Chapter Four: Understanding the Politics of ‘Doing Good’\textsuperscript{1}
A study on Cambodian French returnees’ activities as Institutional Entrepreneurs

4.1 Introduction
This chapter explores the dynamics of Cambodian French returnees’ institutional entrepreneurial activities in their home country in order to contribute to transformative change in Cambodia. The central question is in what ways the political contexts they are embedded in upon their return facilitate or constrain their contributions to the transformation of Cambodia. It discusses this issue by presenting the experiences and practices of Cambodian French returnees to Phnom Penh, Cambodia. These findings are interpreted in their multiple historic and social contexts as well as with reference to relevant literature. The selected informants want to fulfill their ambitions to ‘do good’ and contribute to transformative change, yet, in effect, they have often not achieved their objectives.

The emphasis is on Cambodian French returnees’ ‘institutional entrepreneurial activities’. These entrepreneurial activities are understood as focused on the creation or improvement of institutions for the common good (Rindova et al. 2009: 478). In this chapter the initiation of institutional entrepreneurial activities is explored by looking at the promotion of transformative change\textsuperscript{1} in the ‘hybrid democracy’ that is the Kingdom of Cambodia. While political entrepreneurs aim at the transformation of political institutions, institutional entrepreneurs want to make change happen in a broad range of institutions that are not exclusively bound to political action (Meydani 2009, Steelman 2010). 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 exploration is limited, however, to the perceptions and practices on the ways Cambodian French returnees transform Cambodian institutions in the governmental and non-governmental sectors.

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This is relevant as, so far, there has been little discussion about the contributions of returnee institutional entrepreneurs to transformation in an emergent nation and limited understanding of the resources that may help them resolve the ‘paradox of embeddedness’ in working on transformative change. This paradox describes the contradictory dynamics of institutional entrepreneurs who are trying to change the societal structures within which they also have to find social legitimacy (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, Granovetter 1985, Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993). In order to contribute to the transformative change of Cambodian institutions, returnees require both the trust and esteem awarded by social legitimacy in a new political context as well as access to their transnational social networks and the social capital they have accumulated in a host country. An understanding of the dynamics between this political environment and the returnees’ transnational ties may enhance both the quality and effectiveness of their contributions.

When it comes to the returnees’ activities upon return, current literature on the impact of returnees’ entrepreneurial activities in institutional reform is rarely conclusive in its empirical findings. Some studies bring to light a marked ambivalence on the conditions and constraints regulating the efficiency of the refugees’ contributions (see, for instance: Beckert 1999, Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2010, Olesen 2002, Portes et al. 2002). Considering the mixed findings on both the role of entrepreneurial activity in bringing peace and prosperity to states recovering from conflict (see, for instance: Naudé 2007, Schüttler 2006) and the limited validity assigned to findings on the effectiveness of returnees’ actions and transnational engagement to bring about institutional reform (see, for instance: Agunias 2006, Castles 2007), many questions about the effectiveness of returnees’ institutional entrepreneurial activities still need to be answered. The research of institutional entrepreneurship among a group of remigrants in the little studied context of a post conflict nation such as Cambodia may thus be considered one of the distinctive qualities of this chapter.

In parallel to relevant literature on political entrepreneurship (Meydani 2009, Steelman 2010), this chapter proposes that solutions to the dynamics of the paradox of embeddedness should be explored through the threefold activities of returnees’ ‘brokering’, ‘building’ and ‘bargaining’ in order to deal with a restrictive political context. As intermediaries that hold dual loyalties, engagements and dual identities, it is a challenge for the returnees to balance their potential in being ‘brokers’ for reform in a (still) traumatized country while wanting to ‘build’ for change according to their own ideas. Also, they have their own ‘re-embedding’ and the re-establishment of their social legitimacy to take care of, amidst
traditional and international contestations for political power. Finally, as this article suggests, in the case of Cambodia, return implies not only finding of an opportune position and social legitimacy but also the ‘bargaining’ between (trans) national social networks and institutional structures in order to reconcile with the renewal of Cambodian society as well as the remnants of a violent past.

The experiences of Cambodian French returnees are explored while acknowledging the social construction of reality and the social embeddedness of individual agents. The research is agent-based and explores their understanding of events and actions. The dual sited research is designed, therefore, as a comparative multiple case study. Cases are built with interviews, observations and documentary research on key informants selected among the Cambodian French returnees in Phnom Penh through their networks in France. Case selection, is based on conversations and referrals by individual informants in Lyon and Paris, France during which, also, additional data was collected.

