

Introduction

The apotheosis of trust

There is perhaps no concept that so federates the disparate caucuses of modernity as trust. From the broad plains of popular psychology to the narrow marches of academia, from the semantic metastasis of management-speak to the quiet, curatorial passion of established religion, trust is everywhere. And everywhere it is lauded as both necessary and good. Necessary, in that trust is, simply put, a precondition for virtually all aspects of collective human existence. So each of the human and social sciences separately insists that their very object of study depends on the presence of trust. For sociologists like Simmel, trust is the glue of society: we could not live alongside others without the minimal trust that allows us periodically to turn our backs to them. For economists, trust is the foundation upon which almost all economic transactions are built; for political scientists, it is the cornerstone of legitimacy and the *fons et origo* of government. And, in the wake of Grice's pragmatic philosophy, trust is even frequently described as a condition of speech and communication.

This fairly incontrovertible claim of necessity is customarily seconded by a moral claim of virtue. As the Swedish-American philosopher Sissela Bok (1978) puts it, whatever it is we value, trust enables it to flourish. Trust, particularly extensive social trust, is variously depicted as enhancing the social fabric, lowering crime rates, increasing happiness, promoting development, generating prosperity, improving one's sex life, and fostering mutually beneficial relationships. Beginning with Weber's foundational work on the legal structures, social forms, and cultural configurations that progressively allow for the extension of

credit beyond the immediate family circle and so give rise to modernity, vast scholarly resources have thus been deployed to identify the processes and institutions that enable trust. Underpinning much of this literature is the assumption that trust is, broadly speaking, a good thing for both the individual and the community that enjoy it, be they paupers, peasants, princes, or thieves. And the more we have of it, the better. Of course, this correlation is not infinitely extensible: everybody recognizes that at some point trust tips over into credulity and this can have unfortunate consequences, but the general rule holds. Trust must be maximized.

There is, unsurprisingly, little room within this absolutist framework for a nuanced discussion of mistrust. With few exceptions (e.g. Rosanvallon 2006), it is treated as little more than an absence of trust—just as in classical Augustinian theodicy, evil does not have an identity in its own right but is a mere privation of goodness. As such, mistrust is frequently not seen as doing anything but *undo* the positive work of trust. Where trust builds relationships, mistrust sunders them; where trust breeds wealth, mistrust generates poverty; where trust gives rise to effective communication and extensive social ties, mistrust is the mother of confusion and isolation. Mistrust is, in short, uniquely corrosive of human bonds—it is social acid. It is precisely this idea that was developed in the literature on “lower-trust” societies that briefly blossomed in the heyday of peasant studies, from the 1950s to the 1970s. The classic work is Banfield’s *The moral basis of a backwards society* (1958), in which the inhabitants of the pseudonymous village of Montegrano, in the Italian *Mezzogiorno*, are depicted as chronically and cripplingly suspicious of everybody outside their immediate nuclear family.¹ They lie, gossip, backstab, and betray without compunction, because they have no ethical ties beyond those of kinship. This is the dog-eat-dog world of so-called amoral familism, in which mistrust locks people and societies into a vicious cycle of backwardness and underdevelopment as squalid and unrelenting as a world without sunlight.

I have spent several years living in and then visiting a peasant society in the Moroccan High Atlas, which shares many of the key characteristics identified

1. Recognizably related lines of thought are developed by George Foster, who argued that peasant societies typically share a cognitive orientation towards an Image of Limited Good and the idea that success can only come at the expense of others, thus leading to mistrust (1965: 297), and Aguilar, who looks at how Mexican peasants seek to overcome an “ingrained disposition” toward mistrust (1984: 3). See Govier (1997) for an overview.

