Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Why study Cambodian returnees?
In my experience at the Cambodian Ministry of Environment in Phnom Penh, as a foreigner trying to share my skills and knowledge in order to build my staff’s capacity, questions on returnees’ contributions to their home country are relevant to the transformation of Cambodia. These issues have, however, not received the attention they deserve. While I have seen educated members of the first generation of refugees arrive back in Cambodia and with them, seen the return of enormous potential for change through their knowledge, finances and social networks, I have also seen them depart again, having fewer dreams. Like many of the volunteers from overseas I worked with, they also often returned to their host countries as disillusioned people. In my mind, feeling out of place and ineffective at managing for change at the Ministry, these returnees from overseas should have been the ones to hold Cambodia’s future in their hands and it seemed rational to assume that they could be the brokers between cultures that were able to bargain for results and help build the country. Instead, I saw many of the returnees muddling through. Just like me, a non-native to the country, they were navigating the river by its bends, hardly ever reaching the ambitious goals they had set themselves or live up to the expectations of their overseas communities. I asked myself what could happen if they would have been accepted, facilitated and stimulated in reaching their aims in contributing to transformative change in Cambodia? Unfortunately, I still do.

1.2 Research questions and theoretical foundations
Central to this research is the question:

In what ways do first generation Cambodian French and Cambodian American returnees create and employ their social capital in institutional entrepreneurial activities upon return?

The roles of institutional entrepreneurs are critical to the inquiry. To understand the way their activities are affected by multiple historical and cultural contexts as well as institutional and opportunity structures, I understand their lives as inherently “mixed” in their embeddedness, meaning that they find different amounts of social legitimacy in the multiple (trans)national social networks they operate in (Kloosterman et al. 1999: 257, Kloosterman 2006: 4, Yeung 2002: 30). The ‘paradox of embeddedness’ is an enigma at the heart of institutional entrepreneurial activity. This paradox describes the mechanism by which the institutions that are the focus of the institutional entrepreneurs’ visions on transformative change are also of structural influence on their actions (Portes 2008: 11). This paradox is explored in this dissertation as a ‘strategic lens’ to understand the roles of individual agency, institutional and opportunity structures as well as other barriers and resources for returnees’ institutional entrepreneurial activities.

To explore how the institutional entrepreneurs may be helped or constrained by their transnational networks in both the host- and homelands, a transnational perspective is introduced. In this discussion the proposition of the “transmigrant” is compared to notions on the exile and return of refugees (Glick Schiller et al. 1992: 259).
Institutional entrepreneurs, their roles, motivations and activities are discussed with special attention to the network theory of structural holes (Burt 1992). This theory helps in understanding the ways in which these mixed embedded actors positioned in multiple social networks may use their exceptional position and the diversity of their connections to their advantage by filling the gaps within and between social networks (Burt 1992: 8,45). These structural holes are explored as part of the opportunity structures that may facilitate or restrain their institutional entrepreneurial achievements.

As resources for their institutional entrepreneurial activities, transnationalism is perceived as operating through transnational social networks in “social fields”; not tied to localities but flowing freely between people and places (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004: 1007-1012). The focus is on the creation and employment of the “social capital” available in (trans)national social networks (Portes 1986: 6). It is proposed that social capital may be a tool for the Cambodian refugees to bind, or be bound by, their social networks in host and home countries and thus affect their institutional entrepreneurial activities through the multiple opportunities at achieving social legitimacy. The facilitating and restrictive propensities of these networks as resources for social capital is explored by introducing:

- an ‘outsider’ perspective in the concept of negative or positive “ethnic identity capital” assigned to members of the immigrant community (Kibria 2002: 98), and;
- an ‘insider’ perspective in the concept of abundant or lacking “bounded solidarity” felt by community members towards their fellows (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993:1329-1333).

Bringing together perspectives and concepts arising from entrepreneurial, transnational, development and migrant studies in a theoretical framework, the exploration of the research question is focused explicitly on selected groups of Cambodian French and Cambodian American returnees.

The turbulence of a civil war (1970-1975), the Khmer Rouge takeover (1975-1979) and the Vietnamese intervention (1979-1989) forced many Cambodians into exile. Among the nations that offered refuge America and France stand out for the number of Cambodia refugees that were accepted for resettlement (Chan 2004, Ong 2003). Decades after these conflicts, the first generations of the overseas Cambodians from these host countries are resettling in Cambodia. This first generation has combined the personal experiences of pre-conflict Cambodia and a prolonged stay in countries of exile with the process of ‘getting reacquainted’ with a post-conflict Cambodia emerging from its position as a weak state under authoritarian leadership to continued economic growth and relative political stability (De Zeeuw 2009: 128).

In the history of the Cambodian refugees’ resettlement, for distinctive social groups, America or France made a logic ‘safehaven’. Since 1975, both host-countries have been the recipient of three chronological waves of Cambodian refugees. Contributing to current discussions on the influence of migrants communities in sending and receiving countries, the focus of this research is on the return of first generation Cambodians who entered either France or the United States before 1979 and have returned to Cambodia after the Paris Peace Accords of 1991. These groups may be distinguished in the Cambodian refugee community, in general, by their relative independence in resettlement, their language proficiency, the cultural awareness displayed of their new surroundings and their social belonging to the Cambodian middle or upper classes (Chan 2004, Mignot 1984).ii

To go into more detail, two thematic subquestions guide the research among these groups in Lyon, France, in Long Beach (CA) in the USA and in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The first question is aimed at exploring the
institutional and opportunity structures affecting the Cambodian communities in host countries and impacting on expectations and ambitions to bring about transformative change:

(1) In what ways have refugee resettlement policies and Cambodian communities in Lyon, France and Long Beach (CA), USA facilitated or constrained Cambodian resettlement and social adaptation in the host countries and affected the institutional entrepreneurial activities of the Cambodian returnees upon return?

The second question, following the returnees to their home country, is focused on a comparison of these distinct groups’ practices and perceptions of their contributions to transformative change using transnational networks as resources for institutional entrepreneurial activities.

(2) In what ways do first generation Cambodian French and Cambodian American returnees of the first waves employ their transnational social networks in their contributions to the transformation of Cambodia through institutional entrepreneurial activities upon return?

These questions are relevant as current literature on the impact of returnees’ activities on changing the conditions in their homeland is rarely conclusive in its empirical findings. It brings forward a marked ambivalence on the conditions and constraints regulating the efficiency of their contributions (Portes et al. 2002, Yang 2004).

Considering the mixed findings on both the role of entrepreneurial activity in bringing peace and prosperity to a number of transitional states (Schüttler 2006) and the limited validity assigned to findings on the effectiveness of returnees’ actions to bring about institutional reform (Castles 2007, Olesen 2002), additional empirical research is needed to ground the field. While financial and social remittances and the implications of global long-distance relationships as tools for change are prominent on the transnational research agenda (see e.g. Levitt and LambaNieves 2001), the contributions of multi-embedded, thus transnational, returnees show a great potential for development that is as relevant as it is underresearched. As I propose, these actors may be more effective in bringing about change as they communicate locally while thinking globally.

The local and global “roots and routes” (Gustafson 2001) employed by these returnees as well as their motivations, resources, networks and the institutional structures affecting their choices are not always recognized as a multisited and mutually constitutive dynamic (Cassarino 2004). Most studies in the field have focused either on one location and community or have approached the subject exclusively from either an actor-based or structural perspective (Hage 2005, Koh 2012). The starting point for this exploration is to fill this gap by studying the classic triangular interdependence between the returnees, their overseas immigrant communities and homeland society in multiple sites (Cohen 1997). With Basch et al. this interdependence may be reformulated as a dynamic between three notions of return. This dynamic consists of interactions between, first, the receiving country’s idea about the returnees’ ongoing incorporation into the country of resettlement, second, the sending country’s idea about the returnees’ belonging to their ancestral nation-state and, third, the returnees’ own views on a shared belonging and loyalty to both worlds (Basch et al. 1994). Building on, among others, Tsuda (2003, 2009), Kloosterman et al. (1999), Yeung (2002) and Flores (2009), this research explores Cambodian remigration as an enduring multisited and networked action ruled by a dynamic that feeds the interaction between actors’ personal histories, their entrepreneurial skills and resources, their chances in creating social capital and employing it in local and transnational opportunity structures as well as the consequences of their
embeddedness in the structural institutions that rule the (trans)national arena as visible in the ideas on return held by host- and homelands.