In the following, first, the methods and theoretical framework of this research are discussed. Next, the background of the research population as well as their institutional contexts are introduced. A thematic overview of findings, illustrated with anonymized excerpts from the interviews, then provides the input for analysis. In conclusion, contributions and implications of the chapter are proposed and pathways for future research are suggested.

4.2 Bringing together “worlds apart”

This research aims at bringing forward descriptions, and qualitative assessments organized as case studies built around selected ‘exemplary’ key informants. The research was designed to compare Cambodian French returnees’ “narrativizations” of their practices upon return by using qualitative methods. In contrast to personal narratives such as life stories, a narrativization focuses on particular experiences considered pivotal by the interviewee (Kohler Riessman 1993:2). Narrativizations obtained in semi-structured interviews thus allow for insights into ‘turning points’ in the informants’ lives according to their own perceptions. In the excerpts from these narrativizations presented in this chapter, for privacy reasons, the names of the informants central to this case have been changed in order to guarantee their anonymity. The accounts have been transcribed in English from the original French interviews as conducted in Phnom Penh in August, September and October 2010. In these excerpts, the emphasis is on the informants’ social networks used as resources before, during and after exile.
as well as their motivations for initiating, and personal reflections on, institutional entrepreneurial activities.

The adoption of a dual sited research design is relevant as multisited research holds the promise of integrated perspectives in data collection and analysis, the benefits of a people-driven approach and the completeness of acknowledging national institutional structures while following informants’ social networks across borders. As a result of approach to the experiences of selected individual Cambodian French informants in France and Cambodia, the dual sitedness resulted in a form of juxtaposition of phenomena that conventionally appear to be “worlds apart” (Marcus 1995: 100-102).

In the process of case selection, members and leaders of community organizations in Lyon were contacted systematically and they assisted me in the recruitment of other informants (“snowball sampling”: Goodman, 1961). Contacts were asked to refer me to returnee institutional entrepreneurs working in Phnom Penh that they considered ‘successful’ in their position within the overseas Cambodian community and in their contributions to transformative change in Cambodia. In this way, the method of selection also provided insights into perceptions of returnees’ ‘success’ in the ethnic community (Saunders 1979). The research population for case selection was limited to the first generation of Cambodians, born in Cambodia and entering a resettlement country before 1979 in the first waves of exile. This research was chosen as, next to their insights in the collective history of conflict, exile and resettlement, this generation holds considerable status in both the host land and homeland as independent professionals, leaders and entrepreneurs.

In a first three-month period of fieldwork, 20 members of, and stakeholders in, the Cambodian community in Lyon were interviewed once or repetitiously. Also, members’ activities for the Cambodian community were observed in a limited form of participative observation. This group consisted of women and men ranging in age from 29 to 82 with considerable involvement in the Cambodian community in Lyon. The semi-structured interviews were complemented by five focused conversations with members (35 to 67 years of age) of the Parisian Cambodian community. During another three-months period of fieldwork in Phnom Penh, 35 informants were interviewed. The group of informants, key and individual, consisted of ten women and 25 men, the youngest was 31, the oldest 78 years of age. For five key informants, involvement in their organizations was sought as a way to conduct limited participatory observations. Interviews were supplemented with information from personal, professional and documentary sources.
Data analysis involved, first, the broad analysis of interviews to determine main themes and establish the first version of a codebook. Then, the interviews were made subject to more detailed deductive and inductive coding in Atlas.ti, a software tool for qualitative data storage and analysis. Finally, in order to follow patterns that had been discovered in the process, fine coding and axial coding brought forward specific issues and experiences that are presented in this paper.

4.3 Entrepreneuring development workers or institutional entrepreneurs?

Just like the political entrepreneurs that are central to this book\(^1\), entrepreneurial activities aimed at institutional reform by institutional entrepreneurs, inherently, are embedded social actions involving actors that want to make change happen (Granovetter 1985, Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993). Embeddedness is understood, not as an act or situation, but as the ongoing production of social legitimacy. Thus, the ways in which the routines they establish receive recognition in the diversity of (trans)national structures they are embedded in (Steelman 2010).

Literature often describes political entrepreneurs as driven by ‘political profit’ (Holcombe 2002; Meydani 2009). For instance, they are then defined as entrepreneurs who want to seize opportunities to gain ‘public prestige’ and accrue ‘electoral capital’. In contrast, the institutional entrepreneurs central to this chapter are perceived as intrinsically motivated to succeed. Their motivation is not for a public approval but for a private objective. Institutional entrepreneurs contribute to transformative change while acting on their own interests.

