjorth, Holt and Steyaert, 2015). Entrepreneurial practice unfolds within these patterned limits of context, where constraint is not external but experienced through the routines, negotiations, and moral judgements of everyday life (Giddens, 1984; Baker and Nelson, 2005; Essers and Benschop, 2009). It views entrepreneurship as an ongoing accomplishment emerging through day to day interactions such as talking, persuading, waiting, giving, and repairing (Cunliffe, 2011; Larty and Hamilton, 2011; Hytti et al., 2017).

From this view, entrepreneurial processes are embedded in moral, cultural, and relational worlds (Down, 2006; Steyaert, 2007; Johannisson, 2011). What counts as legitimate entrepreneurial action is shaped by local

expectations of obligation, respectability, and care (Anderson and Gaddefors, 2016; Ahl and Marlow, 2012). Ignoring these dimensions conceals the daily negotiations through which entrepreneurs sustain legitimacy within their communities (Welter, 2011; Essers and Benschop, 2009; Korsgaard et al., 2021). In contexts where institutions are weak and markets unreliable, such negotiations are not peripheral but essential: they often determine whether a venture can exist at all (Sutter, Bruton and Chen, 2019).

Parallel ideas from moral economy and value pluralism (Sayer, 2005) deepen this picture by showing that entrepreneurial action produces not one but many forms of value, economic, social, and moral, often inseparable in practice. In many settings, entrepreneurs pursue respectability, reciprocity, or service to others as part of how they make a living (Anderson et al., 2018; Galloway, Kapasi and Sang, 2015). Legitimacy thus functions as a moral currency, the social and moral acceptance of action (Suchman, 1995; Anderson and Smith, 2007; Dodd, Jack and Anderson, 2023), earned through alignment with local expectations of propriety and care.

Even so, most practice-based and moral perspectives stop short of examining how these processes unfold when agency itself is limited. We still know little about how legitimacy is sustained when resources, recognition, or autonomy are precarious, or how moral expectations can both enable and constrain action (Berglund, Hytti and Verduijn, 2020; Welter et al., 2019; Kimmitt, Muñoz and Newbery, 2020). In such conditions, the same norms that secure legitimacy can also reinforce hierarchy and exclusion. Agency, in this sense, is a situated and relational achievement, a continuous negotiation of meaning and possibility within constraint (Kabeer, 1999; Essers and Benschop, 2009; Ortner, 2006). Understanding entrepreneurship under constraint, therefore, requires bringing practice back into its broader social and institutional environment, recognising context not as a static background but as something lived, negotiated, and continually contested.

This perspective invites us to look beyond what entrepreneurs have or lack and toward what they do with what is at hand. It shifts attention from entrepreneurship as achievement to entrepreneurship as navigation, the ongoing effort to sustain meaning, legitimacy, and livelihood within structurally constrained contexts. The next section develops this argument by exploring how context shapes and is reshaped through entrepreneurial practice.

3.2 Context as lived and contested

Entrepreneurship research increasingly acknowledges that context matters (Welter, 2011; Zahra et al., 2014). Yet, in much of the literature, context appears merely as a background setting, a list of environmental factors or institutional conditions said to influence opportunity recognition or firm performance (Autio et al., 2014; Davidsson, 2015). It is often reduced to categories such as location, industry, or stage of development, as if it were a space around the entrepreneur rather than something produced through their actions (Korsgaard, Müller and Tanvig, 2021). In this thesis, context is understood in relational terms as the social, institutional, and moral environment in which entrepreneurial processes unfold. It is lived and interpretive, continually made and remade through practice, rather than a neutral container in which action merely happens (Anderson and Gaddefors, 2016; Flyvbjerg, 2001). This framing keeps a subtle divide between actors and their environments, suggesting that context only constrains or enables behaviour rather than also being dynamically created through it.

This externalised view has been challenged by sociologists and institutional theorists who see economic life as inherently social. Classic work by Polanyi (1944) and Granovetter (1985) showed that economic action is always embedded in moral norms, networks, and shared meanings; markets do not exist apart from the social relationships that sustain them. Institutional theorists extended this idea by revealing how overlapping logics of state, family, religion, and market shape what counts as legitimate entrepreneurial action (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury, 2012). Yet within entrepreneurship studies, these insights often surface only as the vague claim that “context matters,” leaving unexplored how entrepreneurs actually experience, interpret, and negotiate the worlds in which they operate (Anderson, Dodd and Jack, 2012; Baker and Welter, 2018).

The so-called contextual turn (Welter, 2011; Zahra et al., 2014) has pushed this conversation further. Rather than seeing context as a fixed container, it invites us to think of it as fluid, multi-layered, and continually interpreted. Context becomes part of the entrepreneurial process itself, something co-produced through everyday practices, stories, and relationships (Welter & Gartner, 2016; Korsgaard et al., 2021). Entrepreneurs and their environments, in this sense, are not separate entities: they constantly make and remake one another. Local norms define what is

possible, but entrepreneurial activity can gradually reshape those same norms (Jack & Anderson, 2002; Anderson & Gaddefors, 2016). Work in development and poverty settings highlights this interdependence particularly clearly. Studies by Mair and Martí (2009) and Sutter, Bruton and Chen (2019) show that where formal markets are weak, legitimacy and access depend on informal institutions, reciprocity, kinship, and social ties (Anderson et al., 2019). In such places, context is not a neutral backdrop but a lived and contested terrain, where people navigate moral and material boundaries in the process of getting things done (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Ram et al., 2008).

Still, despite these advances, our knowledge of what this co-production involves is limited in detail, particularly in the context of structural constraints (Anderson and Ronteau, 2017; Welter et al., 2019). We recognise that entrepreneurs shape their contexts, but rarely explore how this happens when poverty, gendered hierarchies, or institutional fragility define everyday life (Galloway, Kapasi and Sang, 2015; Abbas et al., 2019; Kimmitt, Muñoz and Newbery, 2020). Poverty here is not treated simply as a lack of income but as multidimensional deprivation, a narrowing of capabilities and possibilities shaped by social exclusion and limited voice (Sen, 1999; Alkire and Foster, 2011). Patriarchy, likewise, is not viewed as simple men oppressing women, but rather as a gendered order of power that regulates visibility, respectability, and access to legitimacy (Kandiyoti, 1988; Walby, 1989; Johnson, 2004). Together, they constitute forms of structural constraint that both delimit and give shape to entrepreneurial practice. To understand entrepreneurship in such settings, we must look closely at how people enact agency both within and against the structures that surround them. The next section turns to this question by examining how agency is performed under structural constraints.

3.3 Agency under constraint

Much of the debate about structure and agency draws on Giddens' (1984) structuration theory and Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) temporal-relational model, both of which view agency as the interplay between past trajectories, present improvisations, and imagined futures. Within this framework, individuals are seen as "knowledgeable agents" who reproduce and transform social structures through their actions. In entrepreneurship studies,

these ideas have inspired practice-oriented analyses of how entrepreneurs mobilise resources and create change (Baker and Nelson, 2005; Rindova, Barry and Ketchen, 2009). Yet the emphasis on reflexivity and choice often assumes a level of freedom, stability, and access to resources that is rarely available in conditions of poverty (Sutter, Bruton and Chen, 2019). As a result, agency is frequently treated as an abstract capacity, something people have, rather than as a fragile, uneven activity worked out in everyday life (Ortner, 2006; Kabeer, 1999).

Feminist and critical scholars have challenged this tendency to universalise the autonomous actor. They argue that agency is always shaped by power and inequality, which define what forms of action are even possible (Ortner, 2006; Sewell, 1992). In many social worlds, agency does not take the form of dramatic change but is expressed through adaptation, negotiation, and moral reasoning. Kabeer (1999) and Mahmood (2005) illustrate that, in patriarchal and impoverished contexts, agency may lie in small manoeuvres, acts of endurance, quiet adjustments, or cautious defiance that allow life and dignity to continue within constraint. From an outside perspective, these actions can appear passive, yet they are meaningful ways of sustaining room to act when autonomy cannot be assumed. Looking at women's entrepreneurship within the intersecting structures of patriarchy and occupation, Omran and Yousafzai (2024) similarly argue that universal, Western readings of agency fail to capture how it is lived, recognised, and constrained in such settings, calling for more situated and relational understandings. Within entrepreneurship research, these everyday forms of agency are rarely theorised; action is still most often associated with innovation, growth, or explicit resistance (Ahl and Marlow, 2012; Berglund, Hytti and Verduijn, 2020).

Recent studies have begun to broaden this conversation by conceptualising constrained agency as both relational and situated. Berglund, Hytti and Verduijn (2020) and Kimmitt, Muñoz and Newbery (2020) show that entrepreneurial agency can be seen in the small, situated acts that keep ventures alive under pressure, waiting, negotiating, preserving legitimacy, or balancing visibility with discretion. These perspectives echo feminist readings of agency as an ongoing accomplishment that unfolds within, rather than outside, the networks of power that shape everyday life (Kabeer, 1999; Mahmood, 2005). Yet, as Omran and Yousafzai (2024) point out, even these newer, practice-based views still draw on Western ideas of autonomy and

control, overlooking how agency is shaped by the overlapping constraints. Their argument highlights the need to attend to the epistemic dimensions of constraint, whose knowledge counts, and whose experience is believed, and reminds us that studying agency in marginalised settings requires moving beyond individualistic and universal models to recognise how constraint, legitimacy, and recognition are unevenly negotiated in entrepreneurial processes. Legitimacy, understood as the social and moral acceptance of action (Suchman, 1995; Anderson and Smith, 2007; Dodd, Jack and Anderson, 2023), and recognition, the acknowledgement of worth and visibility within a community (Honneth, 1996; Fraser, 2000; Essers and Tedmanson, 2014), together define whose agency becomes visible and valued. They draw attention to the moral labour through which entrepreneurs maintain legitimacy (Anderson and Gaddefors, 2016; Down, 2006). From this standpoint, agency is not the opposite of constraint, but something forged through it, a continuous effort to act meaningfully within social and institutional limits (Sutter, Bruton and Chen, 2019).

To understand agency under constraint, we need to consider how structure and possibility intersect, and how they shape who can act, and in what ways. The next section turns to these intersectional and relational dimensions, exploring how even modest advantages can alter what is possible within constraints and how entrepreneurial agency emerges through these uneven relations (Crenshaw, 1989; Adam, 2022; Collins, 2022).

3.4 Intersectional and relational view of agency

Entrepreneurship research increasingly recognises that social categories such as gender, class, and ethnicity shape access to resources and legitimacy. Yet these dimensions are often treated as separate variables rather than as intersecting relations of power. Studies commonly address “women’s entrepreneurship” or “ethnic entrepreneurship” as distinct subfields, as if inequalities could be understood in isolation (Ahl and Marlow, 2012; McAdam et al., 2019). This separation obscures how multiple axes of identity interact to produce entrepreneurial possibilities and how advantages and marginalisation can coexist within the same context. As a result, the uneven distribution of agency across social positions often remains only partially understood (Calás, Smircich and Bourne, 2009). In what follows, intersectionality is used to read these differences not as additive variables but

as patterned relations that organise who is seen, who is believed, and on what terms action becomes credible.

Feminist and critical scholars have long shown that entrepreneurship is far from gender neutral. Rather, it has been shaped by masculine ideals of autonomy, rationality, and control (Calás, Smircich and Bourne, 2009; Ahl and Marlow, 2012). Research by Verduijn and Essers (2013) and Hytti (2005) illustrates that women's entrepreneurial activities are frequently intertwined with care, respectability, and family obligation, dimensions that conventional theories of innovation and growth tend to overlook. Intersectional theorists expand this critique by showing how gender intersects with class, ethnicity, and geography to create distinct configurations of power and constraint (Crenshaw, 1989; Adam, 2022; Collins, 2022). In contexts of poverty and informality, these intersections become even more pronounced: moral codes, generational hierarchies, and religious norms combine with material scarcity to shape who can act entrepreneurially, and on what terms (Sutter, Bruton and Chen, 2019). This work highlights that disadvantage is not simply additive; it is relational, emerging through the interactions between social positions and contexts (Korsgaard et al., 2021). Crucially, these same interactions can confer small but consequential advantages that ease access to recognition, information, or protection and thus widen the space for action.

Building on these insights, recent feminist and contextual approaches have started to frame entrepreneurship as both structured by and constitutive of intersecting inequalities (McAdam et al., 2019; Jones, Al-Dajani, Harrison and Swail, 2025). Scholars such as Goundar (2025) and Holmes (2020) emphasise the importance of positionality and situated knowledge for understanding how agency and constraint are co-produced. Within this emerging conversation, attention is turning toward how small social advantages can shape the possibilities for action. From this perspective, entrepreneurship appears as a process of relational enablement as much as adaptation, a practice where even small differences in social standing can open or close space for agency (Welter, 2011; Anderson and Gaddefors, 2016). Here, legitimacy, the social and moral acceptance of action, and recognition, the acknowledgement of worth and visibility, operate as the immediate mechanisms through which positional differences are translated into entrepreneurial possibilities (Suchman, 1995; Anderson and Smith, 2007; Honneth, 1996; Fraser, 2000; Dodd, Anderson and Jack, 2023).

Despite these advances, intersectional and relational perspectives remain unevenly integrated into entrepreneurship research. Few empirical studies trace how overlapping inequalities and differentiated forms of access are experienced and negotiated in everyday entrepreneurial practice, especially in settings of poverty where legitimacy and recognition are fragile (McAdam et al., 2019; Welter et al., 2019). Addressing this gap requires close attention to how agency is distributed, and how entrepreneurs both mobilise and are constrained by the moral and institutional expectations that surround them (Ahl and Marlow, 2012; Anderson and Smith, 2007; Calás, Smircich and Bourne, 2009). The final section, therefore, brings these strands together, synthesising insights from contextual, practice-based, feminist, and relational literatures to articulate a relational theory of agency under constraint.

3.5 Synthesis: Towards a relational theory of agency under constraint

Across the preceding sections, entrepreneurship appears not as a universal recipe for opportunity seeking but as a contextual, relational, and embedded practice (Steyaert, 2007; Johannisson, 2011; Welter, 2011). Over time, scholarship has shifted from focusing on the autonomous individual toward exploring the practices, contexts, and relationships through which entrepreneurship is lived (Zahra et al., 2014; Welter and Gartner, 2016). This reorientation has major implications for how we understand agency under constraint, how people act, make sense of their actions, and sustain legitimacy when the social and institutional foundations of entrepreneurship are fragile or exclusionary (Sutter, Bruton and Chen, 2019; Berglund, Hytti and Verduijn, 2020). Put differently, entrepreneurial action is read here through the patterned limits of context and the relational processes, recognition and legitimacy by which that action becomes visible and acceptable.

3.5.1 Context

The contextual and practice turns in entrepreneurship (Steyaert, 2007; Johannisson, 2011; Welter, 2011; Zahra et al., 2014) made clear that entrepreneurship cannot be separated from its surroundings. Later work goes further by showing that context is not a fixed setting but something

constantly made and remade through everyday practice (Welter and Gartner, 2016; Korsgaard et al., 2021). In conditions of poverty, context is both a constraint and a field of possibility (Mair and Martí, 2009; Sutter, Bruton and Chen, 2019). Entrepreneurs do not simply respond to what the context allows; through ordinary acts of adaptation, negotiation, and endurance, they subtly reshape its boundaries and meanings (Anderson and Gaddefors, 2016; Baker and Nelson, 2005). Here, poverty and patriarchy figure as durable configurations of constraint within context, organising access to resources, respectability, and the terms of public action.

3.5.2 Agency

Drawing on structuration theory (Giddens, 1984; Emirbayer and Mische, 1998) and feminist extensions of it (Ortner, 2006; Kabeer, 1999; Mahmood, 2005), recent work reframes agency as an ongoing negotiation within limits rather than as freedom from them. In resource-poor environments, action rarely takes the form of dramatic breakthroughs or resistance; it often unfolds through small, careful adjustments that maintain legitimacy, and continuity (Kimmitt, Muñoz and Newbery, 2020; Berglund, Hytti and Verduijn, 2020). Everyday gestures, balancing visibility, waiting, and keeping relationships intact, are therefore not trivial but central to entrepreneurial life (Down, 2006; Anderson and Ronteau, 2017). Agency, in this view, is a lived accomplishment, produced through time and through relationships (Cunliffe, 2011). Its visibility and viability depend on whether others recognise it and grant it moral standing as legitimate.

3.5.3 Intersectionality and relational view of agency

Feminist and postcolonial perspectives remind us that agency and constraint are never evenly distributed. Gender, class, and social position intersect to shape the moral and material conditions under which entrepreneurship can occur (Calás, Smircich and Bourne, 2009; Ahl and Marlow, 2012; Anderson and Smith, 2007; Verduijn and Essers, 2013; Crenshaw, 1989; Adam, 2022; Collins, 2022). In contexts of poverty, these intersections are intensified: expectations of propriety and respectability define who can act and what counts as legitimate action (Hytti, 2005; Sutter, Bruton and Chen, 2019). Recent feminist and contextual work show that entrepreneurship both reflects and reproduces these intersecting inequalities (McAdam et al., 2019; Jones, Al-Dajani, Harrison and Swail, 2025).

Scholars such as Holmes (2020) and Goundar (2025) highlight that understanding agency in such settings requires attentiveness to positionality and situated knowledge, how access, recognition, and possibility are mediated through social relations and local moral expectations. Entrepreneurial processes thus unfold within uneven relational terrains, where legitimacy and visibility are differently distributed, shaping whose actions are recognised and whose remain hidden (Welter, 2011; Anderson and Gaddefors, 2016).

3.5.4 Toward a relational theory of agency under structural constraint

Bringing these strands together suggests that agency is not a personal attribute but a relational process of negotiation, recognition, and adjustment. It takes shape through the interplay of practice, meaning, and context, each grounded in moral and social relations (Anderson and Gaddefors, 2016; Korsgaard et al., 2021). A relational understanding of agency under constraint, therefore, recognises that entrepreneurship is conditioned not only by material and institutional structures but also by whose knowledge, experiences, and actions are granted legitimacy (Omran and Yousafzai, 2024). From this perspective, entrepreneurship in poverty is less a route out of constraint than an effort to sustain life, legitimacy, and possibility within it (Mair and Martí, 2009; Sutter, Bruton and Chen, 2019). This approach bridges contextual, feminist, and practice-based thinking, offering a more integrated understanding of how entrepreneurial action both reproduces and subtly reshapes its environment (Welter, 2011; Steyaert, 2007; Johannisson, 2011).

Table 5 below summarises the key insights and remaining gaps across the five core strands of entrepreneurship research reviewed in this chapter. It highlights how scholarship has progressively contextualised and moralised entrepreneurship, yet continues to overlook how agency is lived, relational, and unevenly distributed under structural constraint.

Table 5. Key insights and remaining gaps in entrepreneurship scholarship: toward a relational understanding of agency under structural constraint

Theme	What the literature has established	Remaining gaps
From the entrepreneur to entrepreneuring	Entrepreneurship has gradually shifted from being viewed as an individual, opportunity-driven act toward a socially embedded and contextual process (Steyaert, 2007; Welter, 2011; Zahra et al., 2014).	Most work still assumes relatively autonomous, well-resourced actors and overlooks entrepreneurship as lived within poverty or fragility (Calás, Smircich and Bourne, 2009; Anderson and Gaddefors, 2016).
Entrepreneuring as practice	Entrepreneurial action is understood as an ongoing practice through which people create economic, social, and moral value (Hjorth, 2013; Anderson and Gaddefors, 2016; Rindova, Barry and Ketchen, 2009).	Limited insight into how such practices unfold where legitimacy, continuity, or dignity must be negotiated daily rather than assumed (Berglund, Hytti and Verduijn, 2020; Down, 2006).
Context as lived and contested	Context is seen as co-produced through everyday relations, material conditions, and meaning-making (Welter and Gartner, 2016; Korsgaard et al., 2021; Baker and Welter, 2018).	Empirical work remains sparse on how context is negotiated in environments of constraint, where institutional support and recognition are fragile (Kimmitt, Muñoz and Newbery, 2020; Mair and Martí, 2009).
Agency under constraint	Agency is reconceptualised as relational and situated—expressed through adaptation, negotiation, and endurance within limits (Kabeer, 1999; Mahmood, 2005; Berglund, Hytti and Verduijn, 2020).	Existing research still draws heavily on Western assumptions of autonomy and success, under-theorising how agency is enacted through uneven recognition, legitimacy, and constraint (Sutter, Bruton and Chen, 2019; Omran and Yousafzai, 2024).
Intersectionality and relational view of agency	Feminist and postcolonial perspectives highlight how gender, class, and social position shape entrepreneurial possibility and the moral conditions of legitimacy (Ahl and Marlow, 2012; Anderson and Smith, 2007; Calás, Smircich and Bourne, 2009; Verduijn and Essers, 2013).	Few studies examine how overlapping inequalities and small advantages are lived and negotiated in everyday entrepreneurial practice, or how legitimacy and visibility are unevenly distributed across social hierarchies (Welter, 2011; Omran and Yousafzai, 2024).

Taken together, these insights form the basis of a relational theory of agency under structural constraint. The next step is to consider how such phenomena can be studied in practice. If entrepreneurship is indeed situated, relational and embedded, then the methods used to explore it must also be sensitive to those qualities. This means moving beyond the search for universal patterns or predictive variables toward approaches that capture meaning, context, and lived experience. The following chapter, therefore, outlines the methodological foundations of this thesis. It introduces the interpretive and constructionist orientation that underpins the research, explains how narrative and practice-based methods were combined to study entrepreneuring in contexts of multidimensional poverty, and reflects on the ethical and positional considerations that shaped the inquiry. Through this approach, the analysis remains closely attuned to how entrepreneurs make sense of their lives, sustain legitimacy, and navigate constraints within their everyday worlds.

4. Approaching the matter of methodology

This chapter outlines how I investigate entrepreneuring as a lived, negotiated practice in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan. I begin by positioning the study within a constructionist, interpretive, and practice-based approach to knowledge (4.1). I then detail the research design, qualitative, longitudinal, and iterative, grounded in narrative life stories and a reflexive, autoethnographic gaze (4.2). Subsequent sections describe the case design and context, the narrative methods and analysis procedures, and the strategies used to ensure quality, credibility, and transparency, alongside a candid account of my insider/outsider positionality and its methodological implications.

4.1 Research approach

I adopt a social constructionist view of knowledge in which entrepreneurship is understood as something people do and make meaningful through interaction, language, and shared cultural understandings rather than as something fixed and measurable (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Cunliffe, 2011; Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2018). From this standpoint, knowledge is co-created in the encounter between researcher and participants and is always situated in a particular moral and social world. This stance orients the study toward understanding rather than prediction, focusing on questions of how entrepreneurial agency is enacted under constraint and why certain practices become legitimate or appropriate in specific contexts (Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba, 2011).

While acknowledging the positivist aspiration to statistical generality and prediction (Bryman and Bell, 2019), my approach aligns with interpretivist and practice-based perspectives that view entrepreneurship as relationally embedded practice (Steyaert, 2007; Johannisson, 2011; Welter, 2011). In this understanding, entrepreneurship is not an isolated act of opportunity discovery, but an ongoing social process embedded in cultural values, gendered expectations, and systems of legitimacy. In KP, poverty, gendered respectability, kinship obligations, and informal governance do not simply “surround” entrepreneurship; they co-produce what is thinkable, sayable, and doable as entrepreneurial practice (Baker and Welter, 2018; Zahra, Wright and Abdelgawad, 2014).

This orientation also draws on critical and feminist insights, recognising how patriarchal norms, class hierarchies, and moral orders shape the distribution of possibilities and recognition (Calás, Smircich and Bourne, 2009; Ahl and Marlow, 2012). Feminist and postcolonial perspectives are particularly relevant in the KP context, where gendered notions of honour, modesty, and respectability profoundly influence what counts as acceptable economic behaviour (Essers and Benschop, 2009; Roomi and Harrison, 2010; Dy, Marlow and Martin, 2017).

Analytically, I work with narrative inquiry supported by an autoethnographic gaze. Narrative approaches enable entrepreneurs to articulate how they understand and justify their actions within moral and relational frameworks (Czarniawska, 2004; Riessman, 2008; Down and Warren, 2008). In this thesis, I distinguish between life narratives (multiple, situated accounts) and life story narratives (more integrated, whole-of-life arcs); Papers I, III, and IV primarily engage the former, while Paper II draws on the latter. The autoethnographic stance, in turn, recognises that my own cultural and language fluency in Pashto and Urdu is not a bias to be removed but a resource that can access deeper meaning, though demands continual reflexivity (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011; Alvesson, 2003). This approach acknowledges that meaning emerges in the interaction between participant and researcher, and that interpretation is inseparable from positionality (Finlay, 2002).

Throughout the research process, I engaged an abductive and iterative logic, moving back and forth between empirical material and theory (Dubois and Gadde, 2002). The constant comparison technique (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006) guided analysis, allowing emergent themes to be refined through repeated reading and cross-case synthesis. This iterative engagement fostered theoretical insight while remaining grounded in participants' lived realities.

Taken together, the study treats entrepreneurship as a contextually constituted practice and sees knowledge as co-constructed between participants and the researcher. This orientation is appropriate to the aim of the thesis: to explore entrepreneurial agency in the context of structural constraints.

4.2 Research design

Following Bryman and Bell (2019), the research design provides the overall structure that connects the research questions to the strategies for collecting and analysing empirics. It outlines how the study is organised so that theoretical aims, empirical material, and analysis are coherently aligned. Within this framework, the present study adopts a nested, longitudinal case study design, guided by a qualitative and interpretive methodology that is described in the next section.

A case study design is appropriate when the aim is to explore a phenomenon within its real-life context, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are blurred (Yin, 2018). In this thesis, the overarching case is entrepreneurship in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan, a setting where entrepreneurship is deeply intertwined with poverty, patriarchy, and informality. Within this wider case, individual entrepreneurs and their life narratives constitute embedded units of analysis.

The design follows what Stake (1995) terms an instrumental case study, in which the case serves to illuminate a broader conceptual concern, in this instance, entrepreneurial agency under structural constraint. The four empirical papers that make up this thesis each address one aspect of that concern but remain connected within a single empirical and theoretical frame.

The study is longitudinal, encompassing several rounds of fieldwork between 2017 and 2021. A longitudinal perspective allows the researcher to observe continuity and change over time, an essential consideration when the focus is on process and lived experience (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Neergaard and Ulhøi, 2007). Extended engagement in the field made it possible to trace how participants' practices, meanings, and relationships evolved as they navigated shifting social and economic realities. This temporal sensitivity is central to understanding entrepreneurial agency as an ongoing process rather than a discrete event.

The research developed through an abductive and iterative logic (Dubois and Gadde, 2002). Early empirical encounters shaped subsequent empirical work, while emerging interpretations were continuously refined in dialogue with theory. Rather than following a linear sequence of hypothesis and verification, the study moved back and forth between field material, reflection, and conceptual development, a process that Dubois and Gadde

(2002) describe as systematic combining. This iterative approach deepened the theoretical grounding of the work while remaining responsive to participants' lived contexts.

This design privileges contextual richness and interpretive depth over breadth or representativeness, consistent with the study's interpretive orientation (Flyvbjerg, 2006). The intention is not to generate statistical generalisations but to develop analytical generalisations, insights that refine conceptual understanding through close engagement with situated realities (Yin, 2018; Stake, 1995). By treating KP as a single case comprising multiple, interlinked narratives, the design enables both cross-case sensitivity, identifying recurring patterns across life stories, and contextual integrity, retaining the nuances and moral worlds unique to each participant.

The research design reflects the ontological stance of this thesis: that entrepreneurial agency is constituted through relational and situated practices, continuously shaped by cultural norms, gendered expectations, and the moral economy of poverty (Cunliffe, 2011; Welter, 2011; Roos, 2021; Tunberg, 2017). This ontological understanding carries clear epistemological implications: if reality is co-constructed through social interaction and moral negotiation, then knowledge about it must be approached interpretively, through methods that attend to context, reflexivity, and lived experience.

4.3 Methodological orientation

This study is guided by a qualitative and interpretive methodology, chosen because it enables close engagement with meaning-making, context, and lived experience. Qualitative research is particularly suited to questions that ask how and why phenomena unfold, and to studies that seek depth, nuance, and process rather than prediction (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). In entrepreneurship research, qualitative approaches have proven especially valuable for uncovering the relational and contextual dimensions of entrepreneurial processes that remain invisible in quantitative accounts (Neergaard and Ulhøi, 2007; Hjorth et al., 2015).

Consistent with the social constructionist and practice-based orientation of this thesis, the methodology treats knowledge as situated and co-constructed (Cunliffe, 2011). The focus is therefore not on uncovering an objective reality but on interpreting how individuals and collectives construct

meanings around their actions. This interpretive stance assumes that language, stories, and interactions are central to how social worlds are made and remade (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2018).

Narrative inquiry provides the primary methodological frame for this thesis. Narratives are more than stories; they are ways of organising experience, creating coherence, and making sense of events and identities (Czarniawska, 2004; Riessman, 2008). Through narratives, entrepreneurs can describe what they do and, just as importantly, why their actions matter within their social worlds. This methodological choice allows the analysis to move beyond entrepreneurship as an event or outcome and toward entrepreneurship as a process of interpretation.

The life-narrative approach enables participants to recount their entrepreneurial journeys as lived stories, revealing the emotional, moral, and relational work involved in sustaining ventures under constraint. Where Papers I, III and IV privilege life narratives as multiple, situated accounts, Paper II elicits and analyses life-story narratives that trace broader biographical arcs. Narrative methods also resonate with practice-based perspectives, since stories often convey what people do, how they mobilise support, maintain legitimacy, or adjust to expectations, through the ways they describe their everyday life (Down and Warren, 2008; Gartner, 2007).

The narrative approach is complemented by an autoethnographic gaze (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011; Adams, Jones and Ellis, 2015). Autoethnography recognises that the researcher's own experiences, emotions, and cultural knowledge are part of the research process rather than sources of bias to be eliminated. My position as a researcher from KP afforded cultural fluency, shared language, familiarity with social codes, and an insider understanding of practices such as *purdah* (seclusion) and *izzat* (honour), which shaped both access and interpretation.

Rather than a full autobiographical account, autoethnography here operates as an analytical stance (Chang, 2016), providing a reflexive lens through which to interpret participants' stories. This aligns with Haraway's (1988) argument that all knowledge is situated and with Holmes' (2020) and Finlay's (2002) emphasis on reflexivity as a continuous and transparent part of qualitative inquiry. My dual positioning, simultaneously insider and outsider, echoes what Berger (2015) calls the "shifting space of positionality," where access and interpretation are shaped by proximity and difference. This distinction between narrative forms also sharpened

reflexivity: I treated fragmented life narratives and integrated life stories as different performances of self, with implications for how claims to legitimacy are read. Goundar (2025) describes this as reflexive self-positioning, a practice of examining how understanding is filtered through lived experience.

By acknowledging my embeddedness, I follow Alvesson and Sköldbberg's (2018) notion of reflexive methodology, recognising that knowledge is always produced through interaction, culture, and interpretation. Reflexivity here is not an afterthought but a methodological principle, allowing me to move between empathy and critical distance, between shared understanding and analytical questioning.

Methodologically, this study follows an abductive and iterative logic (Dubois and Gadde, 2002; Timmermans and Tavory, 2012), characteristic of interpretive and process-oriented research. Abduction involves a dialogue between empirical material and theoretical interpretation, in which the researcher moves back and forth, constantly asking what the empirics are saying and what theoretical lenses make those observations intelligible. Unlike induction, which moves only from empirics to theory, or deduction, which tests pre-existing hypotheses, abduction allows theory to evolve alongside empirical discovery.

In practice, this meant that my understanding of entrepreneurial agency emerged gradually. Early fieldwork raised conceptual puzzles, such as how legitimacy is maintained through concealment or how family obligations both constrain and enable action, which prompted me to revisit literature on context, practice, and feminist theory. New theoretical insights, in turn, reshaped my subsequent rounds of empirical work and analysis. This cyclical process mirrors Dubois and Gadde's (2002) idea of systematic combining, in which the researcher's framework, empirical fieldwork, and analysis develop in parallel rather than sequentially.

Abduction also underpinned my constant comparison strategy (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006). As each interview was transcribed and interpreted, I compared narratives across participants and time periods, looking for recurring themes, contradictions, and silences. These iterative comparisons informed ongoing theoretical refinement and ensured that emerging interpretations were both grounded in participants' lived experiences and conceptually robust. Such iterative reasoning is particularly

important in narrative and reflexive work, where meaning is negotiated rather than discovered (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2018; Riessman, 2008).

The abductive logic, therefore, reflects both my chosen epistemological stance, that knowledge as provisional and co-constructed and a practical strategy, a way of thinking and rethinking that keeps analysis open to surprise, complexity, and nuance.

