

Song of the Champion, Sëriñ Fallu

For Shaykh Muhammadu Fāḍilu Mbakke.¹

Written by Shaykh Muusaa Ka,² the sincere Murid,

and reproduced by your humble servant, Muhammad Fāḍilu Si,

with the authorization of Shaykh Muhammad Kabir Ka.

[Page 1]

In the name of God, The Merciful, The Beneficent,

May peace and blessing be upon Prophet Muhammad.

You are the Provider in Whom we seek refuge.

Today, I will praise a champion!

God, the king Maker, has chosen him to lead!

It is the turn of Shaykh Fāḍilu [to lead]!

God has made him a knight of the Légion d'Honneur!³

He has decided it by the grace of the servant

of His Servant, the Announcer, and the Warner!⁴

¹ *Shaykh Muhammadu Fāḍilu Mbakke* (1888-1968) is also called *Sëriñ Fallu Mbakke*, *Serigne Moubammadou Fadlou Mbacké*, *Shaykh Fāḍilu*, *Cheikh Fadilou*, *Serigne Fallou*; *Al-Hajj Fallou* or *Alaaji Fallou*. He was the second son of Cheikh Ahmadu Bamba (also spelled *Cheikh Ahmadou Mbacké*) and successor of the first Caliph of the Murids, *Mustafaa Mbakke* (or *Moustapha Mbacké*) (1888-1945).

² *Shaykh Muusaa Ka* (1889-1963) is also known as *Cheikh Moussa Ka*, *Sëriñ Muusaa Ka*, *Serigne Moussa Ka*, *Njàmmé*, *Njàmmé Ka*, or *Ndiamé Ka*. He was a disciple of Bamba and the greatest Wolof Ajami poet. He was a hagiographer and Murid historian who took inspiration from Bamba's writings, Islamic sources, and the works of his senior colleagues. For more on him, see Fallou Ngom, *Muslims Beyond the Arab World: The Odyssey of 'Ajami and the Muridiyya* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 22-23.

³ *Lasindanoor* is the Wolofization of *Légion d'Honneur* (English: Legion of Honor), the highest French order of merit established by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1802.

⁴ *The Servant of His Servant* refers to Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba who refers to himself in his writing as the servant of the Servant of God (Prophet Muhammad).

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Only a fool dares to criticize his actions!

“Nothing is impossible,” only a king can this!

I renewed my allegiance to the Caliph.

I rehabilitated my allegiance to the newly installed leader!

Now that I have renewed my spiritual allegiance, I am set and comfortable.

I will no longer stray away from the path,

for I have safely arrived at my destination!

Xaliifa and Siidi Nuur are certainly impressed!⁵

We have walked to the dock of Mbuur,⁶

and boarded a canoe there.

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Please get on board! Let us pay our fares, my friends!

Our canoe has arrived at the shore.

We have lined up to get onboard before sailing across.

As we toured the sea in Mbuur,

jumped in the water for a cleansing bath,

face the waves while kneeling.⁷

I am grateful for joining this gathering!⁸

My leader [Caliph] has fed me well. I am satiated!

⁵ *Xaliifa* and *Siidi Nuur* maybe referring to *Xaliifa Abaabakar Si* (also spelled *Khalifa Ababacar Sy*) and *Seydu Nuuru Taal* (or *Seydou Nourou Tall*) respectively who were leaders of Si and Taal branches of the Tijaniyya. Both are contemporaries of the poet.

⁶ *Mbuur* is also spelled *Mbour*, a coastal city in the region of Thiès, Senegal.

⁷ The author uses in this verse *Gaaju* (to visit or tour), *Sëmbu* (to jump in, dive, or immerse), *Duus* (ocean waves, breaking of waves), and *Sukaleef* (an obsolete form for *Sukal nu*, which means to kneel) to show his status as mariner.

⁸ *Saantu*, which is used here, also means to follow, to congregate.

Now, I am excessively feeling intoxicated!

And I have wrestled and defeated Faati Njaay in Mbuur!⁹

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I am Bamba's Murid who praises his champion,

and always celebrates his Master.

Without much ado, I have joined my friend's gathering.

So, I shall not rally any other gathering in Kajoor!

I have aided, supported, and recruited [people].

I have answered the call or have been a path blazing scorpion!¹⁰

Spectators have obviously no fun [wrestling] event at home!

