



# North and Central African Societies

## MAIN IDEA

**RELIGIOUS AND ETHICAL SYSTEMS** North and central Africa developed hunting-gathering societies, stateless societies, and Muslim states.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Modern African nations often must find ways to include these various peoples and traditions in one society.

## TERMS & NAMES

- lineage
- stateless societies
- patrilineal
- matrilineal
- Maghrib
- Almoravids
- Almohads

**SETTING THE STAGE** Throughout history, different groups of Africans have found different ways to organize themselves to meet their political, economic, and social needs. In the varied regions of Africa, climate and topography, or landforms, influenced how each community developed.

## Hunting-Gathering Societies

Hunting-gathering societies—the oldest form of social organization in the world—began in Africa. Hunting-gathering societies still exist in Africa today, though they form an extremely small percentage of the population. Scattered throughout Africa, these groups speak their own languages and often use their own hunting techniques. By studying these groups, scholars learn clues about how hunter-gatherers may have lived in the past.

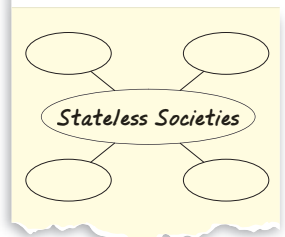
**Forest Dwellers** The Efe (AY•fay) are just one of several hunting-gathering societies in Africa. They make their home in the Ituri Forest in the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire). Like their ancestors, the modern-day Efe live in small groups of between 10 and 100 members, all of whom are related. Each family occupies its own grass-and-brush shelter within a camp, but their homes are rarely permanent. Their search for food causes them to be somewhat nomadic. As a result, the Efe collect few possessions and move to new camps as they use up the resources in the surrounding area.

In the Efe society, women are the gatherers. They walk through the forest searching for roots, yams, mushrooms, and wild seeds. Efe men and older boys do all the hunting. Sometimes they gather in groups to hunt small antelope called duikers. At other times, hunters go solo and use poison-tipped arrows to kill mammals such as monkeys. The Efe add to their diet by trading honey, wild game, and other forest products for crops grown by farmers in nearby villages.

**Social Structure** A respected older male, such as a father, uncle, or father-in-law, typically serves as group leader. Although members of the group listen to and value this man’s opinion, he does not give orders or act as chief. Each family within the band makes its own decisions and is free to come and go. Group members settle arguments through long discussions. If conflicts cannot be settled by talking, a group member may decide to move to a different hunting band. Daily life for the Efe is not governed by formal written laws.

## TAKING NOTES

**Summarizing** Use a web diagram to list characteristics of stateless societies.



## Stateless Societies

As in other parts of the world, family organization is central to African society. In many African societies, families are organized in groups called lineages. The members of a **lineage** (LIHN•ee•ihj) believe they are descendants of a common ancestor. Besides its living members, a lineage includes past generations (spirits of ancestors) and future generations (children not yet born). Within a lineage, members feel strong loyalties to one another.

South of the Sahara, many African groups developed systems of governing based on lineages. In some African societies, lineage groups took the place of rulers. These societies, known as **stateless societies**, did not have a centralized system of power. Instead, authority in a stateless society was balanced among lineages of equal power so that no one family had too much control. The Igbo (IHG•boh) people—also called Ibo—of southern Nigeria lived in a stateless society as early as the ninth century. (Although the Igbo lived in West Africa, their political structure was similar to stateless societies found in central Africa.) If a dispute arose within an Igbo village, respected elders from different lineages settled the problem. Igbos later encountered challenges from 19th-century European colonizers who expected one single leader to rule over society.

**Tracing Family Descent** In African societies, the way a society traces lineage determines how possessions and property are passed on and what groups individuals belong to. Members of a **patrilineal** society trace their ancestors through their fathers. Inheritance passes from father to son. When a son marries, he, his wife, and their children remain part of his father's extended family.