4.4 Methodological coherence

Methodological coherence refers to the alignment between the research purpose, theoretical framing, design, and methods (Morse et al., 2002). In this study, coherence is achieved through a consistent thread linking constructionist epistemology, interpretive methodology, and narrative–autoethnographic methods. Each level informs and reinforces the others: the philosophical stance assumes that knowledge is relational; the design (a nested, longitudinal case) captures relational practice over time; and the narrative methods reveal how meanings and identities are performed in context.

Ensuring coherence required continuous reflection on how methodological choices shaped the kind of knowledge being produced. For instance, adopting an autoethnographic gaze made my positionality an explicit part of the analysis rather than a confounding variable to control. Similarly, privileging narratives over structured interviews meant accepting partial, storied accounts as forms of knowing (Czarniawska, 2004; Boje, 2011). These decisions align with the interpretive aim of understanding how entrepreneurship is lived and made meaningful, rather than explaining why it happens in a causal sense.

Coherence was also sustained through reflexive documentation: I maintained analytic memos and a field journal to trace evolving insights, record shifts in interpretation, and note how theoretical ideas entered the analysis. This reflexive audit trail (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Tracy, 2010) ensured transparency in how meanings were generated and strengthened the credibility of the research.

Ultimately, methodological coherence here means that every element from philosophical stance to analytical practice points back to a single, unifying concern: to explore entrepreneurial agency in the context of structural constraints. The interplay of abduction, narrative inquiry, and

reflexivity forms a consistent methodological architecture that holds the study together both conceptually and practically.

4.5 Context and access to the field

The empirical foundation of this research lies in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), a province in the north-west of Pakistan. KP is marked by enduring poverty, gendered hierarchies, and informal governance structures that deeply shape economic life. These features make it an analytically rich setting for studying entrepreneurial agency under structural constraint.

4.5.1 The research context

KP has long been characterised by multidimensional poverty and limited institutional infrastructure. The province's economy is dominated by small-scale trade, home-based enterprises, and informal services, with limited formal employment opportunities (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2021). Family and kinship networks play a decisive role in access to capital, legitimacy, and mobility. These networks, however, are structured by gendered norms of respectability and honour, often articulated through the concepts of *izzat* (honour), *purdah* (seclusion), and *sharam* (modesty), that regulate when, where, and how women and men can work (Roomi and Parrott, 2008; Jamali, 2009).

In this setting, entrepreneurship is rarely an autonomous act of opportunity pursuit; it is a relational negotiation within moral and social boundaries. Entrepreneurs balance aspirations for income and recognition with obligations to family, community, and faith. These dynamics make KP not only a case of economic hardship but also a space where agency and constraint are continuously co-produced.

4.5.2 Entering the field

My engagement with this field began through a British Council-supported entrepreneurship project that collaborated with universities in Pakistan to provide training for local entrepreneurs. As a research assistant on that project, I was involved in organising workshops, collecting participant data, and conducting informal interviews. This early involvement introduced me to a wide network of micro-entrepreneurs, many of whom later became participants in this doctoral study, and provided an initial platform of trust.

When I began my PhD, these relationships formed the entry point for empirical work. Participants were contacted through existing networks, referrals, and snowballing techniques (Patton, 2015). Because most entrepreneurs operated informally, often from their homes or small rented shops, access required sensitivity to privacy and gendered norms. Many interviews took place in domestic settings, while others were conducted in workplaces or university spaces. In some cases, women requested that I visit under the guise of being a “customer,” reflecting their need to maintain discretion in front of family or neighbours.

My familiarity with the local language (Pashto and Urdu) and culture facilitated rapport and nuanced conversation, yet it also required careful reflexivity about assumed understanding. Some participants felt free to share personal experiences with “someone who knows,” while others strategically left things unsaid, trusting that I would “understand without explanation.” These moments highlighted what Holmes (2020) calls the ambivalence of positionality: being simultaneously inside and outside the field.

Fieldwork unfolded between 2017 and 2021, in multiple phases of interviews and informal follow-ups. Prolonged engagement was essential for developing the credibility and intimacy required to access sensitive narratives (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Over time, I met participants in different circumstances, during workshops, at home, or through digital calls when the COVID-19 pandemic limited travel. For Paper II, prompts explicitly invited participants to “tell the story of your life/work from the beginning,” to elicit life-story narratives alongside the more open life-narrative format used elsewhere. Maintaining continuity through repeated contact allowed me to trace changes in their practices, relationships, and perceptions.

Trust developed gradually through sustained contact and mutual respect. Participants often shared personal stories that required careful listening rather than immediate response. Reciprocity, in this sense, was not material but relational: showing genuine interest in their work, returning to visit, remembering family events, or following up on earlier conversations. Such gestures communicated respect and continuity, which are highly valued in the local culture. Over time, this form of everyday reciprocity helped to strengthen rapport and made participants comfortable enough to speak openly about sensitive issues. Following ethical principles for qualitative

fieldwork (Bryman and Bell, 2019), I explained the purpose of my research, obtained verbal consent. Participants were free to withdraw at any stage.

4.5.3 Cultural and ethical sensitivity

Working in KP required awareness of gendered and cultural expectations regarding interaction, movement, and representation. Female participants, in particular, faced scrutiny for visibility in public spaces, while male entrepreneurs navigated expectations of being household providers. My autoethnographic stance was critical in interpreting these layered moral orders and ensuring that the analysis respected participants' voices. Visual documentation was limited due to participants' concerns about privacy; where permitted, photographs of workplaces were used only for contextual reference.

Throughout fieldwork, I maintained a reflexive journal, recording observations, emotional responses, and ethical dilemmas. These reflections not only informed later analysis but also served as an accountability tool, helping me to recognise how my presence shaped encounters and how participants' trust placed responsibility on me as a researcher.

4.5.4 Empirical material and analysis

Participants were selected through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling (Patton, 2015). The initial contacts came from entrepreneurs I had met during earlier work with a British Council-supported entrepreneurship project in KP. These contacts, together with referrals through family and professional networks, provided access to information-rich cases across different sectors of the informal economy. The purpose was not representativeness but depth and diversity of lived experience (Bryman and Bell, 2019).

Empirical material was gathered through several rounds of fieldwork between 2017 and 2021. The first round involved life-narrative interviews with seventeen entrepreneurs, forming the empirical foundation of the thesis. Subsequent rounds extended and deepened this material to include new participants and follow-up interviews as analytical themes evolved, particularly those concerning community-oriented venturing, gendered norms, and privilege. Altogether, the thesis draws on interviews with 32 entrepreneurs, men and women from across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, some of whom were interviewed multiple times over four years. This longitudinal

engagement made it possible to trace continuity and change in how entrepreneurs made sense of their actions, relationships, and legitimacy within the shifting moral, social and economic landscape of KP.

Empirical material was collected primarily through life-narrative interviews, complemented by informal conversations, field notes, and reflexive journaling. The interviews were designed to encourage participants to narrate their entrepreneurial journeys in their own terms. I typically began with broad, open-ended prompts such as “Tell me about you, How did you start this business?” or “What has this journey been like for you?” and followed up with questions about turning points, family influences, and moral dilemmas. In Paper II, additional prompts encouraged full biographical arcs (e.g., “start from childhood/earliest memories related to work”) to elicit life-story narratives.

Interviews were conducted in Pashto or Urdu, depending on the participant’s preference. Because I am fluent in both languages, I could listen attentively and translate the nuances of expression during transcription into English without external translators. Most interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, though several extended across multiple sessions or informal follow-up conversations.

During fieldwork, I also engaged in participant observation and everyday discussions in homes, shops, and local markets. These informal encounters often revealed subtleties, gestures, tones, or silences that formal interviews could not capture. Most interviews were audio-recorded with participants’ consent; some also allowed for photography, but in some cases, recording and photography were not considered appropriate. When participants preferred not to be recorded, I wrote notes as we talked, allowing the conversation to unfold naturally. Such interviews often took several hours, as I paused periodically to ensure accuracy. I also expanded and reflected on these notes immediately after each conversation to preserve detail and context.

Each interview was transcribed verbatim and translated into English by me to ensure fidelity to meaning. I paid special attention to idioms, metaphors, and culturally specific references, annotating them to preserve contextual richness. For example, when participants used terms such as *izzat* (honour), *sabr* (patience), *sadqa* (charity) or *rizq* (livelihood as divine provision), I retained the original words alongside an English explanation, as

these terms carried moral and emotional connotations central to interpretation.

All transcripts and field notes were coded and stored securely. Empirical material was anonymised, and pseudonyms were assigned to protect participants' identities. I maintained an audit trail documenting interview contexts, analytic decisions, and emerging themes (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Tracy, 2010).

4.5.5 Analysis

Analysis began concurrently with empirical work and evolved through several iterative rounds. I used a combination of constant comparison (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006) and narrative thematic analysis (Riessman, 2008). This involved repeated reading of transcripts, identification of key events and metaphors, and comparison across cases to trace patterns of meaning. Rather than coding line by line mechanically, I worked with interpretive memos to connect individual stories to broader theoretical ideas.

In the early stages, I noted recurring motifs such as “hiding work,” “seeking permission,” and “proving oneself.” These were refined into analytical categories like masking, negotiating legitimacy, and mobilising privilege, which later informed the theoretical development in Papers 3 and 4. Throughout, I oscillated between empirical material and theory, in keeping with abductive reasoning (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012; Dubois and Gadde, 2002).

To capture the relational dynamics of stories, I paid attention to how participants positioned themselves and others, family, customers, community, and state, in their narratives (Bamberg, 1997; Down and Warren, 2008). This approach viewed stories as performative acts rather than objective reports, aligning with the interpretive concern of understanding entrepreneurship as a lived and narrated practice. Analytically, I treated life narratives and life stories as related but distinct forms, examining how fragmented, situational accounts and more integrated, retrospective accounts (Paper II) differently organise meaning, identity, and claims to legitimacy.

Reflexivity continued to guide analysis. I revisited transcripts multiple times to check how my interpretations were shaped by my cultural familiarity and emotional responses. When I found myself identifying too strongly with a participant's account, I discussed it with supervisors and peers, following

the principle of critical dialogue (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2018). I also recorded analytic reflections in a field journal, noting when assumptions of “shared understanding” might obscure analytical clarity.

By combining narrative analysis with reflexive and abductive reasoning, the study developed a layered understanding of entrepreneurial agency as situated negotiation. Each story was treated not merely as data but as a window into how people construct meaning, legitimacy, and belonging under constraint. In this way, the analysis produced knowledge that was both empirically grounded and theoretically generative.

4.6 Empirical material in the four papers

Building on the longitudinal empirical work described above, this section summarises how the empirical material was used across the four interrelated papers (see Appendices I–IV).

Although the same empirical work underpins the entire thesis, each paper examines a distinct dimension of entrepreneurial life under structural constraint. This variation reflects the iterative and abductive character of the research design: as analysis progressed, new questions and emphases emerged, guiding further empirical work and theoretical refinement.

The empirical material, therefore, grew in both depth and scope. The first round of life-narrative interviews formed the core of the empirical material, while subsequent rounds expanded it to explore new analytical directions, such as social value creation, patriarchal gendered norms, and the dynamics of privilege.

Detailed tables listing individual participants are presented in Papers I and II; Table 6 below provides an overview of how the empirical material was used across all four papers. The symbol “X” indicates that participants or narratives formed part of a paper’s main empirical material, while “(X)” denotes illustrative or comparative use.

Table 6. Empirical material in Papers I–IV

Participant group/theme	Paper I	Paper II	Paper III	Paper IV
Original 17 entrepreneurs (10 women, 7 men) – life-narrative interviews	X	(X)	X	X
15 additional participants – focus on social and community-oriented ventures		X	(X)	
10 women from the original empirical material – additional interviews focusing on patriarchy			X	(X)
Follow-up interviews with original participants – emerging theme of privilege and advantage				X

Paper I draws on the original life-narrative interviews to explore how entrepreneurs living in poverty narrate and enact agency and value in their everyday practices. The analysis highlights how entrepreneurship unfolds as a process of making do, negotiation, and meaning making under structural constraint, where notions of value include not only economic gain but also moral worth, social recognition, and care for others. These narratives form the empirical and conceptual foundation for the entire thesis and are revisited in later analyses.

Paper II extends the fieldwork with fifteen additional participants, creating a total of twenty-five interviews. Here, data were elicited and analysed as life-story narratives to trace coherent biographical arcs alongside practice descriptions. It examines how entrepreneurs engaged in social and community-oriented ventures mobilise moral legitimacy, kinship ties, and collective agency to sustain initiatives that generate social and moral value alongside economic viability. This paper marks an analytical broadening from individual meaning-making to community-embedded processes of entrepreneuring.

Paper III revisits ten women from the original empirical material, supplemented by additional interviews, to analyse patriarchy, gendered moral orders, and respectability as conditions shaping entrepreneurial action. The study shows how women navigate, accommodate, and subtly reconfigure patriarchal norms, thereby enacting agency grounded in moral

negotiation and relational legitimacy. The paper contributes to theorising gendered and situated agency in contexts of poverty.

Paper IV returns to the original participant group through follow-up interviews conducted after themes of privilege and advantage emerged during ongoing analysis. It explores how subtle, relational forms of privilege—social, familial, or educational—mediate access to legitimacy and opportunity. The longitudinal perspective reveals how value and recognition evolve over time, illustrating that entrepreneurial agency is not only constrained but also enabled through shifting configurations of privilege.

Together, these four papers form an iterative and cumulative research programme. Each builds on insights from the previous one, refining the conceptualisation of entrepreneurial agency as contextually enacted, relational, and morally negotiated. This cumulative design exemplifies the abductive and practice-based logic of the thesis, where theoretical insight develops in continuous dialogue with empirical realities.

4.7 Quality, credibility, and ethical considerations

Ensuring quality and ethical integrity was a continuous and reflexive process throughout this research. Following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for trustworthiness, I approached the evaluation of qualitative research not through notions of validity or reliability, but through the lenses of credibility, transparency, reflexivity, and trustworthiness. Later frameworks, such as Tracy's (2010) "big tent" criteria, further informed my commitment to transparency, sincerity, and meaningful resonance in how findings were generated and represented.

4.7.1 Credibility

Credibility concerns the plausibility and trustworthiness of interpretations. In this study, credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement in the field, iterative analysis, and triangulation of perspectives and materials (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Fieldwork spanned multiple years (2017–2021), which allowed me to return to participants, observe change over time, and deepen the relational trust essential for accessing sensitive stories.

I also engaged in methodological triangulation, drawing on different sources of empirical material, narrative interviews, field notes, and reflexive journals, to cross-check and enrich understanding. For example, when an interview contained ambiguous silences or references, I compared it with my field observations and follow-up conversations to clarify meaning. This iterative comparison helped ensure that the analysis remained grounded in participants' lived realities rather than driven by theoretical expectations.

Credibility was further supported by member reflection rather than formal member checking. In follow-up meetings, I shared preliminary interpretations with participants and invited their reactions informally. These exchanges often prompted valuable clarifications or alternative perspectives, reinforcing the dialogical nature of knowledge production.

4.7.2 Transparency and reflexivity

Transparency involves making the research process visible and traceable. I maintained a reflexive field journal throughout fieldwork, where I recorded observations, emotional responses, and analytic decisions. This documentation created an audit trail (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) that allowed me to trace how interpretations evolved and where my assumptions shaped analysis. Reflexivity was not treated as a separate stage but as an ongoing stance, acknowledging that my position as an insider-outsider continually shaped what I could see and how I made sense of it (Berger, 2015; Finlay, 2002).

Reflexivity also functioned as an ethical safeguard. Writing about my field interactions, particularly with women entrepreneurs, helped me recognise moments when familiarity risked blurring professional boundaries or when cultural empathy might unintentionally reproduce normative assumptions. Discussing these reflections with supervisors and peers acted as a form of critical dialogue (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2018), ensuring that the analysis remained both self-aware and theoretically rigorous.

4.7.3 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were central to every stage of the research. Before each interview, I explained the purpose of the study and obtained verbal informed consent, as written consent forms can feel formal or intimidating in local contexts (Orb, Eisenhauer and Wynaden, 2001). Participants were informed that their involvement was voluntary and that they could withdraw

at any time. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured through the use of pseudonyms and careful removal of identifiable details.

Given the gendered and often private settings of the empirical work, particular care was taken to respect participants' comfort and boundaries. Some women preferred that I visit under the pretext of being a customer or acquaintance rather than a researcher; others preferred that no audio recordings be made. These decisions were respected without question. Visual material, such as photographs, was used sparingly and only when participants explicitly permitted it.

As a female researcher from KP, I was sensitive to the cultural codes governing visibility, mobility, and modesty. This awareness shaped how I approached interviews, dressed, and conducted myself in the field. Such ethical sensitivity aligns with the feminist principle of situated ethics (Mauthner et al., 2002), which recognises that ethical practice is relational and context-dependent rather than universally fixed.

4.7.4 Trustworthiness

Finally, the overall trustworthiness of this study lies in the resonance of its interpretations, the extent to which readers can recognise the complexity of lived experience within them (Tracy, 2010). By providing rich, contextualised narratives, the study aims not for statistical generalisation but for analytical transferability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985): insights that illuminate how entrepreneurship unfolds under constraint in similar contexts.

Through sustained reflexivity, transparent documentation, and ethical attentiveness, the study aspires to meet the qualitative ideals of rigour, sincerity, and relational responsibility (Tracy, 2010). Together, these principles ensure that the knowledge produced here is both empirically grounded and ethically sound.

5. Paper presentations I-IV

In this chapter, the four papers included in the thesis are presented. Each paper examines a distinct facet of entrepreneuring in contexts of structural constraint. Together, they explore how entrepreneuring is practised and made meaningful within conditions where access to resources, recognition, and institutional support remains uneven. The aim, theoretical focus, empirical work, and main findings of each paper are outlined in turn. The chapter begins with an overview that situates the papers within the broader analytical trajectory of the thesis and concludes with a table summarising their central contributions.

5.1 Overview of the papers

The four papers that comprise this thesis each explore how entrepreneuring is practised, narrated, and made meaningful in contexts of poverty. Taken together, they develop an understanding of entrepreneurial agency under constraint, how people create and sustain value, negotiate legitimacy, and make sense of their actions within the moral, social, and institutional boundaries that both limit and enable them. While each paper is grounded in its own empirical and theoretical focus, they are connected through a cumulative inquiry into the contextual and relational conditions that shape entrepreneurial practice.

The sequence of the papers reflects both analytical and conceptual progression. Paper I begin with everyday practice, asking how individuals in poverty construct and sustain value and legitimacy in their work. It presents entrepreneuring as a contextual and value-creating practice grounded in moral and social relations. Paper II moves from practice to narration, examining how entrepreneurs articulate and give meaning to the social dimensions of their work through stories that negotiate legitimacy and moral worth. Paper III deepens the analysis by focusing on entrepreneuring under patriarchy and poverty, showing how gendered expectations shape what is possible and how women navigate and adjust within these constraints. Paper IV turns attention to relational privilege, illustrating how education, family support, gendered positioning, economic capital, and social networks shape entrepreneurial possibilities and sustain certain forms of legitimacy within poverty.

Across the four papers, a conceptual trajectory unfolds, from agency as value-creating practice, to agency as narrated and negotiated, to agency as situated within constraint, and finally to agency as relationally shaped. This progression reflects the broader argument of the thesis: that in contexts of poverty, agency is not a fixed attribute but an ongoing accomplishment that emerges through practice, relation, and recognition. The studies share an empirical foundation in KP, Pakistan, and build cumulatively through a qualitative, interpretive, and abductive design, where insights from one paper iteratively inform the next.

Together, the papers show that entrepreneuring in contexts of poverty cannot be understood through simplified notions of constraint or success. Rather, they reveal how people navigate and take actions within the moral, social, and institutional conditions that surround them. Through these lived negotiations, entrepreneuring appears as a situated and relational process through which respectability, legitimacy, and possibility are sustained. The chapter proceeds by presenting each paper in turn and concludes with a comparative table that summarises their contributions.

5.2 Paper I

The first paper provides the empirical and conceptual starting point for the thesis. It explores how individuals living in poverty practise entrepreneuring and how they give meaning to what they do. Rather than viewing entrepreneurship as firm creation or growth, the paper examines entrepreneuring as an everyday practice, as a process of making do, seeking legitimacy, and creating value within the constraints of poverty. The central question concerns how people understand their own entrepreneuring when resources, recognition, and institutional support are limited, and how value is produced in such contexts.

Drawing on a practice-based and contextual perspective, the paper situates entrepreneuring within the moral and social worlds of everyday life. It challenges dominant ideas of entrepreneurship as a route out of poverty and instead shows how poverty shapes the very logics and actions through which entrepreneuring unfolds. Based on life-narrative interviews with seventeen entrepreneurs in KP, accounts that capture multiple, situated stories rather than single, unified biographies, the analysis focuses on how participants describe their practices, relationships, and aspirations. Rather

than measuring outcomes, it attends to how value and legitimacy are created and sustained in daily practice. Conceptually, the paper develops a framework for understanding how entrepreneuring creates different kinds of value, economic, social, and moral, that allow individuals to enable and reshape the context of poverty.

The findings show that entrepreneuring in poverty is grounded in meanings that reach beyond economic exchange. Participants describe their work through notions of moral and social value — respectability, obligation, and endurance. Everyday practices such as maintaining respectability, ensuring social harmony, and balancing visibility with discretion are central to sustaining livelihood and legitimacy. In these life narratives, entrepreneuring appears not only as a response to scarcity but as a way of living responsibly and meaningfully within constrained circumstances.

5.3 Paper II

The second paper builds on the first study's focus on value and legitimacy in practice by examining how entrepreneurs in poverty narrate what it means to be social in their entrepreneuring. It explores how the idea of being “social” is understood, expressed, and performed within a setting where social expectations are strong and constantly changing. The paper asks how entrepreneurs describe the “social” aspects of what they do, and how these descriptions help them make sense of, legitimise and sustain their activity in a complex moral and institutional environment.

Drawing on a narrative approach, the paper treats stories as interpretive acts through which entrepreneurs position themselves, their ventures, and their social surroundings. Using twenty-five life-story interviews, coherent, retrospective accounts that trace how individuals make sense of their lives over time, with self-defined social entrepreneurs in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region, the analysis traces how participants construct their identity and purpose through storytelling. The study identifies three interlinked narrative draws that entrepreneurs rely on when describing their work: dealing with social consequences, benevolence through enterprise, and changing with society.

The findings show that these narratives reflect a continual movement between moral duty and enterprise ambition. Entrepreneurs describe how they cope with social barriers and expectations, frame their activity as a

contribution to others' wellbeing, and adapt their practices as society itself changes. The "social" emerges not as a fixed category but as a contextual and evolving meaning, a moral space within which entrepreneurs negotiate what is right, appropriate, and possible.

By engaging these multiple and sometimes contradictory life stories, the paper demonstrates how social entrepreneurs construct and reconstruct the meaning of their work in response to shifting norms and social change. It shows that in contexts of poverty, social entrepreneuring can be understood as a storied practice, an ongoing process of legitimisation and adaptation shaped by the interaction between individual aspiration and social expectation.

5.4 Paper III

The third paper examines how women practise entrepreneuring within the intertwined structures of patriarchy and poverty. It asks how women sustain their businesses and navigate everyday life when both economic scarcity and gendered moral order constrain what can be done. Drawing on the same empirical setting of KP, the paper analyses how women's entrepreneurial practices emerge within a social environment that is, at the same time, restrictive and enabling.

Anchored in a feminist and practice-based perspective, the study understands entrepreneuring as a situated process of adjustment and negotiation rather than as open resistance or empowerment. Through narrative inquiry with ten women entrepreneurs, the analysis identifies four recurring practices, hiding, masking, negotiating, and rule-breaking, that illustrate how women manage the demands of family, community, and business within patriarchal settings.

The findings show that women continually adjust their visibility and presentation of work to maintain safety and legitimacy. Hiding allows them to work beyond public scrutiny; masking, framing business activity as caregiving or household responsibility, renders it morally acceptable; negotiating involves reaching compromises with family or local authorities; and rule-breaking refers to small acts that quietly stretch social boundaries, such as working without permission or continuing operations despite disapproval.

Together, these practices demonstrate how women navigate entrepreneurship within patriarchal poverty. Their actions reproduce certain moral expectations while simultaneously creating room for movement and continuity. The study shows that change occurs not through open confrontation but through the quiet acts and incremental shifts that women perform in their everyday practice. Entrepreneurship, in this context, becomes a means of enduring, adjusting, and gradually reshaping the boundaries of what is possible.

5.5 Paper IV

The fourth paper extends the discussion of constrained agency by examining how relational privilege shapes entrepreneuring in contexts of poverty. It explores how subtle advantages, such as education, family support, gendered positioning, economic capital, and social networks, influence access to resources and legitimacy, and how these forms of privilege are experienced and enacted in everyday practice. The paper asks how privilege operates in settings where poverty is pervasive and opportunities to act entrepreneurially are uneven.

Grounded in a relational and contextual perspective, the study understands privilege not as a personal attribute but as a situated and negotiated condition that emerges through social relations. It highlights that privilege and poverty coexist within the same relational field, shaping one another in practice. Drawing on seventeen life-story interviews with women and men entrepreneurs in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, complemented by longitudinal fieldwork, the analysis traces how individuals draw on or are positioned through relational configurations of support, recognition, and legitimacy.

The findings show that privilege operates through education, family support, gendered positioning, economic capital, and social networks. These elements interact to create uneven possibilities for entrepreneurial action. Privilege is enacted when education or social position provides credibility and access; co-constructed when legitimacy is granted or reinforced by others through trust or protection; and contextual in that its meaning depends on local moral orders. The same advantage may serve as an enabler for some and a constraint for others, depending on how it aligns with prevailing expectations of gender, class, and propriety.

The paper demonstrates that within poverty, relational differences quietly structure entrepreneurial possibilities. Those who can activate and sustain forms of recognition or approval from others navigate social and institutional landscapes with greater ease. By foregrounding privilege as a relational process, the study reveals how agency and constraint are intertwined and continuously reshaped through social relations. Privilege, in this sense, becomes part of the moral and institutional texture through which entrepreneuring in poverty is made possible.

5.6 Summary of the papers

The four papers together trace a cumulative analytical movement, from practice to narration, from constraint to relational enablement, showing how entrepreneuring in poverty is both socially shaped and socially generative. Each paper focuses on a different aspect of how agency is enacted, recognised, and constrained within moral, cultural, and relational orders. While Paper I begins with the question of how value is created and sustained in poverty, Paper II explores how entrepreneurs narrate and legitimate the social aspects of their work. Paper III turns to women's entrepreneuring within patriarchy, examining everyday practices of negotiation and adjustment. Paper IV concludes by showing how, even within constraints, relational privilege influences access to legitimacy and possibility.

Taken together, the papers reveal that entrepreneuring in contexts of poverty cannot be understood through a singular model of agency. Instead, agency appears as contextual and emergent, continuously produced through interaction with norms, relations, and material conditions. Across the four studies, entrepreneuring is recast as a situated process of meaning-making rather than a pursuit of opportunity; a moral, discursive, and relational accomplishment that sustains life within structural limits while gradually opening spaces for movement and change.

Table 7 below summarises the aims, contexts, empirical work, theoretical framing, and conceptual focus of each paper and highlights their cumulative contributions to the thesis argument.

Table 7. Summary of the papers

Category	Paper I	Paper II	Paper III	Paper IV
Aim	To explore how individuals in poverty make sense of entrepreneuring and construct value within constrained conditions.	To examine how entrepreneurs narrate what it means to be social in their entrepreneuring and how such narratives shape legitimacy.	To analyse how women navigate entrepreneuring within the intersecting structures of poverty and patriarchy.	To explore how relational privilege shapes the possibilities and recognition of entrepreneuring within poverty.
Empirical work	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan; 17 life-narrative interviews.	KP, Pakistan; 25 life story narrative interviews.	KP, Pakistan; 10 women's life-narrative interviews.	KP, Pakistan; 17 life-narrative interviews (mixed sample, longitudinal).
Theoretical Focus	Practice-based and contextual perspectives on value creation.	Narrative and discourse perspectives; contextual meaning-making.	Feminist contextual entrepreneurship: practice-based lens.	Relational and contextual perspectives on privilege and legitimacy.
Conceptualisation of Agency	Agency as value-creating practice.	Agency as narrated and negotiated.	Agency as situated practice in constrained settings.	Agency is relationally shaped.
Main Findings / Contribution	Entrepreneuring enacted through moral and social meanings—respectability, obligation, and endurance—rather than economic gain, establishes the empirical and conceptual foundation.	The “social” articulated as a moral vocabulary; legitimacy constructed through storytelling; shows entrepreneuring as a storied and evolving practice.	Practices of hiding, masking, negotiating, and rule-breaking sustain entrepreneuring under patriarchal norms; highlight agency as adaptive and situated.	Privilege enacted through education, family support, and social recognition shows how uneven relations of support and visibility shape entrepreneurial possibilities.

The following chapter brings these insights together into a theoretical synthesis, outlining how agency under constraint can be understood as a relational, contextual, and situated process.

6. Discussion and conclusion

This chapter brings together the insights that emerge across Papers I–IV and relates them to the overall aim of the thesis: to explore how entrepreneurship is practised and made meaningful by individuals navigating conditions of structural constraints. The intention is not to present the four papers as direct answers to the research questions, but to consider how, taken together, they contribute to a broader understanding of how agency is enacted, negotiated, and situated within these conditions. All four studies draw on empirical material from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, and together they build a cumulative picture of entrepreneuring under constraint.

The chapter proceeds in four analytical steps. Table 8 summarises how each section of Chapter 6 addresses the research questions, outlining the analytical focus and key insights that build toward the thesis’s broader theoretical contributions.

Table 8. Overview of Chapter 6

Section	Research Question (RQ)	Focus of Analysis	Key Insights
6.1	How do entrepreneurs narrate and give meaning to their everyday actions within contexts of poverty?	Examines how entrepreneurs use storytelling to make their work morally acceptable and socially meaningful, articulating forms of value aligned with shared norms and expectations.	Stories of respectability, obligation, and endurance make entrepreneurial activity meaningful.
6.2	How is legitimacy relationally constructed, negotiated, and enacted?	Analyses the mechanisms through which legitimacy is granted, withdrawn, or sustained.	Highlights the moral and affective labour involved in maintaining “safe visibility.”
6.3	What entrepreneurial practices constitute agency when structural power is limited or absent?	Identifies a repertoire of practices—hiding, masking, negotiating, and rule-bending.	Shows how actors sustain action under constraint.
6.4	How is context co-produced through entrepreneurial actions and interactions in settings marked by poverty?	Integrates preceding insights to show the recursive making of context.	Entrepreneurs contribute to shifts in norms, permissions, and expectations; relational privilege amplifies or restricts this room for manoeuvre.
6.5–6.8	extends the discussion by situating these insights within wider theoretical conversations on context, agency, and practice, outlining the thesis’s contributions, limitations, and avenues for future research.		

6.1 Narratives as meaning making

This section relates to the first research question: How do entrepreneurs narrate and give meaning to their everyday actions within contexts of poverty? Papers I and II contribute to this question by showing how individuals describe what they do, why they do it, and how these accounts help them sustain legitimacy and continuity within social and moral expectations.

Across the studies, participants rarely spoke about entrepreneurship in terms of opportunity or profit. Instead, they narrated their work through stories of respectability, responsibility, and persistence. Through these accounts, value was articulated not as economic gain but as moral and social contribution, grounded in what was considered “Proper”. These narratives located economic activity within moral worlds shaped by family, faith, and community, echoing contextual and relational perspectives that view entrepreneurship as socially embedded rather than purely economic (Anderson and Jack, 2002; Johannisson, 2011; Anderson and Gaddefors, 2016; Welter, 2011). Doing business became meaningful not because it promised advancement but because it allowed participants to meet obligations, maintain dignity, and continue despite constraint.

As one entrepreneur explained that she “worked from home so that people would not talk,” presenting her tailoring as “helping my household” rather than running a business. Another described her small shop as “a way of keeping dignity,” emphasising reliability and service over ambition. Such framings did more than justify action; they created permission. By portraying their work as responsibility, entrepreneurs aligned their enterprise with accepted gendered and moral codes. In this way, narrative functioned as both interpretation and protection, a language that made entrepreneurial action socially intelligible and morally safe, illustrating how moral and social values, not only economic ones, shape entrepreneurial legitimacy (Sayer, 2005; Anderson & Smith, 2007). This resonates with feminist analyses that highlight how women navigate propriety and agency within normative expectations while working to sustain moral legitimacy within constraint (Ahl & Marlow, 2012; Verduijn & Essers, 2013).

