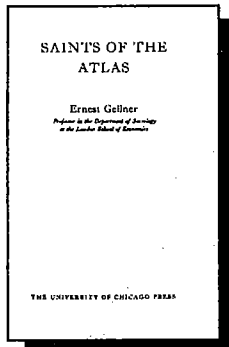


Labor of the Undead : Segmentarity, Globalization and the Temporality of Inequality*

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L'auteur propose ici une analyse critique de la notion de segmentarité qui a constitué une dimension importante des études que Ernest Gellner avait consacrées à la société tribale marocaine. Il considère que rapprocher le thème gellnerien d'une organisation segmentaire « égalitaire » ne prend pas en considération la notion de temporalité. Aussi souligne-t-il les mutations qu'ont connues les tribus berbères du Haut-Atlas (le cas des Goundega), notamment leurs relations au pouvoir central, à partir du milieu du XIXème siècle, ce qui rend impertinent l'interprétation de leur système politique en termes de segmentarité. De même que l'organisation du travail fait apparaître de profondes inégalités sociales entre les membres de ces mêmes tribus.

The notion of segmentarity has generated more confusion in North African anthropology than any other idea in the last thirty-five years. Segmentarity is one of Abu-Lughod's three key "theoretical metonyms" of the Arab world (1989:274), topics so tired that addressing them now requires we begin with apologies. Specifically in Morocco a generation of anthropologists has been fixated on Ernest Gellner's understanding of segmentarity, whether Gellner was "right", or, more usually, why and in what ways he was wrong. While reluctant to resuscitate what is now widely deemed irrelevant, I too return (apologetically) to Gellner because it seems to me that the problem is not that he

took an anthropological wrong path, but that he did not see what path he was on, and thus did not go far enough down it. I will not deny that much of what Gellner had to say is, as David Hart once wrote, "simply not so", but I want to explore some significantly broader implications to segmentarity that Gellner raised but glimpsed only dimly.

I believe that the available evidence, including my own fieldwork, supports the claim that there exists in the Atlas mountains a cultural understanding of socio-political solidarity something like (but not exactly like) what Gellner labeled "segmentarity". While defenders of Gellner retreat, murmuring that "the degree to which Gellner's ideal-type model is in line with the facts of actual behaviour might not be the most appropriate question for appraising his theoretical contribution" (Kraus 1998:2), I want to suggest the opposite. The significance of Gellner's model is precisely that it can help us to understand "actual behavior", despite the fact that Gellner himself failed to do so (c.f. Hammoudi 1980, Munson 1993, 1997).

David Crawford recent publications :

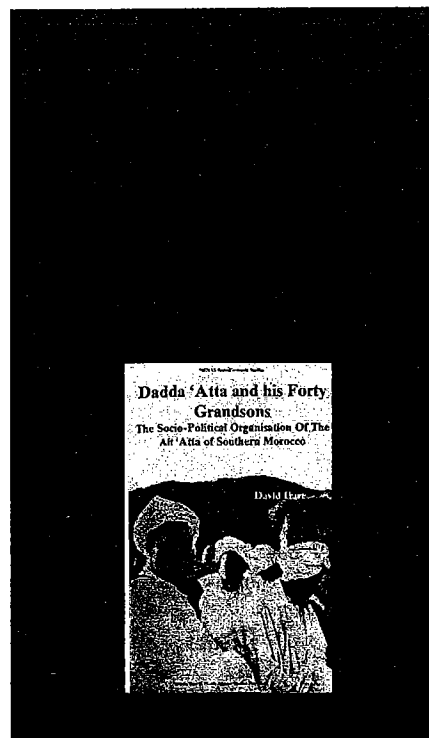
- "Royal Interest in Local Culture: The Politics and Potential of Morocco's Imazighen", (in press as a chapter in *Nationalism and Minority Identities in Islamic Societies*, ed. Maya Shatzmiller, Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press).
 - "Arranging the Bones: Culture, Time and Inequality in Berber Labor Organization", in *Ethnos*, Vol 68, N° 4, p. 463-486, 2003.
 - "Morocco's Invisible Imazighen", in *The Journal of North African Studies*, Vol. 7, N°1, Spring 2002.
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I will argue that the exclusivity of Gellner's segmentary model is wrong, that the stated coherence of it is illusory, but that the particular discourses underpinning the social operation of segmentarity are in fact quite common and quite important – both within Morocco and beyond. Understanding how these discourses animate processes of social order in Morocco offers us a useful platform to suggest how social intercourse more generally produces both “durable inequalities” (Tilly 1998), and longer term equitable inequalities. Of particular interest here is the way opportunities generated through the dynamics of local transactions are seized by ambitious men at key moments to capitalize on larger economic and political structures. This illuminates one way that “globalization”¹ is manifest in the Moroccan countryside.