In a **matrilineal** society, children trace their ancestors through their mothers. Young men from a matrilineal culture inherit land and wealth from their mother's family. However, even in a matrilineal society, men usually hold the positions of authority.

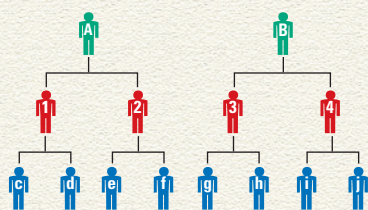
**Age-Set System** In many African societies, young people form close ties to individuals outside their lineage through the age-set system. An age set consists of young people within a region who are born during a certain time period. Each age set passes together through clearly identified life stages, such as warrior or elder. Ceremonies mark the passage to each new stage.

Men and women have different life stages, and each stage has its own duties and importance. Societies like the Igbo use the age-set system to teach discipline, community service, and leadership skills to their young. **A**

## Muslim States

While stateless societies developed south of the Sahara, Islam played a vital role in North Africa. After Muhammad's death in 632, Muslims swept across the northwest part of the continent. They converted many by the sword of conquest and others peacefully. By 670, Muslims ruled Egypt and had entered the **Maghrib**, the part of North Africa that is today the Mediterranean coast of Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco.

### Social History



#### Negotiating Conflict in Stateless Societies

In a stateless society, the power to negotiate conflicts shifts from generation to generation as circumstances demand.

Look at the diagram of two lineages above. If **d** is in conflict with **f**, then **c** will side with his brother **d**, and **e** will side with his brother **f**. Therefore, the parents—**1** and **2**—will meet to negotiate.

If **f** is in conflict with **g**, both entire lineages will take sides in the dispute. Therefore, the members of the oldest surviving generation—**A** and **B**—must meet to negotiate.

#### INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY

**INTERNET ACTIVITY** Use the Internet to prepare a poster on methods of conflict resolution. Go to **classzone.com** for your research.

#### MAIN IDEA

#### Making Inferences

**A** What advantages might an age-set system have for a society?

## Selected African Societies, 800–1500

INTERACTIVE



### Societies

#### Hunter-Gatherers

The seminomadic hunter-gatherers lived by gathering wild foods and hunting animals.

- The Efe were hunter-gatherers who traded with farming villages.
- The San (also called the Bushmen) lived in southern Africa and part of East Africa.

#### Stateless Societies

Stateless societies did not have centralized power. Instead, power was balanced among lineage groups, usually within villages.

- The Tiv had no formal government.
- The Igbo resolved disputes by having elders from different lineages meet.
- The Nuer organized over 250,000 people without an official ruler.

#### Muslim States

In North Africa, two groups of Muslim reformers founded empires.

- In the 11th century, the Almoravid Empire controlled Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, and part of Spain.
- Beginning in the mid-1100s, the Almohad Empire controlled Morocco, much of the Maghrib, and part of Spain.

### GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Maps

1. **Location** Where were the Muslim states located?
2. **Region** Why would hunter-gatherers be spread across such a large region?

As Islam spread, some African rulers converted to Islam. These African Muslim rulers then based their government upon Islamic law. Muslims believe that God's law is a higher authority than any human law. Therefore, Muslim rulers often relied on religious scholars as government advisers. (See World Religions, pages 290–291.)

**Islamic Law** In Islam, following the law is a religious obligation. Muslims do not separate their personal life from their religious life, and Islamic law regulates almost all areas of human life. Islamic law helped to bring order to Muslim states.

However, various Muslim states had ethnic and cultural differences. Further, these states sometimes had differing interpretations, and schools, of Islamic law. Nonetheless, Islamic law has been such a significant force in history that some states, especially in North Africa, are still influenced by it today.

Among those who converted to Islam were the Berbers. Fiercely independent desert and mountain dwellers, the Berbers were the original inhabitants of North Africa. While they accepted Islam as their faith, many maintained their Berber identities and loyalties. Two Berber groups, the Almoravids and the Almohads, founded empires that united the Maghrib under Muslim rule.