In both kinds of motivation, however, ‘entrepreneurship’ is the core activity. Authors have distinguished a great number of elements that make an actor, individual, organization or social movement into an ‘entrepreneur’. In this chapter these characteristics are summarized as their skills in the discovery and use of opportunity as well as the mobilization of resources (Li \textit{et al.} 2006, Shane 2000). However, I do not want to overemphasize the ‘heroic actions’ of entrepreneurs in initiating institutional entrepreneurial activities and also pay attention to the cognitive, cultural and political structures they are embedded in (Steelman 2010).

The definition of institutional entrepreneurial activity central in this chapter wants to encompass political entrepreneurship, focus on the idea of contributing to the common good, acknowledge the embeddedness in societal structure, power and interests yet emphasize the
individual’s evaluation and agency in employing opportunity structures in institutional entrepreneurial activity. Thus, institutional entrepreneurs are understood as: “Organized actors with sufficient resources who see in the creation of new institutions an opportunity to realize their interest” (DiMaggio 1988: 14).

The ways in which the political context may facilitate or constrain these institutional entrepreneurs is explored through the ‘strategic lens’ of the paradox of embeddedness. This paradox of agents’ initiatives to change institutions that have, and are, shaping their lives, is considered an enigma at the heart of institutional entrepreneurial activity and thus, a key to its exploration (Maguire et al. 2004). In adopting this ‘strategic lens’ possible barriers to overcoming this paradox will be discussed in the analysis. Also, in connection to other contributions in this edited volume, the level of economic and political stability and the character of the political culture in Cambodia are explicitly included in the analysis (Meydani 2009: 13).

In both migration and returnee studies the dual engagement of its subjects does often not receive equal attention. The majority of research seems to focus on either the home or host country (For exceptions see: Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004, Mazzucato 2007) and does not explicitly acknowledge the opportunities entrepreneurial returnees, especially, have in contributing to transformative change in their home country.

Following Kloosterman (2003, Kloosterman et al. 1999) I want to emphasize the occurrence of “opportunity structures” in the dynamics of embeddedness. Opportunities offer chances to entrepreneurs to initiate and profit from entrepreneurial activities. These opportunities may be 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). Kloosterman continues to describe how these elements enter into relationships that produce a “mixed embeddedness” (Kloosterman et al. 1999: 257). The notion of a mixed embeddedness refers to the time-and-place specific structures that allow an entrepreneur to take social action and seize any interesting opportunities that may present themselves.

As introduced in the above, this chapter therefore proposes that returnees’ institutional entrepreneurial activities need to be understood as encompassing political entrepreneurship, functioning within opportunity structures and (trans)national institutional forces in both host and homeland as well as taking account of returnees’ individual skills, character and agency. Explored are the ways in which they may employ these in the political
context of a country, Cambodia, that is considered a hybrid democracy and an emergent nation.

4.4 Background

4.4.1 A history of Cambodian resettlement.

The history of the first generation of Cambodian French returnees that form the research population to this chapter deserves an introduction. At the time of the Khmer Rouge take-over of Cambodia (1975-1979) an estimated 40,000 refugees were legally granted asylum in France, its former colonizer, thus making it an interesting research location (Duclos and Cogne 2008). This group consisted of a relatively minor first wave of forced migrants arriving and obtaining residency in resettlement. They were joining a group of voluntary Cambodian ‘knowledge migrants’, already in France, who now could obtain official refugee resettlement status.

Arriving in resettlement countries before 1979, these first groups of refugees are distinguished as well educated and easily ‘integrated’ due also to the substantial amount of their adolescence and adulthood spent in a Cambodia under colonial French influence. In general, these first groups of refugees show relative independence in resettlement, language proficiency, the cultural awareness displayed of their new surroundings and their social belonging to the Cambodian middle or upper classes.

After 1979, a larger number of Cambodian exiles arrived as they were fleeing the Vietnamese take-over (Mignot 1984, Mysliwiec 1988, Prak1992). By 1989 an estimated 50,000 Cambodians were living in France. Family reunions and knowledge migration allowed this number to grow to about 63,300 by the year 2000 (Nann 2007: 148). While every year, many members of the Cambodian community in France return to Cambodia for the long or short term, the dynamics of Cambodian French remigration are still little studied. For the present, the Cambodian French community remains “in the shadows” in its outward presentation (Prak 1992: 20-21).

