

Labor of the Undead:
Segmentarity, Globalization and the Temporality of Inequality
by David Crawford¹

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 sodality something like (but not exactly like) what Gellner labeled "segmentarity." While defenders of Gellner retreat, murmuring that 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).

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"² is manifest in the Moroccan countryside.

What Gellner Said

The case of segmentarity has been well reviewed.³ 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).⁴ While conceptually attractive, this last statement is ethnographically unsupportable, as