**Almoravid Reformers** In the 11th century, Muslim reformers founded the Almoravid (al•muh•RAHV•uhd) Empire. Its members came from a Berber group living in the western Sahara in what is today Mauritania. The movement began after devout Berber Muslims made a hajj, or pilgrimage, to Mecca. On their journey



▲ Carpets for sale in Marrakech, Morocco

home, they convinced a Muslim scholar from Morocco named Abd Allah Ibn Yasin to return with them to teach their people about Islam. Ibn Yasin’s teachings soon attracted followers, and he founded a strict religious brotherhood, known as the **Almoravids**. According to one theory about the name’s origin, the group lived in a *ribat*, or fortified monastery. They were therefore called the “people of the *ribat*,” or *al-Murabitun*. This eventually became “Almoravid.”

In the 1050s, Ibn Yasin led the Almoravids in an effort to spread Islam through conquest. After Ibn Yasin’s death in 1059, the Almoravids went on to take Morocco and found Marrakech. It became their capital. They overran the West

African empire of Ghana by 1076. The Almoravids also captured parts of southern Spain, where they were called Moors.

**Almohads Take Over** In the mid-1100s, the **Almohads** (AL•moh•HADZ), another group of Berber Muslim reformers, seized power from the Almoravids. The Almohads began as a religious movement in the Atlas Mountains of Morocco.

The Almohads followed the teachings of Ibn Tumart. After a pilgrimage to Mecca, Ibn Tumart criticized the later Almoravid rulers for moving away from the traditional practice of Islam. He urged his followers to strictly obey the teachings of the Qur’an and Islamic law. The Almohads, led by Abd al-Mumin, fought to overthrow the Almoravids and remain true to their view of traditional Islamic beliefs.

By 1148 the Almohads controlled most of Morocco and ended Almoravid rule. The new Muslim reformers kept Marrakech as their capital. By the end of the 12th century, they had conquered much of southern Spain. In Africa, their territory stretched from Marrakech to Tripoli and Tunis on the Mediterranean. The Almohad Empire broke up into individual Muslim dynasties. While the Almohad Empire lasted just over 100 years, it united the Maghrib under one rule for the first time. **B**

Stronger empires were about to emerge. Societies in West Africa created empires that boasted economic and political power and strong links to trade routes.

**MAIN IDEA**

**Recognizing Effects**

**B** What was the main effect of Almohad rule on the Maghrib?

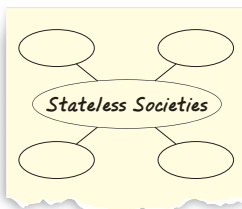
**SECTION 1 ASSESSMENT**

**TERMS & NAMES** 1. For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- lineage
- stateless societies
- patrilineal
- matrilineal
- Maghrib
- Almoravids
- Almohads

**USING YOUR NOTES**

2. How might these characteristics have helped stateless societies to endure for many centuries? Explain.



**MAIN IDEAS**

3. What sorts of food do the Efe hunt and gather in the Ituri Forest?
4. What different purposes does the age-set system serve in African societies?
5. What role did Islam play in the political history of North Africa?

**CRITICAL THINKING & WRITING**

6. **ANALYZING ISSUES** What was the main disagreement that the Almohads had with the Almoravids?
7. **DRAWING CONCLUSIONS** How did the law help to unify Muslim society?
8. **COMPARING** In what ways are hunting-gathering societies and stateless societies similar?
9. **WRITING ACTIVITY** **RELIGIOUS AND ETHICAL SYSTEMS**  
Working with a partner, prepare a **time line** showing the impact of Islam on North Africa. Include significant events for the period described in this section. Display your time line in the classroom.

**CONNECT TO TODAY** **MAKING A CHART**

Research hunting-gathering societies in Africa today. Find out their numbers and where they live and present your findings in a **chart**.