Intervention

Essay on the Anthropology of the Fiduciary

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Mistrust, Distrust & Suspicion

Because the term 'mistrust' itself has been used to mean both the absence of trust and that which hinders trust (Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary 1963), even ground-breaking scholarly work, such as Mistrusting Refugees (Daniel and Knudsen 1996), has often conflated 'mistrust' and 'suspicion' under the assumption that they are one and the same. Likewise, the term 'distrust' is also used to express 'lack of confidence', 'suspicion', 'wariness', and 'lack or absence of trust' (Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary 1963). Broadly speaking, the prefix 'mis-' can be used to convey the meaning of something 'erroneous' (as in 'mistake') or simply the lack or absence of something (as suggested in 'misconduct'). The prefix 'dis-', in turn, can be used to express reversal (as in disembark), negation/lack (as in 'disgrace'), removal or release (as in 'disembowel') or even intensive force (as in 'dissever')[1] (Dictionary.com n/a). Therefore, both 'distrust' and 'mistrust' have often been used interchangeably albeit to mean different things.

Nonetheless, a lack of trust need not necessarily be understood as leading to the impossibility of entrustment, but rather the opposite. By definition, entrustment, or the process of conferring trust to something or someone, is motivated by a complex agency that entails the subject's only partial consciousness and control, and can only exist in the relative absence of trust. While trust may already have been mobilized in a given entrustment process, entrustments must at least lead to the reinforcement, renegotiation, or restatement of trust. However misrepresented and misunderstood, this relative absence of trust, or what we may call distrust, is not the same as that which actively hinders trust, or what we may call suspicion. Moreover, if there is no necessary intrinsic con-

1 | Dis-; Mis-. n/a. Dictionary.com. See: http://www.dictionary.com/

nection between suspicion and trust in a given context, suspicion, whenever present, greatly affects the dynamics of entrustment.

Therefore, as a heuristic device, instead of grouping diverse phenomena under interchangeable synonyms, I propose using each one of these concepts in reference to a specific social phenomenon. As the prefix 'dis-' seems to evoke absence above all, I propose using distrust to mean simply the absence of trust. As 'mis-' conveys the idea of misplacement, I propose using 'mistrust' to mean misplaced trust. Finally, I prefer to reserve the term suspicion to convey active resistance towards entrustment. As I will argue in what follows, trust is better understood in practice as embedded in complex dynamic processes often but not always entailing suspicion. In such a process, distrust and mistrust are different attitudes toward trust. Suspicion, in turn, besides being more than simply the absence of trust, deeply affects dynamics of trust. In other words, while these concepts are indeed all interlinked as the Webster's dictionary suggest, they also reflect different moods and dispositions that characterize and affect a given social situation differently, and thus social research must acknowledge the nuances between them.

Entrustment and Ritualization

In 'The Nature of Entrustment', Parker Shipton reminds us that 'economic entrustment is not neatly distinguishable from ritual, symbolic, or spiritual entrustment' (2007: 215) and that these are 'dealings and sentiments' to which 'people feel strongly about' (2007: xi). In this essay, I am inspired by Shipton's insight, and critically locate my perspective somewhat within the symbolic exchange tradition inaugurated by Marcel Mauss in The Gift (2000). However, I look at a relatively neglected form of exchange, that which I call 'economies of trust'. In other words, this is the management of trust as a resource and entrustment as boundary-maintenance mechanisms, framed through particular contextual and cultural proclivities, further shaping a given context's unique entrustment practices (Schiocchet 2014a).

In The Gift, Mauss had already hinted that trust is at the base of all forms of exchange, even if this does not appear to be the case overtly. This was actually a common trope of social theory in the period when Mauss worked, especially under the influence of the social contract theory supported by authors such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau, and Friedrich Hegel. Supposedly, even the most formal transactions rely on trust. Take the modern world financial system, for example. Most of us have a bank account, that is, most of us deliberately hand part of our money to an institution that promises to store it while allowing us to use it whenever we please. For an external observer not well acquainted with the principles of capitalism, this could sound

like a terrible idea, much worse than hiding money under the mattress. However, while many who willingly engage with the modern world's international financial system do challenge the morality of banks and the goodness of their intentions, most still believe our money, or at least part of it, is safe in their hands. Ironies aside, what is important here is that most of us believe the bank will follow the rules they themselves have stipulated no matter how fair or unfair they may seem to us.

