Chapter Seven: Conclusion

7.1 Outline
This dissertation’s title, *Navigating a river by its bends*, is inspired on a Cambodian proverb reminding us to follow a country’s customs when we want to build our lives there. In a country covered with waterways like Cambodia, the importance attached to these flows illustrates the importance I attach to exploring the ways in which the flow of return is navigated. This research explored the experiences of returnee institutional entrepreneurs. In the comparison of Cambodian returnees’ contributions to the transformation of Cambodia I looked into Cambodian French and Cambodian American returnees’ creation and employment of social capital in their transnational social networks through institutional entrepreneurial activities upon return. In this conclusion, first, my findings are brought together and interpreted in light of the theoretical framework. Next, the research question and its subquestions are reiterated and answered, leading to some suggested pathways for future research as proposed in the final remarks.

7.2 A comparison of Cambodians’ experiences
As of 1975, Cambodians fleeing the Khmer Rouge regime were entitled to official refugee status in countries that had signed the 1951 International Convention on Refugees. In several waves they made their way abroad while their homeland was effectively closed off from the outside world. General media were not reporting on the actual events under the Khmer Rouge regime. While the world was not aware of the violence they were fleeing, both France and the United States stood out in the number of Cambodians that found refuge and the relatively benign circumstances of their resettlement there.

In this research the experiences of the first two, relatively small, waves of Cambodian refugees were explored. The focus was on those that arrived in Lyon, France and Long Beach (CA) in the USA. The members of these refugee waves stand out in their relatively well-off background, growing up as educated, middle- and upperclass citizens in the post-colonial Cambodian ‘golden years’, and their independence in resettlement. The two localities were selected for both the quality and quantity of Cambodian refugees that had resettled there. Members of these first waves, especially, have played leading roles in the Cambodian communities established there. Many of them have returned and tried to contribute to transformative changes in post-conflict Cambodia.

7.2.1 In Lyon, France
In Lyon, the conditions of Cambodian refugees’ reception were deeply affected by the history of refugee resettlement and the positive political bias with respect to the Southeast Asian groups as compared to other groups of migrants. The cultural and social ‘mood’ and the supportive media attention at the time of their arrival helped initiate an atypical political mobilization of resources for the Cambodian asylum seekers as well as the larger group of Southeast Asian refugees they were a part of. For my informants, as they compared themselves to other migrant groups, they were perceived as relatively ‘in tune’ with French society due to, among other things, the French inspired education system in post-colonial Cambodia. In general, the Cambodians’ feeling part of
French society resulted in the Cambodian French informants’ tendency to feel ‘integrated’ in French society and express fewer ambitions to return.

These positive perceptions on both sides are not unequivocal, however, and have also turned the refugees into ‘political pawns’. The warm rhetoric that accompanied the Cambodians’ reception later, sometimes, led to disappointment and a sense of abandonment among the Cambodians. The French government privately failed to provide them, in fact, with the help that was promised in public. Furthermore, initially, it resulted in the mixed experiences of refugees that were occasionally perceived as ‘anti-communist’ as they were fleeing the Vietnamese troops. They would be refused the support locally that was agreed upon officially.

The comparison of findings brings forward that, for the Cambodian French this has resulted in a discourse implying that contributing to transformative change in their homeland is important, yet that it does not mean they will have to resettle in Cambodia. For instance, while claiming their lawful French benefits and fulfilling their mortgage obligations, my informants in the overseas communities proudly mention their feelings of ‘homecoming’ in Cambodia. The Cambodian French remigrants they refer me to, also, may rather be characterized as ‘circular migrants’.

The Cambodian French in Lyon and many of the returnees, prioritize their firm embeddedness, financially and socially, in French society. A general disappointment in the progress made in Cambodia when it comes to transformative change seems to have set in among them, affecting choices on resettlement. It seems that, over the years, the more information on Cambodian society is accessible to them, the less their tendency to become involved in Cambodian politics. Their successful ‘integration’ in French society has lowered their expectations of, and desire for, a renewed ‘homecoming’. As Prak (1992) proposes, generally, both as resettling refugees and as entrepreneurial returnees the Cambodian French remain “in the shadows” of French and Cambodian society (Prak 1992: 20-21).