What Gellner Said

The case of segmentarity has been well reviewed². Here I focus only on Gellner (rather than the whole discourse within and beyond the Middle East), and only on what I take to be the core of his definition. Gellner writes “In ... segmentary society, similarity is not merely lateral but also vertical: it is not simply that groups resemble their neighbors at the same level of size, but it is also the case that groups resemble, organisationally, the sub-groups of which they are composed, and the larger groups of which they are members” (Gellner 1987:31). The assertion is that segmentary society is fractal, that social units are isomorphic with one another whatever their size and, thus, there is a single, exclusive logic by which all of a segmentary society is organized. In other words, “What defines a segmentary society is not that this [segmentation] does occur, but that this is very nearly all that occurs” (Gellner 1969:42 emphasis added)³. While conceptually attractive, this last statement is ethnographically unsupported, as Hammoudi (1980), Munson (1996) and others have shown. A great deal occurs in High Atlas society that cannot be called segmentary, which is why Berque's classic account of the matter is definitively plural: *Structures sociales du Haut-Atlas* (1955).

One significant part of Gellner's claim – a part that gained it enthusiastic opponents – is that it seems to define an archetypal “other,” a way of being that is entirely unlike European society. Gellner writes “In complex societies,



the State or the city are quite unlike the family. In a segmentary tribe [by contrast] there is a resemblance between the tribe or clan on the one hand and the family on the other, not merely in terminology, but also in reality” (1969:49). This putative distinction between segmentary and complex societies is founded, Gellner says, on Emile Durkheim's opposition between mechanical and organic solidarity, an opposition that Durkheim had mistakenly based on the ethnography of Kabyle Berbers⁴ in Algeria (Roberts 2002). As Durkheim puts it, “Thus, among the Kabyles, the political unity is the clan, constituted in the form of a village (*djemmaa* or *thaddart*); several *djemmaa* form a tribe (*arch*), and several tribes for the confederation (*thak'ebilt*), the highest political society that the Kabyles know. The same is true among the Hebrews... These societies are such typical examples of mechanical solidarity that their principal physiological characteristics come from it” (1964 [1893]: 178)⁵. The argument is that “We say of these societies that they are segmental in order to indicate their formation by the repetition of like aggregates in them, analogous to the rings of an earthworm, and we say of this elementary aggregate that it is a clan, because this word well expresses its mixed nature, at once familial and political” (Durkheim 1964 [1893]: 175)⁶.

Durkheim's formulation fit conveniently with the prejudices of social evolution, as in “The Hebrews remained in [a segmental social condition] to a late date, and the Kabyles never passed beyond it (Durkheim 1964 [1893]:177), or in Gellner's review of the matter, “Durkheim used [Masqueray's Kabyle] material to highlight not the mechanisms of cohesion

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operative in nineteenth-century European societies, but the mechanism we have left behind, and which illuminates our condition only by contrast" (1987:41 emphasis added). It is unclear here whether Gellner shares the hypothesis that contemporary Moroccan Berbers represent the pan-European past. What is clear is that Gellner was in no way addressing Moroccan or a wider Muslim intelligentsia; the "we" and the "our" refer to "European societies". Combining Orientalist and Darwinian tropes to make the case for segmentarity guaranteed rejection by a wide variety of post-colonial scholars. This framing has led many to reject the idea of segmentarity as a cultural model or as social reality.

There is, however, a more intriguing theoretical point. Durkheim suggests an irony in the emergence of what Elias (1994 [1939]) and others call "civilization", which is that an increasing specialization of labor gives rise to deeper and more binding ties between people. Even if Berbers cannot be considered Europe's contemporary ancestors, it makes some logical sense to imagine that societies with less specialization of labor may be less densely dependent (parts can survive independently, more like the segments of a worm rather than the limbs of a mammal) while the individual is also less free to pursue her or his particular calling (because there are fewer callings available in a non-specialized society). From this perspective a compelling interdependence is the price of our contemporary "freedom". This is a Rousseauian twist to the social evolutionary model. It echoes Freud, Foucault and others in that it is modern society and its fine-grained divisions of labor and status that smother the soul with surveillance, with a pervasive discipline required of extreme interconnectedness. Contemporary theorists of globalization have taken up this thread, arguing that "The qualitative difference between traditional and modern life-stories is not, as many assume, that in older corporate and agrarian societies various suffocating controls and guidelines restricted the individual's say in his or her own life to a minimum, whereas today hardly any restrictions

are left. It is, in fact, in the bureaucratic and institutional jungle of modernity that life is most securely bound into networks of guidelines and regulations" (Beck 2000:166). In this sense Gellner is not simply commenting on the obscure customs of North African agropastoralists and the saints who litigate on their tribal borders. He is addressing fundamental questions of social order.