These stories also reveal how legitimacy is negotiated through narrative discretion, what is told, to whom, and how. Participants were acutely aware that a wrong word or visible sign of profit could invite gossip, moral judgment, or bureaucratic scrutiny. Calling an activity “small work” or “helping

others” was a calculated choice that maintained modesty while preserving agency. Storytelling thus became an everyday practice through which entrepreneurs managed visibility and belonging. This aligns with practice-based understandings of entrepreneuring as situated doing, ordinary acts of talking, explaining, and performing that sustain participation within constraint (Steyaert, 2007; Johannisson, 2011; Hjorth et al., 2015).

Taken together, Papers I and II show that entrepreneurs in poverty construct credible selves and communicate value through stories that connect enterprise to moral worth and social continuity. These narratives neither celebrate resistance nor reproduce passivity; they sustain a form of agency that is careful, relational, and contextually attuned. In this sense, narrative is the first site where what I conceptualise as *nuanced agency* takes shape, where people compose workable meanings for actions that are modest, adaptive, yet quietly transformative, extending Berglund, Hytti and Verduijn’s (2020) view of agency as situated adjustment within constraint.

6.2 Relational legitimacy

This section relates to the second research question: How is legitimacy relationally constructed, negotiated, and enacted in entrepreneurial practices shaped by poverty? Papers II, III and IV together show that legitimacy is never a fixed attribute; it is produced through continual interaction with others whose approval matters. Entrepreneurs sustain what can be called safe visibility, being visible enough to earn trust and clients, yet discreet enough to avoid sanction. Legitimacy is thus relational and contingent, emerging through negotiations, compromise, and performance within the social worlds of family, community, and local authority (Anderson and Jack, 2002; Johannisson, 2011; Welter, 2011).

Across the narratives, legitimacy was rarely granted in advance; it had to be earned and maintained through demonstration of responsibility and moral alignment. For many participants, the initial act of entrepreneurship required family endorsement that made it socially permissible (Anderson and Gaddefors, 2016; Welter et al., 2019). One participant described how encouragement from her mother and elder sister made her work possible, explaining that such support “led me to where I am today.” Such endorsement insulated her from external criticism and provided a moral cover under which business could begin. Similarly, another participant described how “it wasn’t

just permission; it was genuine belief.” Family trust converted a potentially transgressive act into a responsible one.

Yet legitimacy remained fragile. Participants repeatedly described needing to prove that their work did not compromise respectability or domestic duties, illustrating what feminist entrepreneurship scholars describe as the gendered negotiation of legitimacy and propriety (Ahl and Marlow, 2012; Verduijn and Essers, 2013). One participant explained, “My family approved because I was still at home, managing household responsibilities.” By staying physically inside the home, she translated entrepreneurship into an extension of feminine care rather than a challenge to it. Others adopted more tactical approaches. Another participant, warned by officials to shut down her informal salon, recalled: “They warned us again. My mother was distressed... I pretended to stop, but I didn’t really stop.” Through this selective compliance, she balanced deference with quiet persistence, maintaining face while continuing activity beneath notice.

Such examples reveal negotiation as a continuous practice rather than a single act. Legitimacy was achieved through iterative small gestures—seeking advice, offering explanations, performing humility, or highlighting service to others. These performances were not deception but moral communication, signalling that entrepreneurship remained consistent with collective values (Anderson and Ronteau, 2017; Anderson and Smith, 2007; Korsgaard et al., 2021). As participants put it, they needed to “show responsibility” before earning recognition. One participant explained, “My family didn’t support me at first... When they saw I was responsible, earning, and no longer dependent on them, they began to change.” Here, legitimacy was not granted by discourse but by evidence of care and accountability.

Relational legitimacy also involved boundary work (Essers and Benschop, 2009), deciding what to disclose and what to keep hidden. Participants managed visibility in calibrated ways: a closed curtain during customer visits, a modest dress code, or a carefully worded post on social media. These details sustained the appearance of propriety while quietly expanding what was possible. Through these small negotiations, entrepreneurs converted partial acceptance into a workable space. Legitimacy, in this sense, was not the opposite of constraint; it was the medium through which agency was exercised (Steyaert, 2007; Hjorth et al., 2015).

Taken together, these findings suggest that entrepreneurial agency in poverty depends on relational legitimacy as an ongoing negotiation. Entrepreneurs do not simply acquire legitimacy; they make it, remake it, and sometimes disguise it. The work of maintaining safe visibility, proving responsibility, performing respectability, and persisting quietly constitutes a central practice of entrepreneuring under constraint. It is through this careful relational labour that nuanced agency becomes sustainable over time.

6.3 Entrepreneurial practices under constraint

This section relates to the third research question: What entrepreneurial practices constitute agency in contexts where structural power is limited or absent? Paper III examines this question through women's entrepreneuring in the combined context of poverty and patriarchy, identifying four interrelated practices, hiding, masking, negotiating, and rule-breaking, that together sustain entrepreneurial activity under constraint. These practices are not isolated strategies but situated responses that adjust visibility, legitimacy, and access in everyday life. They form the practical repertoire through which agency is enacted when conventional routes to entrepreneurship are blocked (Welter, 2011; Steyaert, 2007; Baker and Welter, 2018).

6.3.1 Hiding

Hiding involves actively managing visibility to avoid scrutiny from both authorities and the social eye. Women kept their ventures discreet, working from home, avoiding signage, or conducting transactions through trusted intermediaries. One participant described beginning her tailoring business "from a room in the house," which allowed her to continue her work "without people talking." Hiding provided physical and symbolic protection; it enabled women to pursue income and recognition while maintaining conformity with local expectations. Far from simple concealment, hiding was a way of operating within available moral and institutional space, consistent with relational views of entrepreneurship as contextually negotiated practice (Anderson and Gaddefors, 2016; Korsgaard et al., 2021).

6.3.2 Masking

Masking refers to the cultural framing of entrepreneurial work in terms that align with accepted gendered roles. Entrepreneurs presented their

activities as extensions of domestic responsibilities rather than as independent ventures. One participant framed her enterprise as “helping my household,” while another described her salon as “women visiting other women.” Through masking, entrepreneurship appeared familiar and legitimate. This practice transformed potentially controversial actions into socially intelligible forms, allowing women to continue entrepreneuring without confrontation, echoing feminist accounts of how women entrepreneurs navigate respectability and agency within patriarchal norms (Ahl and Marlow, 2012; Verduijn and Essers, 2013). In contrast, hiding operates through invisibility, offering protection by withdrawing from view, whereas masking works through reinterpretation, remaining visible but aligning entrepreneurial action with accepted moral and gendered codes.

6.3.3 Negotiating

Negotiating captures the continuous process of engaging gatekeepers—family elders, community members, and local officials—to obtain or retain permission to act. Participants relied on persuasion, compromise, and demonstrations of responsibility to reach workable arrangements. They “showed care first” or “proved reliability” before requesting support. These negotiations were rarely formal; they took place through small, repeated interactions that secured incremental acceptance. In practice, negotiation was the connective thread that linked all other practices, translating relational effort into room for manoeuvre (Anderson and Jack, 2002; Johannisson, 2011; Down, 2006).

6.3.4 Rule-Breaking

Rule-breaking denotes selective defiance of restrictive norms or regulations when negotiation fails. Participants bent formal and informal rules to keep their ventures viable, while remaining mindful of risk. One participant described continuing her training academy despite Taliban threats, and later relocating secretly after authorities’ warnings, exemplifying how rule-breaking was embedded in a wider logic of persistence. These actions were not rebellion for its own sake but pragmatic adjustments to sustain work that was socially valuable yet institutionally unsupported, resonating with literature on constrained or situated agency under structural limits (Kabeer, 1999; Mahmood, 2005; Berglund, Hytti and Verduijn, 2020).

Together, these four practices constitute a repertoire of entrepreneuring under constraint. They show that agency in poverty and patriarchy is not exercised through overt transformation or resistance but through the careful calibration of visibility and legitimacy. By alternately concealing, reframing, negotiating, and quietly transgressing, entrepreneurs maintain continuity while expanding what can be considered acceptable. In this way, entrepreneurial practice becomes both adaptive and generative, a means of sustaining livelihoods and gradually reshaping the moral and institutional boundaries within which entrepreneuring unfolds (Johannisson, 2011; Welter et al., 2019).

6.4 Co-Producing context

This section relates to the fourth research question: How is context co-produced through entrepreneurial actions and interactions in settings marked by poverty? Papers III and IV, together with insights from the earlier studies, show that context is not a static backdrop to entrepreneurship but a set of evolving social relations that are continually made and remade through everyday practice (Welter, 2011; Welter and Gartner, 2016; Korsgaard et al., 2021). As illustrated in Figure 1 below, the co-production of context occurs through the interaction between an existing structural context and an evolving one, connected by the everyday negotiation of agency. Entrepreneurs do not simply act within context; through their actions, they both enact context and participate in shaping what the context becomes (Anderson and Gaddefors, 2016).

Figure 1 situates this process between two structural states. On the left lies the Existing Structural Context, characterised by poverty, patriarchy, informality, and weak institutions. On the right is the Evolving Structural Context, marked by gradual and micro shifts in norms, recalibrated expectations, and emerging openings. In between is Nuanced Agency, the space where individuals constrained by poverty and patriarchy act through moral and social values to gain legitimacy and recognition.

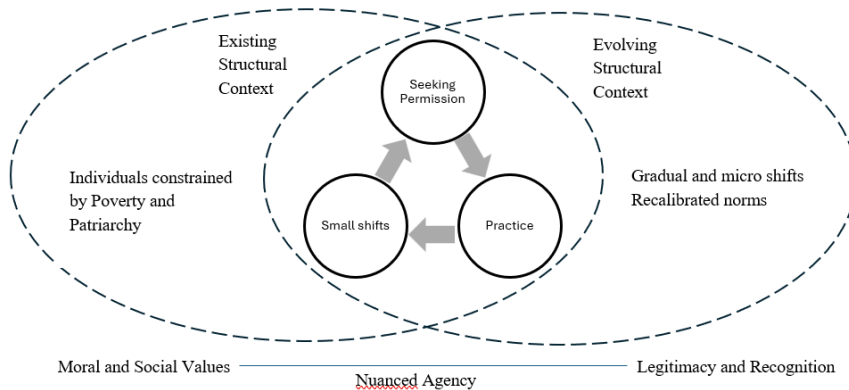


Figure 1. The co-production of context

Across the cases, entrepreneurs' actions formed a recurring cycle of permission, practice, and small shifts, which together move activity from the existing toward the evolving context. Entrepreneurs act within moral and social constraints, seeking permission to begin, engaging in practices such as hiding, masking, negotiating, rule-bending, and thereby producing small shifts in community expectations. These incremental adjustments gradually reshape what is considered legitimate and possible within the local context.

Permission referred to the initial moral and relational approval that made action possible, often negotiated through family endorsement or tolerated discretion. Practice encompassed the everyday actions—hiding, masking, negotiating, and rule-bending—through which entrepreneurs sustained their work. Over time, these practices accumulated into small shifts that modestly extended the boundaries of acceptance and recognition, particularly for women's economic activity. Such micro-level enactments illustrate how context is lived and co-produced rather than given in advance (Baker and Welter, 2020; Steyaert, 2007; Johannisson, 2011).

While the figure captures this cyclical movement between permission, practice, and small shifts, it also highlights that the strength of each element varies across structural conditions. What counts as permission differs across moral and institutional settings: in some cases, it depends on family or religious endorsement, while in others it rests on community tolerance or informal regulation (Welter, 2011; Korsgaard et al., 2021). Similarly, the repertoire of practices is contextually specific—where social expectations are rigid, hiding and masking dominate; where more openings exist,

negotiation and subtle rule-bending become possible. Even the scope of small shifts differs: in some communities, they alter norms around women's work or informal trade; in others, they remain confined within household boundaries. Each iteration of permission, practice, and small shifts therefore repositions the entrepreneur within the broader structure, feeding back into its gradual transformation.

For example, one participant's home-based training centre began as a private activity hidden from public view, yet her persistence led others to seek similar arrangements, and over time, the idea of women offering training from home became locally recognised as appropriate. This shift represents the rightward movement in Figure 1, from an existing structure of constraint to an evolving structure of recalibrated norms. Such small transformations did not overturn patriarchal or institutional structures, but they subtly redefined what was permissible, changing how entrepreneurship was interpreted in everyday life, a pattern consistent with studies of incremental contextual change in constrained settings (Sutter, Bruton and Chen, 2019; Korsgaard et al., 2021).

Paper IV extends this understanding by introducing the idea of relational privilege, the small but significant advantages that some actors can mobilise within poverty. These include education, kin support, or community reputation, each providing a slightly stronger platform from which to negotiate legitimacy. One participant described how her family's encouragement of her postgraduate education turned into disapproval when she channelled that knowledge into an online food business. What had been a source of legitimacy in one setting became questionable in another, revealing how support can shift with changing moral expectations. Relational privilege, therefore, is not a fixed status but a resource enacted and recognised in practice. It amplifies agency when activated and recedes when withdrawn, reminding us that context is stratified and dynamic (Ahl and Marlow, 2012; Calás, Smircich and Bourne, 2009).

In this light, the co-production of context is an iterative and relational process in which nuanced agency bridges structural states. The same practices that maintain continuity, masking work as domestic, hiding activities from scrutiny, negotiating permissions, also generate subtle shifts in how entrepreneurship is imagined and accepted. Through this iterative interplay, moral and social values are continually negotiated, and legitimacy and recognition emerge as central mediators between constraint and change.

Each loop contributes to the gradual re-making of structure itself. Context, therefore, is both a condition of action and an outcome of it (Anderson and Ronteau, 2017; Welter et al., 2019).

Taken together, these insights highlight that entrepreneurship in poverty is not merely adaptive; it is constitutive and relational. Through the daily labour of maintaining moral credibility, legitimacy, and recognition, entrepreneurs reproduce, adjust, and occasionally stretch the boundaries of what is possible. In this sense, context is continually enacted through entrepreneuring itself, a living terrain that moves from existing to evolving through nuanced agency (Johannisson, 2011; Steyaert, 2007).

6.5 Towards a view of nuanced agency

The preceding sections have shown how entrepreneurial processes in poverty unfold through relational and situated practices that sustain both livelihood and legitimacy. This section brings these insights into conversation with the literature reviewed in Chapter 3, extending the discussion of context, agency, and practice to articulate the thesis's overarching conceptual argument: a view of nuanced agency as the everyday, relational enactment of entrepreneuring under constraint.

6.5.1 Context as lived and relational

The findings demonstrate that context is not a fixed structure but a field of relationships, expectations, and moral codes that entrepreneurs continuously interpret and adjust to (Anderson and Gaddefors, 2016; Korsgaard et al., 2021). Through practices of hiding, masking, negotiating, and rule-bending, entrepreneurs not only respond to context but also participate in its making. What was earlier described as *permission* → *practice* → *small shifts* illustrates how context is lived and co-produced through action. This extends contextual perspectives by showing that even when poverty and patriarchy constrain behaviour, entrepreneurs' micro-adjustments incrementally reshape what is deemed legitimate (Baker and Welter, 2020; Welter et al., 2019).

6.5.2 Nuanced agency under constraint

Across the four papers, agency emerges not as autonomy or resistance but as situated and negotiated practice (Ortner, 2006; Kabeer, 1999; Mahmood,

2005). Nuanced agency refers to the spectrum of small, adaptive actions through which entrepreneurs act with calibrated visibility, moral reasoning, and persistence within constraint, preserving legitimacy and creating openings without overt defiance. It acknowledges that agency is embedded in social relations, sustained through responsibility and respectability, and expressed in the quiet persistence that keeps activity possible (Ahl and Marlow, 2012). In this sense, agency is both constrained (Berglund, Hytti and Verduijn, 2020; Ortner, 2006) and generative, anchored in the ability to continue within limits while subtly expanding them (Sutter, Bruton and Chen, 2019).

6.5.3 Entrepreneurship as practice and process

The studies reaffirm that entrepreneurship is not a discrete event but a continuous flow of doing. Everyday acts, telling a story, negotiating approval, adjusting work routines, are the material of entrepreneurship itself (Steyaert, 2007; Johannisson, 2011; Down, 2006). The findings contribute to practice-based understandings by detailing how such micro-practices function where legitimacy and institutional support are fragile (Hjorth et al., 2015). They reveal that the craft of entrepreneurship lies in the maintenance of relationships, not only in the pursuit of opportunities (Anderson and Jack, 2002).

6.5.4 Intersectionality, positionality, and relational privilege

The research further highlights that possibilities for action are unevenly distributed. Small differences in education, family standing, or mobility, forms of relational privilege, shape who can negotiate legitimacy and how far they can go (Ahl and Marlow, 2012; Calás, Smircich and Bourne, 2009; Honneth, 1996; Fraser, 2000; Anderson and Smith, 2007). These variations reflect how poverty is not one condition but a configuration of overlapping relations, economic, moral, and social, that together shape entrepreneurial processes (Dy and Agwunobi, 2019; Anderson and Gaddefors, 2016; Essers and Benschop, 2009). Privilege appears here not as a static category but as something enacted and recognised in interaction. This insight connects intersectional and positional perspectives with contextual and practice-based views, showing that poverty is never experienced uniformly (Crenshaw, 1989; Adam 2022; Collins, 2022). As the researcher, my own positional proximity to the field also mirrors this relational dynamic, reminding that

knowledge, like agency, is situated and co-constructed (Haraway, 1988; Holmes, 2020).

Taken together, these discussions position nuanced agency as a way of seeing entrepreneurship in poverty: a relational process in which individuals maintain legitimacy, practise responsibility, and persist within constraint, thereby co-producing the contexts in which they live and work.

6.6 Contributions

6.6.1 Theoretical contribution

This thesis expands on the concepts of context and agency by developing the idea of nuanced agency—a way of understanding how entrepreneurial action is enacted, recognised, and sustained within the constraints of strong social structures. The emphasis on the situated, adaptive, and relational dimensions of action contributes to a deeper understanding of how entrepreneurship unfolds in contexts where legitimacy, resources, and institutional support are inconclusive (Welter, 2011; Steyaert, 2007; Johannisson, 2011).

The research shows how entrepreneurship can both reproduce and rework context. Through the entrepreneurial practices of hiding, masking, negotiating, and rule-bending, entrepreneurs adapt to structural constraints while simultaneously altering their boundaries. In doing so, the thesis extends the contextual view of entrepreneurship beyond its treatment as background conditions, emphasising context as lived and continually co-produced through everyday practice (Anderson and Gaddefors, 2016; Baker and Welter, 2018; Korsgaard et al., 2021; Welter and Gartner, 2016).

Furthermore, the discussion offers a significant theoretical contribution by nuancing how agency under constraint operates as a relational process in limited settings. Agency is presented not as autonomy or resistance but as a spectrum of small, situated practices that sustain continuity, preserve legitimacy, yet enable gradual transformation. In this way, the thesis extends practice-based perspectives by highlighting the moral, affective, and relational labour through which entrepreneurial processes are maintained (Kabeer, 1999; Mahmood, 2005; Berglund, Hytti and Verduijn, 2020).

The study also introduces the concept of relational privilege as enacted advantage, showing how small differences in education, family endorsement,

or social standing condition what forms of agency become possible. These variations reflect how poverty itself is relational and layered, shaped by the intersection of economic scarcity with gendered, moral, and social hierarchies that define what actions are recognised as legitimate (Dy and Agwunobi, 2019; Calás, Smircich and Bourne, 2009; Crenshaw, 1989; Adam 2022). This extends intersectional and positional perspectives by framing privilege not as a static resource but as something produced and recognised in practice (Calás, Smircich and Bourne, 2009; Crenshaw, 1989; Adam 2022; Collins, 2022).

Ultimately, the thesis presents entrepreneurship as a process of contextual co-production—a dynamic interplay between constraint and creativity, legitimacy and adaptation. By conceptualising nuanced agency, it offers a framework for understanding how entrepreneurs in poverty sustain action, create meaning, and quietly reshape the conditions in which they live and work. This conceptual framing also informs the methodological choices of the study, guiding the use of narrative and practice-oriented inquiry to capture how agency is enacted and interpreted in everyday life.

6.6.2 Methodological contribution

Methodologically, this thesis adopts a narrative, practice-oriented, and autoethnographic approach to studying entrepreneurship under structural constraint. The research design treats life narratives as windows into practice, enabling analysis of how meaning-making and action are intertwined in everyday entrepreneuring (Czarniawska, 2004; Riessman, 2008; Down and Warren, 2008). This combined approach proves particularly suited to exploring the relational and contextual dimensions of agency in settings where formal visibility and institutional recognition are limited (Steyaert, 2007; Johannisson, 2011; Welter, 2011).

The study applies a constructionist and interpretive orientation, focusing on how people make sense of and sustain their actions within the moral and social worlds they inhabit (Cunliffe, 2011). Rather than seeking patterns of causality or measurable outcomes, the analysis attends to how entrepreneurs narrate legitimacy, responsibility, and persistence as part of their everyday practice.

The thesis further demonstrates the value of a reflexive insider and autoethnographic stance in qualitative entrepreneurship research. The researcher's proximity to the field provided access to tacit cultural

understandings and local moral codes that shape entrepreneurial processes. At the same time, systematic reflexivity and analytic documentation helped maintain critical distance, allowing positional familiarity to be used as a resource rather than a source of bias (Holmes, 2020; Finlay, 2002; Berger, 2015). This reflexive positioning enriches the interpretation of participants' narratives and underscores how knowledge itself is situated and relational.

Finally, the study illustrates how qualitative inquiry grounded in context, narrative, and reflexivity can surface subtle, often unseen forms of agency that remain obscured in conventional research approaches. By combining narrative accounts with practice-oriented and autoethnographic interpretation, the thesis provides a methodological example of how entrepreneuring in poverty can be studied as lived, relational, and situated action (Dubois and Gadde, 2002; Timmermans and Tavory, 2012).

This methodological stance also underpins the thesis's conceptual contribution: by attending to stories as practices and to reflexivity as analysis, it becomes possible to trace how agency is enacted, recognised, and made meaningful within constraint—the process theorised here as nuanced agency.

6.6.3 Practical contribution

A dominant view continues to frame entrepreneurship as a linear route out of poverty—a pathway through which self-reliant individuals, equipped with training and credit, can transform their circumstances for economic gain. This assumption circulates easily between research, policy, and development practice. Agencies, NGOs, and support programmes frequently act upon it, designing interventions that prioritise autonomy, formalisation, and measurable expansion. While such views have long shaped entrepreneurship policy, they become problematic when applied unreflectively, because they overlook the relational, moral, and situated character of entrepreneurial processes in poverty.

Acting upon this narrow understanding has practical consequences. It creates unrealistic expectations of what entrepreneurship is and how it works. Programmes that reward visibility and scale can expose entrepreneurs, particularly women, to reputational risk or social sanction. Financial initiatives that assume a desire for independence may neglect the forms of legitimacy, reciprocity, and care that actually sustain ventures. Policies that define success only through quantifiable outcomes miss the everyday work

of maintaining trust and responsibility within community networks. As a result, even well-intentioned interventions can misread what constitutes progress and unintentionally place entrepreneurs in vulnerable social positions.

The thesis does not aim to provide prescriptive recommendations, but it invites reflection on how entrepreneurship in poverty is supported and represented. Recognising that entrepreneuring is embedded in relationships and moral expectations calls for a more careful approach—one that values discretion, continuity, and legitimacy alongside ambition.

If entrepreneurship in poverty is understood as relational and contextually negotiated work, then policies and programmes need to respect that complexity. Interventions might benefit from:

- allowing flexibility in how entrepreneurs participate and present themselves, acknowledging the importance of safe visibility;
- strengthening networks of trust and mutual responsibility rather than focusing solely on individual autonomy;
- designing evaluation criteria that attend to moral legitimacy and social recognition, not only to measurable expansion.

Such an approach would not replace existing frameworks but broaden them, recognising that entrepreneurship under constraint is sustained less by independence than by interdependence. Supporting these quiet, relational forms of entrepreneuring can create conditions where agency is safer, more legitimate, and more enduring.

6.7 Limitations and future research

Every study is shaped by its choices of context, focus, and method, and this thesis is no exception. The insights developed here are grounded in qualitative research conducted in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The findings, therefore, reflect the specific social, cultural, and institutional conditions of that setting. While the analytical ideas—particularly nuanced agency and relational legitimacy—may resonate beyond this context, they should be read as situated and interpretive rather than as universal claims. In line with Flyvbjerg's (2006) argument on theoretical generalisation, the value of such qualitative work lies not in statistical representativeness but in

its ability to generate concepts that illuminate broader patterns of reasoning and practice. The theoretical contribution, therefore, rests in the analytical transferability of ideas rather than their empirical replication.

The focus on micro-level practices means that structural and policy dimensions of poverty are engaged with indirectly. Future research could extend this work by connecting everyday entrepreneuring to broader institutional or policy processes, tracing how subtle shifts in legitimacy or gender norms accumulate into larger transformations. It could also explore how nuanced agency operates under other forms of structural constraint, such as migration, informality, economic precarity, or post-conflict reconstruction, where legitimacy, recognition, and resources are likewise contested

The study has also prioritised depth over breadth. Its strength lies in the richness of narrative accounts, but this necessarily limits generalisability. Following Flyvbjerg (2006), this limitation can be viewed as a feature rather than a flaw, as the intensive exploration of a single setting allows for the development of nuanced, theoretically generative insights. Comparative studies across regions or cultural contexts could build on these insights, exploring how nuanced agency manifests differently where norms of respectability, family structures, or state surveillance vary.

Finally, the thesis has highlighted how the researcher's own positionality shapes interpretation. This reflexive stance can be developed further through collaborative and participatory approaches, involving entrepreneurs more directly in the co-analysis of their experiences. Such work could deepen understanding of how agency and context are jointly produced—not only in entrepreneurship but across other forms of everyday organising under constraint.

Taken together, these reflections point toward future inquiries that move between micro and macro levels, between contextual depth and comparative scope, and between individual narratives and collective change. Each of these directions can continue to refine how entrepreneuring is understood as a relational, contextually embedded practice.

6.8 Concluding remarks

This chapter has drawn together the insights from Papers I–IV to build a cumulative understanding of how entrepreneurial agency is enacted and made meaningful in contexts of constrained structures, such as in this case, multidimensional poverty. The discussion has traced how entrepreneurs narrate their actions, negotiate legitimacy, and practise agency through everyday adjustments to fit within the constrained structure in which they exist, but in doing so, participate in the gradual re-shaping of their contexts.

Across the thesis, entrepreneuring emerges not as a pursuit of autonomy or resistance but as a relational and situated process, one sustained through responsibility, respectability, and persistence. The concept of nuanced agency captures this mode of acting: careful, adaptive, and oriented toward maintaining continuity within constraint.

By viewing structural constraints not as a backdrop but as a constitutive condition, the thesis repositions entrepreneurship as an everyday practice through which people make life workable. The constraints of poverty in KP mean that entrepreneurs act within tight boundaries of legitimacy and visibility, yet their stories and practices demonstrate agency that is both constrained and creative. These small acts of narrating, hiding, negotiating, and persisting are not marginal details; they are the texture of entrepreneuring itself.

In this way, the thesis offers a grounded account of how entrepreneurship is lived under constraint and how, through the quiet persistence of ordinary actors, context itself is continually made and remade.

References

- Abbas, A., Byrne, J., Galloway, L., and Jackman, L. (2019). Gender, intersecting identities, and entrepreneurship research: An introduction to a special section on intersectionality. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior and Research*, 25(8), 1703–1705.
- Acs, Z. J., Szerb, L., and Lafuente, E. (2018). *The Global Entrepreneurship Index 2018*. Washington, DC: The Global Entrepreneurship and Development Institute.
- Adams, B. N. (2022). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics [1989]. *Contemporary Sociological Theory*. Pine Forge.
- Adams, T. E., Jones, S. H., and Ellis, C. (2015). *Autoethnography*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ahl, H., and Marlow, S. (2012). Exploring the dynamics of gender, feminism and entrepreneurship: Advancing debate to escape a dead end? *Organization*, 19(5), 543–562.
- Ahmad, M. (1996). The crescent and the sword: Islam, the military, and political legitimacy in Pakistan, 1977–1985. *The Middle East Journal*, 50(3), 372–386.
- Ahmad, S. Z. (2011). Evidence of the characteristics of women entrepreneurs in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: An empirical investigation. *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship*, 3(2), 123–143. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17566261111140206>
- Ali, N. (2023). Educational development in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (NWFP): An historical perspective. *Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 11(2), 1213–1219.
- Ali, S. (2013). Pakistan: Target revision in education policy. *Education in West Central Asia*, 30, 163.
- Alkire, S., and Foster, J. (2011). Counting and multidimensional poverty measurement. *Journal of Public Economics*, 95(7–8), 476–487. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2010.11.006>
- Alvarez, S. A., and Barney, J. B. (2007). Discovery and creation: Alternative theories of entrepreneurial action. *Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal*, 1(1–2), 11–26. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sej.4>
- Alvesson, M., and Sköldbberg, K. (2018). *Reflexive methodology: New vistas for qualitative research* (3rd ed.). London: Sage.
- Alvesson, M. (2003). Methodology for close up studies—Struggling with closeness and closure. *Higher Education*, 46(2), 167–193.

- Anderson, A. R., and Gaddefors, J. (2016). Entrepreneurship as a community phenomenon: Reconnecting meanings and place. *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business*, 29(2), 213–228. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJESB.2016.077576>
- Anderson, A. R., and Jack, S. L. (2002). The articulation of social capital in entrepreneurial networks: A glue or a lubricant? *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development*, 14(3), 193–210. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08985620110112079>
- Anderson, A. R., and Ronteau, S. (2017). Towards an entrepreneurial theory of practice: Emerging ideas for entrepreneurship research. *International Small Business Journal*, 35(5), 667–688. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEEE-12-2016-0054>
- Anderson, A. R., Dodd, S. D., and Jack, S. L. (2012). Entrepreneurship as connecting: Some implications for theorising and practice. *Management Decision*, 50(5), 958–971. Available from <http://openair.rgu.ac.uk>
- Anderson, A. R., Dodd, S. D., and Jack, S. L. (2018). The role of family members in entrepreneurial networks: Beyond the boundaries of the family firm. *International Small Business Journal*, 36(1), 82–99.
- Anderson, A. R., and Smith, R. (2007). The moral space in entrepreneurship: An exploration of ethical imperatives and the moral legitimacy of being enterprising. *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development*, 19(6), 479–497.
- Audretsch, D. B., and Link, A. N. (2019). *Sources of knowledge and entrepreneurial behavior*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Autio, E., Nambisan, S., Thomas, L. D. W., and Wright, M. (2018). Digital affordances, spatial affordances, and the genesis of entrepreneurial ecosystems. *Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal*, 12(1), 72–95. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sej.1266>
- Baker, T., and Welter, F. (2018). Contextual entrepreneurship: An interdisciplinary perspective. *Foundations and Trends in Entrepreneurship*, 14(4), 357–426.
- Baker, T., and Nelson, R. E. (2005). Creating something from nothing: Resource construction through entrepreneurial bricolage. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 50(3), 329–366. <https://doi.org/10.2189/asqu.2005.50.3.329>
- Bamberg, M. (1997). Positioning between structure and performance. *Journal of Narrative and Life History*, 7(1–4), 335–342.
- Berger, P. L., and Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. New York: Penguin Books USA Inc.
- Berger, R. (2015). Now I see it, now I don't: Researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, 15(2), 219–234.
- Berglund, K., Hytti, U., and Verduijn, K. (2020). Unsettling entrepreneurship education. *Entrepreneurship Education and Pedagogy*, 3(3), 208–213.