7.2.2 In Long Beach (CA), USA

In contrast, many of the Cambodian American informants in Long Beach talk about the hardship and marginalization they have faced in the US resettlement. The Cambodians arriving in Long Beach often belonged to modest to mediate social classes. Those that arrived before 1979 were dwarfed by the mass of uneducated agrarian Cambodians arriving in the 1980s. While the Cambodians that were already living in the United States before 1975, and had studied here, did their best to aid the relatively small wave of refugees arriving between 1975 and 1979, initially, the new arrivals’ integration into American society was often limited as compared to the Cambodian French resettlement in France. When the larger waves arrived the community leaders were a little better prepared but the absence of Cambodian American networks and a solid community infrastructure to support the struggle for economic self-sufficiency remained a barrier to their resettlement processes.

For the Cambodian community in Long Beach, its popularity as a destination for primary and secondary resettlement helped deplete the limited resources it could offer. Central and local US governments’ policies were based on the idea of ‘multicultural nationalism’ that proposed a competition for resources between strong communities fostering their ethnic identity with ‘cultural pride’. It seems, however, that the authorities may have underestimated the arriving Cambodian refugees’ cultural competences, education attainment levels and social needs. With ‘immersion’ in society as the central strategy for social adaptation, Cambodian communities were supposed to play a leading role in resettlement. However, it required shared feelings of solidarity and identity for
the community to come together, while the Cambodian community in Long Beach was, and is still, fragmented over issues based on conflicts from the homeland.

The Cambodian American informants in Long Beach generally express high expectations of a return home. Extensive and visible homeland attachments and involvements show that transnational activities in the Long Beach community are not necessarily ‘choices’ but may provide an ‘escape’ from a socially marginalized existence in the United States. For example, political rhetoric during public events and a history of support for military activities that were initiated on the Thai border during the Vietnamese takeover (1979-1989), demonstrate aspects of migrant nationalism in this overseas Cambodian community.

The Cambodian American informants paint a picture of, on the one hand, idealism and, on the other hand, limited opportunities within the Cambodian community in the US. There seems to be a prestige in taking the leap and planning permanent return and resettlement in Cambodia. In referring me to ‘successful’ returnees, however, it becomes clear that many of them have little direct contact with, or knowledge of, the returnees’ activities in Cambodia.

7.2.3 Cambodia
Since 1953 competing hegemons of, among others, western and eastern forces have informally fought their wars on Cambodian territory. Today, moreover, aid dependence has delivered the country into new structures of alternative governance. This study takes as a basic assumption the hybrid democracy in Cambodia that has evolved from the traditional patronage system fostered by Cambodian politics and the western ideals advocated by the NGO-sector. In this oppressive institutional context, marked by a weak state and limited freedoms of speech and press, many of the Cambodian French and Cambodian American returnees are set apart. They are the Anikatchun, the ‘foreigners’ that have come back to Cambodia.

Returnees from both France and the USA, to a different extent, get stuck and become isolated in following the flows imposed on them by host land and homeland institutions. Both the Cambodian American and Cambodian French informants of this research explain how perceptions of group and individual identities, their feelings of ‘belonging’, ‘homecoming’ and being part of social networks, are re-evaluated and renegotiated upon return. As a result the returnees’ transnational ties and distinct histories have, sometimes, actively led to a dynamic of cultural exclusion, self-exclusion and even marginalization upon return in Cambodia. When it comes to the institutional entrepreneurs’ roles as builders, their institutional entrepreneurial activities do not lead to the significant contributions to the transformation of Cambodia that they had intended and that was expected of them. The social capital these returnees have created in the host land is hard to employ in Cambodia while their transnational social networks have mixed functions and objectives. Resistance, opposition and disinterest towards institutional entrepreneurship by their fellow Cambodians in the country, their distrust, often neutralizes the effectiveness of their intentions to make change happen.

In the 1990s, when Cambodia was in its first post-conflict period of recovery under UNTAC, initially, the Cambodian French had the advantage of a warm welcome related to the historical relations between the two countries. In contrast, rather, the Cambodian Americans were limited in their actions by a lack of opportunity to voice their ideas from within the governmental sector. Over time, however, the USA gained economic influence, as did the Cambodian American returnees in positions available to ‘brokers’ able to mediate between English speaking NGOs and donors and the Cambodian government. As the regime consolidated, the Cambodian French
found themselves at a disadvantage on the local labor market as French is not the language of the international NGO world and France no longer holds a hegemonic position as a colonial power in Southeast Asia.

