Conclusion: Geopolitics, Critical Responsiveness and Navigational Agency in Eurasian Connectivity

One of the challenges facing anthropologists exploring contemporary dynamics is how to forge a balance between shedding light on the specificities and complexity of human lives while addressing major debates about the nature of the world in which we live. I have sought in this book to emphasise the value of exploring the social institutional structures of networks, and of documenting the social and cultural practices that undergird these and the lively trade in commodities in which they are involved. At the same time, I have sought to do so without taking emphasis away from specific and unique aspects of individual agency and experience.

Navigational Agency in Eurasia

Throughout this book, I have argued that mobile traders operating across a range of settings in Eurasia demonstrate their ability to navigate between competing geopolitical projects of connectivity, and that my experience of life with such traders was consistently one of the enactment and performance of sophisticated forms of cultural, linguistic and political versatility. Yet there is also a darker side to the lives of the traders on whom I have focused: anxieties arising from decades of living in the context of fraught and often violent geopolitical struggles are a recurring dimension of their experiences. Focusing on the ability of traders to navigate between geopolitical projects and the pressures and strains of their daily lives challenges the notion that trading networks are durable because they are built upon functioning relationships of trust that are cultivated in ideologically and culturally coherent communities. I have instead documented the ways in which traders cultivate enduring social relationships in environments permeated by feelings of mistrust and regard access to a wide range of cultural, ideological and political resources as of inherent value to the forms of work in which they are involved.

The connective and conductive tissues of inter-Asian connectivity converge at vibrant nodes, including Yiwu, Odessa, Jeddah and

254

Istanbul. The wider significance of a commercial node might be in terms of it providing trading infrastructure, or in relationship to the social and cultural reproduction of a particular trading network. In rare cases, nodes successfully combine roles, playing a stable role in the provision of infra-structure for commercial activity and the environments that enable trad-ing networks to engage in sociological and ideological reproduction and thus to endure over time and space. The case of Yiwu is especially striking because while Chinese policymakers envision the city as a specialised site of trading infrastructure, international traders active in the city – includ-ing those of an Afghan background – regard themselves as being key contributors to its development and emphasise their multiple cultural and emotional attachments to the city. Such diversity in the nature and function of nodes means that actors travel frequently between them in order to accomplish diverse goals and ambitions, nurturing family and community life in some contexts and securing and expanding their busi-ness activities in others.

The networks whose dynamics, structures and personnel I have docu-mented and analysed in this book are not merely ad hoc responses by 'local' actors to contemporary forms of economic globalisation. Their internal composition and structure are informed, instead, by long though often silenced histories of participation by specific 'mobile societies' in trade, commerce and long-distance and circulatory forms of mobility. Our understanding of the commercial activities and mobile trajectories of Central Asian émigrés today will be impoverished without taking into account the past activities of mobile people from this region in inter-Asian commerce. Similarly, the role played by a small but versatile and eco-nomically influential community of Afghan Hindus and Sikhs in connect-ing various Eurasian settings to one another builds on the long-term contributions that networks comprising these and other ethno-religious minorities have made to commercial and cultural exchange in a variety of contexts across Eurasia over hundreds of years.

Recognition of the significance of historical processes to the activities and organisation of trading networks – the delicate connective tissues as opposed to blunt mega-projects of infrastructure that connect Eurasian societies from the ground up – does not inevitably romanticise stasis over change in the manner of much work on contemporary iterations of 'the Silk Roads'. Far from being archaic or anachronistic, the networks described and analysed in this book bear the imprint of global transform-ations in the organisation of political and economic life. The networks demonstrate, however, the ability to adapt to such transformations while simultaneously maintaining their cohesion. The Afghan traders in the former Soviet Union include individuals who successfully etched

themselves on to the Soviet Union's visions of an interconnected Eurasian landmass, mostly through participation in its ideological programmes of training and education. Commercial skills only came to the fore for these actors after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the political order in Afghanistan that it had played an important role in installing. Indeed, the individuals who established themselves as traders in the former Soviet Union were mostly new entrants to the 'field of trade' (*maidan-e tijarat*). Their backgrounds had hitherto been rural, or they may have come from families that had derived social status through state service rather than commercial skill and endeavour. Afghanistan's historic merchant families – the social respect and position of which derived from successive generations enacting prescribed forms of morally virtuous forms of behaviour in markets and urban settings – largely vacated the country and, indeed, the wider region in the mid-1970s. Few historic merchant families maintain a 'position' in Afghanistan's market; newer generations of traders argue, moreover, that the remaining descendants of older merchant families in the country are out of step with the skills required for business in the twenty-first century. Against this context, it is striking that Hindu and Sikh Afghan traders continued to play a role in the extension of Afghan commercial networks in the European settings in which they settled.