When it comes to returnees to Cambodia, a study of the limited amount of Anglophone and French literature on first generation Cambodian returnees confirms the observation that the French and American groups of Cambodian returnees have divergent attitudes towards their home country. While there is no merit in cultural stereotyping, previous studies do suggest that this group of returnees born in Cambodia, resettled abroad and returning to Cambodia at a mature age, have distinct reactions to the Cambodian political and social system (Heder 1995, De Zeeuw 2009). It is observed that Cambodian American returnees are predisposed to ‘exit’ and exclude themselves from the mainstream society, thus propagating a break with traditional cultural systems like the patronage relationships and habitual forms of corruption. This is visible in their creation of advocacy organizations and the mobilization of civil society, thereby positioning themselves outside of accepted societal behavior and becoming critics of society (Chan 2004, Poethig 1997). In contrast, Cambodian French returnees seem predisposed to try and work on the system from within. Looking for social legitimacy and working on their embeddedness, they are observed to rather accept a position in the governmental sector and function within the system to ‘voice’ their ideas, seemingly thereby tacitly accepting the current state of affairs (see, for instance, Gottesman 2003: 286 and Sam 2008: 168-9). While authors have acknowledged that remigration may often lead to social exclusion and marginalization for groups of returnees (Cassarino 2004, Tsuda 2003), the sources and social consequences of this return have mostly received attention in research on diasporas as related to large sending countries like, among others, China and India (Dahles 2011).

In summary, therefore, this research fills in a gap in research on remigration and transnational entrepreneurship by looking at it from a multidisciplinary, multisited and multi-embedded perspective through institutional entrepreneurial activities by Cambodian returnees using their transnational networks as resources. To go into the theoretical framework in more detail, in the following, the key concepts are discussed.

1.3 Key concepts

1.3.1 Institutional entrepreneurial activities

The theoretical debate on determinants of entrepreneurial behavior has long revolved around personality traits and a presumed individual need for power, wealth and prestige (Baumol 1990, Knight 1942, Schumpeter 1926). The promise of entrepreneurship as a field of research was recognized by a wide range of disciplines focusing on, for instance, the entrepreneur as a ‘hero’ working at the ‘visionary’ act of new venture creation (Gartner 1985, Shane and Venkataraman 2000). Scott Shane convincingly bridged the range of economic, political, psychological and institutional perspectives on entrepreneurial activity in proposing a general theory of entrepreneurship based on the nexus of individual assets and contextual opportunity (2003). While, on the one hand, embracing the entrepreneurial talent for innovation and creativity and, on the other hand, bringing forward their ability to create value by recognizing and exploiting business opportunities, he proposes:

Entrepreneurship is an activity that involves the discovery, evaluation and exploitation of opportunities to introduce new goods and services, ways of organizing, markets, processes, and raw materials through organizing efforts that previously had not existed (Shane 2003:4).
Thus, focusing on entrepreneurship as a ‘down to earth’ activity based on recognizing and seizing opportunities and organizing their realization, this definition also lays the foundation for the use of ‘institutional entrepreneurial activity’ as a key concept in this research on Cambodian French and Cambodian American returnees. Closely related to Shane’s general theory, I consider the skills of the institutional entrepreneur to discover, create and seize opportunities as well as to recombine existing conditions to be institutional entrepreneurial activity’s distinctive assets that may also be employed in other settings and used towards institutional aims (Crouch 2005, Shane 2003).

The definition of institutional entrepreneurial activity central to this project wants to encompass both the individual’s altruism as well as opportunism in institutional entrepreneurial activities. Working from an actor-based perspective, in this research institutional entrepreneurs are “Actors with sufficient resources who see in the creation of new institutions an opportunity to realize their interest” (DiMaggio 1988: 14). The definition of the institutional entrepreneur central to this research is focused especially on the roles of institutional entrepreneurs in ‘building’, ‘brokering’ and ‘bargaining’ for the reform of Cambodian institutions. Institutions are considered the “Symbolic blueprint for organizations” encompassing both the formal and informal rules that govern relationships (Portes 2008: 10). The exploration is limited to the perceptions and practices on the ways Cambodian French and Cambodian American returnees transform Cambodian institutions by initiating and starting up institutional entrepreneurial activities in the governmental and non-governmental sectors.

As mentioned in the above, why returnees, especially, are prone to initiate institutional entrepreneurial activities is explored and analyzed with the network theory on “structural holes” (Burt 1992). This proposes that gaps in social fields along which there are no current contacts, structural holes, may be connected by well-positioned brokers who gain control over flows of information (Kilduff and Tsai 2003: 67). I propose that these roles as brokers and drivers of bargains between networks are especially suited to the multi-embedded returnees. Since institutional entrepreneurship is perceived as a relational phenomenon a focus on the different roles of the institutional entrepreneur and their embeddedness in historical, cultural and institutional contexts may shed light on the contradictory process by which institutional change is initiated.

Embeddedness is understood, not as an act or situation but as the ongoing production of social legitimacy in social networks that, building on Granovetter, could result in “trust” or “malfeasance”, or, in this case rather, effective or ineffective entrepreneurial activities (Granovetter 1985: 490). Kloosterman emphasizes the occurrence of “opportunity structures” in the dynamics of embeddedness. These opportunities are seized by a skilled actor with “The levels of financial, human, social and perhaps ethnic capital needed to enter a specific market” (Kloosterman 2006: 4). They are elements that enter into relationships that produce a “mixed embeddedness” referring to the opportunities warranted by a time-and-place specific opportunity structure to take social action. Focusing on the riddle of embeddedness and the returnees’ achievements in institutional entrepreneurial activities the ‘paradox of embeddedness’ is understood as: “The human exchanges that institutions seek to control and guide in turn affect the same institutions” (Portes 2008:11). In order to overcome the paradox of embeddedness weighing on institutional entrepreneurial activities, thus, we will have to include the diversity of structures impacting on them (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993, Uzzi 1997).

Institutional entrepreneurs are perceived as directly and indirectly influenced and regulated by institutions in host and home countries, in a continuous dynamic. With Yeung it is agreed that returnees are: “Both facilitated and constrained by ongoing processes of institutional relations in both home and host countries”
These transnational institutional relations are perceived of by Yeung as consisting of social and business networks as well as politico-economic structures and dominant organizational and cultural practices in the home country and hostland that may shape the outcomes of their activities (Yeung 2002).

Success or failure in institutional entrepreneurship is difficult to assess. As mentioned in the above, this research does not highlight the full spectrum of institutional entrepreneurship but concentrates on motivations, perceptions and initiatives to work on transformative change. It is limited to those acts that are considered ‘exemplary institutional entrepreneurial activities’ by community members in overseas communities as well as peers and stakeholders in Cambodia, defined as activities that challenge and disrupt extant institutional arrangements as well as alternative practices (Van Wijk 2009). This is explained by a focus on the challenges and constraints that institutional entrepreneurial activities perceived as a ‘success’ have had to deal with. In short: tasks like the approval of proposed institutional changes, the spreading of innovations throughout the field and the institutional maintenance, thus the effective implementation of institutional change, are not explicitly included in the analysis and are suggested subjects for future research.

### 1.3.2 Transnational social networks

With the proposition of the “transmigrant” in the influential work of Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc (1992, 1995) a field of migration studies was coined that is focused on migrants “To be transmigrants when they develop and maintain multiple relations - familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political - that span borders” (Glick Schiller et al. 1992: 259). The key-element in this transnational behavior is the interconnectivity between people at the grassroots level as a social experience evolving in “social fields”. Social fields are described as sets of “Multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged, organized, and transformed” that are anchored, nevertheless, in specific localities (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004: 1009). As an idea, thus, transnationalism takes place “from below” through a multitude of involvements between migrants’ host- and homecountries in networked relationships, and is not determined by national governments or national organizations, nor bounded by national borders (Guarnizo and Smith 1998, Vertovec 1999).

Transnational migration thus turns the static focus on a singular point of departure and arrival and puts in its place the idea of a back-and-forth dynamic, a flow of people, information and goods that connects citizens across the world. These flows may create transnational communities, institutions and social organizations through the social capital produced and transferred in processes of networked interaction and introduced in the next section. Transnational behavior takes place both in and through networks (Landolt 2001, Levitt 2001). These networks are produced by the attachments formed in transnational social fields and may be interpreted as a means of providing security across borders by keeping their options open. As Glick Schiller et al. observe, these migrants “Continuously translate the economic and social position gained in one political setting into political, social and economic capital in another” (Glick Schiller et al. 1992: 12).

It has been argued by Al-Ali and Koser that the idea of transnationalism and transnational social fields bringing people together, has removed the relevance of motivations for migratory movements as such, and redirected attention to the transnational activities that take place after (involuntary) migration (Al-Ali and Koser 2002: 4). As Basch et al. (1994) and Chan (2003) suggest, however, there may be also be acts of “forced transnationalism” as outlets of diasporic nationalism (Um 2006b: 276). In order to escape the exclusion and repression prevalent in their direct environment, transnational social fields provide opportunities to share ideas.
on return, send contributions to the homeland and allow for the expression of cultural pride. This necessity to
flee into transnationalism would allow migrants to find support in imagined or real transnational communities as

Moreover, until recently, the transnational resources employed upon return have not been considered a
particularly interesting subject of study. The assumption being that, once returned to their place of origin, people
are automatically “rerooted” and absorbed into their former homeland’s society (Eastmond 2002: 3). For lack of
a consistent body of research on refugees’ return experiences, this research emphasizes the need for an
understanding of the consequences of the return of former refugees as they have different experiences in exile
(see e.g Chimni 2009) that will also affect their transnational activities and their return (see e.g Kunz 1981).