Trust and belief are thus tightly interwoven. Yet, as I suggested before, trust is a dynamic process with many shades of grey, and most exchanges actually take place between ultimate mistrust and ultimate trust. Thus, it is wise to avoid talking simply about the absence or presence of trust, and concentrate, like anthropologists tend to do, on studying trust as a process. This explains my own preference for Shipton's concept of 'entrustment'. The concept of entrustment suggests exchanges beyond ultimate trust, as it evokes the existence of both motivations leading to a given trust exchange and of an action that leads to the actualization of trust itself. In other words, an act of entrustment may happen in the relative absence of trust, and may itself lead to negotiating trust.

Moreover, the need for this processual, nuanced understanding of trust is reinforced by trust's inherently dialogic nature. While trust may also be theorized in terms of one's attitudes toward that which or who must be trusted, a given entrustment process is actually always multifaceted, even when power asymmetries may conceal trust's dialogical nature. Returning to the example of the financial system, while bank customers must trust the bank and follow the terms of a given contract, the bank must also trust that the 'conditions of possibility' for the system, and hence the contract, will be in effect. That is, the bank must trust a given national government not to change the terms of engagement without its consent or prior notice. The bank has to trust that the judicial system of this given state will act as a deterrent to any breach of contract from the side of the customer. After all, there have been numerous occasions in world history when bank assets have been frozen and banks nationalized. So, while banks may consider investing in countries they deem more 'stable', what the extreme case reveals is a principle inherent to the form of exchange itself, as opposed to the content of a given exchange. Finally, the bank has also to trust that its customers themselves will not change the rules of engagement in their favour by changing the government through democratic or forceful means. However, while this is all true, the balance of power is generally tipped so far on the side of the banker that the dialogic nature of entrustment is in this case largely concealed. Yet, scholars should acknowledge the dialogical nature of entrustments and the power asymmetries inherent to particular contexts. As I see it, this understanding of trust dynamics goes hand-in-hand with a Foucauldian approach to power. According to this perspective, power emerges from the relational dynamics between the subjects (being them individual,

collective or institutional), rather than simply being located within the subjects themselves. Furthermore, power is exercised not only through overt expressions of legitimate dominance, but mainly through disciplinary practices mobilized by regimes of knowledge (Foucault 1975).

In light of this, as Edmund Leach put it, we must question the Marxist thesis stating that the values behind the secular market are ruled by 'the strictest cannon of rationality'. Instead, like Mauss, we must acknowledge that, in the words of Edmund Leach, 'exchanges grounded on secular, rational, utilitarian needs turn out to be compulsory of a ritual kind' (cited in Hugh-Jones and Laidlaw 2000: 167-8). While I prefer to use the term 'rationality' to refer to any possible way of understanding and engaging the world – much like Louis Dumont's use of the term 'ideology' (1992) – it must be noted that in Leach's usage he is referring to Cartesian rationality in particular. Thus, what Leach was questioning, backed by Mauss, was the limits of Cartesian logic in separating practical reason from more complex forms of motivation entailed in ritual behaviour.

To better understand this complexity, I suggest merging the Maussian perspective on ritual exchange with Talal Asad's Foucauldian critical insight on the nature of disciplinary practice, well expressed in the work of Charles Hirschkind. As Hirschkind (2006) reminds us, discipline is not mainly the effect of practical reason, but the result of a process of cultivation (for example, of religious values) through practices leading to the embodiment of dispositions, sensibilities and affects. This suggestion is in fact partially corroborated by Mauss and is central to his concept of 'habitus of the body' (Mauss 1973: 82), which in turn was influenced by Aristotle and influenced Pierre Bourdieu's famous usage (2002). It must be noticed, however, that while Bourdieu's concept deals mainly with unconscious and inescapable social pull, Hirschkind's (2006) and Saba Mahmood's (2012) usage of the concept highlights instead its conscious pedagogical dimension, retrieving a feature already present in Mauss' work and later minimized by Bourdieu's mimetic, and deterministic perspective. For the proposes of this discussion, what must be noted then is that entrustments are complex and multifaceted processes often expressed in ritualized disciplinary practices that mobilize a complex blend of practical reason and embodied moods, dispositions, affects, and sensibilities.