When continuities are evident in the commercial activities and geographies of Afghan traders, these do not, I have suggested, arise from either the traders or the structures in relationship to which they act seeking to resist or even being in opposition to a transforming world. My discussion of the activities of Central Asia's émigré merchants instead demonstrates the ability of this mobile society to maintain historically vital commercial structures while simultaneously being able to adapt to the cultural and ideological content of such structures. Participation in and adherence to formal Sufi brotherhoods played a critical role in promoting the cohesion and durability of historically mobile Central Asian communities across much of Eurasia until at least the mid-twentieth century. By contrast, the 'Bukharans' described in the pages of this book today are more likely to identify their modes of being Muslim with Islamic reformism than shared adherence to a Sufi brotherhood. Many Central Asian émigrés are in fact hostile to the forms of Sufic thought and practice that were of importance to previous generations of traders from their home region. At the same time, the social institutions bound up with Sufi Islam that were significant to earlier generations of traders – including the lodges (*tekke*) forged out of religious endowments (*waqf*) – are important to the collective lives of the traders in Jeddah and Istanbul today, being used to hold shared religious rituals and community celebrations. The modes of being

Muslim these traders practise today thus intersect in complex ways both with the current ideological projects of the nation states they inhabit and their community's long-term history.

Institution Builders

A crucial component of the durability of networks is the proficiency of their participants in institution-building. Historians and economists have increasingly emphasised the role that social institutions play in determining the 'rules of the game' in relationship to which trading networks conduct commerce. This book has sought to contribute to this body of literature by bringing granular attention to specific social institutions and sites that are of relevance for understanding the activities of Afghan traders. The social institutions important for Afghan traders are mostly autonomous from the state. Yet traders rarely establish institutions in direct opposition to the state structures of the countries in which they live. In settings as diverse as China, Turkey and the countries of the former Soviet Union, traders instead forge close and intimate relationships with state officials, yet rarely in a manner that suggests they are governed by or dependent on them. Indeed, individual traders who are regarded as acting in a manner that suggests unbending compliance with the dictates of local officials are a focus of much criticism in Afghan commercial circles.

The form taken by the social institutions fashioned by Afghan traders inevitably reflects the wider political cultures and environments of the societies in which they live and work. In the former Soviet countries, the traders build formal institutions recognised by local governments that are organised in relationship to national identity markers – a conventional medium through which Eurasian states have managed ethnolinguistic and cultural diversity, today as in the past.[1] In China, attempts made by traders to organise officially recognised institutions focus on their collective economic activities; institutions important but not formally recognised by the Chinese authorities are of a decidedly informal and amorphous form – notably the restaurants and cafés described in Chapters 4 and 7. The bifurcation between formal economic and informal social institutions in China reflects the local and national preoccupation of Chinese officials with ethnolinguistic, cultural and religious identity. In West Asia, by contrast, mobile traders establish institutions – notably religious foundations (*wakf*) and community associations (*dernigi*) – that are informed by the religious and ethno-nationalist goals and identities of the nation states in which they are based.

[1] Crews 2007.

The social institutions established by the traders play a multiplicity of roles in their networks' activities. They are critical to the construction and instantiation of shared senses of familiarity and cultural and moral sensibilities, most especially through the organisation of cultural, religious and political events, as well as displays of hospitality and the sharing of food. Social institutions also play a major role in the sharing and pooling of knowledge and information about trade and commerce, as well as the social reputations of individual traders. They perform such roles in geopolitical contexts in which critical information and knowledge are regarded by traders and officials alike as being highly sensitive. In this sense, rather than distinguishing between institutions that seek to cultivate the cultural identities of diasporic communities and those that are organised as platforms for building economic partnerships, it is more helpful to explore the significance of a multiplicity of social institutions – formal and informal – to multi-layered and intersecting forms of inter-regional connectivity.