Descriptions of movements between home- and hostland, inherently bring forward terminological and
analytical dilemmas. As Gmelch (1980) has pointed out, for instance, most returnees do not have solid
intentions to either make their migrations temporary or permanent, but visit their countries of origin for shorter
or longer periods on a trial basis (Gmelch 1980: 138). In the following, the home- and hostlands are often
referred to, by lack of more adequate terms, as places of ideological belonging that force their expectations upon
the returnees. This suggests that the concepts of ‘homeland’ and ‘hostland’ hold many ambiguities for the
transmigrant. In the transnational perspective, and in this research, these complexities are considered to be ideas
that are anchored in localities (Lyon, Long Beach (CA) and Phnom Penh) rather than nations (France, the USA
and Cambodia). In order to ground transnational behaviors and bring forward the lives and experiences of the
selected Cambodian returnees informing the research, I collected their experiences in these localities.

1.3.3 Social capital

In order to describe the way transnational connections may be used as a resource for the returnees’ institutional
entrepreneurial activities, the concept of social capital is used. To inquire into the, embedded, social relations of
the Cambodian French and Cambodian American returnees, networks are operationalized by the social capital
that is inherently part of networks and derived from it. A network is characterized by the way it structurally
shapes relationships. These relationships may connect people, but can also apply to, among other things,
organizations and all kinds of communication hardware. Networks may function within a specific discipline,
geographical area or time zone, or be open to all. They are, however, always embedded in a certain context
which may affect their character and function. Within a network, tangible and intangible resources such as
finances and technical capacity, knowledge and research may be shared. A person’s network may be considered
the reservoir of their social relations (Boissevain 1974).

Authors have treated these social relations and the social capital they create mostly as a positive force
(See e.g. Coleman 1988, Uzzi 1997, Woolcock 1998 or Putnam 1993). However, I propose that they can be
structures of both constraint and opportunity that are negotiated and reinforced in the dynamic relationships of
interacting individuals. To inquire into the, embedded, social relations of the Cambodian French and Cambodian
American returnees, both the constructive and destructive attributes and effects of social capital are explored.
Social capital is thus used as a “thinking tool” that does not inherently hold sought after resources for
institutional entrepreneurial activities (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 23).

The interdisciplinary resonance of social capital in the social sciences has led to a range of uses and
interpretations that are not easily reconciled. Bourdieu is among its most prominent authors, defining social
capital, among other capitals in his groundbreaking work such as symbolic and cultural capital, as “The sum of
resources that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 1992). In this interpretation social capital is perceived of as a sum of relationships within a social network. It is an emotional and personal attribution that may bind individuals, groups and communities. Despite Bourdieu’s contention that, in the end, all capitals will be transformed into economic capital, his definition has influenced the description of social reality from an individual or group perspective.

In contrast, the political scientist Robert Putnam proposes that social capital, rather, is an asset, a resource that may “belong” to owners and organizations and may function to “Improve the efficiency of society” (Putnam 1993: 167, 2000). For the exploration of the field in this research, I will understand it as: “The ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures” (Portes1986: 6).xii

Research has documented the limitations of immigrant ties as resources for social capital in poorer communities (Menjivar 2000). Pertinent to the lives of refugees in exile, Kibria has suggested that ethnicity and identity issues among migrants are tied to the outsiders’ perceptions of their “ethnic identity capital”. xiii He argues that the opportunities that accrue to migrants also result from exterior perceptions of them as members of an immigrant community, thus, the stereotypes that exist about them. In Kibria’s understanding of ethnic identity capital the attributions that are made by outsiders on the basis of these prescribed identities may both enable and constrain the access to resources (Kibria 2002: 98). xiv A problem with his argument, however, is that he seems to assume that ethnic identities may be tightly defined and summarized in exhaustive descriptions.

For instance, in the United States and France we could presume their ‘Asian looks’ may lead to attributions of Cambodians as being ‘Chinese’ and enable them to tap into the Chinese ethnic identity capital assuming them to being ‘good businessmen’. Nevertheless, as Chapter Three illustrates, the social capital accrued to them as being ‘Chinese’ is subject also to current political relations, the state of the economy and they may suffer from exclusion by other groups based on this ‘Chineseness’. I propose that the blurry boundaries of ethnicity make it hard to benefit from this ethnic identity capital in a straightforward and ‘predictable’ fashion. While the notion of ethnicity as a source of social capital is certainly attractive, this research will explore to what extent it actually holds merit in the exploration of social adaptation in Cambodian communities.

Furthermore, in this dissertation the idea of “bounded solidarity” will be explored (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993: 1329-1333). This is an insider’s belief in the collective fate of an immigrant group. Bounded solidarity is understood as a mechanism by which (trans)national network ties are turned into sources of social capital for in-group members. This idea proposes that the interior perceptions on membership of an immigrant network are an important factor in the willingness of other members to bestow benefits or restrictions upon their fellow group members. Portes interprets this as a benefit and notes that bounded solidarity is observed among fellow immigrants, that its motivations are “altruistic” and results in “Transferring resources to others because of identification with in-group needs and goals” (Portes 1995:15). However, restrictive effects of social networks in small communities have also been reported. For instance, pertaining to migrant communities, Portes (1998) proposes that social networks are too often perceived as the source of public “good” while they can also be the source of public “bad” (Portes 1998: 19).

Again, the notion of bounded solidarity seems to assume a critical level of cohesion in as well as the well-defined boundaries to immigrant communities. It seems rational that, in order to share their social capital, its members would need to perceive of their fellows as ‘one of us’ and award them with the needed resources.
This research enquires into the ways in which this understanding of bounded solidarity as a source of social capital can help in exploring the (trans)national networks of Cambodian communities as resources for returnees’ institutional entrepreneurial activities.

In order to understand the historical, cultural and institutional context within which these institutional entrepreneurial activities by Cambodian returnees are embedded, the circumstances that have helped shape their experiences and practices are now introduced.

1.4 Historical background

1.4.1 Democratization under Sihanouk (1953-1970)

This story starts in 1953, a seminal moment in Cambodian history. After nine decades of French colonization (1863-1953) the French colonizers gave in to Cambodian public demand and left the country, but only after a number of distinct conditions were fulfilled. The most notable of the demands were for the king to no longer be an absolute ruler, and for the country to have a government that was democratically elected. Thus, building on its French colonial legacy, Cambodia established a rule by ‘the free will of the people’ (De Zeeuw 2009). Next, several political parties were established. The King, Norodom Sihanouk, abdicated in favor of his father so he, as a Prince, became the leader of his own political party, the Sangkum Reastr Niyum (SRN)* (translation: Popular Social Community). Prince Norodom Sihanouk has gone down into history as a very charismatic man with a strong set of ideals that kept his country neutral and together. He soon pushed other political parties out and, in 1957, the SRN was the only political party ruling ‘democratic’ Cambodia. The Prince himself invited people to join, turning the SRN government into an exclusive group of friends that joined together to rule the country (Daravuth and Muan 2001).

In many ways, from 1953 to 1970, the traditional Cambodian ideological mix of Buddhist socialism and Royalist liberalism continued to determine the rule of the country. Governmental rhetoric was now filled with hopes for building an independent future, meaning that attempts were made under the regime of Prince Norodom Sihanouk to reorient Cambodia’s economy from agriculture towards industry (Peang-Meth 1980). A time of transformation and growth, the 1950s and 1960s of the last century are often referred to as the Cambodian ‘golden years’ characterized by relative peace and prosperity within the state (Daravuth and Muan 2001). For many of the participants in this research, this is the Cambodian cultural and socio-economic climate they grew up in and that they still idealize.

1.4.2 Ethnicity in the Cambodian nation

The socio-economic and political climates of these times were already permeated by questions of ethnicity that had been appropriated by a plethora of groups as well as individuals (Edwards 2007: 241). In the postcolonial era, Cambodia was by no means equal to its proposed image of an ethnically homogeneous, tranquil Buddhist nation that was inhabited solely by the ‘original Khmer’ (Khmâi daem)*. For one thing, a significant part of its inhabitants have Chinese roots (see for current research on this issue: Verver 2012, Dahles and Ter Horst 2012). The idea of Cambodia as a country of rare ethnic homogeneity at this time is questionable considering the number of minority groups mentioned by French ethnographers (see e.g. Delvert 1961, Forest 1980). All
through its modern history, however, this portrayal of the ethnic Khmer as a superior race has inspired the cultivation of the picture of Cambodia as the cultural heir to the mythical Angkor empire (Edwards 2007).xviii

The Cambodian population’s ethnic diversity in both rural and metropolitan areas had already been observed by the French colonizer and grew under postcolonial rule. As a Cambodian writer described on the study of a rural city in 1974:

The interviewees recall that around 1950 there were already about 30 Chinese or Sino-Kampuchean shops. In 1960, there were more than 100...Overall the Chinese and Sino-Kampucheans make up 70 per cent to 80 per cent of the total population of Slap Leng (Described in Kiernan 1982 : 9).