For a better understanding, in the next section, the history of their return is introduced.

4.4.2 Arriving in your home country, as a foreigner.

In October 1991 the ‘Paris Peace Accords’ were signed by all Cambodian factions, making an end to more than 30 years of internal conflict. 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 now officially was 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 an end to conflict, 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. Especially as the UNTAC’s national program for reconstruction and reconciliation in Cambodia was very ambitious for 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, those who were considered educated and financially secure, were called upon to return. The call met with a large response.

Important to this research, Cambodian French returnees of the 1990s that reacted to these appeals have witnessed the change of the political climate in Cambodia. In interviews they relate how, at this time, they were relatively free to move between local and international forces, between the government and aid organizations, between France and Cambodia. In the early 1990s when the country was in a ‘transitional’ phase there was freedom to move between different social networks. This, however, changed after the 1993 and the 1997 elections that will be discussed later.

The returning overseas Cambodians met with a positive reception from most parties, the Cambodian government, the UNTAC and the population in general. However, the ‘quest for survival’ they had to undertake in post-conflict Cambodia was something they had to do alone. They were left to their own devices. Adequate jobs for the educated returnees were hard to be found and these positions often did not provide enough payment to meet their basic needs. Unless the 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 either partisanship and governmental service or, for instance, the use of their experiences and education as intermediaries for an international organization (Hughes 1996).
Informants of this research consider it impossible to establish and maintain political, social and cultural neutrality in Cambodia in the long term. A case in point are the experiences of Mr. Tim.

In 1995 Mr. Tim returned to Cambodia for the first time on a vacation to visit his remaining family members. He explained how the decision to return on the long term left him in a difficult situation as there was ‘nothing’ to do. At the time, he said, unless you agreed to join one of the big political parties, it was impossible to find a job that would earn you a living. While he felt very welcome as part of a group of returnees, and the transitional government stated clearly that the country needed them in its reconstruction, there were no salaries to be expected. The most well-educated returnees from France, speaking multiple languages, were clearly at an advantage over other returnees as they had more skills to apply in the NGO-world, in order to remain neutral. Those with little education and funding were quickly forced into a partisan position and patronage dependency in order to survive.

4.5 A mixed reputation

On top of this disappointment of 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 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).

The attraction of a certain social status and job security inspired unqualified returnees to run for official political positions as a means to obtain a livelihood. Informants in France and Cambodia evaluated this situation in similar wording to this returnee: ‘No matter who you are or what you used to do in France, you would find a good position in Cambodian government’ (Interview Phnom Penh, August 2010). The situation contributed to an image of the overseas returnees as opportunists (Le Gal 2010). Their return was perceived as being one of self-interest.
It is illustrative of the animosity felt by local Cambodians that the returnees are labeled the *Anikatchun* (litt. ‘foreigners’). This label and the accompanying stereotypes are experienced as pejorative and painful by many of the returnee informants in this research. They feel, among others, that the diversity of backgrounds and potential in the groups of returnees was not sufficiently acknowledged, their contributions were not valued and they were excluded from reintegration after a first warm welcome.

As Mr. Tim observed on his motivations, he felt no need to become a hero and look for fame and fortune. He just tried to fit in. Nevertheless, people continued to approach him as a ‘foreigner’. Laughingly he said: “We had our shirts tucked into our trousers! People immediately saw that we were different”. Mr. Tim believed this low-profile, modesty and slow progress have paid off for him in the long term and have earned him the prestigious positions he now holds. He has little contact with his former social network in France. These relations have all slowly eroded as he built his life in Cambodia. Mr. Tim remembered that every visit to France would usually lead to some of his friends also returning to Cambodia, seeing that he could make a living here. Not all of them have succeeded, as they could not make the most of their human and social capital under the restrictive government and local suspicions. He did believe he was lucky, as he said: “At least I did not have to remain ‘a stranger in a strange land’, like many of the other returnees in those days”.

### 4.6 A consolidation of political power

Despite the FUNCINPEC leading the 1993 elections with an absolute majority vote, it was forced into an uneasy coalition with the ruling nationalist Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) that had evolved from Vietnamese takeover. This was 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 a trusted 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).