In contrast, we are beating the drums in God's wrestling arena!

We rely solely on God, our Creator,

and on the spiritual proximity with a great Shaykh!

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I am ailing and weak, please cure me!

Give me a treatment for my heart.¹¹

The wrestling competition of the Saints has begun!

Either Mbakke or Buso shall win the trophy!¹²

Attack your challengers to knock them down!

⁹ *Jaaru naa jandi naa* (or *jaaru ba jandi*) used here means literally to be warm enough, but means in this context, intoxication. *Faati Njaay* is also spelled *Fati Ndiaye*, the name of the poet's wife.

¹⁰ The poet used *Këbkëboor* here, which is a species of scorpion. He used the metaphor of this specific scorpion to suggest that he has blazed the path of Murid discipleship and protected it from enemies, just like the specific scorpion called *Këbkëboor* leaves a track and protects it for other insects.

¹¹ The poet used the word *Saafara*, which is a healing potion used in the treatment of all sorts of illnesses. *Saafara* can be rubbed on the arms or face, sprinkled over the body, sipped, or used for bathing.

¹² *Mbakke* or *Buso* are also spelled *Mbakke*, *Mbacké* or *Bouso*. *Kubéer* is a Wolofization of the French word *couvercle* (lid). It means in this context prize or trophy.

May you bring down all these tough opponents!

I am a prisoner of earthly passions and lust,

carnal pleasures and Satan!¹³

Anyone who can set me free

shall therefore be my Greatest Champion!

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My champion has many victories!

As the celebrated champion of Bawol and Kajoor,

he is worth praising and cheering up!

I will cheer him up tirelessly, brandishing my amulets!

And I shall confront anyone who challenges him!

If you hate him, go up to Sigicoor!¹⁴

If you hate him, you will be welcomed

by Munakkir ak Nakiir in your tomb!¹⁵

If you hate him, you will not cross sirat,

for no "chauffeur" (intercessor) will help you there!¹⁶

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If you hate him, you will live forever in hellfire,

and experience its fearsome rage!

¹³ The self-deprecating language the poet uses here is the typical among the Sufis.

¹⁴ *Sigicoor* is the Wolof rendering of *Ziguinchor*, the capital city of the Southern Casamance region of Senegal, which is the farthest point in the country from the Wolof perspective. The English equivalent of the phrase "go up to Sigicoor" is "get lost!" or "get out of here!"

¹⁵ In Islamic eschatology, *Munakkir* ak *Nakiir* (or *Munkar* and *Nakir*) are two angels who first meet dead people in their tombs and test their faith with interrogations. The suggestions here is that the interrogations will be difficult for those who hate his champion, *Shaykh Mubammadu Fāḍilu Mbakke*.

¹⁶ *Sirat* (Arabic: *Sirāt*) refers to the bridge above the hellfire that every human being must cross before entering paradise.

I am the servant of our Ahmad (Bamba),

and the bard of his noble family!

I have praised Bamba as I have praised Mustafaa [the Prophet]!

I have praised Bamba, the noble,

and I continue to praise him as the Servant of Mustafaa!

Now I praise Fāḍīl and Bashīr.¹⁷

I have submitted myself to my Shaykh [Fāḍīl],

the chosen from God, our Lord!

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It was not the best lawyer who made him be chosen!

It was the Will of God, the Most Powerful!

You are the grandson of Balla¹⁸ who rests in Ɔay!

You are the paternal cousin of Sērīñ Balla Joor,

and the grandson of Maam Asta Waalo Buso!

Son of Maam Jaara [Bamba], your offspring is honorable!¹⁹

My champion has sailed across the ocean of Mbuur,

[just as his father] Bamba drank in the celestial ocean!

I quote him here: "I am intoxicated by your drinks!"²⁰

He wrote it himself. [But] our intoxication is divine!

¹⁷ *Al-Bashir* (the Announcer of good news) is one of the names of Prophet Muhammad.

¹⁸ The shortcut for *Maam Balla Aysa Mbakke* or *Mame Balla Aissa Mbacké*, the paternal grandfather of Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba.

¹⁹ *Maam Jaara* (1831-1864), also known as *Mame Diarra* or *Diarra Bousso* or *Maam Jaaratu laabi Buso* is Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba's mother.