Moreover, to confirm the historica ethnic diversity of Cambodia’s population, the first city-maps of Phnom Penh show that, even under the French protectorate, Phnom Penh was divided in Vietnamese, Chinese and European sections that each held at least an equal number of people as the number of Cambodian citizens in town (Starkman 1997).

During the ‘golden years’, the Sino Khmer, the Vietnamese as well as the hill tribe people and the muslim Cham population all suffered in different ways under Prince Norodom Sihanouk as well as the nationalist movements revolting against him, up to the point of being persecuted and losing parts of their civil rights or even their lives (Kiernan 1982). During the Khmer Rouge takeover (1975-1979) as well as the Vietnamese intervention (1979-1989), ideas on ethnicity had an even stronger impact on political and societal behaviors. During both periods the superiority of the ‘real Khmer’ was emphasized in contrast to those perceived of as ‘others’ by characteristics like education, trade or place of residence.

The controversial issue of ethnicity, a concept to which attributions are highly subjective, multi-interpretable and of which the boundaries are blurred, provides a relevant background to the reception of the overseas Cambodians upon their return. This is illustrated already by the local Cambodians sometimes describing them as the Anikatchun*, a pejorative term meaning: the ‘foreign people’. I propose that there is a Cambodian ‘myth’ of ethnic uniformity that has as many followers as protagonists in host and home countries. Overseas, this notion cannot but affect people’s expectations of Cambodian communities as homogeneous sources of ethnic social capital and bounded solidarity.

1.4.3 Competing Hegemons

In postcolonial fashion, Prince Norodom Sihanouk took his distance from the cultural legacy of the French. After joining the 1955 Bandung Conference, he became one of the founding members of the Non-Aligned Movement, advocating a middle course for states in the developing world between the Western and Eastern blocs in the Cold War. In speeches and articles he explained that the Western-based economic and social models for Cambodia should be exchanged for modern Asian examples. Neutrality and peaceful co-existence are considered Sihanouk’s guiding principles in defending his Kingdom’s interests (Peang-Meth 1980). Nevertheless, his strategic positioning of the country on the West and East balance of power may be described as ‘mercurial’, as he continued to change sides and alliances according to his own interests, suspicions and sympathies (Sihanouk 1979).

While the 1950s and 1960s were ‘golden years’ for a happy few, others remember them as times of insecurity, oppression and Western interference (Chandler 1999). With independence in 1953, the foreign domination of Cambodia was meant to finally have ended, yet, international influences on the economy grew at
the dawning of the Cold War era. Simplifying history, we could say that the unrest in these years, played out in the American support to Cambodia and enhanced by the US illegal bombings on Cambodia related to the neighboring Vietnam War, have contributed to the civil war that brought forth the Khmer Republic (1970-1975) and ended in the Khmer Rouge takeover of 1975 (Shawcross 1979).

1.4.4 The Khmer Republic (1970-1975)

While an extensive discussion of the regime that was formed around former general Lon Nol surpasses the limited space available in this introduction, this period in Cambodian history has deeply affected the thoughts of the first waves of Cambodian refugees resettling in France and the United States. Pivotal in the ‘coup’ that is often supposed to have started the Lon Nol government of the Khmer republic (République Khmère) in 1970, were the growing number of French educated Cambodian middle class citizens; the university students that could not find a job, the teachers that could hardly make a career in education, the disgruntled civil servants and other urbanites that felt oppressed and ‘suffocated’ by Sihanouk’s regime (Chantrabot 1993, Corfield 1994). They wanted to make a new beginning to work at a democracy that would bring genuine freedom, brotherhood and equality. Despite their democratic ambitions, however, the Khmer Republic quickly turned repressive under political pressures (De Zeeuw 2009).

Until about 1962, the Cambodian intelligentsia consisted of only a few people who had studied either in France or, at least, in French. Afterwards, with population growth and new information technologies that opened up the world, Cambodian youths had access to the resources to recognize and reflect on the realities of inequality in Cambodian society. Ironically, the seeds of trouble were planted under the Sihanouk regime through the great improvement of education. The country was unable to absorb all the graduates in the programs of national development which bred frustration (Peang-Meth 1980). These children of the golden age were able to take inspiration from, for instance, the 1968 student movements in France and the Vietnam war protests in the United States (Ayres 2002). Revolution was in the air. In contrast, other groups in these well-educated classes rather took the side of postcolonial Indonesia under Soekarno and bought into the promise of communism under Mao in China. Remarkably, just like the initiators of the democratic Khmer Republic, the leaders of communist, rivals in their nationalist and ethnic ideologies on Cambodian society, had also been part of select groups of students that had had the opportunity to be educated at the same institutions in France (Chandler 1999, Samphan 1959).

1.4.5 American Aid

The division between the pro-American Lon Nol regime and the pro-communist Sihanouk regime is relevant to this research as geopolitical rivalry was at initially played out in Cambodia and continued to be part of the overseas Cambodian communities. In 1970 Sihanouk called for the fight against American imperialist aggression and with his new party he would lay the foundations for the growth of the Khmer Rouge army (Peang-Meth 1980). The American actions against Communism in Southeast Asia also intensified the fighting between Lon Nol and Sihanouk supporters.

In order to fight the communist Vietnamese invaders, during the pro-American Khmer Republic (1970-1975), the United States invested considerable resources in the Cambodian military and they trained members of the Khmer National Armed Forces (FANK) in the USA and Cambodia. It was observed by diplomats that the involvement Nixon and Kissinger sought in Cambodia came not from interest, per se, but was grounded in Cambodia’s geographic role in US troop withdrawal and its Vietnamization programs (Clymer 2007). The US
intervention was meant to prevent this strategic nation in joining the Vietnamese communist regime (Shawcross 1979). Nevertheless, after five years, the corrupt and inefficient regime that was now the Khmer Republic went bankrupt. It was also on the losing end of the war against the Khmer Rouge and Vietnamese forces. The republican dreams of the golden generation had dissolved into shambles with American support suddenly being withdrawn and no resources of its own to sustain it (Clymer 2007).

1.4.6 Khmer Rouge takeover (1975-1979)

The Khmer Rouge had started their offensive from Vietnam in the early 1970s and slowly progressed in their violent conquest of the country. April 17, 1975 will forever be engraved in the country’s history as the day the Khmer Rouge soldiers finally conquered Phnom Penh, and with it the whole of Cambodia. This was ‘year zero’ of democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979). Many books have been written about the atrocities of the Pol Pot regime that caused the death of millions (see e.g. Bizot 2003, Ponchaud 1978, Pilger 1979). Relevant to us here is that, effectively, Cambodia was locked off from the outside world during this period. For years, the West paid little attention to the reports on forced labor, hunger and violence that were destroying Cambodian society. Because they were forced exiles from a communist regime, nevertheless, fleeing Cambodians that met official requirements were accepted as refugees in France and the USA within a year after the Khmer Rouge takeover. They were later joined by just the relative few that were be able to flee the country before 1979.

1.5 Waves of refugees

The first wave of refugees from Cambodia started with the 1970 Lon Nol coup that made an end to the reign of King Sihanouk, it finished with the 1975 fall of Saigon and Phnom Penh. About 17,000 refugees went to France, a country familiar to the well-to do as the former colonizer they visited regularly and were well-acquainted with. Members of the well-educated Cambodian classes and families connected to the Royal Court and Sihanouk’s government established their exile homes here. This Cambodian elite was able to flee the internal political turmoil with little international support by mobilizing the resources and networks grounded in their long-standing relationship with France dating from colonial times. With the takeover by the Khmer Rouge regime in 1975 these exiles turned into refugees and could officially acquire refugee status to be allowed shelter in France (Gilles 2004, Poethig 1997). The USA, in this same period, made an effort to actively evacuate ‘their people’ from Cambodia. Cambodians working for American organizations and the USA government were facilitated in their move to the United States. Admitted were several thousands of Cambodian citizens connected to the US military, the pro-American and anti-communist Lon Nol regime and American aid organizations working in Cambodia as well as community leaders and politicians – all of them mostly higher educated middle and upper class Cambodians (Chan 2003: 21, Poethig 1997: 52-57). This group, comfortable with American culture and the American language, had relatively little difficulty transferring the working skills acquired at American organizations to the new environment.

