

Acknowledgements

The research grant out of which this book arose spanned the years between 2015 and 2020: Donald Trump's election year marking one end of the period, and the UK's exit from the European Union the other. It will come as no surprise that a key theme of this study is the ways in which the mobile traders upon whom it focuses engage with geopolitical processes. These traders – most of whom identify themselves as being from Afghanistan – offer unique insights into the nature of such processes because of their experiences of the ongoing attempts of empires and nation states to project power and influence on the part of the world they call home.

In an earlier book, *Trading Worlds: Afghan Merchants across Modern Frontiers*, I explored the life histories of mobile Afghan traders living and working in Central Asia. *Trading Worlds* documented the nature of mobile Afghans' livelihood strategies and everyday lives, especially in Tajikistan, and theorised these in relation to the anthropology of ethics and morality and to debates about the form taken by national identity formations in fragile states. By turning its attention to Afghan traders active in China, as well as documenting their connections to traders in the former Soviet Union (especially Russia and Ukraine) and West Asia (notably Turkey and Saudi Arabia), this book expands the geographical scope of *Trading Worlds*. More significantly, *Beyond the Silk Roads* shifts its thematic focus away from the traders' individual life histories and social relationships and towards the structure and dynamics of the networks and nodes that are critical for their collective activities.

This book would not have been possible without the support of grant number 669 132 'TRODITIES: Yiwu Trust, Global Traders and Commodities in a Chinese International City' awarded by the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme. I also acknowledge the support of the British Academy for making research visits to China in 2016 possible.

Some sections of the chapters have been previously published elsewhere, though they are reanalysed and framed here in relation to this book's overarching themes. The final section of the ethnographic material presented in Chapter 5 was initially published in the *Journal of History and Anthropology* as 'Islamic cosmopolitanism out of Muslim Asia: Hindu-Muslim business co-operation between Odessa and Yiwu' (29(1): 121–39). Chapter 4 includes a revised and reframed version of ethnographic material initially published by myself and Diana Ibañez-Tirado.¹ Ethnographic material discussed in one section of Chapter 6 was initially published by the *Journal of Global Networks* in the form of an article in *Global Networks*.²

I would like to thank all the TRODITIES project team members (Paul Anderson, Huaichuan Rui, Caroline Humphrey, Diana Ibañez Tirado, Heila Sha, Vera Skvirskaja, Marina Marouda and Filippo Osella) for their commitment and devotion to the project, and for the support they offered me in the field, in the writing-up stage and in the administration of the project. I am especially grateful to Diana Ibañez Tirado for the many ways in which she supported the project – from its conception to conclusion – and my role on it. Filippo Osella, Geert de Neve and Jon Mitchel helped to ensure the project was supported within the University of Sussex, as did Elizabeth Harrison. At Sussex, I am grateful also to Susan Chater, who helped the project well beyond the call of duty.

Lucy Rhymer of Cambridge University Press oversaw the initial stages of the publication of the book. I would also like to thank Sebastian Ballard for his work on the maps, and Tim Page for his careful editing of the manuscript.

Fieldwork in China would not have been possible without the support of numerous members of staff of the Yiwu College of Commerce and Industry. I am also grateful to the leadership of the China Electronic Commerce Centre which played an instrumental role in enabling myself and other members of the project team to conduct successful fieldwork in Yiwu. Fieldwork was also supported by Oleg Yarosh, Sergey Abashin and Şebnem Koser Akçapar. A visiting research fellowship at the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies made fieldwork in Jeddah and Riyadh possible. Engseng Ho played a pivotal role in making possible my visit to Saudi Arabia. My fieldwork in Afghanistan would not have been possible without the support and sincere friendship of Zalmai Nishat. I am also grateful to Zalmai's family for taking care of me on numerous

¹ Marsden and Ibañez Tirado 2018. ² Marsden 2020a.

occasions. In Kabul and Herat, I benefited immensely from my affiliation with the Afghanistan Institute of Strategic Studies (AISS). I am especially thankful to Davood Moradian and the administrative and research staff at AISS offices for their help.

Portions of this work were shared with the participants of seminars, lecture series and conferences hosted by academic institutions across the world: my thanks to all those who organised and attended these events.

David Henig and Paul Anderson kindly read the entire manuscript in its entirety on a number of occasions. I am extremely grateful to them for their insightful comments, suggestions, criticisms and encouragement. I would also like to thank two anonymous reviewers appointed by Cambridge University Press who read the manuscript with care and dedication and provided helpful and concrete suggestions for its improvement.

Friends and colleagues across the world have helped me a great deal in completing the book. Ben Hopkins, Ka Kin Cheuk, Shah Mahmoud Hanifi, Mohammed Jamil Hanifi, Tang Man and Moska Najibullah have all been wonderful friends while I have been writing this book. I would also like to thank colleagues at the Sussex Asia Centre for providing a stimulating environment for thinking about inter-Asia, particularly Jakub Polansky, Ireena Ibnu, James McMurray, Yunlong Jia, Syed Faisal Mohammad and Thomas Chambers. My deepest thanks to Naveed Shinwari for welcoming me into his home in Islamabad for a fruitful stay in the autumn of 2017 and for making sure that I was able to see Peshawar once more.

As the following pages will make amply clear, the fieldwork on which this book is based was not always plain sailing: its more difficult aspects, however, were frequently punctuated by the warmth and generosity of traders from Afghanistan, many of whom I am now honoured to think of as friends. I regret for reasons of confidentiality that I am unable to name any of them here.

My parents – Charles and Lucilla Marsden – made the fieldwork possible on several occasions, most especially by looking after my son whenever I called upon them to help. As ever, I am very grateful to them for all their help, understanding and love. Above all, I would like to thank Robin. I will always remember spending time with Robin in Yiwu searching for ‘bat-catchers’ and eating ‘special bread’, not to mention afternoons swimming in the Black Sea in Odessa, and going on walking tours around ‘Biladi Zeytunburnu’ in Istanbul. I hope some of those memories will continue to live with him and that we will be able to resume our travels before too long. It has been a delight to see him grow up as the project has

progressed and eventually concluded. I wish him all the best in the years to come and am honoured to dedicate this book to him and to him alone.

I have used pseudonyms for all people in this book, as well as for easily identifiable locations and businesses. Any mistakes remaining in the book are my own, and I take responsibility for them.