Remarkably, both those returnee institutional entrepreneurs considered ‘successful’ and ‘well-integrated’ as well as those considered to have ‘failed’ in re-establishing their social status upon return have had to deal with cultural exclusion in Cambodia. Both the Cambodian Americans and the Cambodian French are perceived as separate groups of ‘minorities’ with their own customs and approaches. The returnees’ reactions to this exclusion has been either a search for autonomy and the adoption of an independent course of action (an exit from the system), or a continuing bargain for social legitimacy while finding embeddedness within (semi-) governmental organizations (a voice in the system). However, issues pertaining to dual loyalties and political affiliations have led to suspicions and exclusion in both host lands and homeland, thus restricting returnees’ embedding and social legitimacy.

7.3 Returnees as institutional entrepreneurs

7.3.1 Research questions, research findings

This exploration of the experiences and practices of Cambodian returnees was guided by 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?

As was introduced before, two subquestions were explored in multiple sites:

(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?

(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?

In order to answer these questions in this concluding chapter, first, the findings are interpreted within the theoretical framework. This section is organized in smaller clusters of related concepts: (1) the social capital in (trans)national social networks, (2) transnational social capital and (3) institutional entrepreneurial activities.

7.3.2 Social capital in (trans)national social networks

One of the more significant conclusions to emerge from this study is that the social capital in transnational networks is even more versatile than previous research would have us believe. Not only can it provide a person with benefits through their membership of these networks, also, in the dynamics of social relations, ‘negative social capital’ may be produced that functions as a restraint to relationships. For instance, the association with a
Cambodian political party may prove a barrier to access into a community organization in Long Beach. Also, activities within a Cambodian French political group in France may prove to be a barrier to building social relations with a Cambodian governmental organization. The barriers set up by the accruement of negative social capital are manifest especially at the ‘turning points’ in the returnees’ trajectory when new social relations need to be built and resources related to old social ties are called upon.

Upon return, the comparison and analysis of the Cambodian French and Cambodian American returnees’ cases show that neither group can freely employ the social capital in their transnational networks to realize their ambitions for Cambodia. When the returnees first arrive in the country and their social legitimacy in Cambodia is not yet established, they are often met with suspicion by local parties. The questions of loyalty, ‘foreignness’ and the ‘ethnicity’ question of being a ‘real Khmer’ are being put to them. This affects their access to resources as well as their effectiveness in the initiation of institutional entrepreneurial activities. Only few returnees are well-established socially, both overseas and in Cambodia, and allowed to work from trust in multiple localities. Those individuals are often perceived as ‘successful’ institutional entrepreneurs by overseas immigrant communities.

Both on an individual and a collective level, immigration policies are now assigning positive attributes to the social capital available in immigrant social networks. A first conclusion of this research must be that, contributing to transnationalism theory, returnees’ transnational social networks may function as a source of both positive and negative social capital and, thus, as both a resource and a restraint to the social legitimacy needed to initiate and innovate through institutional entrepreneurial activities upon return.

Additionally, Cambodian returnees’ transnational social networks demonstrate how the maintenance of transnational connections on the long term is still very much determined by a physical presence passing national borders. This would put into question the perception of, among others, Glick Schiller et al. (1992) and Vertovec (2001) that transnational social networks transcend borders in ‘social fields’ which provide unbounded terrains for transnational ties. In the longer term, the returnees in this research find barriers related to negative social capital from their social relations in overseas countries blocking their social legitimacy in Cambodia. It seems that in a hybrid democracy with many oppressive institutions, building social legitimacy cannot be a ‘win-win’ situation with a former home country but will be a ‘zero-sum game’. Old social ties will weaken and the impact of the new context changes the resources available in transnational networks as well as their usefulness.