- Boje, D. M. (2011). *Storytelling and the future of organizations: An antenarrative handbook*. London: Routledge.
- Bruton, G. D., Ahlstrom, D., and Li, H. L. (2010). Institutional theory and entrepreneurship: Where are we now and where do we need to move in the future? *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 34(3), 421–440. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6520.2010.00390.x>
- Bruton, G. D., Ketchen, D. J., and Ireland, R. D. (2013). Entrepreneurship as a solution to poverty. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 28(6), 683–689. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2013.05.002>
- Bryman, A., and Bell, E. (2019). *Business research methods* (5th ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Calás, M. B., Smircich, L., and Bourne, K. A. (2009). Extending the boundaries: Reframing “entrepreneurship as social change” through feminist perspectives. *Academy of Management Review*, 34(3), 552–569.
- Casson, M. (1982). *The entrepreneur: An economic theory*. Oxford, UK: Martin Robertson.
- Chang, H. (2016). *Autoethnography as method* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. London: Sage.
- Collins, P. H. (2022). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Cornelissen, J. P., and Clarke, J. S. (2010). Imagining and rationalizing opportunities: Inductive reasoning and the creation and justification of new ventures. *Academy of Management Review*, 35(4), 539–557. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/29765004>
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory, and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, (1), 139–167.
- Creswell, J. W., and Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cunliffe, A. L. (2011). Crafting qualitative research: Morgan and Smircich 30 years on. *Organizational Research Methods*, 14(4), 647–673. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428110373658>
- Czarniawska, B. (2004). *Narratives in social science research*. London: Sage.
- Dana, L. P. (1995). Entrepreneurship in a remote sub-Arctic community. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 20(1), 57–72. <https://doi.org/10.1177/104225879602000104>
- Davidsson, P. (2015). Entrepreneurial opportunities and the entrepreneurship nexus: A re-conceptualization. *Journal of Business Venturing Insights*, 4, 49–57.
- Denzin, N. K., and Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2018). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Dey, P., and Teasdale, S. (2016). The tactical mimicry of social enterprise strategies: Acting 'as if' in the everyday life of third sector organizations. *Organization*, 23(4), 485–504. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508415570689>
- DiMaggio, P. J., and Powell, W. W. (1983). The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review*, 48(2), 147–160. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2095101>
- Dodd, S., Anderson, A., and Jack, S. (2023). “Let them not make me a stone”—Repositioning entrepreneurship. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 61(4), 1842–1870.
- Down, S., and Warren, L. (2008). Constructing narratives of enterprise: Clichés and entrepreneurial self-identity. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research*, 14(1), 4–23.
- Down, S. (2006). *Narratives of enterprise: Crafting entrepreneurial self-identity in a small firm*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781845429904>
- Drucker, P. F. (1985). *Innovation and entrepreneurship: Practice and principles*. New York, NY: Harper and Row.
- Du, J., and Kim, P. H. (2021). One size does not fit all: Strategy configurations, complex environments, and new venture performance. *Strategic Management Journal*, 42(8), 1403–1431. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.3267>
- Dubois, A., and Gadde, L.-E. (2002). Systematic combining: An abductive approach to case research. *Journal of Business Research*, 55(7), 553–560.
- Dy, A. M., and Agwunobi, J. (2019). Intersectionality and mixed methods for social entrepreneurship research. *Social Enterprise Journal*, 14(2), 225–242. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEBr-12-2017-0498>
- Dy, A. M., Marlow, S., and Martin, L. (2017). A web of opportunity or the same old story? Women digital entrepreneurs and intersectionality theory. *Human Relations*, 70(3), 286–311.
- Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., and Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: An overview. *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung*, 36(4), 273–290.
- Emirbayer, M., and Mische, A. (1998). What is agency? *American Journal of Sociology*, 103(4), 962–1023. <https://doi.org/10.1086/231294>
- Essers, C., and Benschop, Y. (2009). Muslim businesswomen doing boundary work: The negotiation of Islam, gender and ethnicity within entrepreneurial contexts. *Human Relations*, 62(3), 403–423.
- Essers, C., and Tedmanson, D. (2014). Upsetting ‘others’ in the Netherlands: Narratives of Muslim Turkish migrant businesswomen at the crossroads of ethnicity, gender and religion. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 21(4), 353–367. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12041>

- Finlay, L. (2002). Negotiating the swamp: The opportunity and challenge of reflexivity in research practice. *Qualitative Research*, 2(2), 209–230.
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2001). *Making social science matter: Why social inquiry fails and how it can succeed again*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(2), 219–245.
- Fraser, N. (2000). Rethinking recognition. *New Left Review*, 3(May–June), 107–120.
- Galloway, L., Kapasi, I., & Wimalasena, L. (2019). A theory of venturing: A critical realist explanation of why my father is not Richard Branson. *International Small Business Journal*, 37(6), 626–641.
- Galloway, L., Kapasi, I., and Sang, K. (2015). Entrepreneurship, leadership, and the value of feminist approaches to understanding them. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 53(3), 683–692.
- Gartner, W. B. (2007). Entrepreneurial narrative and a science of the imagination. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 22(5), 613–627.
- George, G., McGahan, A. M., and Prabhu, J. (2012). Innovation for inclusive growth: Towards a theoretical framework and a research agenda. *Journal of Management Studies*, 53(3), 324–348. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2012.01048.x>
- Giddens, A. (1984). *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Glaser, B. G., and Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Goundar, P. R. (2025). Researcher positionality: Ways to include it in a qualitative research design. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 24, 1–7.
- Granovetter, M. (1985). Economic action and social structure: The problem of embeddedness. *American Journal of Sociology*, 91(3), 481–510. <https://doi.org/10.1086/228311>
- Gul, S., Taj, S., and Zaman, N. (2023). Gender gaps in political leadership of Pakistan: Identifying barriers and strategies for women’s advancement with special focus on KP political structure. *Pakistan Journal of Social Research*, 5(2), 1252–1260.
- Haraway, D. (1988). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist Studies*, 14(3), 575–599. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066>
- Hashim, H., and Gaddefors, J. (2023). The value of entrepreneuring in the context of multidimensional poverty. *The International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation*, 24(2), 88–104. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14657503231156338>
- Hjorth, D., Holt, R., and Steyaert, C. (2015). Entrepreneurship and process studies. *International Small Business Journal*, 33(6), 599–611.

- Holmes, A. G. D. (2020). Researcher positionality: A consideration of its influence and place in qualitative research—A new researcher guide. *Shanlax International Journal of Education*, 8(4), 1–10.
- Honneth, A. (1996). *The struggle for recognition: The moral grammar of social conflicts*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Hytti, U. (2005). New meanings for entrepreneurs: From risk-taking heroes to safe-seekers in gendered contexts. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 18(6), 594–611.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/09534810510628599>
- Hytti, U., Alsos, G. A., Heinonen, J., and Ljunggren, E. (2017). Navigating the family business: A gendered analysis of identity construction of daughters. *International Small Business Journal*, 35(6), 665–686.
- Irshad, K., and Waqar, K. (2025). From grievance to governance: Deconstructing the ecosystem of violent extremism in western Pakistan. *Strategic Conflict and Resolution Research Journal*, 3(1), 45–63.
<https://www.scrjournal.com/index.php/14/article/view/330/403>
- Jack, S. L., and Anderson, A. R. (2002). The effects of embeddedness on the entrepreneurial process. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 17(5), 467–487.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0883-9026\(01\)00076-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0883-9026(01)00076-3)
- Jamali, D. (2009). Constraints and opportunities facing women entrepreneurs in developing countries: A relational perspective. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 24(4), 232–251.
- Johannisson, B. (2011). Towards a practice theory of entrepreneuring. *Small Business Economics*, 36(2), 135–150. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-009-9212-8>
- Johnson, A.G., 2004. Patriarchy, the system. *Women's lives: Multicultural perspectives*, 3(2204), pp.25-32.
- Jones, S., Al-Dajani, H., Harrison, R., and Swail, J. (2025). Feminist entrepreneurship research in transition: Expanding the boundaries of context and theory. *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship*. Forthcoming.
Available at https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk/638764/1/Submitted%20draft_Proof_hi.pdf
- Kabeer, N. (1999). Resources, agency, achievements: Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment. *Development and Change*, 30(3), 435–464. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7660.00125>
- Kandiyoti, D. (1988). Bargaining with patriarchy. *Gender and Society*, 2(3), 274–290. <https://doi.org/10.1177/089124388002003004>
- Khattak, S. (2014). Silent voices, untold stories: Perceptions of female students towards their own experiences and higher educational opportunities in

Peshawar, Khyber Pukhtunkhwah (KP) (Pakistan). Diss. Middlesex University.

- Kimmitt, J., Muñoz, P., and Newbery, R. (2020). Poverty and the varieties of entrepreneurship in the pursuit of prosperity. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 35(4), 105939. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2019.05.003>
- Korsgaard, S., Müller, S., and Tanvig, H. W. (2015). Rural entrepreneurship or entrepreneurship in the rural—Between place and space. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior and Research*, 21(1), 5–26.
- Larty, J., and Hamilton, E. (2011). Structural approaches to narrative analysis in entrepreneurship research: Exemplars from two researchers. *International Small Business Journal*, 29(3), 220–237. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0266242611401796>
- Lee, N., Sameen, H., and Cowling, M. (2019). Access to finance for innovative SMEs since the financial crisis. *Research Policy*, 48(1), 103–112.
- Lent, M., Anderson, A., Yunis, M. S., and Hashim, H. (2019). Understanding how legitimacy is acquired among informal home-based Pakistani small businesses. *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal*, 15(2), 341–361.
- Lincoln, Y. S., and Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Lincoln, Y. S., Lynham, S. A., and Guba, E. G. (2011). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences, revisited. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed., pp. 97–128). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Mahmood, S. (2005). *Politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Mair, J., and Martí, I. (2009). Entrepreneurship in and around institutional voids: A case study from Bangladesh. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 24(5), 419–435. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2008.04.006>
- Martinez Dy, A. (2020). The racialized and gendered inequalities of entrepreneurship. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 58(3), 479–501.
- Mauthner, M., Birch, M., Jessop, J., and Miller, T. (Eds.). (2002). *Ethics in qualitative research*. London: Sage.
- McAdam, M., Harrison, R. T., and Leitch, C. M. (2019). Stories from the field: Women’s networking as gender capital in entrepreneurial ecosystems. *Small Business Economics*, 53(2), 459–474.
- McMullen, J. S., and Shepherd, D. A. (2006). Entrepreneurial action and the role of uncertainty in the theory of the entrepreneur. *Academy of Management Review*, 31(1), 132–152. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2006.19379628>

- Morse, J. M., Barrett, M., Mayan, M., Olson, K., and Spiers, J. (2002). Verification strategies for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1(2), 13–22.
- Mumtaz, Z., and Salway, S. (2009). Understanding gendered influences on women's reproductive health in Pakistan: Moving beyond the autonomy paradigm. *Social Science and Medicine*, 68(7), 1349–1356. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2009.01.025>
- Neergaard, H., and Uhløi, J. P. (Eds.). (2007). *Handbook of qualitative research methods in entrepreneurship*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Omran, W., and Yousafzai, S. (2024). Epistemic injustice and epistemic resistance: An intersectional study of women's entrepreneurship under occupation and patriarchy. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 48(4), 981–1008.
- Ortner, S. B. (2006). *Anthropology and social theory: Culture, power, and the acting subject*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. (2021). *Labour Force Survey 2020–21*. Islamabad: Government of Pakistan.
- Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. (2023). *Labour Force Survey 2022–23*. Islamabad: Government of Pakistan. Retrieved from <https://www.pbs.gov.pk/>
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Polanyi, K. (1944). *The great transformation: The political and economic origins of our time*. New York, NY: Farrar and Rinehart.
- Ram, M., Theodorakopoulos, N., and Jones, T. (2008). Forms of capital, mixed embeddedness and Somali enterprise. *Work, Employment and Society*, 22(3), 427–446.
- Refai, D., Shaw, E., and Galloway, L. (2024). Refugee entrepreneurship and capitals in context. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior and Research*, 30(2), 287–305.
- Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rindova, V., Barry, D., and Ketchen, D. J. Jr. (2009). Entrepreneurship as emancipation. *Academy of Management Review*, 34(3), 477–491.
- Roomi, M. A., and Harrison, P. (2010). Behind the veil: Women's capacity building and empowerment in Pakistan. *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship*, 2(2), 150–172.
- Roomi, M. A., and Parrott, G. (2008). Barriers to development and progression of women entrepreneurs in Pakistan. *The Journal of Entrepreneurship*, 17(1), 59–72.
- Roos, A. (2021). *Reproducing gender: The spatial context of gender in entrepreneurship*. Diss. Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU), Uppsala. <https://pub.epsilon.slu.se/23643/>

- Salvi, E., Belz, F. M., and Bacq, S. (2023). Informal entrepreneurship: An integrative review and future research agenda. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 47(2), 265–303.
- Sarasvathy, S. D. (2001). Causation and effectuation: Toward a theoretical shift from economic inevitability to entrepreneurial contingency. *Academy of Management Review*, 26(2), 243–263. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2001.4378020>
- Sayer, R. A. (2005). *The moral significance of class*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schumpeter, J. A., and Swedberg, R. (2021). *The theory of economic development*. London: Routledge.
- Sen, A. (2014). Development as freedom (1999). In *The globalization and development reader: Perspectives on development and global change* (p. 525).
- Sewell, W. H. Jr. (1992). A theory of structure: Duality, agency, and transformation. *American Journal of Sociology*, 98(1), 1–29. <https://doi.org/10.1086/229967>
- Shane, S., and Venkataraman, S. (2000). The promise of entrepreneurship as a field of research. *Academy of Management Review*, 25(1), 217–226. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2000.2791611>
- Shinwari, N. A. (2011). *Understanding FATA: Attitudes towards governance, religion and society in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas*. Peshawar, Pakistan: Community Appraisal and Motivation Programme (CAMP).
- Siddique, A. (2014). *The Pashtun question: The unresolved key to the future of Pakistan and Afghanistan*. London: Hurst.
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Stake, R. E. (2006). *Multiple case study analysis*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Steyaert, C. (2007). 'Entrepreneuring' as a conceptual attractor? A review of process theories in 20 years of entrepreneurship studies. *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development*, 19(6), 453–477. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08985620701671759>
- Suchman, M. C. (1995). Managing legitimacy: Strategic and institutional approaches. *Academy of Management Review*, 20(3), 571–610. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1995.9508080331>
- Sutter, C. J., Bruton, G. D., and Chen, J. (2019). Entrepreneurship as a solution to extreme poverty: A review and future research directions. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 34(1), 197–214. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2018.06.003>
- Thornton, P. H., Ocasio, W., and Lounsbury, M. (2012). *The institutional logics perspective: A new approach to culture, structure, and process*. Oxford, UK:

- Oxford University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199601936.001.0001>
- Timmermans, S., and Tavory, I. (2012). Theory construction in qualitative research: From grounded theory to abductive analysis. *Sociological Theory*, 30(3), 167–186.
- Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight “big-tent” criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(10), 837–851.
- Tunberg, M. (2017). Rethinking small firm growth: ...while absorbing the processual. Diss. Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU), Uppsala. <https://pub.epsilon.slu.se/14161/>
- Ul Haq, A., Junaid, M., and Khan, M. S. (2024). What triggers informal entrepreneurial learning? A qualitative exploration of small and medium enterprises in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. *International Journal of Social Science Archives (IJSSA)*, 7(1).
- Van Burg, E., Cornelissen, J. P., Stam, W., and Jack, S. L. (2022). Advancing qualitative entrepreneurship research: Leveraging methodological plurality for achieving scholarly impact. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 46(1), 3–20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1042258720943051>
- Verduijn, K., and Essers, C. (2013). Questioning dominant entrepreneurship assumptions: The case of female ethnic minority entrepreneurs. *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development*, 25(7–8), 612–630. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08985626.2013.814718>
- Walby, S. (1989). Theorising patriarchy. *Sociology*, 23(2), 213–234. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038589023002004>
- Webb, J. W., Bruton, G. D., Tihanyi, L., and Ireland, R. D. (2013). Research on entrepreneurship in the informal economy: Framing a research agenda. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 28(5), 598–614. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2012.05.003>
- Welter, F. (2011). Contextualizing entrepreneurship—Conceptual challenges and ways forward. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 35(1), 165–184. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6520.2010.00427.x>
- Welter, F., and Gartner, W. B. (Eds.). (2016). *A research agenda for entrepreneurship and context*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Welter, F., Baker, T., and Wirsching, K. (2019). Three waves and counting: The rising tide of contextualization in entrepreneurship research. *Small Business Economics*, 52(2), 319–330. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-018-0094-5>
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications* (Vol. 6). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Zahra, S. A., Wright, M., and Abdelgawad, S. G. (2014). Contextualization and the advancement of entrepreneurship research. *International Small Business Journal*, 32(5), 479–500.

Zhao, E. Y., and Wry, T. (2021). Not all inequality is equal: Deconstructing the societal logic of stratification in entrepreneurship. *Academy of Management Annals*, 15(1), 266–302.

Popular science summary

When we hear the word entrepreneur, we often imagine someone who takes risks, builds companies, and transforms ideas into growth. Around the world, governments and aid agencies promote entrepreneurship as a solution to poverty and unemployment, a promise that anyone can succeed if they are creative enough. Yet poverty remains one of the world's most persistent challenges. It is the first of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals and affects billions of people in complex, overlapping ways: through economic scarcity, limited education, gender inequality, fragile institutions, and moral expectations that shape daily life. Poverty is not only a lack of income; it is a condition of constrained possibilities.

Most theories of entrepreneurship were developed in Western economies, where independence, innovation, and economic growth are central values. These ideas, while powerful, often fail to describe how entrepreneurship actually unfolds for the majority of the world's population, whose lives are marked by structural constraint. They overlook how power, gender, and inequality shape what people can do. This thesis begins from that gap. It explores how people create and sustain small enterprises in constrained conditions and what their experiences can teach us about entrepreneurship everywhere.

For example, in one of many interviews conducted between 2017 and 2021, a woman told me she kept her sewing machine hidden in a back room. If neighbours saw her working, they might gossip or question her respectability. Officials might demand papers she could never provide. Hiding the machine, she said, was not shame; it was protection. Across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), a mountainous province in north-western Pakistan, I met many people like her. Some sold food from home, others taught children, mended clothes, or traded small goods online. None of them described themselves as entrepreneurs in the usual sense. They spoke instead about making life possible, earning enough to contribute, helping others, maintaining self-respect. Their stories revealed a quieter, relational form of entrepreneurship, built not on disruption or expansion but on care, endurance, and negotiation.

These stories matter far beyond Pakistan. Across the Global South, and in poorer communities in the Global North, millions of people work informally, creatively balancing survival with social acceptance. Their

experiences reveal the limits of theories built in affluent, individualistic societies. If we want entrepreneurship to contribute meaningfully to the Sustainable Development Goals, we must start from the realities of constraint, not the ideals of freedom. Most research celebrates entrepreneurs who “overcome” barriers but seldom asks why those barriers exist. This study turns attention to the structures, poverty, patriarchy, and fragile institutions that shape what people can do. By taking the everyday knowledge and experiences of entrepreneurs seriously, it challenges a long tradition of speaking about the poor instead of learning from them. It shows that entrepreneurship, when viewed from the margins, is not a story of heroic escape but of daily endurance and quiet transformation.

The research shows that entrepreneurship in poverty is not about independence from society but about working through it. People act within the rules that surround them, but they also reshape those rules through their actions. A woman might describe her catering as “helping the community” rather than as a business. A man might frame his small shop as a service to relatives rather than a profit venture. A young person might teach children at home instead of opening a visible centre. These choices may seem small, but they are full of meaning. They reveal an ongoing negotiation between ambition, respectability, and safety.

From these stories emerges the idea of nuanced agency: the subtle, adaptive acts through which people navigate constraint. Agency here is not rebellion; it is a practice of caring. It is the quiet art of continuing, of finding legitimate ways to act and to live meaningfully within the limits imposed by poverty and tradition. Not everyone faces those limits equally. Even within poverty, small differences such as education, family reputation, or male support create uneven opportunities. I call this relational privilege: a form of advantage that depends on who stands behind you and how your actions are recognised. It is not a fixed resource but something that grows or fades with relationships. This idea helps explain why two people doing similar work in the same environment may experience entrepreneurship very differently, one encouraged and respected, the other criticised or ignored. Recognising these differences is vital if we want to design policies that reach those most constrained by their social position.

Over time, these small and careful actions practiced within constraints accumulate into change. When one woman begins sewing lessons from her home, it becomes easier for others to do the same. When a man publicly

supports his wife's business, it challenges assumptions about gender and respectability. Through such everyday efforts, norms begin to shift, not through revolutions but through repeated actions that test the bounds of constraints. These subtle transformations show that entrepreneurship can be a force for social change, even when it looks ordinary. Progress here is not measured in profit margins but in new forms of permission, in what becomes sayable, doable, and acceptable.

Seen in this way, entrepreneurship is not a universal formula but a local practice. It is deeply shaped by relationships, moral codes, and histories. For policymakers and development organisations, this means that support programmes must move beyond narrow definitions of success. When interventions focus only on formalisation or visibility, they risk misunderstanding the people they aim to help. Recognising these quieter forms of agency broadens our understanding of entrepreneurship itself.

By grounding entrepreneurship in lived experience, this research invites a wider rethinking of how we understand agency and development. Poverty is not only about lack of resources; it is also about the ongoing struggle for legitimacy and recognition. Acknowledging this can help shape more humane and effective ways of supporting people who build lives within constraints. This study builds knowledge from the ground up, grounded in the voices and moral worlds of those who live within poverty. Their stories remind us that entrepreneurship is not a simple universal formula, but a contextually embedded human practice that continues quietly, intelligently, and with care, even when the world does not see it.

To continue, we need to explore how these insights apply elsewhere, in migrant communities, post-conflict regions, or low-income urban areas where people similarly work at the edge of visibility. Everywhere, there are entrepreneurs whose stories remain hidden, not because they lack ambition, but because they act within fragile worlds that demand care. This thesis brings such work into view. It reminds us that the world's entrepreneurs are not only those who pitch big ideas or seek investment, but also those who, every day, perform the quiet, steady work of sustaining life, finding ways to act, to care, and to continue.

Populärvetenskaplig sammanfattning

När vi hör ordet entreprenör tänker vi ofta på någon som tar risker, bygger företag och förvandlar idéer till tillväxt. Runt om i världen framhåller regeringar och biståndsorganisationer entreprenörskap som en lösning på fattigdom och arbetslöshet – ett löfte om att vem som helst kan lyckas bara man är tillräckligt kreativ. Ändå är fattigdom en av världens mest utdragna utmaningar. Den är det första av FN:s globala hållbarhetsmål och påverkar miljarder människor på komplexa och överlappande sätt: genom ekonomisk brist, begränsad utbildning, ojämställdhet, svaga institutioner och moraliska förväntningar som formar vardagslivet. Fattigdom handlar inte bara om brist på inkomst – det är ett tillstånd av begränsade möjligheter.

De flesta teorier om entreprenörskap har utvecklats i västerländska ekonomier där självständighet, innovation och ekonomisk tillväxt är centrala värden. Dessa idéer, även om de är inflytelserika, beskriver ofta dåligt hur entreprenörskap faktiskt tar form för majoriteten av världens befolkning – människor vars liv präglas av strukturella begränsningar. De förbiser hur makt, kön och ojämlikhet formar vad människor kan göra. Denna avhandling utgår från just det glappet. Den undersöker hur människor skapar och upprätthåller små företag under begränsade villkor, och vad deras erfarenheter kan lära oss om entreprenörskap i ett bredare perspektiv.

I en av många intervjuer som genomfördes mellan 2017 och 2021 berättade en kvinna att hon höll sin symaskin gömd i ett bakre rum. Om grannarna såg henne arbeta kunde de börja skvallra eller ifrågasätta hennes anseende. Myndighetspersoner kunde kräva papper hon aldrig skulle kunna uppvisa. Att gömma maskinen var, sa hon, inte ett uttryck för skam – utan för skydd. I Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), en bergig provins i nordvästra Pakistan, mötte jag många som henne. Några sålde mat hemifrån, andra undervisade barn, lagade kläder eller handlade småvaror på nätet. Ingen av dem beskrev sig själva som entreprenörer i vanlig mening. De talade i stället om att få livet att gå ihop, om att bidra, hjälpa andra och bevara självrespekten. Deras berättelser visade en tystare, relationell form av entreprenörskap – inte byggd på expansion eller förändring, utan på omsorg, uthållighet och förhandling.

Dessa berättelser är betydelsefulla långt bortom Pakistan. I hela det globala syd – och även i fattigare samhällen i det globala nord – arbetar miljontals människor informellt och balanserar kreativt mellan överlevnad

och social acceptans. Deras erfarenheter visar gränserna för teorier som utvecklats i rikare och mer individualistiska samhällen. Om entreprenörskap ska bidra meningsfullt till de globala hållbarhetsmålen måste vi börja i verkligheten av begränsning, inte i idealet om frihet. Mycket forskning hyllar entreprenörer som ”övervinner” hinder, men ställer sällan frågan varför dessa hinder finns. Denna studie vänder blicken mot de strukturer – fattigdom, patriarkat och bräckliga institutioner – som formar vad människor kan göra. Genom att ta entreprenörers vardagskunskap och erfarenheter på allvar utmanar avhandlingen en lång tradition av att tala om de fattiga i stället för att lära av dem. Den visar att entreprenörskap, sett från marginalerna, inte är en berättelse om hjältemodig frigörelse utan om vardaglig uthållighet och stillsam förändring.

Forskningen visar att entreprenörskap i fattigdom inte handlar om oberoende från samhället, utan om att verka inom det. Människor handlar inom de regler som omger dem – men de omformar också dessa regler genom sina handlingar. En kvinna kan beskriva sin cateringverksamhet som ”att hjälpa samhället” snarare än som ett företag. En man kan se sin lilla butik som en tjänst till släktingar snarare än ett vinstdrivande projekt. En ung person kan undervisa barn hemma i stället för att öppna en synlig skola. Dessa val kan tyckas små, men de är fulla av mening. De visar en ständig förhandling mellan ambition, anseende och trygghet.

Ur dessa berättelser växer idén om nyanserad handlingsförmåga – de subtila, anpassningsbara handlingar genom vilka människor navigerar begränsningar. Handlingsförmåga handlar inte här om uppror, utan om omsorg. Det är den stilla konsten att fortsätta – att finna legitima sätt att handla och leva meningsfullt inom de gränser som fattigdom och tradition sätter. Men alla möter inte dessa gränser på samma sätt. Även inom fattigdom skapar små skillnader som utbildning, familjens rykte eller manligt stöd ojämlika möjligheter. Jag kallar detta relationell förmån – en form av fördel som beror på vem som står bakom dig och hur dina handlingar erkänns. Det är ingen fast resurs utan något som växer eller försvagas genom relationer. Denna idé hjälper till att förklara varför två personer som gör liknande saker i samma miljö kan uppleva entreprenörskapet helt olika – den ena blir uppmuntrad och respekterad, den andra blir kritiserad eller osedd. Att erkänna dessa skillnader är avgörande om vi vill utforma politik som når dem som är mest begränsade av sin sociala position.

Med tiden bidrar dessa små och varsamma handlingar till förändring. När en kvinna börjar hålla sykurser i sitt hem blir det lättare för andra att göra detsamma. När en man öppet stöttar sin hustrus verksamhet utmanas föreställningar om kön och anseende. Genom sådana vardagliga handlingar börjar normer långsamt att skifta – inte genom revolutioner, utan genom upprepade handlingar som tänjer på gränserna för det möjliga. Dessa subtila förändringar visar att entreprenörskap kan vara en kraft för social förändring, även när det ser alldagligt ut. Framsteg mäts inte i vinstmarginaler här, utan i nya former av tillåtelse – i vad som blir möjligt att säga, göra och acceptera.

Med denna syn har entreprenörskap ingen universell formel utan är ett lokalt handlande. Entreprenörskapet formas djupt av relationer, moraliska koder och historiska erfarenheter. För beslutsfattare och utvecklingsorganisationer innebär detta att stödsatser måste gå bortom snäva definitioner av framgång. När insatser enbart fokuserar på formalisering eller synlighet riskerar de att missa människorna de vill hjälpa. Att erkänna dessa tystare former av handlingsförmåga breddar vår förståelse av entreprenörskapet i sig.

Genom att förankra entreprenörskap i levd erfarenhet inbjuder denna forskning till en bredare omprövning av hur vi förstår handlingsförmåga och utveckling. Fattigdom handlar inte bara om brist på resurser, utan också om en pågående kamp för legitimitet och erkännande. Att erkänna detta kan bidra till mer mänskliga och effektiva sätt att stödja människor som bygger sina liv inom begränsningar. Studien bygger kunskap nerifrån – ur rösterna och de moraliska världar som tillhör dem som lever i fattigdom. Deras berättelser påminner oss om att entreprenörskap inte är en enkel universell formel, utan en kontextuellt förankrad mänsklig praktik som fortgår stillsamt, intelligent och med omsorg – även när världen inte ser den.

För att gå vidare behöver vi utforska hur dessa insikter kan tillämpas i andra sammanhang – i migrantgemenskaper, post-konfliktområden eller låginkomststäder där människor på liknande sätt arbetar i det osynligas gränsland. Överallt finns entreprenörer vars berättelser förblir dolda, inte för att de saknar ambition, utan för att de verkar i sköra världar som kräver omsorg. Denna avhandling synliggör sådant arbete. Den påminner oss om att världens entreprenörer inte bara är de som presenterar stora idéer eller söker investeringar, utan också de som varje dag utför det stillsamma och uthålliga arbetet med att upprätthålla livet – att handla, ta ansvar och fortsätta.

Acknowledgements

When I first came to Sweden, I often thought of the film *Tomorrowland*. I hesitate to mention it here because it's hardly a masterpiece and doesn't exactly reflect well on my movie choices, but somehow it captures what those first days felt like. In the movie, a girl touches a coin and suddenly finds herself in a bright, unfamiliar world, full of promise but also confusion. That is how it was for me: one day I was home, and the next, in a new world of silence and systems that worked in ways I barely understood. It was only my second time ever on a plane, and I had no idea how I would live alone or navigate this digital, snow-filled country. The PhD journey since then has been a journey of learning, doubt, laughter, loss, and endurance, and I am not the same person who arrived that first day.

I owe the completion of this journey to my supervisors, Johan Gaddefors and Richard Ferguson. Johan, you are a visionary who makes people think deeply about life and meaning. I have loved our many conversations, sometimes philosophical, sometimes about everything and nothing. You reminded me that words carry weight, that writing is both expression and responsibility. Richard, your curiosity is contagious and your clarity of thought inspiring; I've loved watching you chase the "why." You have a rare ability to make complex ideas feel graspable, and that has really helped me immensely. You both taught me that academic guidance can be both rigorous and kind.

To my co-supervisors and mentors, past and present—Alistair Anderson, Sophie Alkhaled, Annie Roos, and Hanna Astner. Alistair, you were more than a mentor; you were the one who first told me I could and should study abroad, who made the idea of seeing the world feel possible. Your humour, your writing, and your way of thinking have left an imprint on me. Losing you, after losing my father, was one of the hardest parts of this journey. I still hear your voice when I write, and I hope you would be proud of what I have done. I can already hear you teasing me about making it too long.

Sophie Alkhaled, whose thoughtful advice I valued in our early conversations, even across distance. Annie Roos, the very first face I saw in Sweden—you picked me up from the airport, helped me find my apartment, bought my first bus card, and somewhere along the way became a friend, a confidante, and later a supervisor. We have laughed and cried together over work, movies, and life itself. I am deeply grateful for your support and

presence through it all, and Hanna Astner, whose fearlessness, warmth, and generosity I hope to emulate—and who made me braver than I thought I could be. Hanna, you are also the best partner in games; I always want you on my team. I love us as a team. I am deeply grateful to each of you for your guidance, friendship, and presence through the years.

And to Dr. Muhammad Sohail Younis, my first supervisor during my bachelor's and master's studies—you were the one who introduced me to research and to entrepreneurship itself. You became like family, a caring older brother with a tough exterior and a kind heart. You taught me curiosity, discipline, and how wide the world can be. I am forever grateful to you for opening that first door.

To the Entrepreneurship and Innovation for Sustainability (EIS) group (listed alphabetically): Erik, Frida, Hanna, Henrik, Josefina, Karin, and Per Anders—and to former members Annie and Suvi—thank you for being my community. Your kindness, patience, and humour made this long journey bearable. Erik, thank you for our conversations and for helping me think through ideas that shaped this work. Josefina, you are the best travel partner (our Denmark trip still makes me smile). Karin, your quiet kindness and warmth meant a lot during this journey (and I will never forget how you grew the vegetables I was craving from home). I really enjoyed teaching alongside you, Per Anders. Suvi, thank you for your kindness, for taking me in when I was new and alone, and for teaching me to ride a bike. You all reminded me that academia can be a place of friendship as much as knowledge.

To James Cunningham, who has been a friend, mentor, co-author, and a great support throughout this journey. Thank you for your generosity, encouragement, and for believing in my work even when I doubted it myself. Collaborating with you has been both a privilege and a joy.

I would also like to thank those who served as opponents during my formal PhD seminars: the late Rob Smith (50%), Katarina Pettersson (75%), and Ulla Hytti (90%). Your insightful and challenging comments helped me see my work from new perspectives, strengthened my confidence as a researcher, and pushed me to articulate my ideas and contribution with greater clarity. I am deeply grateful for the time, thought, and generosity you brought to engaging with my work, it made this thesis stronger.

To the individuals in KP, who shared their experiences and whose stories shaped this thesis and gave it life—thank you. Your courage and openness

gave meaning to every word I wrote. I hope I have represented your stories with honesty, respect, and care.

There are no words that can do justice to my family's sacrifices. My *Amma* (mother)—thank you for your vision and determination to educate your daughter, even when others doubted you. I now understand the strength it took to defend that choice. My *Abu* (father), my lion, who worked tirelessly, lived for us, and taught me discipline, empathy, and courage. Your loss left a silence that I still carry, but also a strength that keeps me moving. I see your face in every act of persistence. My brothers, Adil and Faisal, thank you for teasing me just enough to keep me grounded.