Geopolitics and Trading Networks

The book has also focused on the strategies, tactics and positioning developed by the traders in relationship to their understandings of the geopolitical processes and dynamics affecting the settings in which they work. Anthropologists are increasingly active in debates about geopolitics.[2] They have documented ordinary people's experience of geopolitical processes, a field of knowledge often referred to as constituting 'popular geopolitics'. A range of studies explores experiences of border regulation and control[3] and the effect of geopolitical struggles on community life in geopolitically contested regions.[4] Less visible, however, are studies of the identities and experiences of groups who inhabit the ideological and territorial spaces that fall between competing geopolitical projects. Building on historical studies of the complex and cosmopolitan identities of inter-imperial subjects,[5] *Beyond the Silk Roads* has sought to illuminate the ways in which actors located in settings informed by multiple geopolitical projects engage in navigational agency. The study of geopolitics as lived involves recognition of the skills demonstrated by actors in carefully calibrated forms of navigation and the tensions and strains they experience in the course of performing such work: enacting navigational agency over long periods has visceral effects on people's identities, feelings and experiences. As Zia told me in the imperial

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[2] For an overview, see Marsden, Ibañez-Tirado and Henig 2016.   [3] Jansen 2009.
[4] See, for example, Rimpiläinen 2017.   [5] Aslanian 2014, Alavi 2015, Li 2020.

surroundings of St Petersburg, traders derive pride from working at the 'heart of Asia', but they are not simply savvy actors who are invariably able to exploit existing orders for their own benefit.

Much scholarship and analysis of contemporary Eurasian connectivity focuses on China's Belt and Road Initiative. However, the Belt and Road Initiative is but one of many attempts made by powerful states in and beyond the region to give political and economic definition to Eurasian connectivity. Russia and Turkey have increasingly positioned themselves as leading players in attempts to forge lasting forms of regional coherence, as the Eurasian Customs Union and Turkey's much-proclaimed 'pivot to the East' illustrate. Turkey's economic growth from the 1990s, alongside the development of a foreign policy that invests heavily in the Ottoman past and modern expressions of Sunni Muslim identity, means that it too plays a visible role in cultivating images and models of Eurasia connectivity.[6] Turkey's presence is often most visible in the active support that the Turkish state offers to Turkish businesses.[7] The political significance of the category of 'Turkic Muslim' in contexts as diverse as those of Crimea, northern Afghanistan and China's Xinjiang province is also notable. The Gulf states have also played a visible role in such dynamics, especially by using scriptural forms of Sunni Islam to extend their influence into multiple settings in West Asia and Eurasia, although there are signs, especially in Saudi Arabia, that change is underway in this region's relationships with Muslim Asia.[8] Projects including the Belt and Road Initiative, the Eurasian Customs Union and Turkey's 'pivot to the East' also intersect with the legacies of earlier projects of Eurasian connectivity. Until its collapse in 1991, the Soviet Union played a leading role in seeking to create a Eurasian arena connected to contiguous world regions. Soviet strategists regularly deployed specific types of actors – including religious authorities and international students – to advance their geopolitical agenda.

Geopolitical projects of Eurasian connectivity relate to one another as well as to those of the United States and Europe in contested ways, sparking moments of outright opposition and conflict, as well as uneasy alliance.[9] This book has sought to expand conventional understandings of the geopolitical implications of such projects by bringing attention to the ways in which they inform and are played out within human lives. It has explored the ways in which actors whose lives criss-cross Eurasia experience and think about the competing geopolitical forces with

[6] Landau 1995 and Ozkan 2014.   [7] See, for example, Flanagan 2013.
[8] Jaffrelot and Louer 2017 and Farquhar 2015.
[9] Chubin and Tripp 2014 and Rolland 2017b.

which they interact. Going beyond both the notions of 'popular geopolitics' and 'globalisation from below', I have built on anthropological studies of transregional networks and communities that have argued that if such actors operate 'beneath', then they also act 'between' governments.[10] My focus has been on the critical responsiveness that traders demonstrate in relation to geopolitical processes: by authoring routes and forging connections between little-related contexts, Afghan traders actively participate in geopolitical processes rather than merely being affected by them. The traders also think of themselves as sophisticated geopolitical actors, deriving pride, esteem and status from displaying and highlighting their linguistic and cultural versatility.