by Banfield: chronic and very vocal mistrust; communicative strategies based on obfuscation and dissembling; relentless gossiping; and frequent accusations of deceit and betrayal. My friends and interlocutors were adamant that “there is no trust” (*ur tilli tiqqa*); the minimal trust previously identified as necessary for human society was of course present, but it did not have the same social, discursive, or ideological extension as we might find in, say, Denmark, where I now live, or rural 1950s Utah, which Banfield uses as the foil for his analysis of Montegrano. And yet, despite these similarities, I cannot recognize Banfield’s description of a chaotic Hobbesian world of solitude, anomie, and pitiless mutual predation. Certainly, the High Atlas lacks the structures of communication, practices of friendship, and political and economic institutions found in so-called high-trust societies. But it is not that there are simply *less* of these things; it is rather that those they have are different. This, I suspect, may be equally true of other societies characterized by widespread mistrust, such as the contemporary Ukraine, where I have since spent some time.²

Simmel describes trust as “a hypothesis regarding future behavior, a hypothesis certain enough to serve as a basis for practical conduct” and suggests that people, eras, and societies differ by the particular admixture of knowledge and ignorance that suffices to generate trust (1950: 318–19). In other words, the morphology of the trust hypothesis shapes and produces particular social forms. I argue that just the same is true of mistrust. It is an alternative hypothesis and one that gives rise to social forms of its own. These are not merely the photographic negative of those produced by trust, but interesting and occasionally admirable constructs in their own right. This book thus examines the impact of mistrust-qua-hypothesis on practices of conversation and communication, friendship and society, as well as politics and cooperation. To explore the nature of this hypothesis, we need to take a brief dip into the trust literature.

TRUST AS ATTITUDE, FAMILIARITY, AND CONTROL

The vast and near perfect concert of voices singing the praises of trust should not be mistaken for any unity of content. Trust may be necessary and it may be good, but it is far from clear precisely what it is. Indeed, for a long time it went

2. I was in Odessa for three months in 2007, and returned to the Ukraine for follow-up visits in 2012 and 2013.

largely without saying. Though trust occupied a central position in the classical sociology of Max Weber, Talcott Parsons, Gabriel Tarde, and to a lesser extent Émile Durkheim,³ it was rarely interrogated directly, functioning instead as a sort of black box at the heart of social theory. It is only in the work of Simmel that trust is tackled head on, but though his writings on the topic demonstrate his invariable ability to identify the crux of an issue, they run to fewer than ten pages in total⁴ and failed to produce any significant intellectual progeny, at least in the short term. We have to wait until the 1960s and 1970s for the arrival of a wave of thinkers who transform trust into a central object of sociological reflection.

When they did so, they approached the topic from a wide variety of angles. One example is Garfinkel's notorious "breaching experiments" (1963), in which he encouraged his students to expose the unspoken expectations of social interactions by acting as if they were a lodger when visiting their parental home or behaving as if they assumed their interlocutor had hidden motives. These experiments addressed the implicit forms of trust that structure everyday interaction. Game theory, meanwhile, which explores decision-making in highly artificial environments, examines trust as a possible strategy in cooperation games like the (iterated) prisoner's dilemma (e.g. Axelrod 1984; Poundstone 1992).⁵ In so doing, it is one of the rare fields to treat mistrust as anything other than a malediction;⁶ in game theory, it can also be a rational strategy in just the same way as trust. Finally, Niklas Luhmann's highly influential *Trust and power*

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3. The relevant texts are *The theory of social and economic organisation* (Weber 1947), *Action theory and the human condition* (Parsons 1978), *Psychologie économique* (Tarde 1902), and *La division du travail social* (Durkheim 1893).
 4. I am indebted to Guido Möllering (2002) for counting them and also for providing a concise and thorough examination of Simmel's position.
 5. For those unfamiliar with the prisoner's dilemma, it involves two criminal accomplices arrested by the police and placed in solitary confinement. The police lack evidence for the principal charge, but can convict on a lesser one; they separately offer the prisoners a choice: they can betray their partner or keep silent. If they both hold their tongue, then they both serve one year; if they both betray the other, they both serve two years; and if one betrays the other and the other stays silent, then the traitor walks free whilst his unfortunate accomplice serves three years. The idea is to explore the different possible strategies to adopt in such a situation and people's reasons for doing so.
 6. The other great exception is certain branches of political theory, which argue that democracy is predicated on a healthy mistrust of one's leaders (see chapter 3).

