



Map 1: Distribution of Fulfulde Speakers (Fulani)

I shall briefly compare recent studies on woodcarvers and sculptors in West African societies that to some degree are gerontocratic (Marghi and Senufo), for the purpose of illustrating the diversity of situations as well as some of the economic historical and political factors which may intervene in the relations between craftsmen and cultivators.³

1. Fulani Woodcarvers: Areal Distribution and Historical Background

a) Areal Distribution of the Fulani LawBe and Wooden Objects Among the Fulani

The *lawBe*, woodcarvers of the Fulani who speak their language, live in a wider region than

that inhabited by the Fulani themselves; numbering some seven million, they cover an area from Senegambia to Lake Chad (Dupire 1981: 167; Map 2). Some Fulani societies obtain wooden items from craftsmen linked with dominant neighboring ethnic groups (Tuareg, Moors, Hausa, etc.), and the *lawBe* do not work only for the Fulani. *LawBe* were primarily located in the western part of French West Africa where they held the monopoly on woodcarving activities (Raffenel 1846: 342). The earliest sources of information come from Senegambia (Mollien 1822; Raffenel 1846; Bérenger-Féraud 1879). This region was the starting point of French colonialization, and in earlier time, of Fulani migratory movements toward the East. Even in Senegal today, the *lawBe* are considered as a separate race and for census purposes are counted apart from the Wolof, Fulani, Tuculor, Moors, and occasionally even from the *rimaiBe* (Fulani freed slaves). Thus, in the mind of the colonizer and the local populations, there arose a confusion that still persists between social category and ethnic group.

In all the ancient accounts, the *lawBe* are described as nomads. In Guinea (Futa Djallon),

³ The phonetic transcription herein uses the official Senegalese alphabet transformed into Roman characters, a solution adopted by A. B. Diop (1981: 9–10). – I would like to thank my colleagues for helping me to complete information regarding the regions where they did field work (C. Seydou, R. Ogawa, M. Aliou, R. Labatut), as well as the Serer interpreters, D. Mbengue and S. Dione, who assisted me in their respective ethnic groups, Ndut and Lala.