Suspicion and Trust among Refugees

My work on Palestinian refugees in the Middle East, Latin America and Europe (2013, 2014b, 2015) reveals that the stigmatization of refugee identity is a paradox according to which the refugee is precisely that which he cannot be. The stigma, being the cause of the flight itself, overwhelms the refugee and

becomes an imperative to be dealt with, one that informs much of the refugee's thoughts, reflections, and actions in the world. Being refugee has important consequences for their sense of belonging, and for the making of social relations both at intra-group and extra-group levels. Among the most important entailments of refugeeness was an almost ever-present sense of suspicion that I call a 'disposition toward suspicion', which can be defined as a collective, generalized suspicion that must be surpassed or put on hold in order for social bonding to occur (Schiocchet 2014a). Therefore, the collective and individual experience of suspicion was of great importance to social organization and identity. In this sense, generalized suspicion was in this case one of the stronger forces heightening the importance of trust and shaping entrustment processes.

Refugeeness created imperatives that the refugees inescapably had to address, not just by reflecting upon them, but also by routinely dealing with them. Continuously dealing with suspicion generated embodied moods and dispositions, coming into being often through disciplinary practices learned by the mind and the body, often through the ritualized context of daily life. Through imitation, iteration, and striving for betterment or simply to belong, refugee camp residents learned scripts contained in daily routines since childhood. That is, they learned proper behaviour, values, and vernacular expressions to deal with the quotidian and the unexpected. This was a learning achieved as much through ritualization as by conscious reflection. While some anthropologists like to call this 'culture', I prefer to understand it as 'knowledge', as Fredrik Barth (2002) and Talal Asad (1993) each in their own way suggested. As a result, a structural disposition toward suspicion and embodied scripts to negotiate trust were thus vital components of the refugees' life contexts.

Given this context, almost no one was totally above suspicion, and trust was not absolute but contextually directed to the same subject or institution concomitantly in a tug of war dynamics. Thus, trust became an element of strategic choice and investment, at the same time that it was expressed through the idiom of sensitivities, feelings and morality. To trust someone or something was also to believe him/her/it. Therefore, every social relationship, even if not primarily concerned with the issue of trust and social bonding, carried along with it an element of trust surreptitiously negotiated. Even being seen in the company of someone was as much a statement of where one stood in the community as it was an investment in that person.

Accordingly, economies of trust tend to be at once political and moral. In the above mentioned cases, they were political because trust was partially exchanged consciously according to strategy, and aimed at individual and group goal maximization. Yet, economies of trust were also moral, because trust was not experienced as something completely open to entrepreneurial transaction, but entrustments also depended on embodied dispositions, sensibilities, and affects translated into affinity, and were commonly expressed through the id-

iom of honour. Honour was at the core of identification and self-identification processes, indexing subjects and entrustment processes to disputed orders of peoples and things. In other words, economies of trust were not completely conscious, strategic and unbound transactions; they were also bound to a subject's character, social standing, and reputation, with honour tending to embody all these features. In spite of the risk, entrustments were often pursued to create or strengthen a bond. However, subjects did not pick freely who would be entrusted, but, first of all, they classified who could be trusted instead. For example, an Israeli soldier would not be as eligible for entrustment as a family member. Likewise, someone in the community who was known to honour her/his word was more likely to be entrusted than someone who was known for not being true to her/his word. In other words, entrustments did not depend exclusively on individual entrepreneurship, but also heavily depended on how the collective measured trust. In this sense, familial, national, religious, ethnic, and political ties were the main repositories of trust among Palestinian refugees in the camps I studied. Elsewhere, however, these preferred institutions and subjects may vary greatly.

The special character of trust as currency for social bonding made economies of trust pervasive in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, and was recurrently found underlying interpersonal interactions. It is precisely the embeddedness of these elements in a broader context – as indicated by Tambiah's example of rioting crowds' (1996) – that gives meaning to life, creating a sense of belonging, evoking salient identities and inspiring collective commitment to patterns of social organization.

In the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon I analysed, entrustment processes set the boundaries between, on one side, 'us' – Palestinian, refugees, Muslims, Christians – and on the other side, 'them' – the Lebanese, the Westerners, the non-refugees, the foreigners, and whoever else the 'other' may be. Although I found a strong disposition toward suspicion in all Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, local economies of trust were unique mechanisms of social and individual junction and disjunction. These mechanisms only made sense embedded in their respective contexts, and in varying from group to group and individual to individual. Furthermore, like other communicational elements, they produced meaning, gained strength, and became disciplinary practices acting as partially embodied boundary maintenance dynamics through the ritualization of the quotidian (Schiocchet 2014a). Thus, on the one hand, we cannot lump all the world's refugees in only one legal, social, and political category if we wish to understand who they are. On the other hand, it is vital to note and discuss general processes related to refugeeness. The idea that a disposition toward suspicion might indeed be a very broad tendency among refugees in general is one such discussion. The disposition toward suspicion must then be understood as a social imperative to be dealt with, which in turn

entails a necessity to highlight socio-cultural and context-related rules on entrustment that are integral to unique processes of social belonging.