And there is more. While Durkheim, as the title *De la division du travail social* suggests, was interested primarily in the division of labor, Gellner extended this concern to political organization. Durkheim writes "We do not have to show the analogies between the type which replaces the preceding one and that of organic societies. In one case as in the other, the structure derives from the division of labor and its solidarity" (1964 [1893]: 192, emphasis added). Gellner's contribution was to extend Durkheim's framework for the social division of labor to political organization, or at least to explicitly connect Evans-Pritchard's political model of segmentarity (1940:139-191) to the broader Durkheimian thesis⁷. Gellner makes strong claims for his political model, too, writing that amongst Berbers in the Moroccan mountains "a separation of powers is not merely a check on tyranny, as intended in classical political theory, but also a check on inequality. The inegalitarian potential of society is as it were drained by the saints. Here, at least, equality and liberty go together" (1969:64, emphasis added).

This is a venerable theme and Gellner's promise to have ethnographically located a contemporary social order of free men and "balanced" power imprinted itself on a generation of scholars – even as the framing of it excited explosive opposition. Thus, since the 1970s the notion of segmentarity has staggered on, undead. Despite demonstrated theoretical weakness and a lack of empirical support, at least in Morocco, segmentarity will not stay buried.

Exhumation

Amartya Sen calls it a "category mistake" to oppose liberty and equality since "Liberty is among the possible fields of application of equality..." (Sen 1992:22). This gives us a clue as to why Gellner's formulation offers a starting point as much as a dead end: the particular field that Gellner and his informants choose to emphasize as "equal" illuminates

something more general about the way inequality operates (or is made to operate) in society. This assertion builds on Sen's observation that "...the major ethical theories of social arrangement all share an endorsement of equality in terms of some focal variable, even though the variables that are selected are frequently very different between one theory and another" (*Ibid.*: 3). While here we are trying to ascertain Amazigh "theories of social arrangement" rather than the views of professional social theorists, I believe there are important convergences between the "idiots" (Robertson 2001:104) and the putative savants. Here I will emphasize the importance of time to inequality (Pickering 2004, Verdery 2001) and argue that we need to contextualize "spaces of inequality" in time. Only thus can we explore how local inequalities intersect larger systems, how they concatenate through time into "durable inequalities" (Tilly 1998), or are "drained" (in Gellner's terms) to transform short-term inequalities into longer term equity.

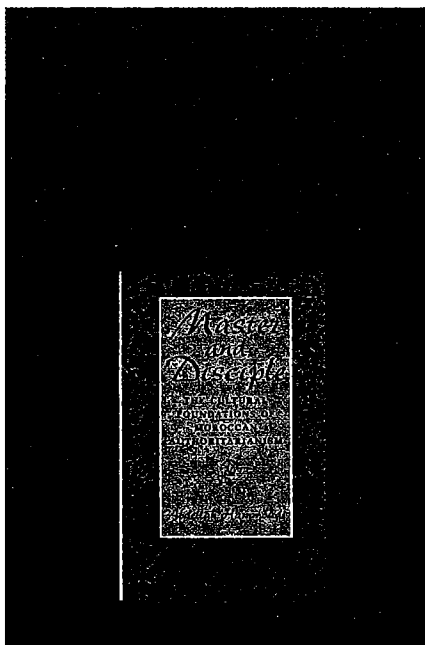
There is, however, some question as to whether such equity existed in the first place. Abdellah Hammoudi, for instance, has argued convincingly that the political reality in the area controlled by the Ait 'Atta was not, in fact, genealogically organized or egalitarian in any real sense. Instead of segmentary equality (notwithstanding the distinction between saints and lay tribes) Gellner's anthropological object is more correctly parsed into a three-tiered, stratified system of immazighen (often translated as "free men," the shepherds and warriors), "saints" or *igurramen*, and the *iharaden*, who "work the land and practice crafts" – divisions that are strongly endogamous (1980 [1974]:287). These groups are said by Hammoudi to be "like castes" and "a genuine division of labour divides these three categories" (*Ibid.*). Munson too finds almost nothing to empirically substantiate Gellner's theory (1991, 1993), though Hart, in the same note where he expressed substantive doubts about Gellner's ethnography, still writes that he finds saints of the Atlas "full of good ideas."⁸ However good the ideas, Gellner confused a stratified caste system with one imagined to have an egalitarian balance or rotation of power in the Middle Atlas. In his later rebuttals to critics Gellner addresses this obliquely, arguing that "lay tribes" were "at the edge of [his] field of vision" (1996:641), but this undermines the argument that the saintly