After the lack of renewal in the period 1989-1993 when transition truly had its moment, thus, the following years only lead to the consolidation of political traditions in the existing CPP, with patronage and favoritism becoming more and more evident (De Zeeuw 2009:144, Roberts 2002:117-118). Following the CPP dominance in rural areas and its effective safeguarding of interests in political institutions, relations within the government started to deteriorate.
The consolidation of power by the Cambodia People’s Party continued, and continues, re-establishing the patronage politics so traditional to Cambodia. Building on the relations surrounding the Cambodian royal court in the past, and inspired on Indian and Chinese aristocratic ordering, this system of ‘patronage’ or ‘clientelism’ is characterized by the centralized powers of government that allows access to resources conditioned on subordination, compliance or 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). As a Cambodian French returnee, now a civil servant at the Ministry of Environment, said: “They just called each other and more and more people came over and got a job through their networks” (Interview Phnom Penh, September 2010). To a certain degree, of course, the return to tradition is a necessary process in post conflict societies in order to provide a suitable and familiar context for new institutions to be embedded and evolve (Gottesman 2003). For one thing, despite the negative aspects, the structural impact of the patronage system has also allowed for an extended period of economic and political stability with a steady economic growth. This might explain the evolution of the ‘hybrid democracy’ that is central to the next section.

4.7 A hybrid democracy

Officially, after the implementation of the Paris Peace Accords, Cambodia is 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 NGOs established in the post-conflict period (after 1991) are both ruling the country. Out of these dynamics of forces holding each other in a bind, a ‘hybrid democracy’ has evolved. These forces complement, overlap and compete with each other in different sectors of society, in which both try to control the social (re)construction of institutions and a hybrid system of governance has evolved. Other 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 chapter I will not go into the complexities of Cambodian politics much further, but refer to the current political context in Cambodia as it being a ‘hybrid democracy’.

In the process of CPP’s consolidation of power, while the first returnees had to handle many hardships with internal relations stabilizing, the Cambodian government slowly adjusted its attitudes in the 2000s and started to acknowledge that groups of Cambodian returnees may have a role to play on the long term in in-country processes of (economic) development, peace building and reconstruction (Gottesman 2004). Since then, the unrelenting entrepreneurial actions of the overseas Cambodians’ in their home-country and communities of origin has come to produce significant flows of money, human capital, networks of social capital, knowledge and technology, and political support (Ear 2007, Poethig 1997). Nevertheless, in recent history, still, returnees have had to deal with cultural exclusion in the sense of being referred to as not ‘pure’ Khmer (no matter their ethnicity) and subject to the government’s nationalist rhetoric aimed at marginalizing social groups.

During an interview Cambodian French Madame Kantoom, director of an NGO, recounted an event that happened to her that morning. She explained: “People react to the returnees, now, I think. it never amazes me how people still discriminate against us. Like this morning at lunch time we had a NGO-leader meeting and we were mapping who we needed to meet at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I said: We need to meet Mr. So-and-So, and then the leader of one of the NGOs said: ‘But he is still an expat, he is a returning Cambodian. He may not be influential, he may not know, he may not be internal in the CPP. And I think these people who are still discriminated. the stereotype is of a person who is not internal in the CPP, not influential. That they not know enough “(Interview Phnom Penh, October 2011).

Attitudes towards overseas returnees of the first generation, especially, still seem to question their loyalty, knowledge. It seems the local community shows them limited trust when it comes to handing over responsibility and leadership in societal change. Also, no distinct policies or organizations have been put in place to facilitate transnational connections and returnees’ institutional entrepreneurial contributions. The distinct capacities of the returnees are not explicitly acknowledged and they are often excluded from mainstream politics.

However, as a Cambodian French member of parliaments, Mr. Than speculated: “It’s not about the returnees specifically, it’s really about power and money. In reality it’s about control and not about development. Things have changed now since the beginning, when it was very much about safety. Now if you touch the money or the
power then you get into trouble. As long as you don’t touch the power or the money you will be fine” (Interview Phnom Penh, October 2011)

4.8 Analysis

The presentation of findings above demonstrates a progressive dynamic in Cambodian French returnees’ activities from being, at first, neutral intermediaries, agents that can ‘broker’ between parties, to being, as the context and perceptions of their social legitimacy changes, partisan players that have to ‘bargain’ between distinct social networks in order to work on the reforms they desire. Next to the suggestion that the dynamics of political contexts deeply affect institutional entrepreneurial activities, this confirms the proposition that change by a political entrepreneur is more likely when the political system is unstable (Holcombe 2002).