Returnees to Cambodia do not remain neutral, however much they want to be, they have to choose sides socially and politically. Therefore, the returnees’ firm embeddedness and growing social legitimacy in Cambodian society implies they will have to find a way to effectively deal with the Cambodian government whose power permeates every aspect of society. Thus, circumstances are created that affect returnees’ connections to peers and friends in former host countries. National borders turn into barriers for transnational networks in an oppressive political context like Cambodian society. On the other hand, over the last decade, these borders were also raised into barriers by the United States’ and French governments in adopting ever more severe immigration policies that hampered regular visits and the free exchange of goods and services with the home country. In the longer term, thus, it will be hard to maintain transnational contacts when there are no regular visits to the homeland. The ‘circular migration’ practices by many Cambodian French returnees seem a very pragmatic choice as they are an efficient way to revive important transnational sources of social capital that may otherwise disappear.
7.3.3 Transnational social capital in Cambodian communities

While similarities in the evolution of the overseas Cambodian communities in France and the United States are relatively easy to find, the differences between the distinct localities of Lyon and Long Beach (CA) may provide us with a deeper understanding of resettlement experiences. In the Lyon and Long Beach Cambodian communities, social capital in community organizations was explored by looking at the ways in which ‘ethnic identity capital’ (the outsiders attribution of benefits to community members) and a sense of ‘bounded solidarity’ (the insiders attribution of benefits to fellow members) could function as sources of (trans)national social capital. The French example demonstrates the ways in which opportunities for ‘integration’ in the host land may be stimulated by a centralized government that has created powerful institutions establishing a strong sense of citizenship, the perception of positive historic relations and supportive media-attention.

My findings in Lyon show that, undeniably, social cohesion within the Cambodian community and a sense of bounded solidarity may enhance members’ social capital and the benefits they accrue. These immaterial assets available in overseas communities may function as resources upon return. However, especially within the Long Beach community the Cambodians’ social ties are demonstrated to also be a restraint as they may bring back old issues of conflict and affect the trust between groups as well as among individual community members. The negative effects of these immigrant groups’ social ties, again, should not be underestimated. While outsiders assigned positive attributes to ‘Cambodian identity’ based on their perception of the Cambodians living in Cambodia Town, my informants, community insiders, shared feelings of distrust and loneliness. It could be said that many of the Cambodian Americans accrued a, comparatively, limited amount of ethnic identity capital from outsiders perceptions as their community was growing. Being perceived of as the ‘minority of minorities’ and ‘victims’ surely has not benefited the Cambodians in Long Beach and affected their emancipation through the immigrant community. The perceptions on ethnic identity capital may just as well procure benefits as mobilize barriers in society at large. Also, when a community is fragmented by a plethora of conflict issues and few resources are available, bounded solidarity loses its strength as a source for social capital and a resource for social adaptation. In extreme cases, the negative impacts of life in the immigrant community may even compel immigrants into other strategies to cope with reality and could lead them into a ‘forced transnationalism’ as an escape from the marginalization they face in their direct environment.

Finally, the history of reception in the two host countries has helped us understand that refugees, especially, are vulnerable when they arrive in resettlement countries of which they have little cultural awareness. This fragility is salient in situations where there is no family or an established immigrant community to welcome them, as was the case in smaller French communities and most parts of the USA. The diversity of refugees in resettlement, involuntary migrants, often traumatized survivors of a conflict, that made up distinct groups in arriving and did not form the uniform entity they sometimes seem expected to be, are prone to dependency and difficulties in social adaptation. This research in both Lyon and Long Beach has provided additional evidence that refugee reception is not a neutral process, temporal variations in internal and external political constellations and public opinion shape resettlement circumstances and, thus, affect their emancipation.

7.3.4 Institutional entrepreneurial activities

Considering institutional entrepreneurs as actors with sufficient resources who see the creation of new institutions as an opportunity to realize their interest, their ‘mixed embeddedness’ (meaning the dynamics of
their social legitimacy that is stronger or weaker in different kinds of social networks) as well as their ‘multiple embeddedness’ (meaning the dynamics of their social legitimacy in multiple societies) are explored by looking through the ‘strategic lens’ of the paradox of embeddedness. This paradox is pivotal in the description of institutional entrepreneurial activities as these entreprenuring individuals are prone to overcome their embeddedness in an institutional infrastructure in order to change aspects of these institutions. A focus on this puzzling situation helps us understand the roles of individual agency, institutional and opportunity structures as well as other barriers and resources for returnees’ institutional entrepreneurial activities.