tribes were crucial mediators, and certainly the idea that segmentarity is distinctively Berber.

The area of the western High Atlas where I work reveals yet another pre-colonial history: the complete domination of a region by one of the two moieties (called *lfuf*, sing. *leff*) and the ascendance of a series of fathers and sons within one *leff*. There is no "balance" here, and no rotation of power except where power is seized. I rely on Hammoudi and others to debunk the Middle Atlas claims, but before and during the Protectorate the section of the High Atlas south of Marrakech, between the Haouz plain and the Sous valley, was in the hands of men labeled the grand caids, petty-dictators with absolute authority over their domain. The Agoundis, the specific valley where I conducted research, had fallen under the control of Si Ahmed Ait Lahcen of Tagoundaft around the middle of the nineteenth century (Montagne 1930:14). It is he who spawned the political category "the Goundaft", and his sons Mohammed and Tayeb inherited the title when they grew in turn to take power⁹. The people living under the Goundafi caid came to be called "the Goundafa" on French "tribal" maps, but there was nothing very tribal about this arrangement, at least if we conceive of the term to involve an imagined genealogical link between the people and their leaders, the succession of Ait Lahcen caids from Tagoundaft¹⁰. Nobody in the Agoundis imagines themselves to be so linked. The people of the Agoundis were political subjects, pure and simple. One could call them a "branch" of the Goundafa, but this would only be true in the sense that their territorial *nisba*¹¹ was part of the broader politico-territorial *nisba* by which the term "Goundafa" gains meaning. The genealogical principle does not today extend far, if at all, beyond particular villages, similar to the situation Roberts identifies in Kabylia (2002:120). Segmentarity accomplishes no significant larger-scale social or political organization in this region.

The area does have "saints". The Agoundis abuts the territory of the neighboring Glaoui

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caid, and above the village where I worked, on the ridge leading into Glaoui territory, there is a shrine to the marabout Lalla Azzou Lahcen and next to it a village of *igurramen* at Zaouite n Oumslane. They seem to have been unable to broker much peace, however, and only intermittently proved able to use their baraka to protect raiders fleeing either the Goundafi or the Glaoui. They certainly were not able to facilitate egalitarian rule at an inter- or intratribal level or dampen the aggressive impulses of the two great caids. These days *igurramen* farm, like everyone else, and I could find no one who paid much special attention to them at all. Today the particular village in which I worked is clearly under the authority of the Moroccan state. Though it received its first road in 1996 and a school in 1998, everyone has long recognized the Rabat-appointed caid as the final arbiter of crime and punishment. He is based 20 km away in Talat n Yacoub and is assisted by a coterie of officials appointed from amongst the local population.

There is nothing – absolutely nothing – segmentary about any of this. Venema may be correct that local political institutions in the Middle Atlas remain “vital” (2002), but vitality is different than segmentarity, at least in Gellner’s terms. As near as I can tell there has been nothing segmentary about the political organization of the Agoundis since at least the middle of the 19th century. Locals understand three distinct political periods: the time of the Goundafi caids, the time of the French caids, and the current period when caids are imposed from Rabat. Each period is undeniably characterized by authoritarianism, though each period is seen as an improvement over its predecessor. None of these categories has or had anything to do with genealogical

reckoning, at least outside of the family from which the caids were drawn.

Given the historical and spatial diversity in Berber political organization, and the many extended critiques of the segmentary model, it is telling that we still read that “Ethnographic and anthropological studies of the Berbers are almost unanimous in their insistence on one overwhelming characteristic of Berber society: its segmentary organization” (Brett and Fentress 1996:231, emphasis added) and that “Berber social organization is based on what structural-functional anthropologists call the segmentary lineage model” (Ilahiane 1999:28). The notion of segmentarity is not dead, and it seems quintessentially Amazigh¹². Few claims are made about Arab segmentarity in Morocco.