Dimensions of Trust

To Shipton, entrustments are 'part of 'multiplex' social bonds – they accompany kinship, friendship, church membership, commercial custom, and so on, which may coincide' (2007: 208). Besides, 'fiduciary thought and practice connect time, space, and social distance in cultural ways not yet widely acknowledged' (2007: 39). If by 'fiduciary', we understand not only 'financial', as is mainly the case for Shipton, but also any other sort of symbolic entrustment, then this proposition covers a crucial part of the processes of social belonging: symbolic entrustments shaping all things social, such as friendship, loyalty, group membership, alliances, marriages, and others. The etymology of the term 'fiduciary' supports my usage. Current English usage of the word stems from the Latin *fiducia*, meaning 'trust' + *arius*, meaning '-ary'. The Webster's Dictionary lists fiduciary in English as a) 'holding, held, or founded in trust or confidence'; b) 'of having to do with, or involving a confidence of trust: of the nature of a trust <a ~ capacity> <a ~ relation>'; c) 'resting upon public confidence for value or currency <~ fiat money>' (1986: 845). In other words, even if today the meaning of fiduciary is mainly associated with economy, it is only so because the question of trust is at the base of economy, as it is at the base of virtually all social relations. Furthermore, at the foundation of the word 'fiduciary' is the Latin root *fidēs*, which relates to trust, but also to 'faith, confidence, reliance, credence, belief' (Lewis 1890) – all associations worth exploring in greater depth.

There is something universal about people's trust dynamics that lies at the base of social exchanges and social bonding. At the very least, all social groups have socially accepted or contested ways to go about entrustment. Beyond this universality, others have suggested that trust as a basic element for social bonding tends to be emphasized by the condition of being a refugee (Daniel and Knudsen 1996), as my own work suggests (Schiocchet 2014a). Moreover, beyond socio-historical conditions, there are the contextual proclivities that make one people's suspicion and trust dynamics unique in relation to others, in which individual engagement flourishes.

Since trust dynamics are by definition relational, there cannot be trust prior to a given social relation, and thus there cannot be mistrust (misplaced trust) or suspicion (active resistance to trust), as these are different moods, dispositions and attitudes that can only exist through conceiving particular social relations. As such, absolute distrust, or the plain absence of trust, can only be understood as an ontological condition to social bonding, a logical point of de-

parture. However, the process of knowing something or someone necessarily entails classification, as the classic Durkheimian critique to Kant, at the base of contemporary social sciences, corroborates (1995). Therefore, in practice, there is no absolute presence or absence of trust, but only different levels of trust (and distrust), mistrust, and suspicion, dynamically effaced, put in place, reinforced, and transformed in a given social relation. Furthermore, as Julie Peteet states, trust is 'a fragile and situational concept, easily broken but difficult to restore' (Peteet 1996: 169). This, in turn, reinforces the dynamic character of entrustments, as broken trust frequently needs to be repaired, or it leads to the repositioning of subjects, which entails redirecting trust elsewhere.

Conclusion

One of this book's points of departure is its effort to transpose what Godelier identifies as part of the enigma of the gift to the question of trust (see Mühlfried, introduction to this volume). Mauss, Godelier and Mühlfried highlight the connection between economy (or the circulation of objects, peoples, and values) and trust, and that trust is a matter of 'public confidence and currency' (Webster's Third New International Dictionary 1986: 845). Godelier took a step forward and understood that for a currency to exist there must be a measure, which by definition does not circulate. In this edited volume, Mühlfried develops this further by reinstating the knowledge sealed into the term's Latin origins and overtly re-associating giving/not-giving with entrustment processes.

Godelier's interest on the inalienability of certain things stems as much from his ethnographic material from Melanesia, and particularly from his study of the Baruya, as it stems from his dialogue with Marcel Mauss, Karl Marx, and Claude Lévi-Strauss. In short, Godelier's The Enigma of the Gift (1999) builds on Annette Wiener's Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-while-Giving (1992) in that it reinforces Wiener's claim that, while social scientists have emphasized giving and sharing, not giving and not sharing are at least just as important.