²⁰ Here the poet uses the following mix Arabic and Wolof structure: *Ku onsu ka tasqīni*. The phrase is his rendering of the tenth verse of the *Kabfun* section of Ahmadu Bamba's panegyric poem called *Muqadimatul Amdab* (*The Beginning of Praises*).

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We are fully satisfied, for we trust him.

Divine drinks are unlike beer drinks!

I admire the father of Faatimatu [Bamba],

for this hero of mine is composed and reliable!

I am grateful to the father of Shaykh Murtadaa [Bamba],

for no one yells the name of Maymunatu's father [Bamba]!

I believe in Muuminatu's father [Bamba].

Obey him if you desire to be the best!

I am in the good graces of Aaminatu's father.

You don't miss diner in his company!

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I tasted the spiritual blessings of Muslimatu's father [Bamba].

One cannot taste his precious sweetness and not want more!

It is Maymuna's father [Bamba] who showered me with blessings

till I was able to have wives up to Mbuur!

I tasted the spiritual blessings of Aysata's father [Bamba].

I am tossed around by the waves of this ocean [of blessings]!

He offered me plenty of clothes that I wear.

He made me inherit a *sabadoor* garb of his²¹

that Maam Cerno loved to touch to seek baraka,

²¹ *Sabadoor* is a traditional Wolof garb.

just like Ka'ab had worn the outfit of al-Bashīr [Prophet Muhammad]²²

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He [Bamba] is my guardian, but do not imitate me!

You will regret it if you try!

He has made me the bard of the miracle makers!

Now, everywhere I go I am treated like a king!

He has made me the miracle of his poems!

For this reason, my poems have reached as far as Mbuur!

He has made my poetic work noteworthy!

For this reason, I have become a celebrity!

He has made me the bard of his family!

For this reason, my words are trustworthy!

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Thanks to him I have receive gifts everywhere I have been.

For this reason, he has led, and I have followed him!

He has made me a celebrity in Ndar [Saint-Louis],

in Jiwaalo, Giloor and beyond!²³

I am indebted to him, for everything I have I owe it to him.

I am his humble servant. If you hate him, please leave him with me!

I am fully dependent on him, for he is my everything!

Boundless thanks and praises be to God!

²² *Ka'ab ibn Malīk* was a great Arab poet who was initially critical of Prophet Muhammad before repenting, being forgiven, and converting to Islam. Later, Prophet Muhammad who was very happy with him offered him one of his beautiful outfits. *Al-Bashīr* is one of the names of the Prophet, which means the *Announcer of good news*.

²³ *Jiwaalo* is also called *Jivalo*, *Djivalo* or *Joal* and *Giloor* is also known as *Djilor* or *Jilor*. These are areas traditionally inhabited by the Sécrécér ethnolinguistic group, which were far away from Wolof and Murid influence.

Bamba has returned to Tuubaa, our beloved [city]!

The son has brought his father's remains to lay him to rest!²⁴

[Page 13]

My esteemed champion [Shaykh Muhammadu Fāḍilu] who visited

Mecca, Tayba, Marwa and Safa, is peerless!

My champion, the master of Mbakke, Daaru,

Jurbel and this mosque, you are a king!

Dance, Yande Ngaan!²⁵ You are the champion!

Show us your talents! Mbakke, you are the best!

You are the champion, owner of this mosque and the spiritual pole of the century!

Without you, Tuubaa would remain heirless!

Your blessings are unavailable to the average people.

Only in Bamba can one find such blessings in our time!

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You paid your respect to al-Mustafā, the Chosen One [Prophet Muhammad],²⁶

then visited the most sacred of the shrines!

Afterwards, you visited Abu Bakr and Umar!

Then you drank the Zam-zam water, the best well water!

You performed the Hajj, the Umra, and you have visited Minna!

²⁴ Here the poet used the following metaphor: *Kaani doom baa toxal waa Jandeer* (*The hot pepper fruit has replaced the hot pepper from Jandeer*). *Jandeer* or *Diander* is a lush region where hot pepper (*kaani doom*) is cultivated. The poet uses the metaphor to highlight the potent connection between Bamba (who is referred to as the hot pepper from Jandeer) and his oldest son Mustafaa Mbakke (referred to as the hot pepper fruit) who brought Bamba to rest in Tuubaa after his death in 1927.