To my late sister, whose experience through a lifetime of illness has deeply shaped how I see the world, your life taught me empathy, patience, and the value of each day. To my aunt Nabila, whose prayers have carried me more than she knows, thank you for being there.

To Shahab, thank you for stepping in, especially when I was broken after loss in life, for your love and patience, and for always encouraging me to experience life fully, to travel, to try new things, and to keep moving forward. Most of all, thank you for your love and care for Rayan, and for making this PhD possible through your support. And to Rayan, you are my heart and my greatest joy. Your presence reminds me every day why balance matters; you brought laughter back into my life, and your hugs remind me what truly matters.

My sincere thanks to everyone at the Department of Economics at SLU, especially the administration team, who kept everything running and always found answers. To Gordana, who served as Director of PhD Studies during my time, thank you for your guidance and steady hand. I am also grateful for the courses I took, the teachers who shared their knowledge generously, and the conferences and seminars that broadened my horizons. The people I met along the way, friends, colleagues, and scholars, each contributed to shaping my academic and personal growth. A special thanks to Emilia for your help with proofreading the Swedish parts of the kappa and to Harold for helping me with technical details.

To all my fellow PhD students (past and current) at the department—thank you for your camaraderie, shared frustrations and laughter, and for reminding me that we were never alone in this. You made the journey lighter and much more human.

To my dear friends Klara, Mehwish, Olivia, Shaista, Shqipe and Sjanna, your friendship means more than I can say.

This PhD has been many things, a test, a transformation, a long walk between worlds. I have crossed cultures, languages, and losses, but also discovered unexpected friendships, kindness, and joy. If I have learned anything, it is that no journey is truly solitary. For every doubt, there was a hand that helped me rise; for every chapter, someone who believed in me. This thesis, like my journey, stands on many shoulders. To all of you— thank you.

Hina Hashim

Uppsala, October 2025

The value of entrepreneuring in the context of multidimensional poverty

Hina Hashim 

Entrepreneurship and Innovation for Sustainability Group (EIS), Department of Economics, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Uppsala, Sweden

Johan Gaddefors

Entrepreneurship and Innovation for Sustainability Group (EIS), Department of Economics, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Uppsala, Sweden

Abstract

The role of entrepreneurship in alleviating poverty has been extensively researched by entrepreneurship researchers and policy makers. The focus of this research has mostly been in the context of business, for example, the links between value creation leading and economic poverty amelioration. We believe that poverty is multidimensional and requires attention to detail. Similarly, we argue that entrepreneurship is more than an engine for economic outcomes; rather it is a process for socioeconomic value creation and change. Therefore, we approach entrepreneurship as a verb – ‘entrepreneuring’, an unfolding value process which points at the inherent processual character of entrepreneurship. We argue that entrepreneuring enables the context of poverty by creating different values. To understand its nuances, we explore the concept of ‘value’ in entrepreneuring that offers a means of escaping poverty. To do so, we conducted a qualitative narrative study of entrepreneurs in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, in an impoverished part of northern Pakistan. This article initially reviews literature about entrepreneurship and poverty. Next, we propose a conceptual framework to understand how and why entrepreneuring happens in the context of poverty, and who is involved. Finally, we provide a theoretical framework as to how entrepreneuring creates values that allow individuals to enable the context of poverty.

Keywords

entrepreneuring, multidimensional poverty, value creation, context, developing country

1. Introduction

In today’s world, about 655 million individuals live in extreme poverty (World Bank, 2018). Entrepreneurship has been suggested as part of the solution to alleviating poverty (Hussain et al., 2014). In its most abstract form, poverty is understood as living on less than 1.90USD a day, and entrepreneurship is a known engine for generating money, which translates to economic prosperity (Bruton et al., 2008; Hussain et al., 2014; Bruton et al., 2015b; Ribeiro-Soriano, 2017; Sutter et al., 2019). However, poverty is more than just a lack of money (Sen, 1999). Poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon and with this view, entrepreneurship as a solution may also provide different values. Therefore, in this study, we will explore different aspects of poverty and entrepreneurship. Our purpose is to explore how entrepreneurship results in alleviating multidimensional poverty.

Poverty has been defined and discussed on different levels of abstraction; sometimes the economic perspective

is the most useful, while at others a broader understanding which views poverty as multidimensional is the most utilitarian (Sen, 1999). The argument that poverty is multidimensional is not new and is well recognized in the literature (Waglé, 2008). Studies focusing on the unidimensional economic understanding of poverty have investigated the possibilities of microfinance (Khavul et al., 2013; Chen et al., 2017); crowdfunding (Bruton et al., 2015a; Manara et al., 2018); entrepreneurship education (Hussain et al., 2014); access to bank loans and gender problems related to such access (Hussain et al., 2019); new venture creation and innovation (Si et al., 2020). Poverty is one of the main challenges of today’s world (Roser and

The International Journal of
Entrepreneurship and Innovation
2023, Vol. 24(2) 88–104
© The Author(s) 2023



Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/14657503231156338
journals.sagepub.com/home/ei



Corresponding author:

Hina Hashim, Entrepreneurship and Innovation for Sustainability Group (EIS), Department of Economics, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Uppsala, Sweden.
Email: hina.hashim@slu.se

Ortiz-Ospina, 2017), and the first of UNs Sustainability development goals (UNDP, 2015); therefore, understanding the dynamics of poverty at greater depth requires investigation on a contextual level.

World Bank (2018) define multidimensional poverty as a measure of poverty that captures deprivation in as defined by education, well-being, and access to basic infrastructure in addition to the 1.90USD definition. Maasoumi and Lugo (2008) understand employment/unemployment as a dimension of poverty, while Alkire (2007) argues that dimensions of poverty include empowerment and agency, the ability to advance goals, physical safety and gender. Kabeer (2008) sees poverty as a phenomenon reinforced by gender inequality and unequal distribution of power and resources in specific cultural contexts. Some argue for a remediation perspective, where poverty is seen as something driven by scarce resources (Alvarez and Barney, 2014; Wu and Si, 2018); a reform perspective that views poverty through institutional voids (Sutter et al., 2019); or a social and plight perspective that takes into account economic, social and personal reasons, where change is impeded by difficulties in access and agency (Easterly, 2014; Si et al., 2015). There are many dimensions or perspective from which we can discuss poverty, but the definition of poverty used in this paper is that of a *disabling condition*; not a description of a condition, but rather a process. The dimensions we include are income (Belfield et al., 2017), lack of access to resources and opportunities (Philip and Rayhan, 2004), lack of education (Philip and Rayhan, 2004), gender inequality (Lustig and Stern, 2000), social exclusion (Kabeer, 2000; Blackburn and Ram, 2006; Mair et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2019a) and a person's right to engage in decision making (Kabeer, 2000), because these dimensions capture the essence of poverty in our empirical material.

Similarly, entrepreneurship is often discussed in economic terms. Seen in this light, entrepreneurship as a solution to poverty only works when the income of the poor is increased and businesses flourish. However, we know poverty is not only the lack of money and entrepreneurship is not only about making money. It has also been described as a change process that creates not only monetary value but different values (Anderson, 1998; Korsgaard and Anderson, 2011; Tobias et al., 2013; Refai et al., 2018). In 2007, Steyaert developed his ideas about 'entrepreneurship' emphasising the processual and the relational aspects, or in Anderson et al. (2012) words the 'connecting', of entrepreneurship. A process approach to entrepreneurship is relevant here as it focuses on how change happens over time and on its different outcomes (Van de Ven and Engleman, 2004). Therefore, in this study, we approach entrepreneurship as a verb; 'entrepreneurship' (Steyaert, 2007), and as an unfolding value process, highlighting the inherently processual character (Verduyn, 2015) of entrepreneurship. In addition, we connect with the contextual

turn in entrepreneurship research (Welter, 2011; McKeever et al., 2015; Welter et al., 2019). Anderson et al. (2009) argued for the importance of social context, and as of late the intricacies of spatial context are often included (Müller and Korsgaard, 2018). Related to poverty, Rindova et al. (2009: 477) argue that entrepreneurship is about bringing change to social, institutional, and cultural contexts. Based on our inductive research work, we will, in particular, discuss entrepreneurship in three contexts: the social, the cultural, and the economic.

In our narratives, we saw how entrepreneurship in the context of poverty created different kinds of values (Anderson, 1998; Tobias et al., 2013; Refai et al., 2018; Colovic and Schruoffenegger, 2021). First, we saw how entrepreneurship enabled individuals to change their circumstances by creating different values, for example by equipping individuals to fight poverty directly, by educating children and providing them with skills. Interestingly, the impetus behind these ventures was often embedded in questions of personal fulfilment for these individuals, and they often emphasised internal values (Bylund and Packard, 2022; Galloway et al., 2019) that worked as a motivator (Bylund and Packard, 2022). For example, 'I do this because I want to help people' (Diochon and Anderson 2011), 'I do this because I am obligated to help make society better', or 'because I am guided by my religion or by my moral compass'. Thus, these internal values mattered to entrepreneurs and helped explain their motivations.

Our enquiry stemmed from the study of entrepreneurs working on a very small scale in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), in impoverished northern Pakistan. According to Pakistan's multidimensional poverty index (MPI, 2015/16) (that includes education, health, and standards of living), poverty in KP falls at 49.5%. On the global gender gap rank score, Pakistan ranks 153 out of the 156 countries that were included (World Economic Forum, 2021). This makes KP an interesting place to study for this project. In addition, KP's local culture is characterized as both conservative and patriarchal (Lindvert et al., 2017; Roomi et al., 2018). The region is known for its conservative views about gender. Women are encouraged to stay at home while men are thought to be the breadwinners of the family. The key challenge for individuals is to be able to do what they want to do.

In order to understand entrepreneurship in the context of poverty, we talked to 17 local entrepreneurs, both men and women. They were all operating in poverty, but their own individual poverty was not visible in the same way as it was for other individuals in their community. Their economic, cultural and societal context constantly challenged them but did not stop them. Thus, we were intrigued by local individual's ingenuity in this particular context of poverty. These locals' entrepreneurs did not focus only on economic value; they were often addressing specific local social issues. The very smallness and the simplicity of their

actions allowed us to observe how and why entrepreneurship happens with more clarity and helped uncover important elements along the way, such as the concept of value in entrepreneurship (Colovic and Schruoffenegger, 2021).

Thus, in this article, we discuss poverty as an intricate mix of six elements that together make up the complex web of what poverty entails. We are interested in how change comes about in poverty and turn to theory about entrepreneurship as a value creating process to describe and offer ways out of poverty. Our research questions are:

1. How do individuals engage in entrepreneurship to create value?
2. What motivates individuals in the context of poverty to do entrepreneurship?

The idea of engagement captures the idea of ‘process’. As Gaddefors and Anderson (2017: 270) puts it ‘It is not so much what entrepreneurs do, but the doing itself’. Therefore, in this study, we first review the poverty and entrepreneurship literature and the connections between them, and argue for a combined understanding of both concepts. We then examine what we know about entrepreneurship in the context of poverty and argue for a more elaborated understanding of the different kinds of values in entrepreneurship. Next, we describe our context and our approach, and finally, we propose a conceptual framework for understanding how entrepreneurship offers a means of escaping the disabling context of poverty.

2. Understanding entrepreneurship in poverty

It is argued that entrepreneurship presents a viable solution to global poverty (Bruton et al., 2013; Santos et al., 2022). Previous research has argued for subsistence entrepreneurship as a solution to reducing extreme poverty (Fischer, 2013; Viswanathan et al., 2014). Subsistence entrepreneurs,

while living and operating in poverty, have focused mainly on economic value creation for the poor (Viswanathan et al., 2014). However, this unidimensional economic view limits understanding of the different kinds of output produced by entrepreneurship the context of poverty. Thus, our understanding of poverty is inspired by Sen's (1999) view that focuses on challenges beyond just the economic in the context of poverty. According to Sen (1999), poverty is the deprivation of capabilities; or, in other words, a constraint what individuals are able to do. Seen in this light, poverty is not merely what people do or do not possess, but rather what enables or prevents them from doing what they want or need to do. Our empirical material shows individuals immersed in poverty have a challenging time doing what they are able to do.

2.1 Multiple dimensions of poverty

Following the research by Sen on the ‘capabilities’ approach, Alkire and Foster (2011) and Grimm et al. (2016) argue that the lives of the poor are affected in many ways and all the issues around poverty are interconnected (see Figure 1)). Klasen and Waibel (2015) and Grimm et al. (2016: 22) see poverty as vulnerability. Philip and Rayhan (2004) studied this vulnerability and its relationship to poverty, and saw poverty as lack of access to education, resources, and opportunities. Others have argued that poor people define poverty in terms of a lack of opportunity, empowerment, and security (Lustig and Stern, 2000). Thus, these views increase the challenge of coming up with a comprehensive definition of poverty as both a term and a concept. Based on our review of poverty dimensions, we decided to include income (Jackman et al., 2021); a lack of access to resources and opportunities (Philip and Rayhan, 2004); a lack of education (Philip and Rayhan, 2004); gender inequality (Lustig and Stern, 2000); social exclusion (Blackburn and Ram, 2006, Mair et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2019a); and a person's right to engage in decision making (Kabeer, 2000). Our inclusion of these dimensions of poverty was empirically grounded; the six dimensions above were encountered in our review of the empirical material.

In our view poverty, in its essence, is many things. In Figure 1, we show how poverty has multiple dimensions and highlights its complexity. For example, the lack of money can decrease of likelihood of accessing education, and not having an education can result, in turn, in a lack of money. Thus, a person with a high income level may still be deprived in the sense of being illiterate, which cuts them off from the privileges that come with learning. A person with a high income level may still be deprived if they cannot make decisions in their own life, cutting them off from privileges of using money the way they want. In Figure 1, we highlight the ways in which an individual can be affected by more than one dimension

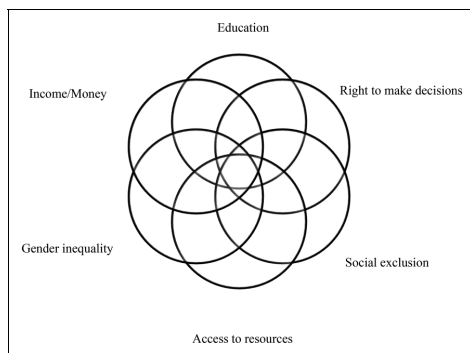


Figure 1. Multiple Dimensions of Poverty.

simultaneously. Therefore, although unidimensional poverty measures are common and thus have the advantage of simplicity they may also deter us from considering all its aspects. Such an approach can work in some contexts, but can't be applied to all situations, as lives can be impoverished in quite different ways.

2.2 Value of entrepreneurship

Similarly, we argue that entrepreneurship contributes to understanding the lived actuality of mundane entrepreneurial endeavours (Steyaert, 2007). It is a complex, non-linear and open phenomenon (Nayak and Chia, 2011). We argue that the solution to poverty is not adding entrepreneurship, it happens when entrepreneurship engages (Verduyn, 2015) with poverty, disrupting the status quo and consequently creating value for change. Thus, entrepreneurship in poverty becomes more like wayfinding, in which individuals are trying to find ways to escape the disabling context of poverty, and draw from their social context using local resources (Baker and Nelson, 2005) that result in different values for the poor (Colovic and Schruoffenegger, 2021). In essence, we can see entrepreneurship as the creation and extraction of value from a situation (Anderson, 1998), with a focus on creation (Steyaert, 2007). Yet again, value is a much richer concept and can be social, economic (Smith et al., 2019b), or social, with economic outcomes, like in a social enterprise (Chell et al., 2010). Indeed, we can understand these different values as addressing different dimensions of poverty. We believe it may be conceptually possible to understand entrepreneurship as tackling several dimensions of poverty. Income improvement is the obvious immediate solution, but we also need to understand other processes involved in this.

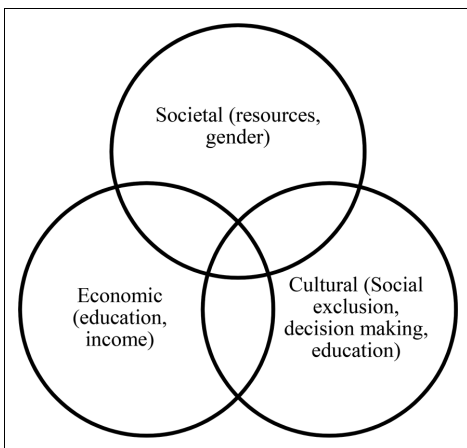


Figure 2. Three contexts related to six dimensions of poverty.

Thus, entrepreneurship may address several issues or aspects that constitute how poverty operates.

Our processual stance and the logic of value helps clarify the reasoning behind entrepreneurship in poverty. The context, especially that surrounding poverty, offers us an extreme case to highlight processes. Our narratives show how entrepreneurship is, or can be better understood, as change-making and is not determined by conventional resource availability, or 'entrepreneurial entrepreneurship'. While our study is contextually-bound, the conceptual contribution of understanding entrepreneurship is generalizable to other circumstances. Essentially, we propose that a conceptual value framework allows a fuller understanding of the entrepreneurial process in its myriad formulations and its multiple contexts.

2.3 Contextual turn

Dana (1995) has emphasized on the importance of understanding entrepreneurship in its context. The concept was further highlighted by Zahra (2007), Welter (2011), Zahra et al. (2014), Welter and Gartner (2016) and Welter et al. (2019) where it is argued that the context in which entrepreneurship occurs is important. Understanding context helps lead to answer the where, when and how of entrepreneurship (Welter, 2011; Welter et al., 2019). Context is complex and multidimensional. The notion of context encompasses spatial, temporal, business, social and institutional dimensions (Welter, 2011). Again, we revisited our empirical material and the contexts that were most relevant to our aim were the cultural, the societal and the economic. Based on our understanding of entrepreneurship as contextually dependent, and poverty as multidimensional, we combined the two theoretical concepts. We categorised the six poverty dimensions into three contexts (see Figure 2).

Depending on the empirical situation these dimensions can be further combined into alternative patterns. Here, we want to illustrate how individuals are part of this process and influenced by the interplay of its social, cultural and economic contexts. In this context, individuals can be societally, culturally and economically deprived. Some can be deprived in one context, in two contexts, or in the centre of the figure, and thus extremely marginalised. Thus, this presents a high degree of complexity for entrepreneurship in poverty; local poverty combinations with a different balance over time between the six dimensions will require different combinations of values produced from entrepreneurship.

3. Methodology

3.1 Context of the study

The choice of poverty dimensions is sensitive to context, in particular to the characteristics of the country under study. Clarifying the unit of analysis – the individual, the

process or the place – helps to sharpen the descriptions. Yet they may also limit our understanding of that context. Put differently, being poor in Pakistan may be different from being poor in Nigeria. Pakistan is the fifth most populated country in the world (UN World Populations, 2019). It has faced multiple sources of internal and external conflicts. The region recently won their battle (which lasted more than a decade) against terrorism at the cost of 50,000 deaths and two million displaced people. While the incidence of terrorism has been reduced, poverty has grown (Muhammad et al., 2017). Pakistan is one country in Asia that has experienced less poverty reduction, compared to others over the last 35 years (Bruton et al., 2013). Pakistan is facing extreme poverty; at least as defined by the socioeconomic aspects of poverty (Saleem et al., 2021).

Pakistan's traditional roots, culture and social beliefs collectively dictate the role gender plays in the country (Roomi et al., 2018; Anderson et al., 2019). For example, the social system of Pakistan allows men to control women's lives because gender forms one of the fundamental aspects of its society (Roomi et al., 2018). The social importance of gender is decided by a patriarchy that is ingrained in the traditional and cultural foundations of the area; thus, women are restricted in private domains and relegated to the role of reproduction, whereas men are held to be bread earners in the public domain (Muhammad et al., 2017; Roomi et al., 2018). It is important to note that society is diverse and holds contradictory views with no consensus as to a definition of women's rights.

Pakistan's official report on multi-dimensional poverty (which includes education, wage, health and living conditions) shows that 39% of Pakistanis live below the poverty line (MDPI, 2015/16), while poverty in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), one of the four administrative provinces of Pakistan, stands at 49%, or almost half of the population. Pakistan ranks 146th out of 180 in the multidimensional poverty index (the index included health, education and economic indicators) (Shirazi and Obaidullah, 2014). Early-stage entrepreneurial activity is lowest in the region at 1.2% for women and 21.27% for men (GEM, 2012) indicating a clear gender gap. A survey by the Government of Pakistan (2013–2014) showed that women's entrepreneurial activity in KP is only 0.1%. The region is known for its conservative principles regarding women which were further influenced by the Taliban (terrorist groups). These terrorist groups limited women's participation outside of the home and instilled corruption at every level of government (Owais et al., 2015). We can thus identify how several dimensions of poverty and its consequences prevail in KP. Therefore, KP offers us a rich site for examining poor entrepreneurship as a socially-situated process that may arise from different kinds of motivation and different kinds of generated values.

3.2 Method

We adopted a qualitative methodology, as there is a shortage of conceptual work on entrepreneurship, especially when we consider the specific context of poverty. In such situations, qualitative methodologies are useful as they allow for the emergence of new insights from the empirical material. This helps explain the subtleties and nuances of this context; our contextual approach is indeed inherent to our studies (Welter, 2011; McKeever et al., 2015). We considered the stories that the entrepreneur tells about themselves and their ventures. Such stories are often used to legitimize what they are doing (Johansson, 2004), so accessing them enabled us to interpret how these narratives informed the entrepreneurial process.

We collected in-depth life stories from 17 self-declared entrepreneurs (Table 1, see Appendix), both male and female, working in the region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. We used a snowball sampling technique (Patton, 2014) to locate our interviewees. Most of them, especially the women, started out as home-based endeavours, and many still are. Eight of the participants have now moved on to commercial arenas with government-registered setups, while the rest remain unregistered with the government and thus have an informal establishment. The first author collected in-depth life stories (McAdams Dan, 1995) from our self-declared entrepreneurs through face-to-face interviews. The interviews were conducted in their native languages; Pashto and Urdu. The researcher who is native to the area, transcribed the interviews into English. To express what the interviewees experienced they needed to be able use their native language, as they were not well versed in English. So having the interviews take place in their native language was a methodological necessity. The empirical material was gathered during 2017–2019, at different points in time. The researcher interviewed the informants three times and followed them on media platforms. Table 1 provides a brief description of the informants. To maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents, we have used pseudonyms (Guenther, 2009).

We analysed the narratives from the field and looked at the narratives through a constructionist lens, thus allowing us to interpret the interactions between the self-declared entrepreneurs and their social contexts (Czarniawska, 2004). The data is analysed through the constant comparative technique, which involves continuous iteration between data and theory (Jack et al., 2015). We first reviewed the empirical material in situations presented by the material, thus comparing interviews from the same person at different times and comparing different informants within and between different situations. Codes were assigned to the empirical material, which were also compared with other codes, thus leading to the development of conceptual categories. We defined themes within the context, or patterns of similarity and differences that can

be conceptually linked to form explanations and concepts (Jack et al., 2015; Ukanwa et al., 2018). Once we were convinced by the analysis, we could use the categories to explain the processes. Thus, our empirical material served as revelatory cases (Yin, 2017). We purposefully sampled (Neergaard, 2007; Suri, 2011) two contrasting elaborating cases as exemplars (Suri, 2011) to be presented in this study. It was important to establish elaborated case representations for two main reasons: first, an elaborated case yields insights and in-depth understanding of the study's context (Patton, 2002); second, they are easy for the reader to follow. Space prevented us from doing this for all 17 of our cases. Therefore, we selected two cases for illustrative purposes (Patton, 2002); however, this does not mean that our analysis is constrained by these two cases; our analysis is based on all 17 cases (see Table 1).

4. Case representations

We continue by describing two of our cases and offer our discussion of the findings. Our cases have led us to three prominent narratives; first, we saw poverty as disabling. Second, we saw value in entrepreneurship as enabling. Thirdly, we saw the value in entrepreneurship as key to explaining the process of enabling disabling context.

4.1 Case of 'street children'

"My aim isn't to just create doctors or engineers like other institutions but to create good citizens for society; citizens with ethical and civic sense that can bring change"

Sehrish is a teacher at a renowned university in KP. She was living a financially independent life, with an understanding family that supported her independence. Even though everything was fine in her life, Sehrish felt she had to do more:

"I think I am obliged...I feel that if a person has everything, then he is supposed to do things. One reason is our religion, it expects that if we have faith that we have to meet Allah, then we have to, um, do something over here and if we have everything and we are privileged then we are supposed to give back to our society."

Every day on her way to the office, she saw the wretchedness of the street children, begging and struggling to get enough food for the day. Sehrish believed in her education and thought that education can improve the circumstances of people. Her feeling of obligation intensified, and she decided to talk about the situation of the street children with her family. They encouraged her and promised their support.

"I would say my strong support mechanism (my family, especially my husband) plays a strong role in getting me to this point...I strongly feel that education is the key, when you are educated then in the future you can make your own life".

Sehrish mentions family support and understanding many times in her story. She believes their support is a powerful force that allows her to work toward change. Therefore, she decided to set up a school, free of cost. Now she had to think about the practicalities of such an initiative. All she had was her education and her supportive family and friends. What she needed now were resources, a location for a school building, and the necessary material resources for starting a school. Sehrish could not afford it on her own. Her earnings were limited, only enough for herself and her family, so she decided to start teaching in the town's nearby park. Her school had no building or furniture – just open education in the park. The fact that a woman was in the park teaching street children was not an everyday image for the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and thus raised concerns about her image as a Pashtun woman. There are some 'dós' and 'doñts' about women's mobility and how they ought to behave in public. Sehrish realized that she cannot operate in the park like this:

"I asked my aunt to join me as she is an elderly person and I thought with her I won't feel uncomfortable working in a park. Alone I might have faced some societal issues."

Having an elderly aunt in the park while she was teaching provided her with some sort of legitimacy. So, she bought some stationery and copies and started teaching in the park. No one showed up for a few days,

"First day we went there, and no kids came. Although I already had been telling those kids in my area for the last two weeks that I am starting a free education school and you kids should come".

Thus, after a few days she went out and practically started grabbing kids off the street. They started to come, and she thought now her school should work. One day a local politician in town saw her and was impressed with her struggle. He offered her an unused room in his office building for the school, and thus the school moved from the park to a spare room. After about a month, she noticed that the kids were having a hard time concentrating on their studies. They were hungry, and did not have access to proper food, which made it difficult for them to study. Therefore, Sehrish thought of adding a meal to the daily curriculum. She arranged funds in order to this. Food led to more kids coming to study. Months passed, and the number of pupils increased. At this point, the parents of

the kids realized that they are not earning what they used to and heard about the school. The parents did not appreciate the fact that their kids were not begging and bringing money home.

“So, their parents don’t care about them. They just care about what they earn. And if the kids don’t earn well, they get a beating from their parents”.

Therefore, Sehrish arranged to begin paying the kids to attend school. She looked for sponsors among friends and relatives. The parents appreciated this gesture and more kids started to come to the school. Today, there are hundreds of kids learning to read and write. Sehrish is particularly focusing on teaching them civics:

“When we do it like this, then what I am thinking is that we have 50–60 children right now, then in next 10 years these 50–60 children will be responsible for 50–60 households and obviously when you focus on individuals then they will end up having better lives no matter whether they are males or females. We have a male-dominant society, so if more males are coming than females, then these males will be the head of their families and will create an environment that will be better, it will be clean, it will be educated, and it will be healthy for the rest of the family members”

Sehrish thanks Allah and the people in her life that made this possible. Sehrish’s students from the university continuously volunteer at the school to teach and help with administration. People in the community sponsor the needs of the school and she acknowledges that. Recently, she started a stitching class for elderly females who did not receive formal education. These women learn a skill that can help them become independent. For now, they have eight students.

“I have never needed funds. We just started with one piece of rug and one board. We are getting funds from places we would never have expected...I don’t know from where I am getting all these funds” [smiling]

Sehrish believes in education and believes that it is a basic human right. She believes that in order to create good independent citizens, they must be educated. She has no formal strategy for how to do it; rather her actions are knowledge-based, and reactive. Everyone around her is trying to do what he or she can do best, together. Sehrish explains her actions with the help of a narrative:

“Once a boy came to me from a science background, and he said that he wants to start an organization and how shall I register so I asked him okay what have you done? Then he said to me that he has not done

any work yet, but he wants to make an organization. So, I told him that you start working and slowly similar people will come together and eventually you will form an organization very soon in less than a year, but you need to start doing something before you actually think. Our people think more about formalities and don’t do actual work”.

This group of individuals have made it their business to help develop their society. It’s not charity work, rather it is value creation. Instead of addressing the poverty in monetary terms and creating monetary values, these individuals are treating the manifestations of poverty. It is a long-term progression, but works in this context.

“One does not need to do something that has a bigger impact, like serving the society on a bigger level—rather a person should just aim for serving the society, the best way one can, for its betterment”

4.2 Case of “our lives”

“Our Lives” is run by Haya and her friends. This venture is dedicated to enabling women, transgender individuals, and children and adolescents by creating awareness about education and basic human rights. They also arrange vocational skill training for marginalised individuals in the society.

Haya belongs to North Waziristan, a rural area in KP. North Waziristan has been one of the places most affected by Pakistan’s war on terrorism. It is also known for its conservative views and norms. Haya explains that she was raised in an understanding family because her parents were educated, and she wanted others – especially women, transgender individuals and youths – around her to also have that kind of advantage.

It is a purely male-driven society. Females are not allowed to have education over here; they are totally dependent on their husband, father, or their brothers, who are considered the elders of the family..... The life of females is meaningless there. Their basic needs are not realized and right to education was not provided to females. They were not free for taking or making decisions. So, I witnessed that environment. I look at my mother who is a motivation for me...She grew up in that environment and tackled it...society did not support her, but she educated my siblings and me. She taught us about our rights so that was when I decided that if my mother can fight society to transform our lives then I can do it for people too. I want to become an inspiration for the girls in my village...if I can go out and make a life for myself then they can do it too. I want the poor girls, the children, and the transgender people in my

village to not be deprived of their rights—why should they be? —and that is why I want to help this community”.

Hayás mother is self-educated, after getting married her mother wanted to get an education and in doing so, she had to fight the cultural and societal structures around her. She believed in educating her children and sent them to universities in KP regardless of their gender. Haya and her friends see the value in that and want to do the same for the people in her village. Thus, taking her mother’s vision to the next level. With the help of family and friends, she started her organization under the name ‘Our Lives’. In this venture, Haya, together with her friends, take on different social projects. Like Sehrish, their venture is also based on no formal strategy, rather their actions are knowledge-based. Haya focuses on three sectors:

“My work is mostly on three sectors of society: women, transgender, and youths, which I have selected for myself, and these three sectors play—in one or another way—a very important role in society.”

First, she mentions women:

“I want females to not be deprived of their rights and that is why I want to do something for them...I want all my sisters (women in her community) when tomorrow they become mothers the person born in their in house is at least a person who is beneficial to society rather than a burden on society”

She feels that she needs to help create more women, who, like her mother that can influence their kids toward change. Similarly, she felt for the transgender community in her area:

“the transgender community is biologically different than others whereas some change their gender due to poverty or other reasons they would either beg people for money or dance to earn some money because they were not allowed to do anything else, they were being harassed, sexually assaulted...So I thought of arranging vocational skill trainings for them to help them eliminate the poverty factor and live their lives as comfortable as they can”

The third sector was focused on children and adolescents. Haya believes these three sectors are very important in a society and can aid change.

“if we work on these 3 sectors these problems will be solved and society would be a better place to live in and that’s how I think my work helps society and is fruitful”

To formally start this venture, Haya needed resources, and some planning:

“I reached out to my teacher for investment purposes, who advised me that nobody invests in anybody’s work like that so you have to start working and slowly you will get the funds to support your venture. I realized that without referrals nobody would try to help you financially, so my friends and I started saving some portion of our pocket money to support this organization”

Keeping the advice in her mind, Haya graduated. After graduation, she started working for an organization. With her income and new connections at work, she managed to obtain funding for multiple projects in her area. She started with arranging training sessions, although this was not easy. In every sector, she faced problems. First, transgender individuals especially were scared when approached for training; as such kind gestures are not offered to them in their daily lives.

