



ADDITIONAL NOTES

Stateless Societies in Africa **Sam Mbah & I.E. Igariwey** *(1997)*

The term “stateless societies” has been used in a pejorative sense by certain European scholars to denote backwardness arising from the inability of African societies to establish their own states. State formation in Africa, says the “Hamitic theory,” was attributable to foreign influence, the belief being that Africans left on their own would never have been able to produce anything more than a “low” level of political organization. Among the stateless societies that existed on the continent were the Igbo, the Birom, Angas, Idoma, Ekoi, Njembe, the Niger Delta peoples, the Tiv (Nigeria), the Shona (Zimbabwe), Lodogea, the Lowihi, the Bobo, the Dogon, the Konkomba, the Birifor (Burkina Faso, Niger), the Bate, the Kissi, the Dan, the Logoli, the Gagu and Kru peoples, the Mano, Bassa Grebo and Kwanko (Ivory Coast, Guinea, Togo), the Tallensi, Mamprusi, Kusaasi (Ghana), the Nuer (Southern Sudan), etc. — numbering today nearly two hundred million individuals in all.

For the purposes of a clear and retrospective understanding of stateless societies, we shall present case studies of three of them: the Igbo, the Niger Delta people (in present-day Nigeria), and the Tallensi (Ghana). Stateless societies tended generally to be agricultural, sedentary, and homogenous in character.

The Igbo

Oral tradition has it that the ancestors of Igbos (also referred to as the Ibo) originated from somewhere in the Middle East. The earliest settlements of the Igbos were at Awka and Orlu, from which they spread south, pushing the Ibibios to the coastal fringes of the Niger Delta. The Igbo generally followed a segmentary pattern of political and social organization. As against large, centralized political units, Igbo society constructed small units, often referred to as “village” political units without kings or chiefs ruling over them or administering their affairs. “In Igbo, each person hails... from the particular district where he was born, but when away from home all are Igbos.” Among the Igbo, there is a popular saying, “Igbo enwegh Eze,” meaning Igbo have no kings.