(1979), which builds on the foundational writings of Simmel, focuses on the functional aspects of trust as a means of simplifying the dizzying complexity of reality and thus opening up the possibility of further-reaching forms of action. Each of these approaches has given rise to huge and highly diverse bodies of literature that are largely immune to summary, although there has been no shortage of attempts to do so.⁷ My purpose here is not to swell their ranks, but simply to develop a few points that are critical for understanding the approach to mistrust developed in this book.

First, is the opposition between trust as strategy and trust as a psychological state or attitude. Strategic approaches predominate in mainstream economics, where rational actors are the lynchpins of social analysis, as well as in the voluminous self-help and management literature, which broadly shares this vision of the human subject. In both cases, the decision to place one's trust in another is seen as a deliberate and conscious strategy that can be used to maximize success, however defined. The sociological and psychological literature, in contrast, tends to stress the attitudinal quality of trust. This takes a variety of forms: in psychology there is a clear contrast between dispositional approaches, which focus on people's general assumptions about the trustworthiness of others and interpersonal approaches, where trust is a function of a particular relationship (cf. Simpson 2007); in sociology, the situation is more complex, but in simple terms, one can identify a spectrum of foci ranging from personal trust to extensive social trust in unknown others (e.g., Putnam et al. 1993) or trust in the system (Seligman 1997), for instance the legal system.⁸ These distinctions are hard fought, but what matters for our purposes here is that all of these different psychological and sociological perspectives stress that trust is not merely a matter of choice.⁹ It is also a way of viewing the world.

7. Among the most straightforwardly and ambitiously titled are: Gambetta's pioneering edited volume, *Trust: Making and breaking cooperative relations* (1988); Fukuyama's *Trust: The social virtues and the creation of prosperity* (1995); Misztal's *Trust in modern societies* (1996); Seligman's *The problem of trust* (1997); Sztompka's *Trust: A sociological theory* (1999); Cook's edited volume, *Trust in society* (2001); Hardin's multiple contributions, including *Trust and trustworthiness* (2004) and *Trust* (2006); and Cofta's *Trust, complexity and control* (2007).

8. The original opposition elaborated by Luhmann is between personal trust and "system trust" or "system confidence" (*Systemvertrauen*), where the latter encompasses both faith in the system and in unknown others qua "personal systems" (1979: 22).

9. Indeed, Hardin (2001: 11) goes so far as to suggest that it is not about choice at all. The choice lies in the decision of whether or not to act on trust.

Second, this way of viewing the world is one that relies on familiarity as a basis for simplification. Luhmann points out that trust involves a telescoping of present and future. At any given moment, the social actor is necessarily confronted with infinitely ramifying possible futures. This vertiginous perspective is basically unmanageable for a human mind. Trust simplifies it, by functionally limiting these possible futures—“to show trust is to anticipate the future. It is to behave as though the future were certain” (1979: 10). For instance, if I can trust my business partner to deliver a shipment of goods for a particular date, then I can rent storage space, arrange meetings with potential buyers, and so forth. In other words, trust generates a temporal collapse, bringing the future into the present and vice versa. Simply put, trust amounts to confidence in one’s expectations, and such expectations cannot emerge *ab nihilo*, but must depend on a certain degree of familiarity with either people, the world, or systemic representations of the real. At an interpersonal level, this simplification through familiarity expresses itself in the attribution of personalities to people (1979: 41); we interpret the behavior of others as motivated and synthesize these motivations into a character, which allows us to predict their behavior. Similar processes can be seen to be at work in socially extensive or system trust, which rely on simplifying models and a goodly degree of apophenia—the human tendency to see system, pattern, and intentions where there is only “noise.” All these forms of trust also depend on the fundamental hypothesis identified by Simmel: “that there exists between our idea of a being and the being itself a definite connection and unity” (1990: 179). In other words, we must believe that other people or entities have durable personalities or characters, that we can understand them, and finally that we can faithfully represent them to ourselves.