“They were scared and wanted us to take them somewhere secure for the training so that the people cannot find out about it, and they also wanted us to take them in secure cars with guards around because of the security concerns. Most of them would not show up even after [all this] and that, for me felt like it was unsuccessful”

Haya states that it is still a struggle when it comes to the transgender community, but they are trying to find ways to work with it. Similarly, when they arranged training sessions for females in her community, the patriarchy in the community tried to stop them. So they had to tweak the trainings a bit to make them work:

“we arranged a training session for those females who are not allowed to go out of their house and earn for living so I rented a place in their village where I provided them with 2 months of training on beautician and stitching work so they could work on their own from home”

When they approached youths, they were branded as ‘agents of the west’:

“We gave trainings to 9th and 10th grade students. They went home and discussed what they had learned with their parents and the next day those parents showed up complaining about the training saying that these organizations are being funded by western society and they are trying to ruin the mind-sets of our children by telling them to empower themselves, be independent, and go out”

After this, Haya and her team decided to deal with this situation by providing counselling and awareness for the parents of the kids. They ran a door-to-door campaign where they talked to the families about education and its benefit. Now, after three and a half years of running this organization, she believes they can manage what comes their way. She explains that even though this is a challenging life, she is happy because it brings happiness and change to people's lives, and that's what matters to her:

"if I am doing something for society it doesn't mean I am getting something (monetary value) in return for that...My main objective is working for society and there is no benefit for me in it, it's only working for the people's happiness and satisfaction and that is what matters to me."

Haya credits support from her family and friends in turning her vision into reality. She states that the continuous support of the people around her inspires her and together they are determined to fight poverty.

5. Analysis and discussion

Based on our aim and research question, we developed three themes. First, we discuss poverty as a disabling multidimensional context. Second, we identify and describe different contexts of entrepreneurship and link them poverty. Third, we show how outcome values and internal values as key concepts help us to understand the role of entrepreneurship in poverty.

5.1 Poverty as disabling

In our cases, we saw poverty as something that was in continuous flux. The entrepreneurs had evolving ideas that disruptively changed in accordance with what dimension of poverty was dominant in that moment. Sehrish initially believed that if she started a free school that would solve the problems of street children; but that did not work. The immediate disabilities caused by poverty – such as hunger – limited the ability of those children to study, and so Sehrish started providing kids with food every day. She thought this would work, but then the parents of the children started beating their kids and stopped them from coming to the school because the kids were no longer earning an income from begging. Again, Sehrish had to manage another dimension of poverty, and provided counselling for parents, and paid a modest amount to kids to come to school. In Sehrish's case we see how she works around the societal and economic contexts of poverty. In Hayas case, Haya and her team thought providing free vocational training to the people in her village would enable them, but social exclusion (Blackburn and Ram, 2006; Mair et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2019a) and gender inequality (Lustig and Stern, 2000) stopped them from

attending the training sessions, and the patriarchs of the society started to label them agents of the west. Considering this, our study agrees that poverty is multidimensional (Sen, 1999), and can be understood from different dimensions. We also agree that change is a long and hard process and is impeded by difficulties (Easterly, 2014; Si et al., 2015). With this study we emphasize the importance of contextualization (Dana, 1995; Zahra, 2007; Zahra et al., 2014; Welter, 2011; Welter and Gartner, 2016; Welter et al., 2019); especially when it comes to understanding poverty.

Thus, we add to the discussion on poverty by illustrating how poverty is dynamic; what dimension is dominant differs over time and by situation, and the interplay between dimensions often works in insidious ways. Thus, the 'disabling' we observed was constantly changing; a process which was often difficult to capture and describe, both by the entrepreneurs and by ourselves, as researchers. This observation was important because it helped us to explain some of the actions performed by Sehrish and Haya; actions that we had problems making sense of. For example, we did not understand why Sehrish had to pay her students to come to class; but when we considered the different dimensions of poverty and how they varied over time, we were able to understand what was happening.

5.2 Entrepreneurship as enabling

The case stories are illustrations of how entrepreneurship and poverty interact and creates change (Sutter et al., 2019). We saw entrepreneurship in our cases as not merely only an economic engine but also as an engine for social and cultural change. This was why we decided to focus our entrepreneurship lens on three contexts: the economic, social and cultural.

Haya and Sehrish were both living somewhat privileged lives, at least compared with others in their community. Sehrish was working as a teacher, and Haya studied in a management institute. According to the economic dimension of poverty they are not poor, but in their life stories they described themselves as poor and disabled in other dimensions. For example they were facing gender issues (Lustig and Stern, 2000), where Sehrish describes that being a woman in a park was not a normal image, and Haya describes that women being educated was not seen as appropriate in her community, which limited access to resources to only the support offered by family and friends; and fear of social exclusion, because of their improper behaviour when refusing to remain house as was the case with other women in the community (Kabeer, 2000). But, as in the case of Sehrish, she went from being a teacher to becoming an owner of a school that empowers people with education and raises awareness about social problems. As such, her organization inspires social change and increases people's opportunities to earn

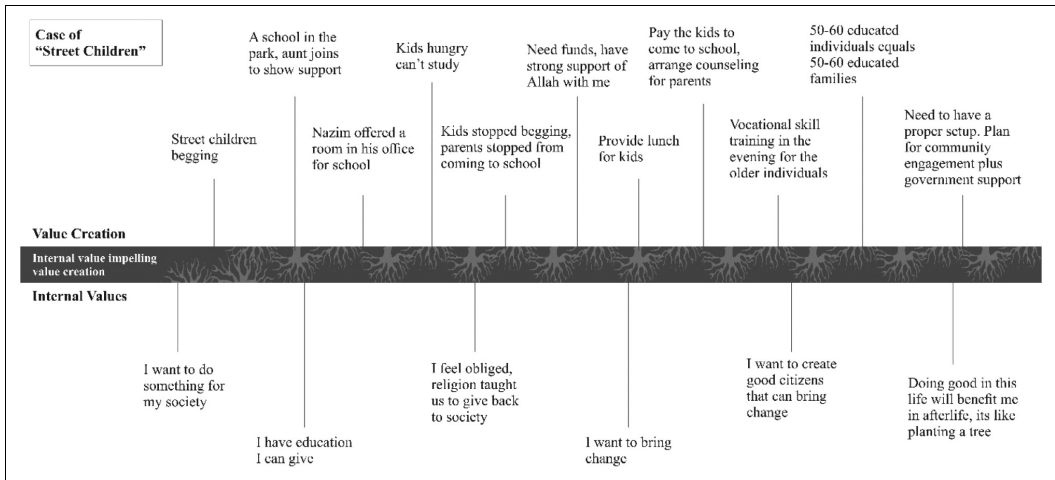


Figure 3. Value Creation 'Street Children'.

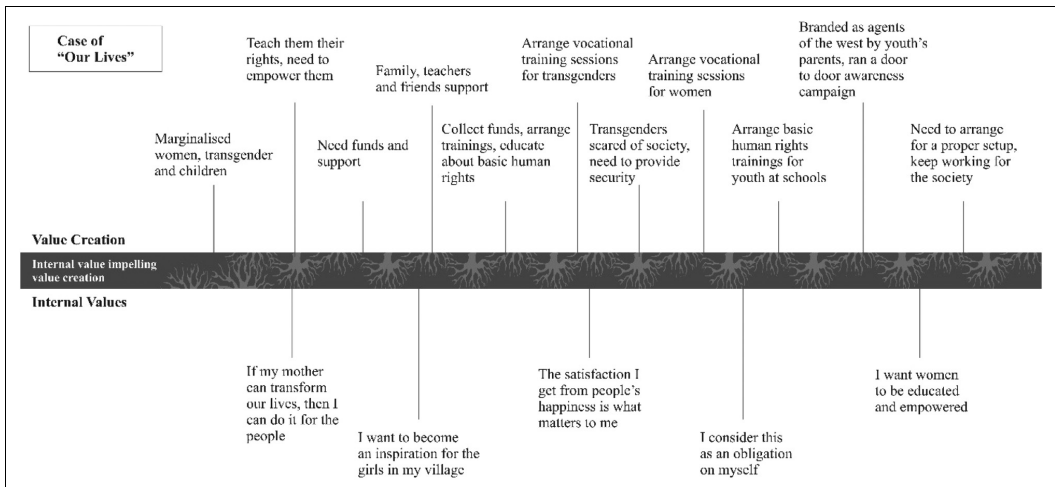


Figure 4. Value Creation 'Our Lives'.

money. Similarly, Haya went from being a student to the owner of an organization that trains poor individuals in skill learning and raises awareness about counteracting poverty. In this way we saw how their entrepreneuring allowed them to first confront different poverty dimensions, and second, to do so through engagement with their context (Colovic and Schruoffenegger, 2021).

Through their entrepreneuring Haya and Sehrish have overcome parts of some of the poverty dimensions for themselves. They have also provided others with tools like

education and skills training that will offer them better ability to handle poverty. We can explain the process of these changes by focusing on the economic, social, and cultural contexts of entrepreneuring in poverty. We add to the entrepreneuring discussion by illustrating how entrepreneuring is flexible and has the ability to adapt to the disabling context of poverty like moss in cracks between paving stones, finding ways to grow. Thus, our processual stance (Seyart, 2007; Colovic and Schruoffenegger, 2021) makes it easier to understand the change process.

5.3 Value creation

This above discussion leads us to examine what kinds of change are happening, and what led to these changes. The concept of 'value' in entrepreneurship (Anderson, 1998; Tobias et al., 2013; Refai et al., 2018) seems to make it clear for us.

In our cases we saw values created for different contexts of poverty (see Figures 3 and 4). These different values are more of a value for life for poorer individuals. These values stay with these impoverished individuals and can be passed on to the future generations. In the poverty context, we see value in entrepreneurship as a more inclusive concept, not solely economic in nature (Colovic and Schruoffenegger, 2021; Galloway et al., 2019; Kasabov, 2021). We argue that recognizing the concept of value as much more than money or income generation is the key to alleviating poverty. Our cases illustrate that for us.

Our respondents saw value in entrepreneurship (Bylund and Packard, 2022; Galloway et al., 2019) as process of change making (Tobias et al., 2013; Colovic and Schruoffenegger, 2021), which we can comprehend in terms of value changes. Our cases show that monetary value is important, but economic value creation alone is not the solution. The solution lies in long-term values created for societal and cultural contexts. That's when change happens. We also notice internal values (Bylund and Packard, 2022; Galloway et al., 2019) come in strongly in these narratives from time to time and seem to drive the motivation for change in these individuals. We have tried to capture this process in the figures above. In Sehrish's case (see Figure 3), we see value created for cultural and economic contexts, such as the creation of more independent citizens in the sense of education and increased civic values, opportunities for free education, and opportunities for skill learning. In Hayás case (see Figure 4) we see value for societal and economic contexts, such as opportunities being created for the poor in their communities, opportunities for empowerment, and opportunities for income generation.

6. Conclusion

Our study aimed to understand how entrepreneurship results in alleviating multidimensional poverty. We found that poverty is a disabling process and entrepreneurship can enable this process by creating different values. To arrive at this conclusion, we explored the concept of value in entrepreneurship and contextualized poverty. We found that poverty has different contextual dimensions, which are dependent on the geographical context of the study, and what dimension is in action differs over time. That makes it hard to find solutions to poverty. It also makes it clear that a unidimensional solution, such as money/income generation is not the answer. Therefore, in

search of the solution, we found that entrepreneuring results in value creation, in terms of value that is socialized that could interact with disabling poverty and ultimately better enable the amelioration of poverty in context. We also identified a set of internal values as motivating factors for entrepreneuring to take place. These motivating factors are also contextual in nature, and resulted in driving the individuals to work toward changes in their community.

Overall, our study points to the importance of entrepreneuring as a value creation process in the context of poverty, suggesting that poverty is not determined and alleviated by numbers but is rather a complex dynamic process which requires big actions. Beside these theoretical discoveries, at least two policy implications can be derived from this. First, the recognition that poverty is multidimensional, and solutions need to be linked to what dimension of poverty is dominating the scene at any one time. Understanding this is very much linked to understanding the context. Secondly, policy makers need to recognize that entrepreneuring in poverty is an asset. One way to accomplish this is for policy makers to recognize that entrepreneuring is much more than an engine for economic value creation.

Like other studies, this research also has its limitations. First, it focuses on individual participant's experiences and reports on the stories they tell about themselves at different points in time. Secondly, it is focused on one geographical context, which might deliver specific results that apply only to that context. Despite these limitations, there were consistencies in the stories the entrepreneurs talked about themselves that allowed us to produce an in-depth account of our research problem. Finally, future studies can focus on social and societal entrepreneurship as theoretical lenses, other geographical areas and regions and investigate how poverty dimensions are disabling in that context, and what kind of values are created in order to alleviate poverty in line with Sustainability agenda 2030.

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank Professor. Alistair R. Anderson for providing ideas, guidance and feedback on earlier versions of this paper. The meetings and conversations we had were exceptionally fun and inspiring. His knowledge and enthusiasm for the topic helped us frame what is now in print.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Hina Hashim  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0181-6186>

References

- Alkire S (2007) The missing dimensions of poverty data: Introduction to the special issue. *Oxford Development Studies* 35(4): 347–359.
- Alkire S and Foster J (2011) Understandings and misunderstandings of multidimensional poverty measurement. *The Journal of Economic Inequality* 9(2): 289–314.
- Alvarez SA and Barney JB (2014) Entrepreneurial opportunities and poverty alleviation. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice* 38(1): 159–184.
- Anderson AR (1998) Cultivating the Garden of Eden: Environmental entrepreneurship. *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 11(2): 135–144.
- Anderson A, Dodd SD and Jack S (2009) Aggressors; winners; victims and outsiders: European schools' social construction of the entrepreneur. *International Small Business Journal: Researching Entrepreneurship* 27(1): 126–136.
- Anderson AR, Dodd SD and Jack SL (2012) Entrepreneurship as connecting: Some implications for theorising and practice. *Management Decision* 50(5): 958–971.
- Anderson AR, Younis S, Hashim H, et al. (2019) Social enterprising informing our concept; exploring informal micro social enterprise. *Social Enterprise Journal* 15(1): 94–110.
- Baker T and Nelson RE (2005) Creating something from nothing: Resource construction through entrepreneurial bricolage. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 50(3): 329–366.
- Belfield C, Blundell R, Cribb J, et al. (2017) Two decades of income inequality in Britain: The role of wages. *Household Earnings and Redistribution. Economica* 84(334): 157–179.
- Blackburn R and Ram M (2006) Fix or fixation? The contributions and limitations of entrepreneurship and small firms to combating social exclusion. *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development* 18(1): 73–89.
- Bruton G, Khavul S, Siegel D, et al. (2015a) New financial alternatives in seeding entrepreneurship: Microfinance, crowdfunding, and peer-to-peer innovations. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice* 39(1): 9–26.
- Bruton GD, Ahlstrom D and Obloj K (2008) Entrepreneurship in emerging economies: Where are we today and where should the research go in the future. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice* 32(1): 1–14.
- Bruton GD, Ahlstrom D and Si S (2015b) Entrepreneurship, poverty, and Asia: Moving beyond subsistence entrepreneurship. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management* 32(1): 1–22.
- Bruton GD, Ketchen Jr DJ and Ireland RD (2013) Entrepreneurship as a solution to poverty. *Journal of Business Venturing* 28(6): 683–689.
- Bylund PL and Packard MD (2022) Subjective value in entrepreneurship. *Small Business Economics* 58(3): 1243–1260.
- Chell E, Nicolopoulou K and Karatas-Özkan M (2010) Social entrepreneurship and enterprise: International and innovation perspectives. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development* 22(6): 485–493.
- Chen J, Chang AY and Bruton GD (2017) Microfinance: Where are we today and where should the research go in the future? *International Small Business Journal: Researching Entrepreneurship* 35(7): 793–802.
- Colovic A and Schruoffenegger M (2021) Entrepreneurship for deprived urban communities: Exploring the role of micro-entrepreneurship. *European Management Review* 19(3): 1–12.
- Czarniawska B (2004) *Narratives in Social Science Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dana LP (1995) Entrepreneurship in a remote sub-Arctic community. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice* 20(1): 57–72.
- Diochon M and Anderson AR (2011) Ambivalence and ambiguity in social enterprise; narratives about values in reconciling purpose and practices. *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal* 7(1): 93–109.
- Easterly W (2014) *The Tyranny of Experts: Economists, Dictators, and the Forgotten Rights of the Poor*. New York, USA: Basic Books.
- Fischer G (2013) Contract structure, risk-sharing, and investment choice. *Econometrica* 81(3): 883–939.
- Gaddefors J and Anderson AR (2017) Entrepreneurs and context: When entrepreneurship is greater than entrepreneurs. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research* 23(2): 267–278.
- Galloway L, Kapasi I and Wimalasena L (2019) A theory of venturing: A critical realist explanation of why my father is not like Richard Branson. *International Small Business Journal* 37(6): 626–641.
- Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2012) Available at: <https://www.gemconsortium.org/economy-profiles/pakistan-2> (accessed 10 June 2021).
- Grimm M, Waibel H and Klasen S (2016) *Vulnerability to poverty: Theory, measurement, and determinants, with case studies from Thailand and Vietnam*. Springer.
- Guenther KM (2009) The politics of names: Rethinking the methodological and ethical significance of naming people, organizations, and places. *Qualitative Research* 9(4): 411–421.
- Hussain J, Mahmood S and Scott J (2019) Gender, microcredit, and poverty alleviation in a developing country: The case of women entrepreneurs in Pakistan. *Journal of International Development* 31(3): 247–270.
- Hussain MD, Bhuiyan AB and Bakar R (2014) Entrepreneurship development and poverty alleviation: An empirical review. *Journal of Asian Scientific Research* 4(10): 558.
- Jack SL, Anderson AR, Drakopoulou S, et al. (2015) Using the constant comparative technique to consider network change and evolution. In: *Handbook of qualitative research techniques and analysis in entrepreneurship*, pp.21–51.
- Jackman L, Galloway L, Kapasi I, et al. (2021) Good option or only option? Poverty, disability, health and enterprise. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research* 27(8): 2079–2095.
- Johansson AW (2004) Narrating the entrepreneur. *International Small Business Journal: Researching Entrepreneurship* 22(3): 273–293.
- Kabeer N (2000) Social exclusion, poverty and discrimination towards an analytical framework. *IDS Bulletin* 31(4): 83–97.
- Kabeer N (2008) Paid work, women's empowerment and gender justice: Critical Pathways of Social Change. Pathways Policy Paper, Institute of Development Studies.
- Kasabov E (2021) So, what is (of) value? *Journal of Rural Studies* 85: 22–31.

- Khavul S, Chavez H and Bruton GD (2013) When institutional change outruns the change agent: The contested terrain of entrepreneurial microfinance for those in poverty. *Journal of Business Venturing* 28(1): 30–50.
- Klasen S and Waibel H (2015) Vulnerability to poverty in South-East Asia: Drivers, measurement, responses, and policy issues. *World Development* 71: 1–3.
- Korsgaard S and Anderson AR (2011) Enacting entrepreneurship as social value creation. *International Small Business Journal: Researching Entrepreneurship* 29(2): 135–151.
- Lindvert M, Patel PC and Wincet J (2017) Struggling with social capital: Pakistani women micro entrepreneurs' challenges in acquiring resources. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development* 29(7–8): 759–790.
- Lustig N and Stern N (2000) Broadening the agenda for poverty reduction: Opportunity, empowerment, security. *Finance and Development* 37(4): 3–7.
- Maasoumi E and Lugo MA (2008) The information basis of multivariate poverty assessments. In: Kakwani N and Silber J (eds) *Quantitative Approaches to Multidimensional Poverty Measurement*. New York: Palgrave, MacMillan, pp.1–29.
- Mair J, Marti I and Ventresca MJ (2012) Building inclusive markets in rural Bangladesh: How intermediaries work institutional voids. *Academy of Management Journal* 55(4): 819–850.
- Manara AS, Permata ARE and Pranoto RGH (2018) Strategy model for increasing the potential of zakat through the crowdfunding-zakat system to overcome poverty in Indonesia. *International Journal of Zakat* 3(4): 17–31.
- McAdams Dan P (1995) *The Life Story Interview*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University.
- McKeever E, Jack S and Anderson A (2015) Embedded entrepreneurship in the creative re-construction of place. *Journal of Business Venturing* 30(1): 50–65.
- Muhammad N, Warren R and Binte-Saleem S (2017) Anything can happen, anytime: The impact of conflict on women's entrepreneurship in Pakistan. *Journal of Developmental Entrepreneurship* 22(4): 1–14.
- Müller S and Korsgaard S (2018) Resources and bridging: The role of spatial context in rural entrepreneurship. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development* 30(1–2): 224–255.
- Multidimensional Poverty in Pakistan (2015/2016) Available at: <https://www.ophi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Multidimensional-Poverty-in-Pakistan.pdf> (accessed 10 June 2021).
- Nayak A and Chia R (2011) Thinking becoming and emergence: Process philosophy and organization studies. *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* 32: 281–309.
- Neergaard H (2007) Sampling in entrepreneurial settings. In: Neergaard H and Ulhoi JP (eds) *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods in Entrepreneurship*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, pp.253–278.
- Owais S, Sanauddin N, Nawaz G, et al. (2015) Negotiating transparency and accountability of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. *Putaj Humanities & Social Sciences* 22(2): 47–61.
- Patton MQ (2002) Two decades of developments in qualitative inquiry: A personal, experiential perspective. *Qualitative Social Work* 1(3): 261–283.
- Patton MQ (2014) *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice*. Sage publications.
- Philip D and Rayhan MI (2004) Vulnerability and poverty: What are the causes and how are they related ZEF Bonn. *Center for Development Research*, University of Bonn, Germany, p. 28.
- Refai D, Haloub R and Lever J (2018) Contextualizing entrepreneurial identity among Syrian refugees in Jordan: The emergence of a destabilized habitus? *The International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation* 19(4): 250–260.
- Ribeiro-Soriano D (2017) Small business and entrepreneurship: Their role in economic and social development. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development* 29(1–2): 1–3.
- Rindova V, Barry D and Ketchen Jr DJ (2009) Entrepreneurship as emancipation. *Academy of Management Review* 34(3): 477–491.
- Roomi MA, Rehman S and Henry C (2018) Exploring the normative context for women's entrepreneurship in Pakistan: A critical analysis. *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship* 10(2): 158–180.
- Roser M and Ortiz-Ospina E (2017) Global Extreme Poverty, Our World in Data. Available at: <https://ourworldindata.org/extreme-poverty>.
- Saleem H, Shabbir MS and Khan B (2021) Re-examining multidimensional poverty in Pakistan: A new assessment of regional variations. *Global Business Review* 22(6): 1441–1458.
- Santos SC, Costa S and Morris MH (2022) Entrepreneurship as a pathway into and out of poverty: A configuration perspective. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development* 34(1–2): 82–109.
- Sen A (1999) Poverty as capability deprivation. *Development as Freedom* 6(3): 87–110.
- Shah Shirazi N and Obaidullah M (2014) Why Poverty Reduction Programs of Pakistan Did Not Bring Significant Change: An appraisal (Working Paper No. 1435–17). Jeddah: Islamic Research and Training Institute.
- Si S, Ahlstrom D, Wei J, et al. (2020) Business, entrepreneurship and innovation toward poverty reduction. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development* 32(1–2): 1–20.
- Si S, Yu X, Wu A, et al. (2015) Entrepreneurship and poverty reduction: A case study of Yiwu, China. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management* 32(1): 119–143.
- Smith AM, Galloway L, Jackman L, et al. (2019a) Poverty, social exclusion and enterprise policy: A study of UK policies' effectiveness over 40 years. *The International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation* 20(2): 107–118.
- Smith BR, Conger MJ, McMullen JS, et al. (2019b) Why believe? The promise of research on the role of religion in entrepreneurial action. *Journal of Business Venturing Insights* 11: e00119.
- Steyaert C (2007) 'Entrepreneurship' as a conceptual attractor? A review of process theories in 20 years of entrepreneurship studies. *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development* 19(6): 453–477.
- Suri H (2011) Purposeful sampling in qualitative research synthesis. *Qualitative Research Journal* 11(2): 63–75.
- Sutter C, Bruton GD and Chen J (2019) Entrepreneurship as a solution to extreme poverty: A review and future research directions. *Journal of Business Venturing* 34(1): 197–214.
- Tobias JM, Mair J and Barbosa-Leiker C (2013) Toward a theory of transformative entrepreneurship: Poverty reduction and conflict resolution in Rwanda's entrepreneurial coffee sector. *Journal of Business Venturing* 28(6): 728–742.
- Ukanwa I, Xiong L and Anderson A (2018) Experiencing micro-finance: Effects on poor women entrepreneurs' livelihood

- strategies. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development* 25(3): 428–446.
- United Nations Development Programme (2015) Sustainable Development Goals. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals> (accessed 8 May 2022).
- United Nations World Population Prospects (2019) Available at: https://population.un.org/wpp/publications/files/wpp2019_highlights.pdf (accessed 15 May 2022).
- Van de Ven AH and Engleman RM (2004) Event-and outcome-driven explanations of entrepreneurship. *Journal of Business Venturing* 19(3): 343–358.
- Verduyn K (2015) Entrepreneurship and process: A Lefebvrian perspective. *International Small Business Journal: Researching Entrepreneurship* 33(6): 638–648.
- Viswanathan M, Echambadi R, Venugopal S, et al. (2014) Subsistence entrepreneurship, value creation, and community exchange systems: A social capital explanation. *Journal of Macromarketing* 34(2): 213–226.
- Waglé UR (2008) Multidimensional poverty: An alternative measurement approach for the United States? *Social Science Research* 37(2): 559–580.
- Welter F (2011) Contextualizing entrepreneurship—conceptual challenges and ways forward. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice* 35(1): 165–184.
- Welter F, Baker T and Wirsching K (2019) Three waves and counting: The rising tide of contextualization in entrepreneurship research. *Small Business Economics* 52(2): 319–330.
- Welter F and Gartner WB (2016) Advancing our research agenda for entrepreneurship and contexts. In: Welter F and Gartner WB (eds) *A Research Agenda for Entrepreneurship and Context*. Edward Elgar Publishing, pp.150–160.
- World Bank (2018) Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2018. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/research/brief/poverty-and-shared-prosperity-2018-piecing-together-the-poverty-puzzle-frequently-asked-questions> (accessed 10 June 2022).
- World Economic Forum (2021) Global Gender Gap Report. Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2021/> (accessed 15 May 2022).
- Wu J and Si S (2018) Poverty reduction through entrepreneurship: Incentives, social networks, and sustainability. *Asian Business & Management* 17(4): 243–259.
- Yin RK (2017) *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*. Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Zahra SA (2007) Contextualizing theory building in entrepreneurship research. *Journal of Business Venturing* 22(3): 443–452.
- Zahra SA, Wright M and Abdelgawad SG (2014) Contextualization and the advancement of entrepreneurship research. *International Small Business Journal: Researching Entrepreneurship* 32(5): 479–500.

APPENDIX**Table I.** Our cases.

Informant	Principal Activities	Reason for entrepreneurship	Value Created	Implications for Poverty
Sehrish	A school for street children in a town	'I strongly feel that education is the key, when you are educated then in future you can make your life'	'Citizens with ethical and civic sense that can bring change'	Education made accessible for the poor
Maria	Created a digital sphere for women employment, after being fired from her job when asked for maternal leave	'I started because of personal pain...there aren't many jobs that are seen as respectable job opportunities for women and their families are not happy with it'	'My work gives confidence to young people to come forward and do the things that they really are passionate about even though they don't know whether it will make result in money'	Independence, work opportunities for the poor
Bushra	Runs sports complex for women in urban and rural areas	'I started this because in our KP, Pakistan as well, people from different areas are living here for whom let alone education, coming out from home is very difficult, buying things of their necessities is very difficult, that is why I started this so that through this, women will feel stronger and independent'	'I am not standing up only for women, I am doing this for those brothers and sisters who lack knowledge and awareness, who have skills as well, but they do not have opportunity, they do not have a proper platform, so I am providing them a platform, giving them an opportunity, rest is their own hard work'	Work opportunities for the poor Gender equality emphasized Education made accessible
Faryal	Runs a training centre and beauty salon, trains beauticians for free	'Helping those who cannot find jobs or those girls who are not allowed to go out and do jobs, and stuff like that. So, something for the females...I was just doing for Sawab and wanted to do something good for the society'	'I have trained many girls free of cost, they later have started something of their own in their areas thus spreading the skill'	Independence, work opportunities for the poor Spreading knowledge, skills
Nabila	Trainer, consultant and supplies of homemade products, trains people in rural areas for free	'I provide training to women in preserved food and healthy food along with marketing knowledge. I do this free of cost to help arrange doable jobs for the poor, and for women'	'I tried to help poor women by providing money, teaching them skill and arranging jobs for them'	Vocational training leading to independence and work opportunities
Maryam	Henna artist, and trains underprivileged women	'Initially I started because I loved doing Henna designs, but it later changed when I became aware of my surroundings'	'I observed that in the living colony that I live, some of the parents of the girls won't allow them to go out of the house. Even for education. Even after some primary education of class 1, 2 and 3 they would make them sit at home. Then I thought if I train them in this skill so they can earn some money from home and become independent'	Vocational training leading to independence and work opportunities

(continued)

Table 1. Continued.

Informant	Principal Activities	Reason for entrepreneurship	Value Created	Implications for Poverty
Sundas	Runs a beauty Salon at her home, also trains underprivileged women from rural areas for free	'In our society girls and girls whom fathers have passed away are considered to be a burden and are discouraged. There are made to realize that they need the support of a "strong pillar" to move forward in life. However, I was encouraged by my mother and elder sister that encouragement had led to me running a small beauty parlour at home. I had to work hard to make this small set up'	'I started training poor orphan girls in the area with the training of beautician. Whatever knowledge and skill I had acquired, I tried my best to pass it on. I felt that it was my duty to do so. I could feel the situation of their lives and I wanted to help. I want to do a lot more for them, but I don't have the resources'	Independence, work opportunities for the poor Spreading knowledge, skills
Samina	Works at Girls Guide Association Pakistan Runs a clothing line Editor of a magazine for promoting young entrepreneurs	'As a young single mother in KP, I wanted to do something for women and my daughter; something that others can reflect on...in our culture divorce is stigmatized and divorced women are looked down upon'	Helps educate and train underprivileged, disable people, also publishes a magazine for free where she highlights the stories of small-scale entrepreneurs to help enhance their visibility	Education Opportunities for the poor Vocational skills training Independence
Salim	Runs Youth organization focused on education, child labour and environment	'The idea came to me when I went to university to talk about girls' education...I was stopped and told that this is what NGOs do (like it doesn't mean anything). At that time, I realized if this is what's happening in a university, then what can we expect from the rest of the world'	'I work with girls' education in the rural areas, areas hit by terrorism. Create awareness about child labour and environment with the help of different funding organizations and individuals that support our projects'	Education Awareness Opportunities for women and children
Haya	Runs an organization named 'Our Lives' (translated from Pashto) in rural areas, educating the young women, and Skill training for elderly, the main idea is to empower them so that they can change their future life. Also focuses on the welfare of kids, transgender people and drug addicts.	'The life of females is meaningless here. Their basic needs are not realized and right to education was not provided to females. They did not have the right to make their own decisions. Females can either do something for their selves or do they talk for their rights. Therefore, I thought that if I would be living in that environment so it would be the case with me. I would be sitting at home and would be specified to the boundaries of the home'	'My work obviously is mostly on three sector of society females, transgender and youth which I have selected for myself to work on, and these 3 sectors play in one or another way very important role in the society'	Right to decision making Vocational skills training
Adil	Runs a Youth Entrepreneurs Organization, focuses on skill development of the	'I wanted to teach women and men to be independent, and	'I provide trainings to students in universities and schools'	Independence Skills training

(continued)

Table I. Continued.