The traders explored in this book are not state actors or strategists, nor do they hold official positions in multinational corporations. As I explored in Chapter 2, some of the traders do have experience of working in high-level positions in the Afghan state – others participated as fighters and ideologues in geopolitical conflicts during the 1990s. More generally, however, participation in geopolitical processes by the traders introduced in this book brings to light a more subtle and nuanced mode of participating in geopolitics. Navigational agency – the ability to steer a course between major geopolitical projects at the same time as playing an active role within them – requires Eurasia's trading networks to work across ideological boundaries rather than being defined by them.[11] The traders explored in *Beyond the Silk Roads* deploy navigational agency to weave between multiple geopolitical projects – a key principle of being a trader in the geopolitical interstices of Eurasia is that of pragmatically working alongside rather than against, and across rather than within, different geopolitical projects.[12]

The traders we have met, then, are skilled at navigating geopolitical processes. Yet, for the merchants explored in this book, accomplishing navigational agency is rarely a straightforward process. The traders emphasise how navigating complex geopolitical contexts is hard work and does not always end in success – the experience of past failures also contributes to the circumspect and watchful manner in which they act. Geopolitical tensions, conflicts and dynamics have indeed often directly impinged on the traders' working and personal lives. Traders must tread carefully. The institutions that are so necessary for their collective activities have resulted in accusations of political activity in states that are sensitive about issues ranging from regional separatism to the politics of ethnicity. Even being inadvertently caught up in such dynamics can damage their ability to navigate geopolitical tensions, access important

[10] Li 2020.   [11] Claassen 2018.   [12] Anderson 2020.

markets and raise their families in the settings they deem suitable and in which they invest cultural and emotional significance. A Chambers of Commerce organisation established in the Saudi city of Jeddah by a long-term Arabian Peninsula-based Central Asian émigré resulted, for example, in accusations by the Saudi authorities of the trader being involved in separatist activities. The security state erected by China in Xinjiang – a region of historic cultural and commercial significance for Afghans – curtailed their activities in the region and resulted in their further geographic dispersal. By 2018, almost all Afghan traders based in the cities of Kashgar and Urumqi in Xinjiang had relocated their activities to trading nodes elsewhere in China, especially Yiwu, as well as relocating their families to Afghanistan or Istanbul. As a result, Afghan traders were no longer anchored to a region that had been of importance for the trade in goods between China and Afghanistan and between China and the former Soviet Union.

The UAE's participation in geopolitical projects has also directly affected the individual lives of traders as well as the geographies and dynamics of their networks more generally. The UAE's deportation of hundreds of Afghan merchants in 2015 arose from government accusations that they were supporting pro-Iranian armed groups in Syria, mostly through charitable gifts.[13] This sizeable deportation also arose against the backdrop of tensions between the UAE and Afghanistan after the arrest in the UAE of Iranian nationals who had travelled to the country on passports illegally issued in Afghanistan.[14] The individuals and families deported had run substantial re-export businesses in Dubai and Sharjah; in order to protect their capital, they quickly exchanged the registrations of their companies with Afghans who continued to be legally resident in the UAE. Traders were able to do so by establishing arrangements that involved businesses run by ethnically Hazara Shi'i Muslims being entrusted to Pashtun and mostly Sunni merchants. Traders who ran smaller businesses in the UAE, by contrast, mostly returned to Afghanistan, abandoning their commercial activities and taking their capital with them. Yet traders who fled in this manner were unable to pay their outstanding debts to UAE-based suppliers; as a result, their businesses fell into bankruptcy, meaning that traders faced charges of financial criminality in the UAE and the possibility of hefty fines and even jail sentences. In this context, suppliers also left the UAE for settings elsewhere, especially Istanbul. It is experiences such as these that lead traders to act in a circumspect and watchful manner and that make them

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[13] Tolo News 9 August 2016.   [14] Tolo News 22 August 2015.

reluctant to invest capital in the settings in which they are based for fear of falling 'under the gaze' (*zer-e nazar*) of the authorities.