A first conclusion relates to the ways in which agency is distributed across individual entrepreneurial actors. Exploring their embeddedness in Cambodian society and the social legitimacy attributed to them, demonstrates the ways in which individual informants differ from one another in the intensity and continuity of their engagement. When it comes to these factors, however, on a group level, distinct differences between the Cambodian French and Cambodian Americans seem to exist (see also previous section). Differences, moreover, that have changed their dynamics over time and may be explained by looking at the ‘structural holes’, the holes in the structure of social networks.

These structural holes, as has been illustrated, used to exist in post-conflict Cambodia at the time when the transitional UN forces tried to implement the Paris Peace Accords in cooperation with the Cambodian government and the Cambodian people. In order to be effective, social ties between these groups had to be established and there was a need for intermediaries who could help build new social networks. This need changed, however, when both the Cambodian government and the parallel regime of NGOs consolidated their hold on sections of the power and established their own social networks to support their goals. In the longer term, however, as the context changed, these structural holes disappeared and the advantages they had brought to the ‘brokers’ able to close them could not provide the foundation for long term institutional entrepreneurial activities.

Both groups of returnees suffer from what may be perceived as the claims of the ‘competing hegemons’ of traditional Cambodian politics and donor driven policies that are still vying for a determining voice in the transformative change of institutional structures in Cambodia. The situation of aid dependence makes it very hard for individual entrepreneurs to overcome the paradox of embeddedness. The traditional patronage system that is persistent in its hold on the Cambodian political, economic and social system will hardly allow for change following contested western models for development or democratization. Moreover, populist rhetoric on ‘foreigners’ posing a threat to the Cambodian nation, affects the reception of returnees. A lack of social legitimacy, trust and acceptance thus limits the returnees’ opportunities to initiate institutional change in this context of cultural competition, political contestation and looming social conflict.

A situation in which we must take note however, of the dynamics of the global status of host countries that does seem to translate into a ‘hierarchy’ of reception that, currently, is more positive for the Cambodian Americans than the Cambodian French. With Tsuda (2009) I agree that the resettlement experiences of returnees may be considered a source of social capital, depending on the reputation of the country that received them, and thus confirm the notion that “geography is destiny” both in host land and homeland reception (Tsuda 2009: 229).

The mixed embeddedness of returnee institutional entrepreneurs is tied up with personal histories, skills and character traits as well as structural opportunities in institutional contexts. Whereas some institutional entrepreneurs act in relative solitude, others are well connected in (trans)national social networks, allowing an
institutional entrepreneurial organization to emerge around issues related to transformative change. This research shows that the distrust evoked by the unique initial positioning of these Cambodian returnees who are embedded in a diversity of networks and whose lives are anchored in two countries, seems to threaten the survival of their activities and organizations in the limited opportunities offered within the restrictive context of Cambodia.

In the UNTAC period, when Cambodia just reopened, opportunity was rife. The returnees were exceptionally suited to propose new ways of doing things in a country in transition. In those days, their initiatives aimed at transformative change in Cambodia met with more fertile grounds and enhanced transnational perceptions of their ‘success’. Yet, in hindsight, this window of opportunity was only a temporary and singular phase as it has not outlived the post-conflict structures that allowed it to exist. Individual brokering and bargaining for transformative change in Cambodia, at home and abroad, provides only limited support for institutional entrepreneurial activities. The need for social legitimacy and profound societal embeddedness trumps the innovative actions of these institutional entrepreneurs and impedes the establishment of effective initiatives contributing to transformative change. In summary: it requires skill, ambition, favorable conditions and abundant opportunity to make it as an institutional entrepreneur, social capital provides a limited and insecure foundation and is affected by a multiplicity of place- and time-specific factors.

**7.3.5 Going with the flow?**

In answer to the first subquestion I propose that national policies and institutional structures determine opportunities as well as the extent of involvement by both refugees in resettlement countries as well as groups of returnees in home countries. In this way, restricting or enabling individual initiatives, the structure of the nation state and its civil society influences the evolution and variation of transnational social networks, refugee organizations and immigrant communities, implying also, their influence on returnees’ choices and opportunities for circular migration.

In answer to the second subquestion, in general, the aspect of transnationalism may actually illustrate the most manifest difference between the Cambodian French and the Cambodian Americans. While a majority of the Cambodian French informants have experiences of circular migration, not returning to Cambodia for more than several months at a time as they aim to conserve the benefits and status they hold in French society, the Cambodian American informants, while also travelling back and forth, rather demonstrate ambitions to leave everything behind in permanent resettlement. As they explain, because of their situation in the USA, it is mostly to their advantage to stay in Cambodia on the longer term and build a life there while loosening ties to the USA.