Informant	Principal Activities	Reason for entrepreneurship	Value Created	Implications for Poverty
Noor	Youth in different areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Runs a beauty salon at her home	be able to work from home, and be independent' 'There is lack of opportunity for women, and that women ought to refrain from participating in free enterprise within a male dominated society'	'Train underprivileged women from rural and urban areas, and ethnic minorities for free...would set the course for women liberation and development in KPK'	Right to decision making Independence Skills training
Hashir	Runs a tuition centre, also teaches kids at their homes for the sake of their security	'I know that students have problems getting good tuition. Especially for female students for who it's much harder to leave the house. Our most students like above 15 are females. For boys, it's relatively easier but even for them after APS attack where over a hundred children died in our city (Peshawar) many parents is concerned for the safety of their kids at small tuition centres'	'Teaches students, male and female in a secure environment'	Education Security
Raza S. S.	Runs an organization that aims to encourage education	'aim of this organization is to spread awareness among the women education, child labour, plantation, and environment...works with Malala funds'	'Currently leading 75 volunteers. On the basis of some projects, I generate some income and also use that to help the society'	Awareness Education
Ishaq	Blogger, trainer, trying to equip people with relevant skills	'The aim was to earn, which later became to teach people to earn from home and be independent'	Trains students and poor to become financially independent	Skills training Financial independence
Junaid	Owens a market and some land	'Basically, my father was a social worker. Therefore, I have that attachment. He is no longer with us (he passed away). Therefore, I had that attachment (social causes) from my family background. So, I was planning to start a business'.	Cultivates barren land and provides livelihoods for the underprivileged	Livelihood Skills training
Nusrat	Runs a school for kids	'Initially I had a minor problem with my husband. I was upset. At that time, I decided that I would do something for myself. Later it became something for society'	'Free education for the poor kids in my town'	Education made accessible for the poor

Narrating the ‘social’: the evolving stories of Pakistan’s social entrepreneurs

James Cunningham^a, Lin Xiong^b, Hina Hashim^c and Mohammad Sohail Yunis^d

^aAberdeen Business School, Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, UK; ^bXJTLU Entrepreneur College (Taicang), Xi’an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, Suzhou, P. R. China; ^cDepartment of Economics, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Sweden; ^dInstitute of Management Sciences, Peshawar, Pakistan

ABSTRACT

Social enterprises are often characterized by the vision and drive of an individual founder. We challenge this by taking inspiration from Alistair R. Anderson’s arguments that social entrepreneurship is better understood as enacted within a social context. We move beyond linear conceptualizations to consider a more nuanced, contextually informed picture, where understandings of what it is to be ‘social’ in one’s *entrepreneurship* are created at the interaction of the individual and their situation. A narrative approach is used to analyse 25 life stories used by social entrepreneurs in the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa region of Pakistan, an area of social transition. We access how these entrepreneurs give meaning to the ‘social’ aspects of what they do. Our findings present a multifaceted character, defined by their responses to changing social contexts. This is manifest in entrepreneurial practice, where we have a vacillation between acts of social rebellion and an enterprising organization of benevolence, evolving in a social context which changes with and, in part, because of our social entrepreneurs. We move beyond definitional characteristics and closer to a theory of practice, by considering how social entrepreneurs interact with changing social demands and adapt their activities accordingly.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 26 August 2021
Accepted 8 May 2022

KEYWORDS

social entrepreneurship;
narratives; developing
economy; Pakistan; context

Introduction

Traditionally, social entrepreneurship is considered a particular organizational form, characterized by not-for-profit and voluntary enterprises. However, recently we have begun to acknowledge a more nuanced approach, where hybrid forms of business and mixed values can direct entrepreneurial activity of all kinds (Korsgaard and Anderson 2011). As such, structural certainty around the concept of social entrepreneurship is reduced. In his work on social *entrepreneurship*, Alistair R. Anderson responds to this issue by making repeated calls for theories of practice to be further developed (Diochon and Anderson 2011; Anderson et al. 2019). He argues that structural conceptualizations aiming for defined typographies are increasingly limited in a world where the very notion of social welfare is itself complex, value-laden, and ever changing. In this article, we address these calls by embracing the ambiguity of social entrepreneurship. We root social entrepreneurial practice in localized understandings of what it is to be ‘social’, which in turn, are both ambiguous and continuously evolving. To elucidate this, we interpret narrative data from self-defined social entrepreneurs in the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa region of Pakistan, an area of acute poverty and deprivation –

CONTACT Lin Xiong  lin.xiong@xjtlu.edu.cn  Xi’an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, Suzhou, Jiangsu Province, P. R. China, 215123

© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

where social change is accompanied by a conservative society with prescribed social expectations. We consider how these social entrepreneurs identify as being 'social' in a context of such diverse and complex need, and the implications for their everyday activities. Through our findings, we construct a socially entrepreneurial character born of the trials and consequences of its surroundings, where identity is multi-faceted, and the future seems hinged on the development of society more broadly.

Our theoretical starting point is taken from a dominant argument in all of Alistair's work, that the shape of entrepreneurship and the practice of *entrepreneurship* relates to the social institutions the entrepreneur encounters. One could argue that social entrepreneurs may be even more informed by their surrounding social context, as they must respond to temporal needs which evolve as local views on social welfare shift (Karanda and Toledano 2012). However, Mair and Marti (2006) suggest that much of our theoretical understanding of social entrepreneurship posits a 'grand narrative', where there exists a clear social vision furthered by individual drive, an image borrowed from the hegemonic economic discourse of individualist entrepreneurship (Dey and Steyaert 2010). As such, we are inclined to conceptualize social entrepreneurs as enlightened visionaries, those who spot problems in need of solving (Parkinson and Howorth 2008), in the same way traditional entrepreneurs may spot economic opportunity in need of exploiting (Robinson 2006). This opens theories of social entrepreneurship to the very same criticism Alistair placed at the door of economic perspectives, that to reduce our understanding to that of individual endeavour neglects the role of social processes and institutional interaction (Anderson 2015). By adopting a narrow individualist focus, theorizing on social entrepreneurship falls foul of an atomized approach (Anderson, Dodd, and Jack 2012), ignoring how a social entrepreneur's practices fit with contextual forces (Dodd and Anderson 2007). Of particular relevance here is Anderson and Smith's (2007) notion of 'moral space', within which an entrepreneur's activities are informed by what is considered right and good in society. If entrepreneurial activity must be socially approved, then to understand it we must focus more on the impact of social surroundings, than on the individualized aims of the entrepreneur. What it is to be a 'social' entrepreneur is determined by the interaction of the entrepreneur with their social context (Defourny and Nyssens 2010).

To achieve this, we investigate the multiple and 'little' narratives drawn upon by social entrepreneurs as they provide meaning to their activities (Johansson 2004; Gartner 2007; Seanor et al. 2013). The use of entrepreneurial narratives allows us to access the value-laden and often emotional perceptions of lived experience (Poldner, Shrivastava, and Branzei 2017). Of these narratives, we ask two research questions: *how do entrepreneurs perceive and give meaning to the 'social' aspects of what they do? And, in what ways can we construct the various interactions social entrepreneurs have with their social context?*

Our contributions are three-fold. First, we support Anderson and Lent (2017) by showing social entrepreneurship as socially constructed, with what counts as 'social' dependent on localized perceptions. We uncover how this frames entrepreneurial action (Anderson and Warren 2011), but extend this to consider the temporal and dialectic nature of these constructions, where the practice social *entrepreneurship* adapts as contextual notions of social value change. Second, a narrative approach in the analysis allows us to recognize important contradictions and ambiguities in the entrepreneurial process (Hamilton 2014), and develops a nuanced and multi-dimensional construct (McKeever, Jack, and Anderson 2015). We encourage a move beyond simplistic notions of a 'social' or 'non-social' entrepreneur, and present social entrepreneurship as a storied presentation, where different narratives can be utilized at different times and for different purposes. Finally, our research setting addresses Anderson et al.'s (2019, 108) continued calls for greater understanding of social entrepreneurs in the developing world, as an area of entrepreneurship which deserves *'to be understood and supported because of the close fit with local needs and local resources and the appropriateness, the usefulness of what they achieve'*.

Storying the social

While much of what we know on social enterprises emanates from conventional articulations of charity and not-for-profit (Alexander and Weiner 1998), modern conceptualizations acknowledge a more muddled picture, where hybrid organizations integrate the demands of for-profit drive with

more socially conscious ambitions (Austin 2006; Dey 2006). The result of this shift in perspective is that we become less certain on what it is that makes an enterprise 'social', and what characteristics enable the entrepreneur to claim the moniker 'social'.

As we embrace such a definitional void, the role of narrative became increasingly important. There has always been considerable debate on the precise influence a story or narrative has (Gabriel 2000; Boje 2001). However, if we focus on stories as a form of retrospective meaning-giving, Downing (2005) suggests these patterns and flows among entrepreneurs form, in part, their identities. For the 'social' entrepreneur this retrospective of storytelling can, at times, fall victim to ideological myth-making, relying on optimism for what is in reality a complex and multi-layered issue (Bull 2008; Dey and Steyaert 2010). This leads Houtbeekers (2017) to posit an implicit tension between the discourse of social entrepreneurship, and the everyday practices of social *entrepreneur-ing*. However, Diochon and Anderson (2011) suggest that it is the guiding values of what it is to be social, expressed in the entrepreneur's storytelling (Anderson 2005), which provide direction through the ambiguities of reality.

The story which the entrepreneur tells can be influential in determining how, and in what ways, their entrepreneurial practice is considered to be 'social' – if at all. In lieu of structural criteria, the personal narratives of social entrepreneurs provide the ability to interpret and transmit their identity, connecting them with others, allowing them to make sense of their social enterprising and even providing legitimacy (Johansson 2004; Parkinson, Howorth, and Southern 2017). Kearins and Collins (2012) suggest that such narratives are often constructed in hindsight, to rationalize decision making and allow for a plausible explanation of experiences. So, narratives give order to an entrepreneur's practice, drawing attention to the dominant discursive strands and interpretations of what it means to be entrepreneurial (Caprotti and Bailey 2014; Downing 2005). By engaging with these narratives, social entrepreneurs position themselves in their own enterprise story, giving meaning to what it is to be 'social' (Anderson and Smith 2007; Anderson 2005).

However, the concept of social activity is itself a value-laden and often emotionally subjective understanding of what is socially-beneficial, this can be individualistic and is often contentious (Poldner, Shrivastava, and Branzei 2017). There can be multiple ways in which the more social aspects of entrepreneurship are conceptualized, with often competing and paradoxical ambiguity (Seanor et al. 2013).

Myth of the 'grand narrative'

In a move to greater understand the narratives of social entrepreneurship, the image of the individual driving the enterprise has come to the fore (Bornstein 2004; Steyaert and Hjorth 2006). Mair and Marti (2006) suggest that this image is the result of a desire to see social enterprise through the eyes of the founder and their unique 'social vision'. However, Parkinson and Howorth (2008) suggest that such a focus on the individual echoes a neo-liberal enterprise discourse set in (mostly Western) capital-oriented societies. Social entrepreneurs, from such a perspective, are painted as having *flair* and afflicted by a desire to *give back*. Thus, fantasies of individual elitism contribute to a 'grand narrative' on social enterprise, where those with a special ability to spot social need (opportunity) become the problems-solvers of society (Pearce 2003; Robinson 2006). The implications of an enterprise-based narrative mean that social entrepreneurs should seek to mirror traditional enterprise in their quest for future sustainability, but with a social rather than economic goal (Pomerantz 2003).

As a theoretical frame of reference, the 'grand narrative' of individualistic social drive is useful. However, more recent investigations into the narrative draws of social entrepreneurs uncover a nuanced character. Muñoz and Cohen (2017), for example, look to how social sustainability is understood by entrepreneurs and find that, instead of a mission to affect sustainable activities, the entrepreneurs see their activities as embedded in their surrounding – and therefore become socially sustainable because they read from their environment what is necessary. Through this lens, the

entrepreneur is seen less as a change agent, but more a follower of change (Cajaiba-Santana 2014), meaning the actions of the enterprise must be observed within the broader context of social meaning and discourse. This revises the simplistic notion of designed social problem-solving and altruistic assumptions, to uncover something more reactive, a more holistic understanding of entrepreneurship within society and all the complexities this involves (Calás, Smircich, and Bourne 2009). Karanda and Toledano (2012) also challenge unidimensional notions of a heroic social warrior, suggesting that social entrepreneurs respond to the needs of their localized community in a manner more mundane than transformational. In particular, the authors see social entrepreneurs in South Africa as supplementing local services, a cooperation with the public sphere, as opposed to individual activism against it. Thus, social enterprise is drawn as more interactionist and evolving than proactive and targeted. The authors restate calls from Austin (2006) to greater understand the nature of social enterprises in developing contexts, where the specific social problems are unclear, and may themselves be changing – a call continued by Anderson et al. (2019).

As we move away from singular images of righteous social crusading (Harding 2004; Pearce and Doh 2005), we are able to uncover narratives around alternative themes, including conceptualizations of opportunity, resources, outcomes and the process of social change itself (Cohen, Smith, and Mitchell 2008). Kimmitt and Muñoz (2018) see this as the various ways in which the social entrepreneurship makes sense of what is indeed 'social'. Seanor et al. (2013) describe this as the entrepreneur wearing 'different hats' at different times, acknowledging that narratives of mission and narratives of market each have their place, though perhaps under different circumstances. This echoes Welter, Baker, and Wirsching's (2019) suggestion of multiple contexts for entrepreneurs to navigate and adapt their story to, these stories and identities evolve as the social situation evolves.

We therefore reject assigning a constant normative idea of what it is to be 'social', and instead look to engage with a more multifaceted character (Santos 2012). In doing so we join calls from Anderson et al. (2019), Shaw and de Bruin (2013) and Mair, Battilana, and Cardenas (2012) to provide a deeper theorization of the practices of social enterprises, enabled through a more critical reflexivity of what it is to be social. In this paper, we move beyond categorizations of social problem-solving (Cohen, Smith, and Mitchell 2008; Kimmitt and Muñoz 2018) and turn our focus on the social entrepreneurs themselves. Specifically, we uncover the narrative discourses drawn upon, providing practical meaning to the role of social entrepreneurship within contextual settings (Gartner 2007).

Methodology

In line with the narrative approach, we consider the stories that social entrepreneurs tell of their business, and indeed of themselves. These stories are often used as a way of building legitimacy for what they are doing (Johansson 2004), so by accessing them, we interpret how they inform entrepreneurial activity. Qualitative data are taken from 25 life-story narrative interviews with self-declared social entrepreneurs in the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP) region of Pakistan. Viewed through a constructionist lens, these narratives allow us to elicit meaning attributed to the various aspects of entrepreneurship (Atkinson 2002; Riessman 2008). We specifically look to how the entrepreneurs' narratives illustrate their response to context and through this process understand their role (Dodd, Anderson, and Jack, 2021). Our findings present the key narrative draws for these social entrepreneurs and we discuss the implications for how we understand and theorize social entrepreneurship more broadly (Larty and Hamilton 2011).

The Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP) region of Pakistan is an area characterized by the tension of social change in the context of a traditionally conservative and hierarchal society (Ullah 2018). This tension and dynamism in society allows us to follow Karanda and Toledano (2012) by moving beyond the conventional US and European conceptualizations, as we look to an area of distinct transition where social entrepreneurship can take on a role of change facilitator, rather than problem-solver. Two authors knew the KP region well and organized a range of free workshops in Social Entrepreneurship sponsored by IMSciences. This led to some willing participants and aided introduction to others.

Snowball techniques were used after initial purposeful sampling (Mason 2002; Jack et al. 2010; Patton 2015), which allows us to choose respondents based on their experience of social entrepreneurship. All our respondents are embedded in KP region and state an aim of making a difference to social wellbeing in the area.

Data were collected on location by a co-author, with interviews conducted in Urdu or Pashto and translated into English. It was important that the interviewer was native to the region to allow for explanation and sensitivity to local dialect, where required. Data collection consisted of extended semi-structured interviews, using a narrative life story approach to capture both context and action. Interviews lasted between 90 and 160 minutes, were recorded and transcribed, and data anonymized to protect respondents. This method is frequently used for examining contextual issues in the field of entrepreneurship (Gartner 2007; Diochon and Anderson 2011; Korsgaard and Anderson 2011; Yunis, Hashim, and Anderson 2018). The interview protocol allowed for more open discussions and reflective responses, enabling the respondents to give their individual account of social *entrepreneurship*. The interviews commenced with initial generative questions and were developed with two main types of elaborative questions: 'planned prompts', for example, 'can you tell me what is specifically "social" about your social enterprise?', and nondirective, such as 'explain how your social entrepreneurial journey started?'. The extended nature allowed respondents to elaborate relevant events, or descriptions that aligned directly to the theoretical aims of the work (Korsgaard and Anderson 2011).

The analysis follows Braun and Clarke (2006) and utilized the constant-comparative method to explore connections and patterns in the data, which involves a recursive sense-making of the data (Anderson and Jack 2015). We started the data analysis by sifting and sorting, an iterative review of data with emerging themes. Each story from our respondents in KP region represents an illustration of their attempts and interpretation of what it is to be social in their *entrepreneurship*. By repeatedly comparing narratives and patterns of detail, we built themes that may be conceptually linked for convincing explanations (Jack et al. 2015). For example, many respondents use a narrative of legitimization to explain the dynamism in the process of their social entrepreneurship and their long-term goals. We then analyse these themes in relation to our guiding theory to form an explanation. Quotation and data structure diagrams allow us to present our findings and the connections in the data. This uncovers the interplay of social purpose with contextual setting, along with the actual stated practices of the entrepreneurs themselves (Diochon and Anderson 2011).

Due to the sensitive nature of personal and business detail in the geographical area, some participants were wary of providing full descriptive information on their enterprise. Where information has been withheld, this has been respected and reported as such. Table 1 describes the 25 participants of the study, with general information on the nature of the enterprise to provide reference to the narrative findings.

Our analysis of interview data leads to the construction of three dominant narrative draws relied upon by our entrepreneurs, what Dey and Steyaert (2018) term *repertoires* of interpretation among the participants. These are: *dealing with social consequences*; *benevolence through enterprise*; and *changing with society*. Each core narrative draw is made up of various components, more micro-narratives that build to produce the core narratives. These narratives are now taken in turn and discussed in relation to the individual components from which they are made.

Findings and analysis

Dealing with social consequences

Our participants are rooted locally in the KP region, an area characterized with poverty and deprivation. More than 49% of 30 million are reported living in acute poverty and vulnerability (Government of Pakistan, 2016). As our participants discuss the story of themselves and their entrepreneurial journey, they often return to the notion of poverty and limited resources, and how their initial entrepreneurialism overcame such challenges. Figure 1 presents the summary coding

Table 1. Sample.

Respondent ^a	Business	Age	Gender	Time in business (years)	Business size (employees) ^b	Social activities
Farhad	Internet training	22	M	2	2 + 12 paid interns	Free workshops/training to young people
Karim	School	42	M	-	400 students	Quality education at lowest costs
Mithra	Child welfare	-	F	1	2PT + volunteers	Free food, free education to street children
Samir	Tutoring	20	M	-	10	Quality home tutoring at low costs
Nasreen	Small school	-	F	-	-	Offer scholarship; changing 'ratta' (memorization) education to better understanding of taught subjects
Jareria	Beauty salon	23	F	3	1 + apprentices	Free training to women
Laila	Vocational training	-	F	15	-	Free vocational training to women
Tahmina	Henna training	-	F	6	1	Free henna training to poor girls
Rashid	Land cultivation for farming	31	M	2	12PT	Rent cultivated land to local farmers at low rates; provide employment opportunities
Iffat	Baking (online and offline)	28	F	3	1PT	Profits donated to social organizations
Deedar	Beauty Salon	27	F	7	1	Free training to poor kids
Ainy	Vocational skill training; retail	-	F	8	1 + trainees	Improve the wellbeing of women artisans
Sara	Stitching centre	29	F	2	1	Free training to poor girls; fund raising for deaf and mute girls; free magazines
Naseem	Diet and healthy cooking & delivery	40	F	1 ½	1	Free healthy food and preserved food training for women
Saim	Primary education	-	M	-	-	Good quality education to poor kids at affordable costs
Muhammad	Workplace Training	28	M	4	20	Train women on their basic rights and ethics
Owais	Training	-	M	5	75 volunteers	Creating awareness on social issues (e.g. women education, child labour, environment)
Ismail	Student exchange platform	28	M	1	1	Providing university students with career counselling and opportunities such as exchange programmes, scholarships, undergraduate scholarships, cultural exchange programmes
Faryal	Digital platform for women	34	F	10		KP's first digital platform that encourages women writers
Maryam	Groceries	23	F	2	3	Online shopping platform promoting access to food
Ushna	Food supply	44	F	18	1	Provide training on farming and horticulture
Sohail	Consultancy	24	M	6	20+	Animal feed and farming consultancy
Wafa	Online newspaper	20	F	½	40 volunteers	Spread awareness; the national and international news, 'Unsung Heroes' in Pakistan
Haya	Entrepreneurship education	32	F	2	3	Creating curriculum teaching for entrepreneurs and workshops to develop soft skills
Nadia	Training	27	F	4	15	Free training to girls living in poverty

^aPseudonyms given to protect participants^bUnless otherwise stated

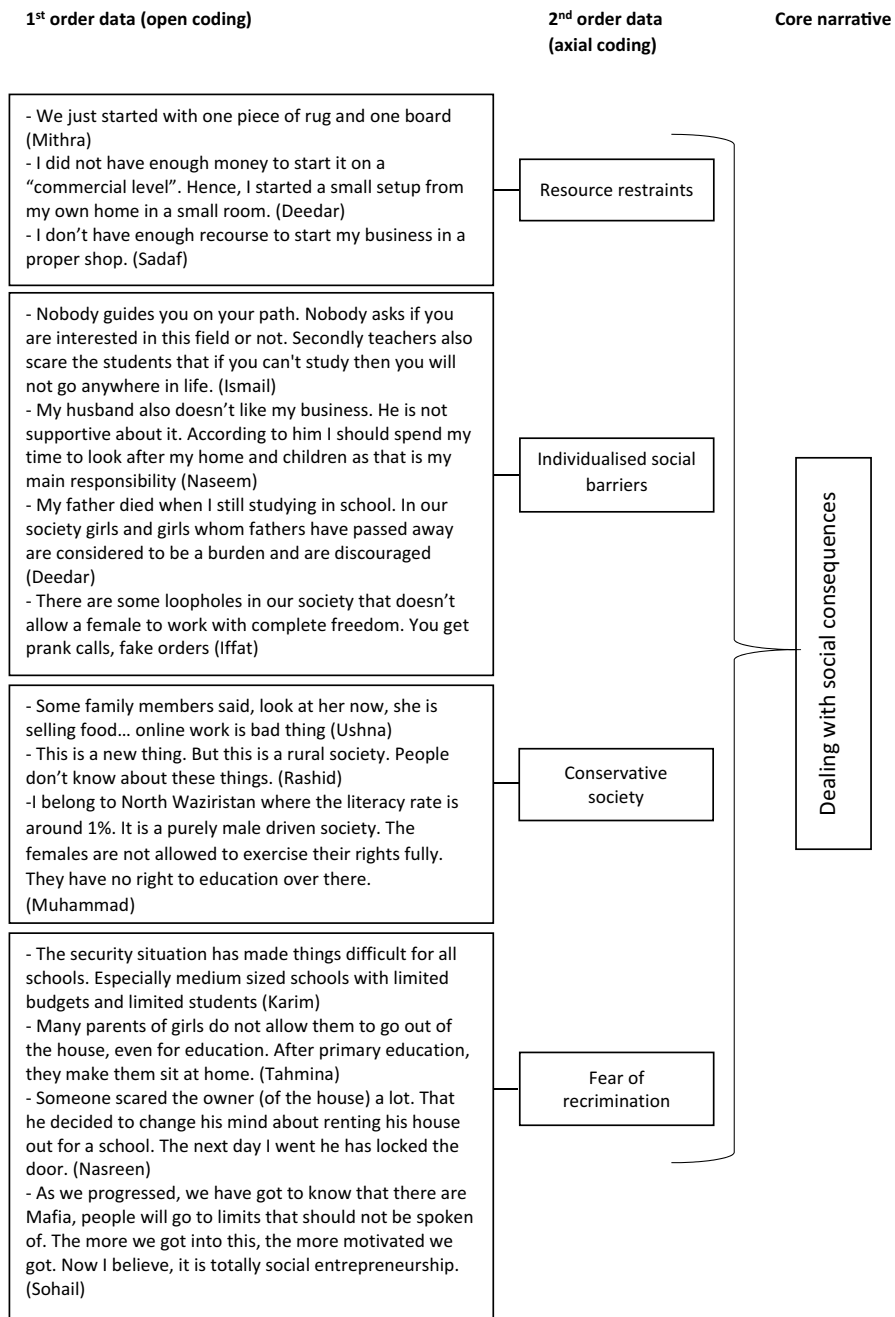


Figure 1. Data structure (Dealing with social consequences)

around this narrative. For instance, images such as, *'I started with one piece of rug and one board' (Mithra)* and, *'I did not have enough money to start it on a "commercial level", I started a small setup from my own home in a small room' (Deedar)*, dominate discussions on the genesis of the enterprises.

The social entrepreneurs of our sample confront restraint in terms of the financial and physical resources to build an enterprise and speak of the ways in which they make use of what they have, echoing Sarasvathy and Dew's (2005) broader arguments on the process of effectuation, and a 'tough beginnings' story not uncommon of entrepreneurs more broadly. As Laila explains:

At the start of the business I was short of funds, however I did not get financial support from others. Therefore, I sold my wedding jewellery worth 2000 Rupees (20 Dollars) at that time for initial investment. I couldn't afford to employ any supporting staff, but I was not ready to give up. I started to stitch by myself. I was living with my family; so I worked mostly at night time so that my family would not be disturbed. (Laila)

This lack of access to capital and resources in the setting of extreme poverty constrained our participants and characterizes much of how they see being 'social'. The hardship and struggle are expected, as a lack of support is assumed, perhaps in contrast to more supportive Western ecosystems.

Another consequence of the KP regional context, is the spectre of religious extremism causing threats and fear. Our respondents explain how the terrorist threats affected them and their social endeavours:

Since 2001, there has been a rise in religious extremism in KP and the surrounding tribal areas which had a direct effect on the lives of women in our community and on the business. We noticed bomb threats were made to schools providing education to girls and we too came under direct criticism from far-right religious groups for promoting women freedom, liberty, and expression. In 2008, my father was kidnapped for the same reason, and it was a severe blow to our efforts. (Jareria)

Individualized and societal resistance to social endeavour is an added element, very specific to context (geographical and social), and brings with it a fear of recrimination. Our social entrepreneurs present an image of not only overcoming the barriers of limited resources, but also living with social barriers and active resistance each day they continue in operation. What we have here is a contextually bound social entrepreneur. They respond to the needs that emerge from the social environment, but are also restrained by them, as straying too far from societal constraints, or being too courageous in ambition could have dire consequences for their welfare. We find that those working with females, or are themselves female, are keen to draw attention to the social barrier they face, defining how and why they endeavour in their social offering. Such challenges are often individualized by our entrepreneurs, where they reflect on their own family situation as being an issue to overcome, rather than as a function of support. Sara presents this in a striking way:

My parents were scared of the idea that I have to work and earn. Furthermore, they were scared what society will say. (Sara)

It seems that in this context, our social entrepreneurs deal with the constraints of family and role expectations, on top of that from broader society. Faryal shared with us,

The biggest challenge we faced was that we were going against the society norms. (Faryal)

Anderson and Obeng (2017) argue that social context often manifests as culture and social norms, we see our participants expected to conform to role expectations in their culture and tradition. The social norms determine the division of labour by gender, with women typically receiving little assistance to venture on their own (Amine and Staub 2009). Society and the expectations for family and community values informs what is possible for the individual. Ushna discovered *'as Pukhtoon society demands, all of my business decisions were taken under [the community] umbrella ... To become a successful social entrepreneur, I needed to establish partnership with the strong [community] stakeholders ... taking great care of the cultural values to keep the business going'*. We recognize 'moral

space' for these social entrepreneurs, with their *entrepreneurship* subject to a 'socioeconomic process, an ongoing synthesis of self and society ... a heavy cultural and ideological loading' (Anderson and Smith 2007, 486). Our participants show how their entrepreneurial efforts are morally encoded and constructed to fit with the demands of the localized context, or at least to acknowledge when they do not. They navigate culture and social values and strive to act in a socially acceptable manner to gain credibility and support from those which a business normally relies upon.

This couples with a traditionally conservative society, where anything 'new' may be considered problematic:

No awareness [of] Internet businesses. Our KP society thinks this is useless, furthermore they can't even accept the idea of earning from home. They don't believe it. Our formal education system only teaches children to become either doctor or engineer. These are the only fields worth trying for. This limits students' thinking, and they cannot think outside the box. So, this created major challenges for us. (Farhad)

The narrative illustrates the need for individual resilience to the social forces which seek to halt their offering, but paradoxically fitting with the social script to maintain the relationships needed to build operation. Our entrepreneurial 'heroes' are not characterized by the righteousness of their social vision, but rather by their ability to withstand and circumnavigate social consequences arising from their activities.

Benevolence through enterprise

A variety of *motifs* are offered when building a narrative around the role of social entrepreneurship in society, summarized diagrammatically in Figure 2. In the first instance, they seek to create an image of enterprise development. In such a way, our social entrepreneurs tap into the usual trope of resource efficiency, income and even growth. Thus, our findings echo voices suggesting that social enterprise cannot always be seen as a purely altruistic endeavour but is instead embedded in a nuanced image of economy (Cajaiba-Santana 2014; Kearins, Collins, and Tregidga 2010). This seeming contradiction in the character of social entrepreneurs demonstrates the complexity of role. From this finding, it cannot be that economic discourse and ideologies have no place in the building of a social endeavour. At times, these social agents will dress as economic entrepreneurs, to present themselves as a more robust contributor, highlighting what Seanor et al. (2013) see as the ambiguities and vacillation of the social entrepreneur's mindset.

That said, themes of enterprise development are fixed with the key drivers of benevolence. Positing themselves as catalysed for the 'aid of others', our social entrepreneurs are still susceptible to the mythology of a 'higher calling'. Sohail offers us an example:

[The] social aspect is basically empowering. Empowering means that we are trying to uplift a certain farmer from where he used to be to a level where he wants to be. So, I believe if I am able to help one farmer to go where he wants to be, helping his household, helping him get a future and for his family People like us who should step up, who have knowledge and from my end, I am contributing this way in the society. If you give a fish to a person and he will just eat it. Unless you help him learn fishing and that is what will make him sustainable. Similarly, our consultation is a continuous process. (Sohail)

This reinforces the ideological view of the 'social warrior' reaching areas others, public and private, cannot (Dees and Anderson 2006), in turn lending to an aura of infallibility (Andersson 2011). In the following excerpt, Mithra characterizes how this image can prevail, even bolstering the drive to succeed:

First day we went there, no kid came. Although I already had been asking those kids in my area for the last two weeks that I am starting a free education school and you kids should come. For two weeks we went there, no kids turned up. After two weeks I got tired of waiting so I just sat in my car, drove to the area where those beggar kids were working, and I just got them in my car and brought them to the one room class that we had created in [the] office. So the first day that we officially started I had three kids that I myself grabbed from the streets. (Mithra)

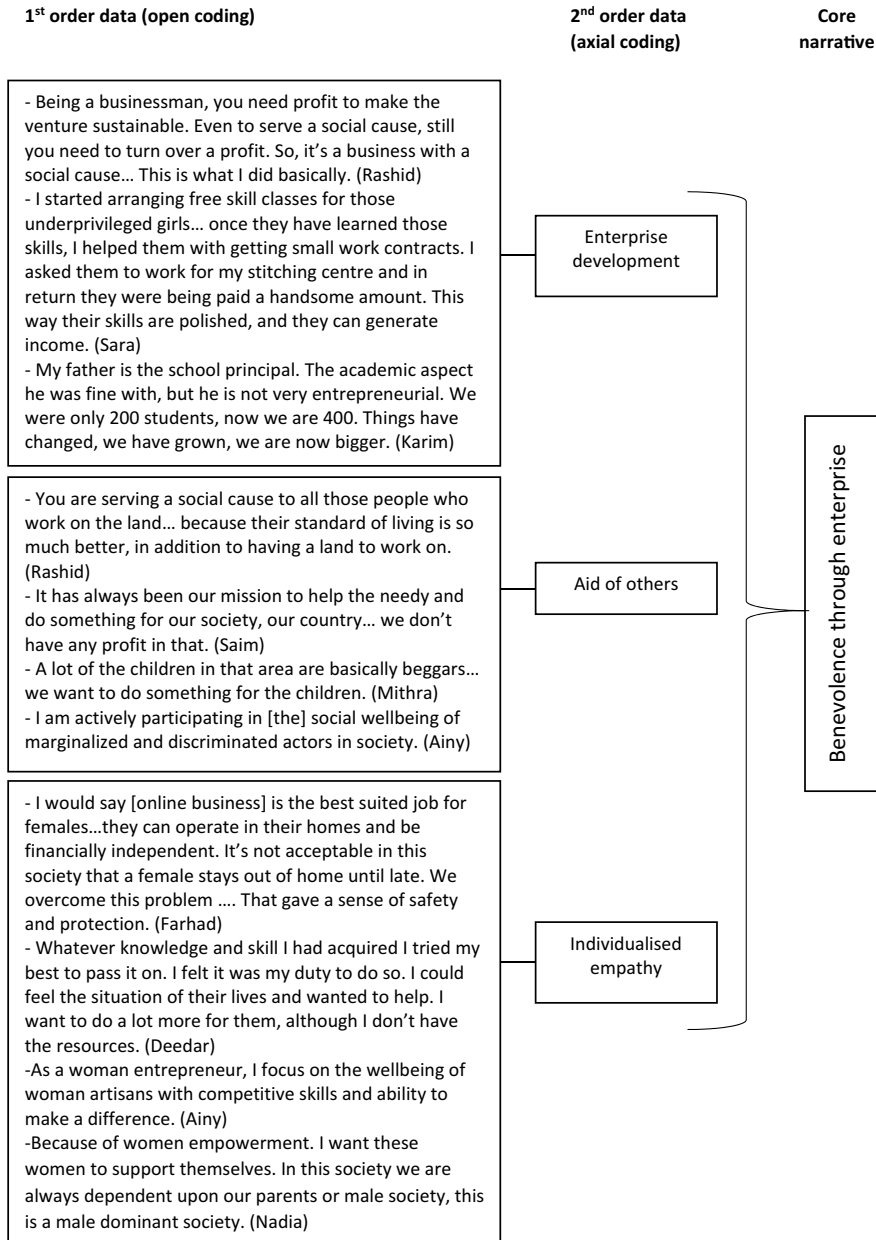


Figure 2. Data structure (Benevolence through enterprise)

Confidence in the meaning and intentions of one's actions is crucial for every entrepreneurial journey, particularly in the initial stages (Cunningham and Anderson 2018). However, it could be said that for a social entrepreneur, this framing of their own role is even more critical, particularly when facing such intense resistance in the form of social consequences. Without the belief and moral backing of a social cause, perhaps our entrepreneurs would not have the confidence to face down the forces against them.