Compared to the first wave, much smaller groups of refugees managed to get away from Cambodia between 1975 and 1979. This second wave was more heterogeneous in its social composition than the first wave. In 1975, during the Khmer Rouge takeover, a number of mainly (French educated) intellectuals and members of the middle class who had worked for the US government fled the country to France and the US. Throughout the Khmer Rouge regime, but in particular when the regime started to crumble at the end of 1978, a constant trickle
of refugees – many of whom former Khmer Rouge cadre – made it out of the country. In this period about 34,000 people found refuge in Thailand first, before being admitted in a neighboring or overseas country. When in luck, members of this group were sponsored by family, members of the first wave, or religious groups in the United States or France. France was considered the country of choice, with America a good second as stereotyped by the idea of democracy, opportunity and freedom of speech for all (Mignot et al 1984, Mysliwiecz 1988).

The third and largest wave of refugees started after the 1979 Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. Over time this group to reach the UNHCR ‘holding’ or Thai refugee border camps would grow to more than a 100,000 (Mysliwiec 1988). This third wave consisted of the largest number of refugees leaving the country over a relatively short period of time. The third wave, part of an Indochinese exodus, helped force host countries like the United States and France to provide for them by establishing special policies and organizations. In the USA, in particular, these refugees arrived at a time when what Aihwa Ong called “compassion fatigue” (Ong 2003: 277) had set in, meaning that the readiness to generously assist refugees with support programs had diminished. As these third wave refugees were often from rural surroundings, illiterate and with little knowledge of the new host country, or even of any foreign country, their ‘integration’ in host-societies was hard for them (Kim and Gudykunst 1987, Smith-Hefner 1999).

However, return to Cambodia was no option as the country was, again, closed to returnees and did not open until the mid-1980s. The Vietnamese controlled government of the People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) was afraid that large numbers of returnees from the camps at the Thai borders would seriously endanger the fragile peace and stability needed for reconstruction. As the next section describes, only after PRK rule was consolidated and the need for economic support became eminent, the resettlement of returnees, with UN support, was allowed. In the following, the political and institutional context of return is introduced.

1.6 Political and institutional background

1.6.1 Repatriation and voluntary return

For the longest time the government of the renamed People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) refused to discuss the issue of repatriation of the Cambodian refugees. Not until the 1987 ‘Declaration on the Policy of National Reconciliation’ that announced a re-evaluation of the socialist inspired economy to transformation into a capitalist market-based economy for Cambodia in order to save the country from its economic demise, was the matter of return open to discussion. With this change of politics, a call went out to all refugees, both overseas and in Thailand, to return to Cambodia. Aimed at the upper class overseas Cambodians, especially, this invitation was made as personal as possible. Through overseas ‘brokers’ related to the Cambodian government, well-educated and established members of the diaspora were pressed to come back, invest and meet with other groups of Cambodians to work on a government of national unity. In general, this first call for return and reconciliation was met with great suspicion by the overseas Cambodian communities in France and the USA. As many of its members had been involved in resistance movements, they did not feel secure with the Cambodian Vietnamese government (Gottesman 2003: 284).

In 1989, the time of the official and internationally supported ‘Paris Conference for a Comprehensive Settlement on Cambodia’ and in transition to the elections to come, the PRK regime became the SoC (‘State of
Cambodia’) and its leaders stepped up the appeals to Cambodian French and Cambodian American communities to help build Cambodia’s human and financial resources. The government’s ‘brokers’ now succeeded in convincing a number of prominent, and rich, members of the overseas Cambodian communities to return and assist the Cambodian government. As of that moment, more people would follow and returnees started to arrive ever more regularly. For the SoC, the capitalist spirit was now out of the box and their need for help was expressed in clear terms to a wide audience.

In October 1991 the ‘Paris Peace Accords’ were signed by all Cambodian factions. In 1992 the ‘United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia’ (UNTAC)* forces arrived to assist the provisional government in the implementation of these accords and to make sure that democratic elections would take place. Cambodia was now officially a ‘country in transition’. The international forces and the attention that accompanied the financial aid by the international community were warmly welcomed as the essential support needed to bring about, as the UN leaders stated, a ‘Cambodian renaissance’ and national unity (Becker 1998: 510-515).

With the arrival of the UNTAC and the organization of the 1993 elections, the repatriation of the majority of refugees, from wherever they had found (temporary) shelter, became a top priority. The UNTAC’s national program for reconstruction and reconciliation in Cambodia, as conceived by and with foreign experts, seemed overly ambitious in a country that had suffered so much conflict for so long (Crisp 2001, Moore 2000). For one thing, decades without any educational structure had resulted in a lack of human resources to address even the most basic issues involved in the implementation of the Paris Peace Accords. Thus, the overseas Cambodians were, again, warmly invited to return. This time, in the early 1990s, the call met with the largest response.

1.6.2 FUNCINPEC and CPP

The returning overseas Cambodians met with a positive reception from most parties, the Cambodian government, the UNTAC and the population in general. However, in the ‘quest for survival’ in post-conflict Cambodia they were left to their own devices. Jobs for the educated returnees were hard to come by and these positions often did not provide enough payment to meet their basic needs. Unless these returnees adhered to a political party, and got awarded a governmental job and salary by a political patron, a ‘sponsor’, for those without exceptional skills or talents it was hard to find a living. Economic forces and the need to survive thus forced many longer term returnees into partisanship and governmental service or, for instance, the use of their experiences and education as intermediaries for an international organization (Hughes 1996). On top of this disappointment in their expectations to reintegrate and contribute to the building a ‘new’ post-conflict Cambodia, some of the returnees also earned themselves a mixed reputation.

The mixture of positive and negative perceptions of the Cambodian returnees seems partly bound up with their support and participation in the Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Indépendant Neutre, Pacifique et Coopératif (FUNCINPEC)* (Le Gal 2010). This political party was set up in Paris in February 1981 by Prince Sihanouk through a central committee of a hundred overseas, mostly French, Cambodians. It grew exponentially with members of all levels of the overseas communities in especially France and the United States. The FUNCINPEC party can be seen as a collaborative ‘diaspora’ project. For many, the FUNCINPEC party embodied their hopes for a renewal of Cambodian politics by Cambodians for Cambodians (De Zeeuw 2009).

Despite the FUNCINPEC leading the 1993 elections with an absolute majority vote, it was forced into an uneasy coalition with the ruling Cambodian People’s Party (CPP)*, a fatally flawed cooperation that
disappointed many of their voters who felt deceived by the promises made during elections. FUNCINPEC failed to consolidate its support and the electoral results into an institutional party structure, thereby losing organizational cohesion and strength (Brown and Zasloff 1998: 289). In addition, media reports on the FUNCINPEC party were mostly loaded with distinctly negative messages, such as, for example, the continuous mediatization of internal factionalism and stories on corruption (Frieson 1996). This negative reporting surely also contributed to perceptions of the Anikatchun as ‘opportunist’ and that of their return to Cambodia as one of self-interest.

After the lack of renewal in the period 1989-1993 when transition truly had its moment, the following years only led to the consolidation of political traditions in the CPP, with patronage and favoritism becoming more and more evident (De Zeeuw 2009:144, Roberts 2002:117-118). Following the CPP’s dominance in rural areas and the effective safeguarding of its interests in political institutions, relations within the government started to deteriorate.

Leading up to the 1997 and 1998 rounds of elections, a ‘Citizenship Bill’ was proposed that would bar a broad range of government’s members to hold citizenship in other countries. Aimed at the returnees, the ‘dual nationality issue’ was instrumental in CPP’s strategy of provocation leading to a continued embarrassment of FUNCINPEC members (Brown and Zasloff 1998). As prime minister Hun Sen remarked on the behavior of those holding a dual Cambodian American nationality during a public speech: “Don’t say you are Khmer when it is easy and American when it is difficult” (Hughes 2009: 178). Echoing Hun Sen’s remark, this Bill held the charge of divided loyalty and questioned the legitimacy of leadership by individuals that held on to an exterior safe haven for both their families and themselves. More than 25 members of the government, most of them FUNCINPEC, would have been affected by this Bill, if it had passed (Brown and Zasloff 1998: 219). Things, however, never got that far.

By 1997 things literally exploded. After clashes in Cambodia, said to be caused by Hun Sen and the CPP, the FUNCINPEC leader Prince Ranariddh went into exile in Paris and many of his former party’s members sought and found refuge either in their second home country or within the CPP (Roberts 2002).

1.6.3 Competing hegemons again

When it comes to current political culture in Cambodia, on the one hand, Ayres (1999) argues that this is an environment that is still dominated by a (neo)traditional system of governance and an administration based on culturally entrenched notions of hierarchy and power found in patron-client relations. Building on the relations surrounding the Cambodian royal court in the past, and inspired on Indian and Chinese caste systems, this system of ‘patronage’ or ‘clientelism’ is characterized by the centralized powers of government that allows access to resources conditioned on subordination, compliance or subject’s dependence on the goodwill of patrons (Roniger 2004: 353). The basic factors in the patronage relationships are reciprocal exchanges between two unequal parties that are maintained by face-to-face contacts (Le Marchand and Legg 1972:412-13). In Cambodia these relationships between political patrons and their clients are instrumental for the accumulation of wealth and power. While the patronage system used to be perceived as a phase in the development of an emergent nation (see e.g. Scott 1972, Weingrod 1968) and traditionally it was limited to the villages and determined the power distribution in smaller communities, currently, patronage characterizes all relationships (De Zeeuw 2009: 492).