The ever-shifting nature of geopolitical dynamics means that traders favour dispersing their activities geographically. Having intimate family members stationed in the United Kingdom, a wholesale business in Moscow and trading offices in the UAE and China, for example, is regarded by the traders as constituting the ideal arrangement. To achieve this scenario, traders must lead mobile lives and be astute in the relationships they build with officials and publics in multiple settings. The strategy of geographic dispersal allows traders to contend with fluctuating markers and unstable political conditions – a stable business in hardware items in Moscow can offset difficult business conditions in Dubai, for instance. As Anderson has argued, the active 'triangulation' of activities across several commercial nodes also allows traders to earn profits from arbitrating between multiple currency markets – a form of navigational agency enacted by the traders in the financial realm.[15] Such modes of agency rest upon decades of patience. For instance, a trader may seek to secure the citizenship of a country that is not especially valuable in terms of trade but does offer the possibility of them holding a passport that can facilitate easier international travel in the future. A trader I know in Yiwu endured long years of partial inactivity in a Scandinavian country, for example, with the aim of securing a passport that would eventually enable him to work alongside his brothers in Yiwu and travel globally in search of new and different markets.

Trust, Entrustment and Mistrust

Social theorists have long debated the relative merits of various attempts to theorise 'trust'. By contrast, this book has sought to move beyond the attempt to fit Afghan trading networks and the relationships upon which they are built in relationship to one or another model of trust. It has suggested, instead, that for Afghan traders, it is impossible to predict with any accuracy a person's future course of behaviour. As this assumption informs the ways in which the traders think and act, I chose to focus on the specific practices of entrustment that traders deploy in a world they regard as being steeped in mistrust. Focusing on such concrete practices of entrustment highlights an important point about the role played by trust more generally in these traders' networks: traders enact trust in relation to particular risks rather than to a relationship or situation as a whole. Traders embark on such acts of entrustment – such as giving

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[15] Anderson 2020.

their savings on the basis of 'gut feelings' to little-known friends – on the basis of knowledge about specific individuals that is pooled and acquired in social institutions of collective significance to them. It is by gathering knowledge in this way – rather than some innately Muslim 'culture of trust' – that allows traders to make assessments about the trustworthiness or, rather, 'trustability' of specific individuals in the networks.[16]

Historians working on trading networks have developed unique insights into this type of social formation because they are able to explore their dynamics over long periods and in specific contexts by consulting archival material. By contrast, most anthropologists working on trading networks in the present day rarely gain access to documentary evidence concerning financial, legal and personal dynamics. This is no doubt because enabling access to documentary material on the part of traders would run the risk of spilling trading secrets and revealing aspects of their activities that could contain evidence of illegal practices. Yet anthropologists are in a position to add depth and complexity to historical models. Most generally, the type of material gathered by anthropologists is based on long-term relationships cultivated with individual traders over long periods of time that illuminate the human and emotional dimension of commerce. The emphasis I have placed in this book on the effects that living at the heart of geopolitical processes has on individual and collective thought and experience was possible only because I came to know traders over a ten-year period and in a range of contexts and circumstances. If the traders upon whom the book has focused are skilled in the arts of navigating competing geopolitical tensions, then doing so also penetrates their thinking, emotions and sensibilities. Traders maintain a disposition of critical responsiveness towards the worlds they inhabit; even the most apparently mundane of social interactions and scenarios is often a source of suspicion and doubt. For an activity that is so often associated in historical scholarship and social science theory with 'trust', the everyday experiences of traders is bound up with concerns about mistrust, and this also informs the relationships they cultivate on a day-to-day basis.

Traders, I have suggested, do not regard the lived experience of mistrust as simply corrosive to the worlds they inhabit – they share a belief, rather, in the value of a healthy degree of mistrust to their activities. Mistrust represents not just a breakdown of social relationships; such social breakdowns also provide the possibility for traders to learn techniques for navigating changing and unpredictable contexts. *Beyond the Silk Roads* has suggested, then, that in addition to reflecting the ontological assumptions that Afghan traders hold about human behaviour,

[16] Monsutti 2013: 147–62.

their critical responsiveness to the world around them reveals the influence on individuals and communities of decades of participation in contexts shaped by multiple and fraught geopolitical processes. Traders illuminate the effects of this particular type of context on their thoughts and emotions, their identities and their modes of agency and behaviour.