Third, trust is, in the words of Dunn, “a policy for handling the freedom of other human agents or agencies” (1988: 75). We cannot have trust in entirely natural entities or systems because they have no agency: we do not, for example, trust the sun to rise or a tree to grow (cf. Sztompka 1999: 20).¹⁰ Nor can we use the word trust to describe situations of complete predictability. There always has to be an element of risk. This umbilical relationship between trust and risk partly explains the current vitality of the trust literature. Trust, for a variety of mutually contradictory reasons, is frequently identified as a specifically modern concern. So on the one hand, in some of the more synthetic sociological literature, complex modern societies, where people freely choose with whom to

10. Though we may trust in God (an agent) to cause them to rise and grow respectively.

associate, are sharply contrasted with small-scale “traditional” societies, where kinship dominates; and both kinship and tradition are portrayed as a matter not of choice, but of duty or obligation (cf. Seligman 1997: 36; Sztompka 1999: 45). In such contexts, where behavior is not chosen, but determined by one’s social role, there is supposedly little place or need for trust. Elsewhere, however, these same traditional networks of kinship and community are seen as the very basis for interpersonal trust (e.g. Putnam 2000; Algan et al. 2012), which modern society is progressively losing. In short, we are living in times where there is less and less trust, or perhaps more and more of it, but either way, everyone agrees that there is more need for it than ever (Giddens 1990).

In an increasingly disembodied and dislocated world, in which traditional forms of social control no longer apply and risk is the order of the day (Beck 1992), trust becomes *the* central social technology. If my local ironmonger sells me a dodgy trowel, I can simply take it back; but if I buy a dodgy Chinese trowel on an online auction site from a middleman in Surinam, then trust is all I have: trust in the Chinese factory, in the Surinamese middleman, in the site administrators, in the online payment system, in the postal service, and in the overarching legal framework. The relationship between trust and risk also highlights the fact that trusting somebody always implies a degree of dependency (Marzano 2010) and, I would add, a *redistribution of control*. In trusting, we both relinquish control over our environment and attempt to extend control over others. If I trust my daughter to play in the yard and not stray into the street, I both abandon direct control over the situation and simultaneously try to assert control over her. Because if she does stray, then my trust will be withdrawn and she will no longer be allowed out on her own. Trust, in other words, is a rather absolute and unforgiving social technology: it requires compliance from those we trust, lest it be lost, perhaps forever. So much for trust. What of its shadow?

THE HYPOTHESIS OF MISTRUST

For the purposes of this book, we can think of mistrust as the countervailing hypothesis to that outlined above. It, too, is not simply a strategy or a matter of choice, but also a disposition and it is this aspect of the phenomenon that principally concerns me. People’s grounds for deciding particular others are untrustworthy have already been thoroughly explored in strategic analyses of trust; here the emphasis is on their reasons for assuming a *general attitude* of mistrust

and the social implications of such an attitude. This also explains my choice of the term “mistrust” over “distrust”: whilst the two are very close in meaning, distrust is more likely to be based on a specific past experience, whereas mistrust describes a general sense of the unreliability of a person or thing.