We also notice that these social entrepreneurs are strongly geared towards creating value for others in the society, while at the same time rely on co-producing with others. Sara provides free training to poor girls in the neighbourhood. She integrates the sense of self and meaning in life through her narratives, and expands her entrepreneurial identity beyond the constraints of her individual life story,

I started arranging free cost skill classes for those underprivileged girls. Once the girl guides learned those skills ... I asked them to work for my stitching centre. (Sara)

The social mission of doing things for 'underprivileged girls' is achieved by doing things with them, not for them. As Clarke and Holt (2010) explain, the integral element of working effectively with others is to create meaning, both for themselves and for the others.

If we follow the classic enterprise discourse, we are led to images of an individual with 'entrepreneurial flair' (Jack and Anderson 1999) and a special ability to spot a social 'opportunity' (Robinson 2006). However, instead of such enlightened gap-spotting, we find notions of individualized empathy to dominate as a call to social action, producing a more utilitarian view. It seems that our entrepreneurs draw from a modified narrative around their own experience, in a similar way to how Cope (2005) describes entrepreneurs justifying what they do by reflecting on their own journey. Thus, the entrepreneurial activity itself becomes a modified version of the individual's own experiences, and what they see mirrored in others. Here, the individual is at the source of entrepreneurial action, but this individual is themselves empathetically reflecting on socio-structural surroundings and reacting to it by making change possible for others. Rather than the enterprise being formed around the entrepreneur's vision, it is formed around the struggles that they encounter, and the hope for more to join them in this fight. Had the entrepreneurs not experienced the struggles of context for themselves, they would not form their entrepreneurial practices in the same way.

Changing with society

A final core narrative drawn among our social entrepreneurs can be constructed through the notion of change. There are two key aspects informing this narrative: one, in which the entrepreneurs reflect on their own practice and how it evolves and adapts; and a second where our entrepreneurs consider their enterprise in terms of the impact and place it has in a changing society – represented in Figure 3.

In reflecting on the development of their own enterprise, our entrepreneurs employ a narrative of continued legitimization. In many ways this interacts with the elements of an enterprise discourse in the earlier narrative. However, here we see our entrepreneurs communicate the trajectory of their offering. For instance, the word 'proper' is frequently used to describe their vision for what the enterprise may look like in the future. '*I want to have a proper big school*' (Nasreen); '*getting a proper building setup*' (Mithra); or to '*have a proper training centre*' (Tahmina). Firstly, this implies that the entrepreneurs do not see their current, socially-driven, practices as sufficient to be considered a legitimate business entity. Second, there is a suggestion that what they currently do will become more 'commercial' as things develop. Ismail explained,

Today my venture is worth 1 million rupees (\$13000), which is a big deal in Pakistan, but I did not sell it to the people offering the money. I wanted to take this venture further. My aim is to take this venture to an even bigger level than [names major industry competitor]. I want to take it to a higher scale and turn it into a company, which has its own employees and its departments. (Ismail)

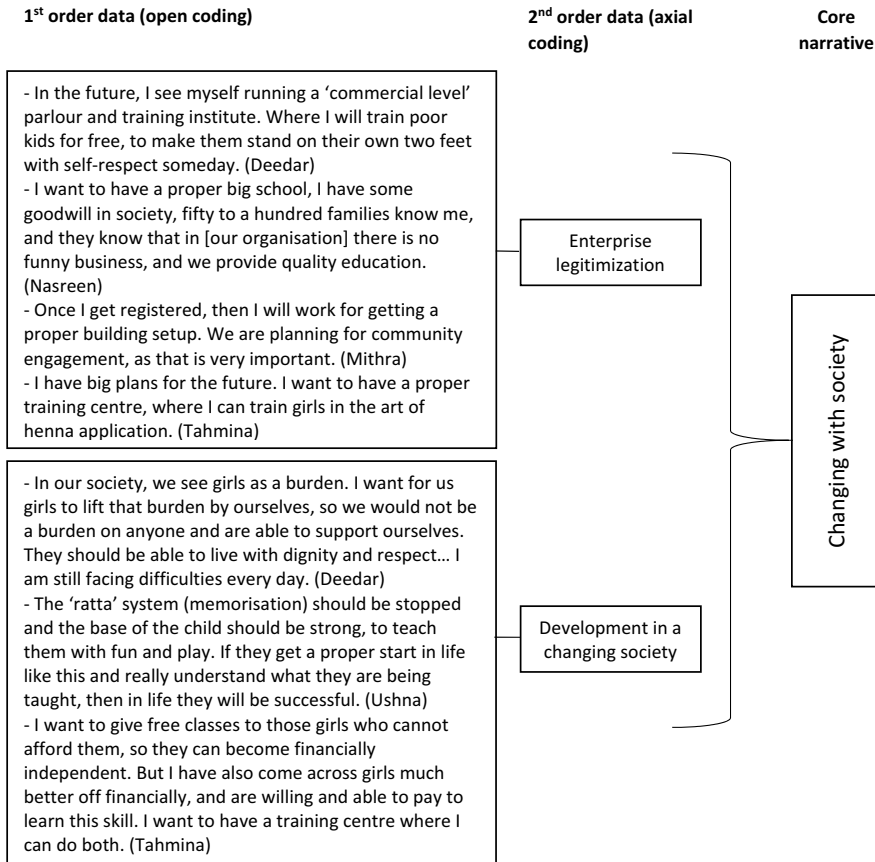


Figure 3. Data structure (Changing with society)

The entrepreneurs themselves appear to be entertaining the dichotomy of social versus economic where, as the story goes on they are accepting that economic narratives will eventually dominate all others, an outcome of economics' hegemonic presence (Anderson 2015). Owais shared with us,

Creating awareness (on social issues) is our first priority and profit is our second priority obviously but right now we need to earn some profits and pitch our ideas, so we are also focusing on the profit portion just as much. I am a social entrepreneur and I have an experience of five years so why should I sell my ideas for free. We have ideas that have value, so we are measuring their worth. (Owais)

In this context, Kearins, Collins, and Tregidga's (2010) view that business growth may not be as important as the founder's vision of change does not seem to hold. These entrepreneurs do not necessarily see the social vision as their defining characteristic, but in many ways see themselves as what Karanda and Toledano (2012) term 'mundane entrepreneurs', looking to use the social elements to drive the enterprise into a more conventional business sphere. Employing narratives of the increasingly economic can be a means of convincing others of their potential for legitimacy (Garud, Schildt, and Lant 2014). This clearly presents a tension, even a paradox, in relation to utilizing an enterprise narrative to show the reach of their benevolence, but it is in the tension that our

entrepreneurs paint themselves as a dynamic entity – not binary but evolving. Certainly, our entrepreneurs do not see themselves as static social problem-solvers, but rather part of a changing and competitive environment, as Karim illustrates,

Those will remain in business that are at the top of their game. The idea right now is not to wait and see what happens. One has to be proactive; we have to be as innovative in our product ... our long-term plan is to make it a complete package. (Karim)

This focus on the changing nature of the enterprise is paired with our entrepreneurs' views of the changing society around them. In contrast to the retrospective acrimony noted in portraying the societal obstacles they have come across; our entrepreneurs present an optimistic view of what they will be able to achieve as their social surrounding develops with them. Ushna told us,

I want to expand my business to national level. Women of this region are held back by an unconscious fear. In recent years, they are seen to be climbing up the corporate ladder ... The rising concept of social entrepreneurship is helping them to be more empowered and aware ... so that more women enter business. (Ushna)

As education develops, gender barriers reduce, and problematic conservatism tempers, our social entrepreneurs see themselves as both facilitating this change, and subsequently having to adapt with it. They each have a vision of what they will do when the social problem they address is widely acknowledged, and that vision is to become a 'proper' entity using a typically enterprise-based narrative. Whether this is the overconfident folly of an entrepreneurial mindset (Cunningham and Anderson 2018), or the realistic view of a socially embedded change agent, is unclear; but what is clear is the way in which the social entrepreneur looks to co-construct themselves in relation to how their societal context shifts. The stories of the entrepreneurs themselves can be seen as social artefacts, a representation of a changing society where the most useful narratives to draw upon depend on the stage of their relations with the surrounding social contexts. If the social optimism our entrepreneurs rings true, they will move from narratives dominated by obstacle and individualized struggles, to what they see as more legitimized commercial and economic discussions.

Discussion

Our findings offer three main contributions to further Alistair's theoretical impetus. The first relates to the social entrepreneur's place in social context. Images of a heroic saviour of society are distant in our findings. When an individualized view is apparent it takes the form of a personalized struggle against societal expectations. This extends into narratives around their role in society, where images of individualized empathy and deeply personal experience drive the intended outcomes of entrepreneurial activity. These findings move us on from a view of the social entrepreneur as an enlightened problem-solver (Dees 2012), and support Anderson and Lent (2017) by demonstrating how our social entrepreneurs read from societal cues on what it is to be 'social'. The practice of our entrepreneurs is presented as a direct response to how they see society as changing, aligning themselves with that progressive change. However, in this context, our entrepreneurs do not portray themselves as elitist, but instead highlight their resilience and effort in facing a resistance to change and want that same resilience to be built up in others. They provide a story of themselves as part of a broader social movement, where they are playing a part in much larger story arch.

Surrounding context is writ large in our narratives (Anderson, Dodd, and Jack 2012). For instance, where obstacles and barriers are considered, these are social and localized, even down to family relations. Where future direction is in focus, this is inextricably linked to the direction of societal change they anticipate in their environment (Muñoz and Cohen, 2017). An implication of this is how our entrepreneurs view their practice changing with society, the way the narratives modify to reflect on something more 'proper', even commercial, as societal problems are gradually addressed. This brings to mind Anderson and Smith's (2007) notion of 'moral space', in that the activities of entrepreneurship must be considered right and good for society in order to be socially accepted.

However, here we see a situation where the value of social activity is not always immediately apparent to society, at times even vigorously and violently repelled. The resilience of our entrepreneurs seems possible only with an understanding of a future state, in which their activities will not provoke such strong reaction. In this scenario, the fit between entrepreneurial practices and acceptance in the social context occurs as a progression, a hopeful process of development for both the entrepreneurs and society.

Theoretically, this is important. When we look to an informative social context to help us understand entrepreneurial activity (Anderson 2015), is not to say that our social entrepreneurs are objects of a dictating context, but rather they are part of its evolving story. Narratives drawn upon not only reflect current local realities but also themselves create imagined realities (Larty and Hamilton 2011). These new realities are not ideological in nature but more dialectic (Dey and Steyaert 2018), they provoke a reaction from the social context and test what is – and what is not yet – possible. By observing this interaction, we move beyond static checklists of what it is to be a social entrepreneur (Anderson et al. 2019). Gaddefors and Anderson (2019) suggest that, in practice, entrepreneurship should not be considered a *noun*, but as a *verb*, a concept of doing, a behaviour that creates value. Our findings endorse this, but also see that this behaviour must adapt as contextual notions of what is socially valuable change. This is manifest in the practice of social *entrepreneurship*, the initial rebellion of our entrepreneurs illuminates a perceived social issue, but this gives way to a more valuable organization of benevolence as society gradually accepts what our entrepreneurs are doing. The practice of the entrepreneur and the acceptance of society aligns in a ‘moral space’ of acceptance.

Second, and in many ways the mechanism through which the entrepreneur attempts to fit with social context, we provide explicit evidence to support Jones, Jones, Latham, and Betta's (2008) contention that entrepreneurial narratives are multi-faceted in their presentation. The narrative approaches we construct are rarely ordered, and do not always follow a linear representation of entrepreneurial processes (De Fina 2009). Our findings demonstrate that dichotomies on social versus economic oversimplify a more complex reality. We support O'Neill and Gibbs (2016) in recognizing that different narratives can be brought into use at different times and when reflecting on different implications. For instance, in considering the future, our entrepreneurs rely on more commercially coloured narratives, while in making sense of their own role in society, they focus on aspects of empathy and overcoming social barriers. In considering social impact, the emphasis appears to be on scale, something only achievable through organized enterprise. This brings us closer to the theory of practice Alistair calls for (Anderson et al. 2019). The ambiguities inherent in issues of the social mean that social entrepreneurs must navigate these multi-dimensional and even contradictory identities. This is not a confused identity (Diochon and Anderson 2011), but is a purposeful adaptation of their story narratives. That is not to say that any telling of the story is a fictionalized account, all elements are true and accurate, but the emphasis depends on the image they are portraying – the benevolent empath, the resilient nonconformist, the rational organizer. Each has its place for these entrepreneurs, and social *entrepreneurship* becomes the practice of changing faces as appropriate.

Finally, we offer evidence that social entrepreneurs in developing economies align closely with the society in which they operate, and the implications of their impact run deep. We can speculate that this may be due to the presence of acute social need, or the immediacy of a conservative societal response to entrepreneurial action, in comparison to what we see in more enterprise-aware cultures. Regardless, it is the vibrancy with which the role and ‘usefulness’ of social *entrepreneurship* (Anderson et al. 2019) is expressed that we have found enlightening, and which makes such settings prime areas of interest in the continued development of a theory of practice for social entrepreneurship.

Conclusion

The importance of gaining a more nuanced understanding of social entrepreneurship is difficult to overstate. An enhanced theory of practice which acknowledges the interaction of the individual with broader elements of society has the potential to drive a collaborative approach to social welfare. Where there has been a premature or misjudged assumption on the nature of these entrepreneurs, this can lead to the misallocation of resources, conflicting goals between the individual and contextual values, and a loss of motivation for those practitioners embedded in the locality. From the practical perspective, greater acknowledgement of the dynamic and multi-faceted character of social entrepreneurs may allow practitioners to serve the needs of their environment more appropriately and with less resistance.

Clearly, a qualitative work such as this is not without limitations. Most importantly, we cannot claim to have represented all forms of social entrepreneur in this study, there are many others operating in other areas, with their own stories to tell. Future studies may look to engage more with the variety of social enterprise types and investigate difference in how they portray their individualized stories. Also, while a tight geographical focus is necessary to access the localized nature of the narratives, it may be that other regions, other countries, will produce alternative findings. As work on social entrepreneurship moves forward, more comparative studies would be beneficial. While our findings cannot be generalized to other areas, there is nothing to suggest that the evolving interaction of the social entrepreneur with their social context is not universal, but the articulation of how this takes place will vary depending on the context under study.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

Production of this work received no external funding.

ORCID

James Cunningham  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3856-6611>

References

- Alexander, J. A., and B. J. Weiner. 1998. "The Adoption of the Corporate Governance Model by Nonprofit Organizations." *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* 8 (3): 223–242. doi:[10.1002/nml.8302](https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.8302).
- Amine, L. S., and K. M. Staub. 2009. "Women Entrepreneurs in sub-Saharan Africa: An Institutional Theory Analysis from a Social Marketing Point of View." *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development* 21 (2): 183–211. doi:[10.1080/08985620802182144](https://doi.org/10.1080/08985620802182144).
- Anderson, A. R. 2005. "Enacted Metaphor: The Theatricality of the Entrepreneurial Process." *International Small Business Journal* 23 (6): 587–603. doi:[10.1177/0266242605057654](https://doi.org/10.1177/0266242605057654).
- Anderson, A. R., and R. Smith. 2007. "The Moral Space in Entrepreneurship: An Exploration of Ethical Imperatives and the Moral Legitimacy of Being Enterprising." *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development* 19 (6): 479–497. doi:[10.1080/08985620701672377](https://doi.org/10.1080/08985620701672377).
- Anderson, A. R., and L. Warren. 2011. "The Entrepreneur as Hero and Jester: Enacting the Entrepreneurial Discourse." *International Small Business Journal* 29 (6): 589–609. doi:[10.1177/0266242611416417](https://doi.org/10.1177/0266242611416417).
- Anderson, A. R., S. D. Dodd, and S. L. Jack. 2012. "Entrepreneurship as Connecting: Some Implications for Theorising and Practice." *Management Decision* 50 (5): 958–971. doi:[10.1108/00251741211227708](https://doi.org/10.1108/00251741211227708).
- Anderson, A. R. 2015. "Conceptualising Entrepreneurship as Economic "Explanation" and the Consequent Loss of "Understanding"." *International Journal of Business and Globalisation* 14 (12): 145–157. doi:[10.1504/IJBG.2015.067432](https://doi.org/10.1504/IJBG.2015.067432).

- Anderson, A. R., and S. L. Jack. 2015. "An Introduction to the Constant Comparative Technique." In *Handbook of Qualitative Research Techniques and Analysis in Entrepreneurship*, edited by H. Neergaard and C. Leitch, 15–20, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Anderson, A. R., and M. D. Lent. 2017. "Enterprising the Rural: Creating a Social Value Chain." *Journal of Rural Studies* 70: 96–103. doi:10.1016/j.jrurstud.2017.08.020.
- Anderson, A. R., and B.A. Obeng. 2017. "Enterprise as Socially Situated in a Rural Poor Fishing Community." *Journal of Rural Studies* 49: 23–31. doi:10.1016/j.jrurstud.2016.11.015.
- Anderson, A. R., S. Younis, H. Hashim, and C. Air. 2019. "Social Enterprising Informing Our Concept; Exploring Informal Micro Social Enterprise." *Social Enterprise Journal* 15 (1): 94–110. doi:10.1108/SEJ-04-2018-0034.
- Andersson, F. O. 2011. "Social Entrepreneurship as Fetish." *The Nonprofit Quarterly* 18 (2): 64–68.
- Atkinson, R. 2002. "The Life Story Interview." In *Handbook of Interview Research*, edited by J. F. Gubrium and J. A. Holstein, 121–140. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Austin, J. E. 2006. "Three Avenues for Social Entrepreneurship Research." In *Social Entrepreneurship*, edited by J. Mair, J. Robinson, and K. Hockerts, 22–33. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Boje, D. M. 2001. *Narrative Methods for Organizational and Communication Research*. London: Sage.
- Bornstein, D. 2004. *How to Change the World: Social Entrepreneurship and the Power of Ideas*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Braun, V., and V. Clarke. 2006. "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3 (2): 77–101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp0630a.
- Bull, M. 2008. "Challenging Tensions: Critical, Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives on Social Enterprise." *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior and Research* 14 (5): 268–275. doi:10.1108/13552550810897641.
- Cajaiba-Santana, G. 2014. "Social Innovation: Moving the Field Forward. A Conceptual Framework." *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 82: 42–51. doi:10.1016/j.techfore.2013.05.008.
- Calás, M. B., L. Smircich, and K. A. Bourne. 2009. "Extending the Boundaries: Reframing "Entrepreneurship as Social Change" through Feminist Perspectives." *Academy of Management Review* 34 (3): 552–569. doi:10.5465/amr.2009.40633597.
- Caprotti, F., and I. Bailey. 2014. "Making Sense of the Green Economy." *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 96 (3): 195–200. doi:10.1111/geob.12045.
- Clarke, J., and R. Holt. 2010. "The Mature Entrepreneur: A Narrative Approach to Entrepreneurial Goals." *Journal of Management Inquiry* 19 (1): 69–83. doi:10.1177/1056492609343030.
- Cohen, B., B. Smith, and R. Mitchell. 2008. "Toward a Sustainable Conceptualization of Dependent Variables in Entrepreneurship Research." *Business Strategy and the Environment* 17 (2): 107–119. doi:10.1002/bse.505.
- Cope, J. 2005. "Researching Entrepreneurship through Phenomenological Inquiry: Philosophical and Methodological Issues." *International Small Business Journal* 23 (2): 163–189. doi:10.1177/0266242605050511.
- Cunningham, J., and A. R. Anderson. 2018. "Inspired or Foolhardy: Sensemaking, Confidence and Entrepreneurs' Decision-Making." *Group Decision and Negotiation* 27 (3): 393–415. doi:10.1007/s10726-018-9563-0.
- De Fina, A. 2009. "Narratives in interview—The Case of Accounts: For an Interactional Approach to Narrative Genres." *Narrative Inquiry* 19 (2): 233–258. doi:10.1075/ni.19.2.03def.
- Dees, J. G., and B. B. Anderson. 2006. "Framing a Theory of Social Entrepreneurship: Building on Two Schools of Practice and Thought." *Research on Social Entrepreneurship* 1 (3): 39–66.
- Dees, J. G. 2012. "A Tale of Two Cultures: Charity, Problem Solving, and the Future of Social Entrepreneurship." *Journal of Business Ethics* 111 (3): 321–334. doi:10.1007/s10551-012-1412-5.
- Defourny, J., and M. Nyssens. 2010. "Conceptions of Social Enterprise and Social Entrepreneurship in Europe and the United States: Convergences and Divergences." *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship* 1 (1): 32–53. doi:10.1080/19420670903442053.
- Dey, P. 2006. "The Rhetoric of Social Entrepreneurship: Paralogy and New Language Games in Academic Discourse in." In *Entrepreneurship as Social Change: A Third New Movements in Entrepreneurship*, edited by C. Steyaert and D. Hjorth, 121–143. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Dey, P., and C. Steyaert. 2010. "The Politics of Narrating Social Entrepreneurship." *Journal of Enterprising Communities* 4 (1): 85–108. doi:10.1108/17506201011029528.
- Dey, P., and C. Steyaert. 2018. "Myth in Social Entrepreneurship Research: An Inquiry into Rationalist, Ideological and Dialectic Practices of Demystification." In *Social Entrepreneurship. An Affirmative Critique*, edited by P. Dey and C. Steyaert, 100–126. Cheltenham UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Diochon, M., and A. R. Anderson. 2011. "Ambivalence and Ambiguity in Social Enterprise; Narratives about Values in Reconciling Purpose and Practices." *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal* 7 (1): 93–109. doi:10.1007/s11365-010-0161-0.
- Dodd, S. D., and A. R. Anderson. 2007. "Mumpsimus and the Mything of the Individualistic Entrepreneur." *International Small Business Journal* 25 (4): 341–360.
- Dodd, S., A. R. Anderson, and S. L. Jack. 2021. "'Let Them Not Make Me a Stone"—repositioning Entrepreneurship." *Journal of Small Business Management*. doi:10.1080/00472778.2020.1867734.

- Downing, S. 2005. "The Social Construction of Entrepreneurship: Narrative and Dramatic Processes in the Coproduction of Organizations and Identities." *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice* 29 (2): 185–204. doi:10.1111/j.1540-6520.2005.00076.x.
- Gabriel, Y. 2000. *Storytelling in Organisations: Facts, Fictions and Fantasies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gaddefors, J., and A. R. Anderson. 2019. "Romancing the Rural: Reconceptualizing Rural Entrepreneurship as Engagement with Context(s)." *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation* 20 (3): 159–169. doi:10.1177/1465750318785545.
- Gartner, W. B. 2007. "Entrepreneurial Narrative and a Science of the Imagination." *Journal of Business Venturing* 22 (5): 613–627. doi:10.1016/j.jbusvent.2006.10.003.
- Garud, R., H. A. Schildt, and T. K. Lant. 2014. "Entrepreneurial Storytelling, Future Expectations, and the Paradox of Legitimacy." *Organization Science* 25 (5): 1479–1492. doi:10.1287/orsc.2014.0915.
- Government of Pakistan. 2016. "Multidimensional Poverty in Pakistan." *Ministry of Planning, Development and Reform* <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/pakistan/docs/MPI/Multidimensional%20Poverty%20in%20Pakistan.pdf>.
- Hamilton, E. 2014. "Entrepreneurial Narrative Identity and Gender: A Double Epistemological Shift." *Journal of Small Business Management* 52 (4): 703–712. doi:10.1111/jsbm.12127.
- Harding, R. 2004. "Social Enterprise: The New Economic Engine?" *Business Strategy Review* 15 (4): 39–43. doi:10.1111/j.0955-6419.2004.00338.x.
- Houtbeckers, E. 2017. "Researcher Subjectivity in Social Entrepreneurship Ethnographies: The Entanglement of Stories in a co-working Cooperative for Social Innovation." *Social Enterprise Journal* 13 (2): 128–143. doi:10.1108/SEJ-07-2016-0025.
- Jack, S. L., and A. R. Anderson. 1999. "Entrepreneurship Education within the Enterprise Culture: Producing Reflective Practitioners." *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior and Research* 5 (3): 110–125. doi:10.1108/13552559910284074.
- Jack, S. L., S. Moul, A. R. Anderson S, and S. D. Dodd. 2010. "An Entrepreneurial Network Evolving: Patterns of Change." *International Small Business Journal* 28 (4): 315–337. doi:10.1177/0266242610363525.
- Jack, S. L., A. R. Anderson, S. D. Dodd, and S. Moul. 2015. Neergaard H., Leitch C. M. "Using the Constant Comparative Technique to Consider Network Change and Evolution." In *Handbook of Qualitative Research Techniques and Analysis in Entrepreneurship*, 21–51. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Johansson, A. W. 2004. "Narrating the Entrepreneur." *International Small Business Journal* 22 (3): 273–293. doi:10.1177/0266242604042379.
- Jones, R., J. Latham, and M. Betta. 2008. "Narrative Construction of the Social Entrepreneurial Identity." *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior and Research* 14 (5): 330–345. doi:10.1108/13552550810897687.
- Karanda, C., and N. Toledano. 2012. "Social Entrepreneurship in South Africa: A Different Narrative for a Different Context." *Social Enterprise Journal* 8 (3): 201–215. doi:10.1108/17508611211280755.
- Kearins, K., E. Collins, and H. Tregidga. 2010. "Beyond Corporate Environmental Management to a Consideration of Nature in Visionary Small Enterprise." *Business and Society* 49 (3): 512–547. doi:10.1177/0007650310368988.
- Kearins, K., and E. Collins. 2012. "Making Sense of Ecopreneurs' Decisions to Sell up." *Business Strategy and the Environment* 21 (2): 71–85. doi:10.1002/bse.710.
- Kimmit, J., and P. Muñoz. 2018. "Sensemaking the 'Social' in Social Entrepreneurship." *International Small Business Journal* 36 (8): 859–886. doi:10.1177/0266242618789230.
- Korsgaard, S., and A. R. Anderson. 2011. "Enacting Entrepreneurship as Social Value Creation." *International Small Business Journal* 29 (2): 135–151. doi:10.1177/0266242610391936.
- Larty, J., and E. Hamilton. 2011. "Structural Approaches to Narrative Analysis in Entrepreneurship Research: Exemplars from Two Researchers." *International Small Business Journal* 29 (3): 220–237. doi:10.1177/0266242611401796.
- Mair, J., and I. Marti. 2006. "Social Entrepreneurship Research: A Source of Explanation, Prediction, and Delight." *Journal of World Business* 41 (1): 36–44. doi:10.1016/j.jwb.2005.09.002.
- Mair, J., J. Battilana, and J. Cardenas. 2012. "Organizing for Society: A Typology of Social Entrepreneurial Models." *Journal of Business Ethics* 111 (3): 353–373. doi:10.1007/s10551-012-1414-3.
- Mason, J. 2002. *Qualitative Researching*. 2nd ed. London: Sage.
- McKeever, E., S. Jack, and A. R. Anderson. 2015. "Embedded Entrepreneurship in the Creative re-construction of Place." *Journal of Business Venturing* 30 (1): 50–65. doi:10.1016/j.jbusvent.2014.07.002.
- Muñoz, P., and B. Cohen. 2017. "Towards a Social-Ecological Understanding of Sustainable Venturing." *Journal of Business Venturing Insights* 7: 1–8.
- O'Neill, K., and D. Gibbs. 2016. "Rethinking Green entrepreneurship—Fluid Narratives of the Green Economy." *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 48 (9): 1727–1749. doi:10.1177/0308518X16650453.
- Parkinson, C., and C. Howorth. 2008. "The Language of Social Entrepreneurs." *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development* 20 (3): 285–309. doi:10.1080/08985620701800507.
- Parkinson, C., C. Howorth, and A. Southern. 2017. "The Crafting of an (Un) Enterprising Community: Context and the Social Practice of Talk." *International Small Business Journal* 35 (4): 385–404. doi:10.1177/0266242615621123.
- Patton, M. 2015. *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Pearce, J. 2003. *Social Enterprise in Anytown*. London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

- Pearce, J. A. II, and J. P. Doh. 2005. "The High Impact of Collaborative Social Initiatives." *MIT Sloan Management Review* 46 (3): 30.
- Poldner, K., P. Shrivastava, and O. Branzei. 2017. "Embodied multi-discursivity: An Aesthetic Process Approach to Sustainable Entrepreneurship." *Business and Society* 56 (2): 214–252. doi:10.1177/0007650315576149.
- Pomerantz, M. 2003. "The Business of Social Entrepreneurship in a "Down Economy"." *Business* 25 (3): 25–30.
- Riessman, C. K. 2008. *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Robinson, J. 2006. "Navigating Social and Institutional Barriers to Markets: How Social Entrepreneurs Identify and Evaluate Opportunities." In *Social Entrepreneurship*, edited by J. Mair, J. Robinson, and K. Hockerts, 95–120. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Santos, F. M. 2012. "A Positive Theory of Social Entrepreneurship." *Journal of Business Ethics* 111 (3): 335–351. doi:10.1007/s10551-012-1413-4.
- Sarasvathy, S. D., and N. Dew. 2005. "New Market Creation through Transformation." *Journal of Evolutionary Economics* 15 (5): 533–565. doi:10.1007/s00191-005-0264-x.
- Seanor, P., M. Bull, S. Baines, and R. Ridley-Duff. 2013. "Narratives of Transition from Social to Enterprise: You Can't Get There from Here!" *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior and Research* 19 (3): 324–343. doi:10.1108/13552551311330200.
- Shaw, E., and A. de Bruin. 2013. "Reconsidering Capitalism: The Promise of Social Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship?" *International Small Business Journal* 31 (7): 737–746. doi:10.1177/0266242613497494.
- Steyaert, C., and D. Hjorth. 2006. *Entrepreneurship as Social Change: A Third New Movements in Entrepreneurship Book*. London: Edward Elgar.
- Ullah, R. 2018. "Socio-Cultural and Economic Factors Affecting Women Political Participation in Dir District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa." *The Women-Annual Research Journal of Gender Studies* 10 (10): <https://sujo-old.usindh.edu.pk/index.php/THE-WOMEN/article/view/4460>
- Welter, F., T. Baker, and K. Wirsching. 2019. "Three Waves and Counting: The Rising Tide of Contextualization in Entrepreneurship Research." *Small Business Economics* 52 (2): 319–330. doi:10.1007/s11187-018-0094-5.
- Yunis, M., H. Hashim, and A. R. Anderson. 2018. "Enablers and Constraints of Female Entrepreneurship in Khyber Pukhtunkhawa, Pakistan: Institutional and Feminist Perspectives." *Sustainability* 11 (1): 27. doi:10.3390/su11010027.

ACTA UNIVERSITATIS AGRICULTURAE SUECIAE

DOCTORAL THESIS NO. 2025:90

This thesis explores how entrepreneurial agency unfolds within the constrained contexts of multidimensional poverty. While entrepreneurship is often portrayed as a pathway out of deprivation, this study examines how it is practised, narrated, and made meaningful when resources, legitimacy, and recognition are uncertain. Drawing on longitudinal qualitative fieldwork in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, the thesis comprises four interrelated papers that together develop a contextual and relational understanding of entrepreneuring under structural constraint. The work shows how value is created within limited means, how legitimacy is negotiated through stories, how men and women navigate poverty and patriarchy, and how subtle privileges shape who is able to act and be recognised as entrepreneurial. In doing so, it contributes to debates on poverty, agency, context, and gender in entrepreneurship.

Hina Hashim holds an MSc in Business and Management from the Institute of Management Sciences, Peshawar, Pakistan.

Acta Universitatis Agriculturae Sueciae presents doctoral theses from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU).

SLU generates knowledge for the sustainable use of biological natural resources. Research, education, extension, as well as environmental monitoring and assessment are used to achieve this goal.

ISSN 1652-6880

ISBN (print version) 978-91-8124-074-0

ISBN (electronic version) 978-91-8124-120-4