Anthropology's focus on individual experiences thus reveals aspects of the dynamics of networks that scholarship that does not involve fieldwork is unable to explore in detail. It remains a widely held assumption in the literature on trade networks that ties of kinship, caste, religion and ethnicity offer an underlying basis for cooperation and trust to commercial actors, even if this is inherently fragile. More recently, historical work has recognised that the significance of the underlying social structures of trading networks in the development of relationships of trust is altogether less certain for commercial partnerships between merchants from different communities. A consideration of relationships between traders of different backgrounds has led historians to emphasise the role played by emotions in trust. By means of an analysis of a commercial partnership between a Somali and Indian trader in the Arabian Peninsula, Mathews has argued that theories of trust need to recognise the role that 'gut feelings' play in encouraging merchants to enter into risky economic partnerships. Rather than being an ethical stance, trust, Mathews suggests, is better conceptualised as a type of relationship that arises from the intermeshing or 'assemblage' of various and contingent aspects of merchant life, including judicial systems, people, commodities, profits and, importantly, gut feelings.[17]

I have also sought to emphasise the contingency of the connected contexts that traders create and inhabit. The decision a trader makes about where to trade is as likely to be based on an evening of impromptu discussion in a café as on careful calculations about the trustworthiness of partners and business strategies. Traders share their worldly possessions with individuals with whom they do not enjoy long-established friendships, even if they often say that length of acquaintance is the best indicator of trust. Dubai-based merchants reportedly handed over million-dollar businesses to traders from different ethnic communities based in the city in the wake of their being deported from the UAE. At a smaller scale, a trader en route to Europe with his small daughters handed his worldly possessions to a merchant in Odessa with whom he had previously had no connections. He engaged in this act of entrustment in a specific context and on the basis of a 'gut feeling' that the partner was 'somebody good'.

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[17] Mathew 2019.

The critical responsiveness to contingency that traders demonstrate in their commercial activities and the plans they make and execute regarding their family lives means that, far from being archaic and unchanging, trading networks are dynamic and unstable structures that are in an inherent state of flux. At the aggregate level, I documented how a group of actors that had initially been formed in relationship to a shared political project shifted their collective activities towards trade and commerce in the context of being violently displaced from the political domain. The longer-term success of the group in the field of trade lay not just in their long-standing internal relationships but also in their ability to incorporate new actors with capital and skill who identified with political cultures very different from their own. At the individual level, I have shown how people shift between different roles within trading networks. Over the course of their life, an individual might identify as a merchant, an intermediary, a migrant and a refugee in relation to the settings in which they act at any particular point in time.

The Future of Eurasia's Networks

What, then, are the future of these networks and the forms of connectivity in which they have played such a critical role? It might be tempting to argue that trading structures are imbued with the capacity to endure over time. Alternatively, do mega-projects (including the Belt and Road Initiative) question the capacity of apparently 'traditional' modes of inter-Asian commerce to persist? The material explored in the preceding pages questions assumptions central to both of these lines of enquiry. On the one hand, as Willem van Schendel has argued, 'states see less – and their knowledge is less precise – than they pretend'.[18] As a result, he contends, state-centric initiatives including the Belt and Road will suffer from the same 'legibility deficits' that have limited the reach of other recent multi-state programmes including the 'War on Terror' and the 'War on Drugs': such projects were unable to eliminate the scope for the informal practices being invested with ongoing significance by a multiplicity of differently positioned actors. On the other hand, trading networks and the corridors along which they operate are not given durable or geographically stable structures. They are heterogeneous and shifting structures that are engaged in a multiplicity of activities at any one time. Successful networks are durable amid such flux and uncertainty. Exploring networks from the inside out challenges assumptions that trust arising from coherent forms of identity or ethics forms the touchstone of durable trading networks.

[18] Van Schendel 2020: 41.

The networks explored in this book take active steps to ensure they have access to a wide and varied pool of cultural and ideological resources. Those making up trading networks seek to create and inhabit institutions that enable and regulate connections between nodes. They also understand broader geopolitical processes and adapt to these in ways that enable them to mediate between different political moments and emerging Eurasian geographies. The future of such networks, then, is entwined with unfolding forms of Eurasian geopolitics. The traders we have met in this book are capable of mediating between competing geopolitical projects. It is unlikely that one or other of these projects will dominate Eurasia; indeed, the rise of smaller states as geopolitical players in the region suggests, if anything, a growing degree of diversity and complexity. Networks of a variety of types that fulfil a range of functions will continue to play a vital role in the making of actually existing forms of Eurasian connectivity in the years to come. However, the structure these networks will take, the nature of their shared goals, identities and collective ambitions, as well as their ideological, ethical and cultural content and the geographical distribution of their nodes, will be contingent upon the outcome of ongoing geopolitical processes.