Either groups’ choices on a life as a “transmigrant” (Glick Schiller et al. 1992: 259), thus, are not necessarily emotional but, rather, rational evaluations on the most advantageous economic position. This is supported by findings on forced transnationalism in the Long Beach community that have demonstrated the ways in which institutional structures and marginalization by society enforce migrants’ inclination to find alternative social spaces in which to find recognition, acknowledgement and create as well as employ their social capital.

In order to respond to the question in what ways first generation Cambodian French and Cambodian American returnees create and employ their social capital in institutional entrepreneurial activities upon return, I now first return to the social capital they may have accrued in resettlement countries.

Structures and opportunities seem to determine processes of resettlement. The description of the Cambodian refugees’ reception and resettlement in France and the United States has focused on historical
political contexts and structures based on the experiences shared by community leaders and community members. In both host countries, indeed, community leaders initiated the creation of familiar cultural models within institutional boundaries such as the laws on immigrant organizations and state policies supporting refugee resettlement. While Lyon and Long Beach, through governmental policies and private initiatives, were busy making the Cambodians into ‘acceptable’ members of the community according to their own immigrant ideologies, however, the Cambodian communities were simultaneously orchestrating their own forms of social capital and utilizing traditional forms of religion and culture in distinct ways to negotiate ‘success’ both in terms of Cambodian and local values. While I agree that refugee agency is an often overlooked element in policy approaches, nevertheless, this research demonstrates the ways in which institutional structures and resettlement infrastructure have deeply affected the Cambodians experiences in exile.

Findings on Lyon and Long Beach Cambodian communities show that theorizing the social adaptation of refugees through community organizations without acknowledging their transnational social networks will produce an incomplete picture. This research suggests that it is a fallacy of ‘integration’ policies to assume homogeneity, unity and a singular interest in immigrant communities. This research proposes that a continuing denial of migrants’ multiple embeddedness and the clash of notions on return, integration and loyalty held in both host and home countries will restrict returnees’ opportunities in and contributions to both countries.

Upon their return, and despite the strength of some transnational networks, it seems that the extent of contributions of returnees to Cambodia are not in the hands of independent individuals but, rather, affected and closely determined by societal organizations, opportunity structures, institutional processes and traditional cultural frameworks. The case-studies on Cambodian returnees in Appendix D illustrate how returnees’ contributions to transformative change in their homeland are multifaceted phenomena that overlap, intersect with and complement other social arenas and can hardly be analyzed as isolated cases. Looking through the ‘strategic lens’ of the paradox of embeddedness this leads to mixed conclusions on the comparison of their ‘success’.

Effectively, the results of Cambodian American and Cambodian French returnees’ institutional entrepreneurial activities are secondary to their exemplary roles in both host and home countries in initiating transformative change and bringing innovation to Cambodian society. Even this study of ‘best cases’ has not enlightened us in the restraints or resources for long term ‘success’ by returnee institutional entrepreneurs in the determining context of Cambodian society. I have not been able to find an unequivocal ‘success’ by these returnee entrepreneurs in the way of initiating transformative change. However, of course, as prior research on change processes has demonstrated, in any society this will not happen overnight and cannot be planned or prescribed, we need to navigate the river by its bends and follow local flows in order to facilitate sustainable transformative change. Acknowledging this is an important factor that merits further research in other contexts.

### 7.4 Methodological contributions

Place-specific factors matter in understanding social networks and social legitimacy. The returnees’ creation and employment of social capital cannot be fully understood without situating them in the institutional structures, histories, and politics of a particular areas in both host and home countries. Lyon, Long Beach and Phnom Penh have very different characters, opportunity structures, demographics, economies and political structures. Moreover, France and the USA have their own distinct historical relationships with Cambodia. The comparison
of these localities and the ideas and networks that bind them did not only influence the ways in which Cambodian refugees were ‘made’ into members of their place of resettlement but also helped color the strategies Cambodian French and Cambodian American returnees employed to find social legitimacy in host countries and upon return to Cambodia. While it is understood that nation-state policies are influential, by anchoring this research in multiple localities I was able to reveal important differences in the resources and structures facilitating the refugees in resettlement thus demonstrating the value of paying attention to localities in research designs.