The Social Operation of Segmentarity – A Case

If the segmentary model has been overextended to encompass all of the socio-political organization of all Amazigh people at all times, there is still one important application of the concept in the village where I work: collective labor for canal repair¹³. Collective labor is essential in the winter (when irrigation canals are washed away by rain) and in the summer (when the water level in the river drops low enough to require a series of temporary dams to be built), as well as for one-time, village-wide projects. Villagers aim to create five balanced labor groups of four men each, or twenty total men for the duration of any project. There is a clear ideal of “fairness” in the construction of these groups. However, the social units that should be “fair” (i.e. Sen’s “focal variables”) are both lineages (*ighsan*, or “bones”) and households (*tikatin* or hearths). Segmentarity does not “specify its own application” (Dresch 1986:312), but this does not imply that “a new set of actions... that does contradict the original categories becomes possible only with explicit redefinition” (*Ibid.*: 320). The “original categories” are both plural and practically contradictory. People produce coherence; coherence is not immanent in the structure of the categories¹⁴.

As I have noted elsewhere (Crawford 2003:466) one difficulty is that households cannot possibly contribute to a project equally at a given time¹⁵. A newly married couple who form an independent household cannot, for instance, send a man to work on a broken canal or a new dam and continue to irrigate the

household fields; an extended family household with half a dozen or more adult men would have no problem sparing one or more men for collective projects. The social unit "household" in fact describes a wide variety of empirical situations (Mundy 1995:5), and thus households do not suffice to manage collective property. This claim has been critiqued as "functionalist", but it seems to me undeniable that the dependence of "private" property (fields) on "public", village-owned irrigation canals demands a creative organizational response, some way of achieving larger social purposes. Households are vastly different over their life spans (Robertson 1991), and are not "simple units that can be added up," a critique Dorham has leveled at Sahlins and Meillassoux (1999:102). One response to the variability within households has been, in the Agoundis valley at least, to exchange labor between households over the long term¹⁶.

These exchanges depend on cultural norms of "fairness", but, again, these are contradictory: households should 1/ contribute male labor equally to the group, but 2/ no household should be overburdened to the point that the domestic economy is threatened. The local solution has been to agglomerate households into five larger groups – *temaideen* – and within these allow larger households to contribute more labor now (to compensate for smaller households), while presumably the smaller households grow and support other new families in turn. The number five seems arbitrary, though my informants stressed the importance of five to Islam in terms of the number of daily prayers and the five pillars of the faith¹⁷. Importantly, the fairness or equality in this scheme is necessarily fairness over time, not fairness at any particular time. Grouping households allows flexibility so that men can exchange labor to meet public responsibilities and private irrigation requirements.

The logic by which households are assembled into groups is clearly segmentary in that it relies on idealized genealogical relationships and demonstrates a concern with balance between the segments constructed from these ideals. The creation of the five culturally necessary *temaideen* involves the linked processes of fission and fusion (Gellner 1969:60) – "linked" because fission provides the ideological framework for division and balance, while fusion is

practically necessary to stitch together shreds of familial relatedness left from the detritus of history, from variations in fertility and migration. *Temaideen* are what lineages ought to be. Assembling groups that nominally accord with the segmentary pattern ensures an ideal parity between groups and a useful authority within them. The elder men of all of the five *temaideen* work together by invoking their authority over the younger men of their particular labor group. Any particular project involves both equality (among older men and between labor groups) and inequality (within labor groups, since younger men are made to work by their elders). The system is only "fair" to younger men if they remain involved long enough to become elders, and thus to benefit from the long term "structural duration" of the operation (Gluckman 1968:221).

Gerontocracy is hardly the only form of inequality embedded in this determinedly "equal" arrangement, however. Different households own very different amounts of property, for instance, which means that any given project benefits some far more than others. No attempt is made to render labor commitments commensurate with property ownership. Households with two fields irrigated by a canal are just as responsible for that canal's maintenance as households owning twenty. This demonstrates again Sen's thesis: actualizations of particular forms of equality imply other forms of inequality.

More interesting for the question of segmentarity are the inequalities in the structure of the groups themselves. For example, one of labor group is made up of the Ait Ali and the Ait Hussein lineages, who evenly split the labor requirement of their group – two men from each lineage per day per project. This is "balanced" in a segmentary sense; the lineage founders Ali and Hussein were brothers; their father Mohammed is the eponymous founder of the larger Ben Oushen lineage, to which both the Ait Hussein and the Ait Ali belong. Two other sons comprise a second work group and split their labor "equally" too, thus the descendents of each of

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