

## **Abstract**

# **NEGOTIATING TRADITION, POWER AND FRAGILITY IN AFGHANISTAN**

## **Institutional Innovation and Change in Value Chain Development**

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Deconstructing the influence of existing institutions in institutional creation remains a key challenge. This thesis explores nuanced institutional phenomena through the lens of social institutions in enterprise, towards unwrapping the interaction of actors and structure in local economic development. Drawing on in-depth qualitative research in the uncertain context of Afghanistan, the case studies specifically examine the initial transformation of the boundary social institution of *pardah*, and the subsequent development of new market institutions in three women's enterprises. The thesis highlights the strategies of the entrepreneur, local power holders and external actors (agency), and the influence of local conditions (structure) in the process of institutional transformation and development. It is indicated that *Trailblazer* entrepreneurs can generate both open and democratic institutions, and promote inclusive opportunities for (new) power and wealth, even in fragile contexts, particularly if supported by enlightened actors. Yet, in less stable conditions without supportive actors, *Gatekeeper* entrepreneurs can equally foster distorted economies through the reproduction of more exclusive institutions. Taking an interdisciplinary approach, this thesis has highlighted the importance of multi-actor, structural and evolutionary thinking, going beyond either pure individualism or structuralism, towards appreciating institutional processes and their outcomes.