In this dissertation I have reflected upon the challenges of multisited research and discussed opportunities to address them through ‘engaged scholarship’, the practice of science through a profound commitment to the research subject. This research has inquired into ways in which researchers may face the partially contradictory challenges of the unboundedness and multiple rootedness of their informants in a constructive and participatory fashion. As a result, I argue that an integrated participative approach is needed to make an attempt at understanding the dynamics at work in the host land and homeland societies that anchor social ties. The approach developed to deal with methodological challenges in transnational research holds the promise of an integrated perspective in data collection, analysis and writing, and the acknowledgment that ‘anchorages’ (foundations in distinct localities) are as much part of a research design as are ‘flows’ (the social ties binding these localities) in order to capture transnational migratory movements.

7.5 Final Remarks

In suggesting pathways for future research I have to select a few among the many questions this research has brought up. For instance, in isolating the cases of first generation returnees belonging to the first two waves of refugees (those entering a country of resettlement before 1979), the experiences of the third wave, of course, have not escaped my attention. Moreover, during data collection, the lives of the second generation and their search for their ‘Cambodian identity’ continuously reappeared as a subject worth more extensive inquiry. As research has recently been done on the return of the Cambodian French second generation to Phnom Penh (Mariani 2012), a comparison with the return experiences and practices of the Cambodian American second generation would certainly contribute to returnee studies in the region and would provide a valuable extension to this research.

Also, I have only been able to mention some aspects of the international and political dimensions of the Cambodian refugees’ reception. In the future, the dynamics of host country’s immigration policies in relation to their geopolitical position and historical relation to sending countries as well as the mediatization of distinct groups of refugees would certainly merit further research. Concerning this last topic, next to the Gunn and Lee’s (1991) Cambodia Watching Down Under. A critical view of Western Scholarship and Journalism on Cambodia since 1975 very little seems to have been written on the issue of media influence in relation to the Cambodians’ reception. My research suggests Cambodian communities in resettlement were deeply affected by positive or negative mediatization in the international press. In a practical sense, an exploration of these connections could also raise public awareness on the subjectivities surrounding the ‘climate’ of refugee reception. Overcoming the notion of ‘geography is destiny’ this may contribute to the formulation of more equal structures of reception with respect to migrants as well as returnees.
The contexts of reception and the initiation of institutional entrepreneurial activities, also, are relevant in the findings on Cambodia. The return to a hybrid democracy whose ‘climate’ of reception is influenced by the traditional patronage system, a weak state under strong leadership, turned out to be of consequence for both the Cambodian French and the Cambodian American returnees in different ways. Comparative research in a multitude of contexts, such as undertaken by the forthcoming Ashgate publication *Entrepreneurship in the Polis: contested entrepreneurs and dynamics of change in diverse contexts* (Narbutaite Aflaki and Petridou) will make a serious contribution to the field of entrepreneurial studies. Inquiries into the barriers to institutional entrepreneurship that may be inherent to institutional structures and political contexts from a multidisciplinary strategic lens including political science and transnationalism would address this issue from a perspective that is not adopted very often. Moreover, this is relevant as the transnational world we appear to be living in may not be as complex and unpredictable as often theorized.

Navigating transnational flows by their bends, gaining insights into localities, their institutional structures and the opportunities they may provide, holds great potential. While acknowledging the distinct challenges of institutional entrepreneurial activities, we may be able to seize many more opportunities for transformative change in emergent nations.
This translation of the well-known proverb “Navigate a river by following its bends, live in a country by following its customs” is available in *The Asian American Almanac* (Gall 1995: 33) yet many others exist. The Khmer script leaves room for a diversity of translations that will also be subject to change in an English or French version. While ‘navigating’ may become, for instance, ‘travel’ or ‘sail’ and the ‘river’ could be a ‘flow’, the essence of the proverb’s pragmatic message remains intact.

For example, as presented in this research, the American system assumes the emancipatory force of social adaptation through social networks in immigrant community. Also, many European countries have now adopted a more acceptance for immigrants’ own organizations and expressions of cultural identities as compared to the example of France in the 1980s and 1990s presented before.