On the other hand, see also the Background section, history has proven Cambodia to be highly adaptive to changing markets and the transition of political regimes. Officially, Cambodia is qualified as being a
constitutional monarchy and a multiparty democracy. Nevertheless, Un and Hughes (2011) characterize the current situation of Cambodia’s government as a posture of ‘paying lip service’ to international (western) principles of liberal democracy and maintaining the patronage system under the pretext of ‘good governance’ (Un and Hughes 2011: 199-218). The Cambodian government and the plethora of non-governmental organizations established in the post-conflict period (after 1991) are both ruling the country and make it into a ‘hybrid democracy’. These forces complement, overlap and compete with each in other in different sectors of society, in which both try to control the social (re)construction of institutions. A hybrid system of governance has evolved. Authors on Cambodian politics have suggested that the fight for democratic ideals, in effect, is led by an international civil society of Donors and NGOs and not by the representatives of the Cambodian government (Öjendal and Lilja 2002, Hughes and Un 2011). It seems that next to the western ideal of ‘good governance’ that is on the NGO agenda, traditional dynamics maintain structures of ‘good enough governance’ within governmental organizations (De Weijer 2011). In this dissertation I will not go into the complexities of Cambodian politics much further, but refer to the current system of ‘competing hegemons’ in Cambodia as it being a ‘hybrid democracy’.

1.7 Methods

This section provides a first introduction of the research methods, as illustrated by several Appendices. In Chapter Two, I will go into more detail and discuss subjects like: the approach of the issues under exploration with “engaged scholarship” (Van de Ven 2007) and the extension of the role of informants to be more like participants at distinct stages in the interpretation of fieldwork findings.

1.7.1 Multisited, comparative and embedded case studies

In the above it was claimed that the Cambodian returnees’ institutional entrepreneurship and contributions to transformative change in Cambodia provide fertile grounds for exploration as these have been little studied and are relevant both scientifically and socially. The exploration of the foundations, practices and perceptions on the aforementioned ideas and notions coming together upon return migration, as related to the Cambodian returnees, is undertaken in the multiple sites where, and between which, these ideas meet. Notions on return held by parties in the host and home countries as well as key informants may clash, connect, cause conflict, converge and create all kinds of dynamics that come to the forefront, especially, when the experiences of returnees are compared to those that remain in overseas immigrant communities. The multisitedness of the research thus aims at a form of juxtaposition of phenomena and processes that conventionally would appear to be “worlds apart” (Marcus 1995: 100).

Comparison between sites and practices holds a richness of data as well as layers of interpretation that fuel empirical analysis of returnees’ experiences from multiple perspectives. The major aim of comparative research is to identify similarities and differences between social subjects and contribute to theory formation. To place multiple locations side by side in order to analyze their convergences and contrasts provides us with a number of insights, however, it is not meant to bring forward generalized structural and ideological differences between France, the United States and Cambodia. Rather, it is a comparison of two distinct localities in which Cambodian immigrant communities are set. 
In accordance with the actor-based level of inquiry, methods inspired on ethnography were considered most pertinent for data-collection with key-informants and individual community members. The fieldwork took place in Lyon, France (2010), Long Beach Ca, USA (2011) and Phnom Penh, Cambodia (2010 & 2011). The research is designed to compare embedded case studies on Cambodian French and Cambodian American returnees’ practices upon return while including the creation and employment of social capital created in exile (Schweizer et al. 1997, Yin 1994). The case studies focused on these two aspects in relation to selected key informants that have been or are active in host and home countries. Explicitly, (trans)national social networks reaching back to Cambodia were not analyzed by using quantitative methods but, rather, evaluated on cohesion and the “Ability of actors to secure benefits” (Portes 1986: 6) on the basis of members’ reports and experiences.

Key informants were selected based on theoretical sampling rather than statistical sampling. This selection isolated specific cases that individual overseas informants perceived as ‘successful’. The research is building on cases, thus, that may not be considered ‘average’ or necessarily ‘representative’ but, rather on ‘best cases’. This choice in design is assumed to hold the advantage of generating a maximum amount of information on the resources used as well as the experiences related to and practice of institutional entrepreneurial activities. Also, using these references built on the sense of bounded solidarity felt by the members of the Cambodian community (see Key Concepts). In the interviews in France and the USA, data was collected from descriptions of the work of key informants as well as the ways these were tied into (trans)national social networks.

Overall, in the selection process, I tried to find a balance between Cambodian American and Cambodian French key informants’ gender as well as the governmental or non-governmental sector they were active in. However, the returnees that were involved varied in their affiliation with public or private organizations, their embeddedness in Cambodian, French and American society, the issues they addressed and the degree and kind of transformative change they envisioned for Cambodia. Multiple data collection methods were combined to bring forward their cases. Interviews were the main method of data collection, yet observations, literature study and archival sources also provided input for analysis (Eisenhardt 1989).

An embedded case is premised upon the idea that cases can only be understood in their social context, thus, next to analysis of key informants experiences, a case study will include contextual analysis to come to an integrated interpretation of their practices, cultural conditions and the institutional structures they are governed by (Flyvbjerg 2006). In this research this is done by, first, collecting “narrativizations” (Kohler Riessman 1993: 2) of personal experiences on three components of refugee/returnee life: the immigrant community in a host country, the cohesion and diversity of their (inter)national social networks and their life upon return to Cambodia. During fieldwork and in relevant literature, furthermore, field level conditions in host- and homeland that restrained or enabled the use of resources available in their transnational networks were evaluated and provided input through systematic analysis of both written and oral sources.

As mentioned in the above, in order to obtain comparable information about past actions in multiple sites and infuse this with the meaning the actor awarded to it, issues were approached through conversation and “narrativization”. While this term has long gone unnoticed in research designs based on ethnographic methods, Kohler Riessman’s narrativizations propose a distinct approach to ethnographically inspired interviews. In contrast to personal narratives, such as life stories, a narrativization focuses on particular limited sets of experiences. The ordering of narrativizations, thus, allows for an ordering of key life events and a focus on those issues the informant considers most pertinent to the questions asked (Kohler Riessman 1993: 1-2, 57-60).
1.7.2 Immigrant communities in two localities

In the host lands, resettlement was studied as it was facilitated by community leaders and community members in immigrant organizations that contribute(d) to the Cambodian communities in Lyon, France and Long Beach (CA), USA. Immigrant communities are understood as social networks of voluntary and autonomous social organizations that are part of civil society and may be extended into collective transnational networks. Through this dissertation I use the term ‘immigrant community’ to describe the overseas Cambodian social networks in specific locations – not in any attempt to construct or impose a national or shared cultural boundary on them but because it is the insider’s perception of their own identity based on their Cambodian connectedness. Although the main focus of this work is not on those pre-resettlement forms, I take seriously the impact of historic, economic, sociopolitical and cultural dimensions of a refugee’s place of origin that shape processes of belonging in the host land (Nibbs 2011).

The experiences of 118 informants in eighteen American, fourteen French and nineteen Cambodian governmental and non-governmental organizations tied to resettled or returned Cambodians are included in this research. See Appendix A for an overview of the participating organizations in the USA, France and Cambodia. These listings per country show that a rich diversity of non-profit, non-governmental and governmental organizations as well as resource centers, educational institutions and religious organizations that have contributed to the research. Additionally, the specific laws setting the conditions within which the voluntary organizations could be established have been specified for the United States and France. Showing the distinctions between the Association Loi de 1901 in France, that does not allow for remuneration and may partly explain the small scale, non-professional nature of Cambodian French organizations, spread out over the country as ‘franchises’ to a central Paris headquarter, and the United States ‘501 (c) organization’ that does allow for professional management, investment and a wider variety of purposes and may thus facilitate a more business-like organization structure open to receiving governmental funding.

1.7.3 Informants

While, at first, members and leaders of community organizations in Lyon and Long Beach were contacted systematically, these individual informants assisted in the recruitment of others (“snowball sampling”, Goodman 1961). Appendix B provides an overview of the relative characteristics of all informants as compared to the overall Cambodian populations. It shows that the countrywide Cambodian population in France (2000) is estimated at 63,300 (Nann 2007: 148). In 2010, fieldwork was conducted in the Lyon-region which holds about 14,000 people of Cambodian descent. This is one of the largest Cambodian French communities, after Paris and Marseille (Wijers 2011). The countrywide Cambodian population in the United States (2000) is estimated at 149,047 (US Census 2000). In 2011 fieldwork was conducted in ‘Cambodia Town’, the Long Beach CA Cambodian American community which holds about 30,000 people of Cambodian descent. The Long Beach community prides itself on being the largest Cambodian community outside of Cambodia.