This general attitude of mistrust can, I suggest, be seen as rooted in the idea that familiarity is insufficient ground for trust.¹¹ Proximity and familiarity do not necessarily equate to knowability or certainty and cannot be used as a basis for generating expectations and predicting future behavior. This point is critical, for it directly challenges the very widespread notion that there is an umbilical relationship between the holy trinity of proximity, familiarity, and trust—a notion that reaches far beyond the literature specifically dedicated to the question. It is, as we have seen, the key contention of Banfield’s work on the social implications of mistrust in Mediterranean societies, and it is also implicit in another disciplinary avenue of enquiry that sinks its roots into Mediterranean and Middle Eastern ethnography: the anthropology of hospitality. As Candea and da Col baldly state in their recent discussion of the question, “For Pitt-Rivers (1968: 20), as for Derrida, the stranger is the absolute unknown, whose radical alterity echoes the numinous presence of the divine itself. Hospitality emerges as a mechanism for holding this dangerous being in abeyance” (2012: 6). In other words, hospitality serves to neutralize the radical otherness of the stranger/guest and thus helps manage what Herzfeld, writing in a Cretan context, calls the “conventional distrust of *kseni* (outsiders)” (1987: 76). What is true of Crete is also true, to an extent, of much of the wider Mediterranean area,¹² of which the Moroccan High Atlas is in this respect a peripheral, but nonetheless vital, appendage. The category of strangers or outsiders (*ayt birra*) is one that can, depending on context, be effortlessly extended to describe everybody from residents of a nearby village, to foreigners proper. And all of these types of stranger are figures that may arouse suspicion and that represent, in any case, a potential threat: they are potentially untrustworthy.

11. There is, in fact, an alternative possible foundation for an absence of trust—viz. the assumption that the other is potentially knowable, but his intentions are malign (cf. Allard et al. 2016). This, however, can only, I suspect, really function as a basis for distrust of specific individuals; it is hard to see how it could be extended to a generalized attitude of mistrust without causing irreparable psychological harm. It is not, in any case, the object of this book.

12. As, indeed, in segmentary systems more generally.

The crucial point, however, is that they are not, at least in my experience, primarily untrustworthy *by virtue* of being strangers. If familiarity is, as I have suggested, insufficient grounds for trust, then it stands to reason that the straightforward unfamiliarity of strangers is not, in itself, a reason for mistrusting the other. Indeed, while most people in the High Atlas very vocally insist that they prefer the company of intimates (kinsmen, fellow villagers, or fellow tribesmen—i.e. people who are not “outsiders,” *ayt birra*), and this preference is reflected in their behavior, nobody ever suggested to me that this was because strangers were less trustworthy. Indeed, unlike in Banfield’s Montegrano, expressions of mistrust were just as commonly directed at close friends and family.¹³ If people preferred to be among intimates, it was because one can only truly be at ease with one’s own. So, if simple alterity is not the basis for this ideology of mistrust, on what foundation does it rest? Here it is perhaps instructive to turn once more to Simmel. In his classic piece on the topic, Simmel suggests that whilst the stranger is principally defined by the fact that he is a “potential wanderer” whose social position is a function of the fact that he came from the outside (1950: 402), he is also a stranger insofar as “one has only certain more general qualities in common [with him]” (1950: 405). And, he continues, “a trace of strangeness in this sense easily enters into even the most intimate relationships” (1950: 406), as no human bond can be pure specificity, devoid of more general, abstract qualities. Thus, strangeness transcends the stranger and seeps into all elements of social life.

Now, Simmel’s definition of strangeness as wandering and generalizability makes little sense in an Atlasian context, but his dual understanding of the concept is worth retaining. For the people I worked with, outsiders (*ayt birra*) were primarily defined not by the fact of their external origin,¹⁴ but by the fact that they were *socially* unknown. There was also, however, a second form of strangeness or

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13. This is not to suggest that the people I lived and worked with simply failed to distinguish between intimates and strangers when it came to trusting them. Close social relations with kith and kin do of course require a greater degree of trust than that typically accorded unknown outsiders: one sleeps alongside them, entrusts property to them, etc. But crucially, people also made it clear that friends and family were also in some ways radically untrustworthy as well.
 14. Indeed, some anthropologists (e.g., Simenel 2010) have argued that the status of integrated outsider or exile is the foundational position of Ichelhiyn Berber identity construction; a process not dissimilar to the idea of the Stranger-King as proposed by Sahlins (2008), albeit one not restricted to a particular elite group.