As Paul Roscoe puts it (2001: 151), Godelier substitutes Wiener's formula 'keeping-while-giving' for 'keeping for giving', which expresses the idea that certain things circulate but cannot become anyone else's property. Yet, Godelier's main interest is in objects that cannot be given or sold, which are considered sacred (1999: 08). These inalienable items are thus 'fixed, still points' and realities 'anchored in the nature of things' which 'are what give time its duration' (1999: 200). From these 'realities', the social body creates the realm of the imaginary, which in Lacanian fashion takes primacy over the

symbolic[2]. In other words, society creates a fiction in which to live in order to mask the reality that society itself is the creator of this very world. In line with Marxism, and also developing Durkheim's conception of society, Godelier understands this as a form of fetishism that naturalizes the world, thus giving it existence ex nihilo (beyond the confines of the social imagination), thus protecting the social body from the incertitude of its own subjectivity. At the very base of this relationship between the realms of the imaginary and the real, there is a relationship between things that circulate (in the imaginary) and those that must not circulate (anchored on the real). Paradoxically perhaps, according to Godelier, what cannot circulate is considered *sacra*, serving as a nodal point around which to construct the fetish social beings chose to inhabit. It is only through inalienable *sacra*, standing as a measure for everything else, that exchange itself is possible and society can exist. Or, as Godelier puts it, 'in order for there to be movement, exchange, there had to be things that were kept out the exchange' (1999: 166-167).

In summary, by focusing on what circulates, both Mauss and Lévi-Strauss overlooked a basic component of social life. In Godelier's words this is 'giving to the gods' – a term that stands for that which is inalienable, that which can never be reciprocated, which in modern society is conflated with the rule of law (1999: 207). It is to this we must turn to understand social dynamics. Likewise, Mühlfried suggests looking at what, when or who is not entrusted as a means to engender social relations, as opposed to halt them. To him, this demands an emphasis on mistrust/distrust (as synonyms) as opposed to the overwhelming anthropological emphasis on trust. I present here another perspective in which trust and mistrust are only different polarities of the same social operation, while distrust stands for the complete absence of trust in one's phenomenological realm, and thus does not belong to the realm of empirical realities. Where Mühlfried's perspective is dyadic, mine is triadic. Yet, underlying both perspectives, is the same urge to differentiate between two sorts of phenomena: the absence of trust and the refusal to trust. Moreover, my particular choice of words here (mistrust and distrust to mean one and another different social phenomena) stems only from the meaning they evoke to me, but is almost completely irrelevant to the point I wish to make. The goal of this essay is not to create jargon per se, but to call attention not only to the need to discuss these different social

2 | The primacy of the imaginary over the symbolic is one of Godelier's most serious critiques of Lévi-Straussian structuralism. According to Godelier, in Levi-Strauss the symbolic eliminates the importance of the sacred, while Mauss exacerbated it though the 'hau', or the spirit of the gift, as if the rule of law was not already enough justification. To Godelier, instead, modern society conflates the rule of law with the sacred, and it is through this imbrication that he suggests one must understand its social dynamics.

phenomena anthropologically, but also to start by differentiating between them heuristically and conceptually in order to accomplish this goal.

Thus, to reiterate, entrustment processes are dialogic even when asymmetries conceal its dialogic nature. They are processual, since they cannot be reduced to a single moment in time, and thus are never static. They are manifested through moods, dispositions, and attitudes; and they are subtly present in most social exchanges alongside other moods, dispositions and attitudes, composing subjects' motivations that cannot be defined simply in terms of either practical reasoning or morality. Entrustment processes may be embedded in ritual exchanges but they are never absolutely present or absent. Finally, they frequently serve as currency for social relations, ordering subjects' proximity and distance, and indexing social categories and cleavages.

Relative to themes such as kinship, ethnicity, or even honour, entrustment dynamics (encompassing distrust, mistrust, and suspicion) are understudied in anthropology. This is particularly noticeable when the anthropology on trust is compared to the social theory tradition, from social contract theorists (like Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, or David Hume) to Charles Tilly and Niklas Luhmann and the contemporary civil society scholars (like Robert Putman or Peter Evans), as some of the chapters in this edited volume suggest. Yet, due to what I have presented in this chapter, I suggest that entrustment is an essential theme underlying general matters of social organization and identity, and a comprehensive understanding of entrustment processes harbours significant potential not only to more theoretically focused approaches to social life, but especially to more ethnographic ones. In turn, due to the intrinsically relational character of entrustment dynamics, micro-sociological and ethnographic approaches are now necessary to advance or challenge classical approaches on the topic, especially those which still insist on centring on the ontological dimension of trust.

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