‘Best’ cases were selected based on transnational reputations at home and abroad, thus focusing on institutional entrepreneurs’ social legitimacy rather than the sum of their tangible achievements. Frequent references of overseas informants were used as ‘leads’ to select key informants in Cambodia. When mentioned in the interviews in France or the US, prospective key informants were approached in Phnom Penh to verify first findings and, eventually, they were invited to participate. Appendix C provides a more detailed overview of the
key informants’ characteristics showing a relatively balanced population when it comes to gender and sector of activities as well as a diversity of personal histories and migration experiences.

Individual informants in Lyon, Long Beach, CA and Cambodia, were interviewed for several hours. Key informants were interviewed several times yet on a similar range of topics. The key informants around which cases were built, varied in their affiliation with governmental or non-governmental organizations and the degree of change they envisioned. These semi-structured interviews were based on three main questions and systematically pertained their experiences of: the Cambodian refugees’ reception in resettlement countries, the strength and cohesion of (transnational) social networks and their assessment of returnees’ contributions to transformative change in Cambodia. In most cases, limited participatory observations were made in key informants’ organizations. Additionally, individual interviews were conducted with other returnees and individual informants with relations to events, organizations, people or situations. Interviews, literature and the juxtaposition of information thus obtained, have provided the majority of data for analysis and for building the case studies (Yin 1994). While Chapter Two is dedicated to the research design and fieldwork experiences, Appendix D presents a limited number of summarized case studies illustrating the diversity of the key informants that were interviewed.

1.7.4 Data analysis

The process of data analysis was focused on finding salient issues in the narrativized experiences and did not involve detailed syntactic or semantic analysis, nor a referential content analysis (Kelle 1997). In an iterative process of revisiting theoretical literature and processing empirical information, assumptions were tested and theoretical propositions explored (“selective coding”, see: Mikkelsen 2005: 182). Thematic analysis of the narrativizations was approached by comparing plot lines across the key-informants accounts. Building on the ways in which Flores (2009) set to work in his research on the Puerto Rican diaspora and their transnational communities, central to analysis of the collected data across the multiple sites of research was the accumulation of information on recurring and acknowledged “turning points” in the informants’ lives (Flores 2009: 75-140). The acts, aims, causes and consequences of the returnees’ working on contributions to the transformation of Cambodia, are processed per case in personal “tales of learning and turning” that address the periods before, during and after exile from the perspective of the now (Flores 2009: 9, 141-151). As mentioned above, Appendix D provides a limited illustration of the resulting ‘tales’.

1.8 The Research Experience

In the basic assumption of a world existing of multiple realities that are continuously being renewed, produced and revised, this work offers yet another perspective of events to add to the accumulation of histories. It is thus an observation of the diversity of experiences and events, a stage for a polyphony of voices as demonstrated in the excerpts of interviews presented in this dissertation, and may lay no claim to portraying a uniform ‘truth’ in its interpretation of returnees’ lives, acts and experiences. Therefore, it is important here to mention some of the personal aspects that have shaped data collection.

Reflecting on the research activities, I have found strengths and advantages in the relative objectiveness that comes with non-affiliation. As a Dutch female researcher who possesses some knowledge on, and experience in, living in Cambodia, who was able to conduct interviews in both English and French as well as
make herself understood, to a limited extent, in the Khmer language, it is my impression that, in practice, I was perceived as non-threatening and trustworthy by my, often senior and male, Cambodian informants. The ‘outsider’ perspective allowed me to ask questions on perceptions, norms and values that might be taken for granted by ‘insiders’, while trying to remain an informed interlocutor. Moreover, just like these informants, I have also had to ‘navigate the river by its bends’ when trying to make a contribution to transformative change in Cambodia as an advisor at the Ministry of Environment. Thus, in many ways, in this research I was exploring institutional entrepreneurial activities both from an etic (observer) as well as an emic (insider) point of view. It allowed me to gain access to groups and sources of information that would have been more difficult to attain had I been, for instance, a member of a Cambodian overseas community belonging to a distinct social group or seemingly holding distinct political affiliations.

Informants’ narrativizations evolved naturally from semi-structured interviews in response to focused questions, covering the major life domains or areas associated with exile, resettlement and return. The interviews aimed at narrativizationed responses were much like conversations that both interviewer/listener and narrator/interviewee engaged in as participants (see also: Mishler 1986). In this way, the narrativizations enhanced the natural process of conversation in which people are not simply recalling facts but also interpret the past in light of the present. At times, they have presented me with deeply emotional and personal experiences as the tragedies of loss and survival were reconstructed by informants affected by the Khmer Rouge regime. Indeed, while gathering data on lives and experiences, it was a challenge to remain an observer as well as an engaged researcher. On their side, the informants sometimes turned into active participants empowered by the research methods and passionate about the subject under exploration. Moreover, it seems the narrativization process occasionally enabled senior informants to enhance their own life story’s coherency, understandability and meaning thus affecting the stories they told me, as they were narrativizing them (Atkinson 1998).

1.9 Relevance and Achievements

One of the most significant achievements of this study may be the comparison of the returnees’ use of their transnational networks as resources in France, America and Cambodia within their historical and institutional contexts. The multisited approach to this issue throws new light on the complexities and consequences of relationships within and between communities in home and host countries, demonstrates the effects of the growing constraints on circular migration due to restrictive national immigration policies as well as highlights the limited opportunity structures for returnees’ contributions to transformative change in Cambodia. It suggests that distinct localities have specific structural constraints and opportunities causing obstacles and challenges for refugee resettlement.

The exploration and comparison of processes connecting return migration, transnational social networks and institutional entrepreneurial activities by Cambodian American and Cambodian French returnees to Cambodia in this research is especially relevant because:

- the majority of current research into the contributions of circular migrants and transnational institutional entrepreneurs focuses almost exclusively on economic actions and effects in either the host or sending country. The multisited and actor-based approach adopted in this research is focused on perceptions,
motivations, the practice of initiation and returnees’ reflections on institutional entrepreneurial activities, moving beyond descriptions of distinct achievements and quantitative measurements of change.

- the comparison of narrativizations focusing on the understanding of institutional entrepreneurs as individuals in social contexts in France, America and Cambodia throws new light on the complexities of refugee-returnee relationships by addressing the dynamics between ideas on ‘integration’, dual loyalties as well as return and belonging held by the three parties involved. The comparison allows for an emphasis on the ways in which the Cambodian identities are localized in host- and homelands as well as contested in transnational spaces.

- the multisited approach of ‘engaged scholarship’ in participation with key informants selected among returnees from France and the United States contributes to method development for the research of transnationalism and institutional entrepreneurship.

1.10 Outline

The dissertation is organized in the chronological order in which data was collected in multiple sites. They are a collection of the articles and a book chapter written on the successive periods of fieldwork in Lyon, France and Phnom Penh, Cambodia in 2010 and Long Beach (CA), USA and Phnom Penh, Cambodia in 2011. First, however, the next chapter, an article written with Heidi Dahles, addresses both the research design as well as the research experience. To continue, Chapters Three and Four describe the reception and return of the Cambodian French refugees. Chapter Five compares aspects of bounded solidarity in the Lyon and Long Beach Cambodian communities and, finally, Chapter Six is focused on the comparison of transnational networks as resources for the activities of both Cambodian French and Cambodian American returnees in Phnom Penh. In the conclusion this dissertation’s findings are summarized in order to directly address the research question and subquestions as well as outline contributions to debates on the key concepts. Finally, some pathways for future research are suggested.

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i While it goes beyond the aims of this introductory chapter, a reference to other approaches to entrepreneurship should, at least, be mentioned. Granovetter’s seminal article on the problem of embeddedness (1985) has opened the way for a network approach to economic action in the “new institutional economics”. The approach of networked entrepreneurial activities from the perspective of economic structures, institutions and organizations, has proven very fruitful for the social economic field of inquiry (Ibarra et al 2005, Swedberg 1991). Much of the strength of the field of research may be derived from the combination of economic and sociological approaches to organization theory acknowledging its multi-embedded nature (Aldrich and Ruef 2006, Uzzi 1997). From a behavioral and embedded perception of entrepreneurial behavior this should, however, be complemented by political and anthropological descriptions bringing to the fore both its relationship with governmental structures of power and individual agency (Baumol 1990, Ibarra et al 2005).

ii The official status of refugee from, and returnee to, Cambodia comes in many shapes and forms. As this brief overview will show, it is important to distinguish clearly between these different refugee and returnee, groups in
order to assess the transnational conditions that might enable their contributions to Cambodian transformative change in the following.

First of all, most relevant to this research, the official status of refugee according to the Universal Declaration on Human Rights would apply to the more affluent group of Cambodians that were studying or working abroad even before the Khmer Rouge takeover in 1975 and the lucky group of Cambodians related to this ‘elite’ and being able to go overseas with their sponsorship (Costa-Lascoux 1986: 193).

Unofficially the term ‘refugee’ would also apply to the many destitute Cambodian born citizens fleeing to the Thai border camps after the demise of the Khmer Rouge-regime in the 1980s (Mignot 1984). This group had no choice to become the first group of returnees when complying with the United Nations initiated repatriation during and after the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia. These returnees were left to rebuild their devastated country with little national security and limited resources.