In the transformation of the political context from international governance towards power consolidation by a strong, restrictive and traditional political party, former affiliations in Cambodia and overseas at first seem to enable the returnees’ initiating of institutional entrepreneurial activities. They have freedom of movement between a mix of social networks. As time goes by and political structures consolidate and returnees need to build more local trust and social legitimacy in order to be effective, however, these returnees get too entangled in the political context. Considering the paradox of embeddedness that describes the difficulty to change institutions you are embedded in, they then seem to have fewer opportunities and access to resources to overcome a growth of structural constraints.

While it is proposed by most entrepreneurship research that marginalized actors are especially strong potential agents of change (see, for instance: Leblebici et al. 1991, Seo and Creed 2002: 241), as the excerpts show, other factors also come into play. To be effective, in theory, actors positioned as brokers between cultures and nations will have access to more information and resources. Yet, in reality, this access requires them to maintain extensive and diverse networks while safeguarding their neutrality. For these returnees to Cambodia that are functioning in a hybrid political context, it seems hard to combine their dual engagement as well as build the local trust so essential to their social legitimacy. I propose that, only when these requirements are met, can they try and resolve the paradox of embeddedness.

Overall, in analyzing the case studies and findings presented, a mixed picture of these Cambodian French returnees’ contributions to Cambodia emerges. It seems hard for them to find common cultural ground with their compatriots as well as other returnees while maintaining a balance in their dual citizenship. On the other hand, both on an individual and
on a social level there seems to be much ‘disembeddedness’ and ‘cultural exclusion’ resulting from governmental rhetoric and public animosity. A majority of the informants expressed that this leads to frustration and a relative sense of failure in their institutional entrepreneurial ventures. Returnees’ effectiveness is affected by their personal history and skills as well as past exposure to other institutional arrangements and networks through their mixed embeddedness in multiple social networks and opportunity structures (Kloosterman 2006). Thus, the nature of their institutional entrepreneurial activities in Cambodia is burdened with both their histories in Cambodia as well as their life in exile in France, both still influencing their current social position in Cambodia and, sometimes, forcing them into involuntary trade-offs. I thus propose that local opportunity structures in a post conflict context are shaped by social, economic and political factors outside of the returnees’ control and allow for limited opportunities and resources to navigate through this.

There is a certain animosity between social groups in the new social ordering of Cambodia that seems to cause these returnees from France to not feel ‘Khmer among the Khmer’ and is, thus, enforcing their sense of disconnection. Feeling the threat of exclusion, these privileged returnees isolate themselves in order to retain autonomy. This self-exclusion, however, makes them less effective in their activities and prevents their embeddedness. In this way, the awareness of a cultural identity, and a dual engagement seems to work against overcoming the paradox of embeddedness. The focus of their activities is on transformative change, yet a lack of social legitimacy makes it hard for their objectives to be heard, acknowledged and accepted.

4.9 Conclusion: resolving the paradox of embeddedness

This paper has explored the politics affecting Cambodian French returnees institutional entrepreneurial activities in order to contribute to the transformative change in Cambodia. Findings suggest that both their brokering and bargaining for the transformation of Cambodia will only provide limited support for their institutional entrepreneurial activities and cannot help overcome the paradox of embeddedness. These activities, indeed, seem temporary and singular events as they appear in a limited timeframe of relative political instability and do not seem to outlive the opportunity structures that allowed them to exist.

The initial positioning of these returnees who are in contact with different networks and can build on a life in two countries seems to threaten the long term survival of their activities and organizations. When it comes to ‘building’ their institutional entrepreneurial
activities do not lead to the significant contributions to the transformation of Cambodia they intend to make, under structural constraints inherent to the Cambodian political culture of patronage and the political system of hybrid democracy.

Future research is needed to explore the validity of these conclusions on the long term. It is of interest to describe the sustainability of these dynamics of returnees' contributions through institutional entrepreneurial activities as more and more returnees of the first generation disappear and the second generation of Cambodian French returnees enter the country. Pathways for further investigations include, also, the question of Cambodian French community in Cambodia. Remarkably, while all key informants expressed to have been victim to cultural exclusion upon return, this has not driven them to solidarity with their Cambodian French peers and the retreat into their own social networks.
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.

For information on the return of the second generation see: Mariani, L. (2013, forthcoming) *Identités narrativizations et identifications sensible. Reconstruction et mise en perspective de quelques itinéraires de migrants franco-cambodgiens de seconde génération à Phnom Penh*. REMI

With ‘this book’ I refer to the Ashgate publication this chapter is being written for.

As the French government did not allow for the registration of separate immigrant and ethnic groups, all these numbers are based on independent research by different authors.

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 this dissertation.