Berbers of North Africa

Background:

The Berbers, who call themselves “imazighen” live across northern Africa and trace their roots to the indigenous pre-Arab, pre-Islamic cultures of the region. Approximately 9.5 million of them live in Morocco, about 4.3 million in Algeria, and smaller numbers in neighboring countries. The language belongs to the Afro-Asiatic language family, making it related to the ancient Egyptian language but not to modern Arabic (though Arabic is widely spoken as a second language). Most Berbers are Muslim though remnants of earlier traditions have survived as well.

Berbers constitute about one-quarter of the population of Algeria. Of these Berber-speaking Algerians, about half are Kabyles, who live mostly in the mountains east of Algiers (though, as we see in the movie, many have migrated to the cities). Most Berbers, like their Arab co-nationalists, are Sunni Muslims. Throughout the 1980s, the Kabyles revolted against Algerian government policies of Arabization. Discontent and sporadic fighting has continued.

To look for in the movie:

- an allusion to fighting in the Berber areas
- geographical/ecological features and hardships
- rural to urban migration
- Islamic religious and cultural practices
- women’s role in Berber society

A few accessible (short, clear, online) resources:


**Lesson plan:**

“Arts and Culture of the Berber Tribes of Morocco and the Sahara” by Lorna Holmes - http://cmes.arizona.edu/outreach/lessons and scroll down to the links to the lesson (alphabetically by title).