Finally, in this all but exhaustive summation, it is important to mention a new and prominent group of returnees. Since mid-2002, the United States have followed a policy to send non-citizens convicted of crimes back to their homeland, following time served in American detention centers. This group of involuntary returnees, often with no livelihood in or connection to Cambodia except for their family in the United States, has brought to life a range of new organizations and returnee integration support programs in Cambodia.

Transformative change is understood as a strategic social process aimed at the profound socio-economic and political development of society and initiated by (inter)national institutions.

As exceptions to this observation, Alejandro Portes’ (2008, 2009) and Ivan Light’s (2006) work on immigrant entrepreneurship through networks merit mentioning here.

Altruism, “doing good”, is not used here as a normative prescription but, rather, describes the aims and ambitions of the returnees that perceive of their institutional entrepreneurial activities as making positive contributions to the transformation of Cambodia.

In relevant literature, there are parallels to this focus, for instance, with use of terms like the returnees and transmigrants ‘ “negotiated, enacted and contested” realities (Al Ali and Koser 2002) as well as the stages of Initiation and Innovation referred to by Van Wijk (2009).

Professor Glick Schiller suggested, moreover, that these connections are not necessarily to be considered bilocal but are formed by networks functioning between a multiplicity of physical localities, which could be cities, immigrant communities or organizations (Personal conversation, 28/9/2012, VU Amsterdam).

Not to be confused with the “deterritorialized nationalism” proposed by Tsuda (2009: 335) which he uses to describe the strong nationalist identities adopted by returnees and that seem to evolve from their marginalization in both host and home countries, thus, they seem related rather to an ‘imagined’ community than to a distinct locality.

This is necessary as previous studies barely even acknowledge a distinct aversion to return among members of refugee communities while empirical research does acknowledge a majority of refugees in host countries struggling with these feelings again and again (see for instance: Gmelch 1980, Al-Ali and Koser 2002). Negative relations to the former homeland are often passed over in silence thus leaving the motivations and actions of an important part of migrants in overseas immigrant communities unrecognized (Hughes 2009). Also, upon return, existing accounts often underestimate the difficulties in working on a restoration of life after a prolonged and forced absence from a homeland that was ridden with conflict before exile and is now in a ‘post-conflict’ state.
(Rodicio 2001: 124). For the sake of this inquiry, the choice to return and acts of return by former refugees, as well as their possible contributions upon return, are described by taking full account of these complexities.

The study of migration has extended its perspective of migratory movements beyond the idea of long term displacements between a host- and homeland. A term like ‘circular migration’, for instance, refers to continuous back- and forth migrations like a pendulum (Agunias 2006). For forced migrants like the Cambodians, these ideas on continuous movement across borders appear to stand in stark contrast to perceptions on a uniform ‘diaspora’, referred to as a bounded entity of displaced citizens in perennial exile abroad (Brubaker 2006, Cohen 1997).

While there is a large body of work on the structural analysis of social networks in the social and behavioral sciences, the network information collected in this research has not been submitted to this kind of analysis (Scott 1991; Wasserman and Faust 1994). As the starting points of this study are experiences researched by collecting narrativizations through methods inspired on ethnography, the relationships among social entities, are evaluated from personal perspectives, loaded with individual attributions and emotions. More on this in the Methods section.

Building on the work of Coleman (1988).

Moreover, as in the case of the Cambodians, a non-existent cohesion on the basis of ethnicity may be ‘assigned’ to the immigrants that, in fact, are not ethnically related but may be mixed in their Khmer, Chinese or Vietnamese roots.

Due to practical constraints, this project cannot provide a comprehensive overview of the historical and current societal context to Cambodian returnees’ experiences. It is limited to a summary of milestone events related to the lives of a relatively small number of key and individual informants that have shared their perspectives and actions.

The label “Khmer” is used instead of “Cambodian”, often, to signify authentic Khmer ethnicity, language and people and distinguish it from other Cambodian ethnicities such as the highland people or the Cham. In fact ‘Khmâi daem’ was even a pseudonym used by Saloth Sor (also known as Pol Pot) in the Khmer language press in the 1950s (Chandler 1999: 37)

The distinct trajectory of Cambodian history holds several implications for writing on the return of its (former) citizens. This article wants to acknowledge that the mono-ethnic, and fundamentally nationalist, governmental stance on Cambodia as a Khmer nation is not seriously contested, or even under scrutiny, in many of the popular post-conflict English-language publications on Cambodia (Becker 1998; Chandler 2007; Freeman 2004; Wilmott 1970) the work of Edwards (2007) is a remarkable exception. In the French-language tradition of Khmer studies, however, Cambodia is traditionally treated as a distinctly multi-ethnic nation (Tan 2008). French research has long-time accepted that the national debate on being ‘pure’ Khmer (Khmer de Souche), in perfect relation to the Khmer motherland, can be considered a political strategy used by subsequent Cambodia rulers over time to legitimize choices in awarding defined ethnic and other minority groups (including the returnees) access to economic opportunities. This debate is influenced by geopolitical relations such as the dependency on China and neighbouring countries (Béja 1982, Cadart 1982, Simon-Barouh 2004).

Angkor is one of the most important archaeological sites in South-East Asia. Stretching over some 400 km2, including forested area, Angkor Archaeological Park contains the magnificent remains of the different capitals of the Khmer Empire, from the 9th to the 15th century. They include the famous Temple of Angkor Wat and, at
Angkor Thom, the Bayon Temple with its countless sculptural decorations. UNESCO has set up a wide-ranging programme to safeguard this symbolic site and its surroundings (UNESCO report 1992).

xviii As in the original text of the Manifeste du Parti Républican:

Le 18 mars 1970 est un jour historique, qui a mis fin à la monarchie. Le grand peuple Khmer a la volonté bien déterminée de bâtir un régime républicain Khmer dans l’idéal unanimement partagé d’accroître la liberté, l’égalité, la fraternité, le progrès et le Bonheur (Chantrabot 1993: 183).

xix Later, again, the division between pro- and anti-communist ideologies would surface in the reception of Cambodian refugees as well as in the media reports on Cambodia (Gunn and Lee 1991, Meslin 2006).

xx These military would later be allowed priority access to the US as their country of resettlement.

xiii Socio-economic, political and cultural ‘integration’ is understood as a social and gradual process that is hard to measure and evaluate comprehensively and meaningfully, therefore, I use the term in parentheses in this dissertation. The complex social processes that make up ‘integration’ contain elements of:

• cultural change, often labeled ‘assimilation’ or ‘acculturation’ in policy documents
• participation in social-economic life, such as finding and holding a job and earning a living
• political participation, often labeled ‘citizenship’
• the continuing personal bonds with the former host-land, or the evolution of transnationalism
• the creation of new resources and ways to stay in touch with the former host-land. The re-establishment of social networks running through, for example, diaspora organizations (Guillou 2006: 3)

xxii Effectively, the country was renamed and changed governments several times in these years. A detailed description of the causes and consequences of these changes surpasses the focus of this dissertation. The work of Gottesman (2003) is warmly recommended for a more complete description of this period.

xxiii The term ‘diaspora’ for this group may be considered a contested concept as it holds a plethora of meanings and is used in many different contexts (Compare, for instance, Abdelhady 2008, Brinkerhoff 2009 and Cohen 1997). For reasons of specificity, it is not used to refer to the overseas Cambodians in the rest of this dissertation.

xxiv See also, for instance, see Malena and Chhim, 2009. Professor Nina Glick Schiller proposes, drawing a parallel to her research in Haiti, that the determining power of traditional Cambodian institutions centralized in the Cambodian state may also be related to its institutional history as a French colony and perceived as a remnant of French Cambodian state building (Personal conversation, 28/9/2012, VU Amsterdam).

xxv While it is clear that nation-state policies are influential, and they are addressed as such in the following, they are not the primary context for comparison. This research looks at the types of structural opportunities, institutional structures, transnational activities as well as forms of social capital and compares these from one locality to another in a multisited research design. While these localities may be considered illustrative when it comes to relative scalar size and positioning on a national level, they are both part of a distinct dynamic of historical forces and cultural practices that shape relationships.

xxvi I have made a choice between three types of interviewees: the ‘subjects’ that are used in social experiments, the ‘respondents’ belonging to social surveys and the ‘informants’ interviewed in semi-structured interviews and considered part of this research. Key informants are defined as those informants in interviews that have a special relationship with the interviewer through the quality and/or quantity of information shared (Lewis-Beck et al. 2004: 537).
While it is an interesting and worthwhile question, in the limited space of this dissertation I will not extensively discuss questions like: Does ‘community’ exist? And if it does, how to define it? The Cambodian situation in Lyon and Long Beach showed that these refugees mostly perceive their extended families as part of a ‘community’ and do not extend this notion to other social networks.