alterity which was understood to pervade social life more generally—one predicated on the notion that other people are, in some sense, unknowable *per se*. That they cannot be sounded or fathomed; their personality cannot be identified or used as a basis for prediction. This applies to everybody and it is this that is the fundamental hypothesis of mistrust: that, to reverse Simmel's maxim, there exists between our idea of a being and the being itself no definite connection or unity. As such, it is a stance that refuses psychological reductionism and embraces social and interactional complexity, rather than simplifying them for functional reasons. And it also refuses either to alienate or assert control. Trust may frequently be described as a way of managing the freedom of others, but, as we have seen, it is also a way of controlling it. Mistrust then, as we shall see, contributes rather to a philosophy of rugged autonomy and moral equality that assumes other people to be both free and fundamentally uncontrollable.

This book explores the origins and implications of this hypothesis, focusing on the core social assumptions of unknowability, irreducibility, and autonomy in a particular ethnographic site, that of the Moroccan High Atlas and using them as a basis for a broader analysis of the morphology of mistrust. In so doing, it also engages with and sometimes challenges a variety of scholarly and popular ideas about the role and nature of trust in society. At first blush, this might look like a derivative example of the sort of radical cultural comparison assayed by Marilyn Strathern in *The gender of the gift* (1988), where an idealized "System M" (for mistrust) is counterposed to a conventional portrayal of Western thought as represented by concepts of trust in the social sciences. It is not. For the simple reason that I do not see the two hypotheses I am describing as grounded in incompatible ontologies of, say, the person, society, or communication. To the contrary, they belong to the same conceptual universe. The ideas and practices that I describe as operative in the Moroccan High Atlas should be intuitively comprehensible to the reader, just as the sociological or linguistic theories I contrast them with are intuitively comprehensible to my friends in Morocco (when I explain them). The hypotheses of trust and mistrust are not mutually exclusive ways of viewing others, but are to an extent constitutive of one another. Each implies its shadow: where people assume that others can be known and so trusted, they are also aware that sometimes this does not hold; and where they assume that others are largely unknowable, they are also aware that some are less unknowable than others.

In short, this book is not an attempt to develop an opposition between two conceptual worlds. Instead, it pursues a wide range of different comparative

strategies to further the twin aims of exploring the mistrust hypothesis in a particular context and challenging academic understandings of trust. I see these as fundamentally intertwined and mutually reinforcing processes, but also ones that are conceptually distinct and which, crucially, are not reducible to comparison.¹⁵

The first chapter explores the practical and conceptual bases of ideas of mistrust in the Moroccan High Atlas. As in certain other parts of the world, most notably Melanesia, local people claim that the inner worlds of others—their intentions, motivations, and character—are inscrutable and that the mere attempt to sound them is immoral. We can neither know nor faithfully represent the interiority of others to ourselves. This claim has radical implications for their ideas and practices of conversation and communication, as people both seek to shield their interiority from prying minds and refuse to speculate on that of others. This process of “lateral”¹⁶ comparison between Melanesia and Morocco is used to expand standard pragmatic understandings of the form and function of speech. I suggest that in certain contexts and certain genres, lying or obfuscation is almost the default mode of speech and so the statements of others and even language itself are widely considered too labile to be trustworthy. Such lability is also a property of people themselves. As they are unknowable, they are also unpredictable and thus liable to betray one another.

The implications of these forms of mistrust for social relations, particularly friendship, are the subject of chapter 2. Here, I develop a frontal (and highly asymmetrical) comparison between classic *representations* of friendship in northwest Europe and actual *practices* of friendship in rural Morocco. Friendships are often the most relaxed, engaged, and intimate relations people have in the High Atlas, but they are not predicated upon a progressive unveiling of one’s self to the other, nor are they built on foundations of trust. It is understood that friends may let you down or betray you. They are autonomous social actors and can neither be predicted nor bound, as trust requires. This, I argue, produces a much more tolerant and flexible form of friendship that allows for and

15. Except in the most banal possible acceptance of the term, whereby any act of exogenous description requires the juxtaposition (and thus comparison) of extraneous objects and concepts.

16. For a discussion of the differences between and implications of “lateral” comparison between different ethnographic objects and “frontal” comparison between an ethnographic object and the author’s cultural hinterland, see Candea (2016).

accommodates fickleness and infidelity, and is based on affection and pleasure in one another's company rather than loyalty or identity.

This same flexibility is very much in evidence in local political practice, which I explore in chapter 3, comparing the High Atlas with other supposedly anarchist polities and using this directly to challenge some of the core assumptions of Western political theory. Standard representations of High Atlas politics, and indeed of Amazigh (Berber) politics more generally, focus on the village or tribal council as the locus of collective action. I paint a much more fluid picture of ephemeral institutions, unpredictable coalitions, and temporary constellations. This, I argue, is closer to traditional ethnographic representations of anarchy, with one key exception: where these latter tend to focus on the clear-sighted, idealistic nature of anarchic institutions, designed as bulwarks against tyranny, I propose to see them as a product of mistrust and oriented not to the ideal (or transcendent) but to the contingent (i.e. immanent).

The final chapter explores the variety of forms that mistrust can assume. It compares contemporary urban Ukraine with the Moroccan High Atlas, arguing that the very different infrastructures of everyday life characteristic of these two spaces allow for the proliferation of quite different imaginaries of mistrust. Places like Ukraine, or lowland Morocco, where the complex logistical frameworks of bureaucracy serve as the warp and weft of social existence, are fertile ground for conspiracy theories, which assume that organized subterranean forces are manipulating the contours of reality. In the more intimate and uncertain infrastructural environment of the High Atlas, meanwhile, different forms of mistrust flourish, centered around fears of the witch (the proximate enemy who betrays from within) and, above all, of the thief. A thief who targets objects, but also and especially a thief of information, who pries into your affairs, "steals your words," and compromises your autonomy.

CONTEXT AND CAVEAT

As must be clear, a great deal of the ensuing analysis draws on the two years I have spent living in the Moroccan High Atlas mountains with *Isbelbiyn* Berbers.¹⁷ That said, I would like very seriously to stress that this book is not

17. It is currently fashionable to refer to all Berber-speaking people as Imazighen (sing. Amazigh or "free-man"), rather than the apparently pejorative word "Berber," which

primarily intended as an ethnography of a place or people; it is an ethnography of a hypothesis—that other human beings are irreducible and thus untrustworthy. My description and analysis of Atlassian life is, I trust, recognizable to those who actually live it, but it is also very partial—partial in that it focuses on the origins and implications of a *single* facet of existence. And even though the purpose of this book is in some sense to rescue mistrust from its universal pillory, it still involves depicting my friends as chronically suspicious and, insofar as it seeks to explain their suspicion, as frequent liars, occasional traitors, and opportunistic welchers. For most of my readers, these are not good things. And so, I would like to offer a pair of caveats. First, they are not good things for my friends in the Atlas either. Nobody likes being betrayed, lied to, or welched on, and nobody extols these things. Nor shall I. My purpose is not to say that mistrust is subjectively pleasant, but that some of the social effects of widespread mistrust are not necessarily corrosive, may at times even be enviable, and most importantly are worthy of sustained interest. And second, the people I lived and worked with are not reducible to their mistrust. They are also friends and lovers and doting parents; they are generous, unfailingly welcoming, and above all very fine company. I have not been able to do justice to these aspects of local life; that does not mean that they do not exist.

probably has the same root as barbarian. However, almost nobody I knew ever used the term in this sense. Instead, they referred to themselves as *Ishelhiyn*—i.e. people who speak *Tashelhiyt*, the largest of the three Moroccan Berber languages. The word *Imazighen* was reserved for the speakers of *Tamazight*, which is confusingly also the word for the specific Berber language spoken in the Middle Atlas region. I stick to local usage throughout.