²⁵ *Tasbital* is a dance move and song of Wolof champions. *Yande Ngaan* is also known as *Samba Yande Ngane* who was the undefeated wrestling champion of his time. Here the author refers to Shaykh Muhammadu Fāḍilu as the champion wrestler *Samba Yande Ngane*.

²⁶ In this section, the poet recounts the 1928 pilgrimage of Shaykh Muhammadu Fāḍilu, the places he visited, and rituals he performed.

You lapidated Satan and paid pious visits to al-Bashīr [Prophet Muhammad]!

You circled the Ka`ba of the Best Creature [Prophet Muhammad]!

You are a *libidoor*, an invaluable and priceless jewelry!

You are a pure carat gold; you cannot be tainted!

You can only be first-rate quality jewelry!

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You are different from people of nowadays, for you are no worthless metal!

You are a valued currency and not broken pottery!

You are a Sharif and the heir of Bamba, the servant [of the Prophet]!

You have visited Qayşara and Quşūr!²⁷

You are a learned and wise hafiz!²⁸

You used to lead the Ramadan prayer!

You are the greatest advisor to all human beings!

You have surpassed those who have surpassed me!

You are fearless, sharp and the best!

You are better than anyone better than me. You are the moon!

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You are a fervent believer who prostrates before God!

You have defeated the one who defeated me. You are the unmatched champion!

You are focused when you pray and prostrate!

You have surpassed Nguuda Kan of Geloor!²⁹

You are my sole noble master!

²⁷ *Qayşara* and *Quşūr* also spelled *Khaisara* and *Khousor* are two cities in the outskirts of Mecca.

²⁸ *Hafizh* in Arabic means someone who knows the entire Quran by heart.

²⁹ *Nguuda Kan of Geloor* was the greatest diviner of his time.

You travelled past Fez and Mount [Sinai]!

All human beings rely on you!

You are the most senior, the more learned, the most terrific!

You are a righteous and fair leader!

You have outshined the scholars of your time!

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You are as educated as disciplined!

You are above us: a palm tree is not a *Dugóor*!³⁰

If you were to have any flaw,

it would be your remarkable fear of God!

You should be known beyond Wolof land!

Your lofty position has dazzled the innocent youth!

May God grant us baraka for the sake of our preferred [leader].

Peace is priceless! And you are not a fake peacemaker!³¹

Your current tenure produced no major discord!

The war has ended, and all goods are affordable!³²

[Page 18]

Soxna Awa Buso has achieved many exploits!

You will regret it if you miss her lavish diner!

She has served us copious food,

and we are now full thanks to her delicious meals!

³⁰ *Dugóor* is a shrub that grows in the savanna of Jolof and Kajoor. It is short and has a yellow strawberry-size sweet fruit.

³¹ Here poet uses the Wolof word *Janjamoor* which means a fake promoter of peace to suggest that his leader is a true peacemaker.

³² Here the poet is correlating the end of WWII and the ensuing prosperity with Sëriñ Fallu's tenure as Caliph of the Muridiyya.

Welcome home, champion! You have won!

From the East and the West, you are our most powerful wrestling charm!³³

You are the most righteous and guardian of the most righteous souls!

Only the lost souls can hate you!

Don't be afraid of anything for you are the best here!

You are the master of the forest, the Elephant King!

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My son, an egg cannot collide with a rock!

The child of a dwarf cannot challenge a lion!

God has already decided! Whatever the enemies' plots are,

He will foil them all!

You are different from previous leaders!

Fresh fish is no adult lizard!

You are the heir of the Servant of Mustafaa [Bamba]!

An adult turtle is no bug!

Divine intoxication is not alcoholic intoxication!

A Lion is no Hyena!

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You are the best who surpassed all in this century!

An adult ostrich is not a chick!

You have tipped the scale of this century!

You are our blessing! You are perfect and accomplished!

³³ Here the poet uses the metaphor of *Singoor* which is the most important and last charm in the mystical arsenal of Wolof traditional wrestlers. It is shown to the public before and after the competition. Wrestlers typically hold the charm above their heads so that everyone in the audience can see it.

Thanks to you, our women in this century are wearing

full outfits without sharing them like they used to!

We have a thriving century, thanks to you!

Don't stop! You are successful!

In this century, many are driving cars [thanks to your blessings]!

Rejoice and harvest your farms in your rich lands!

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You have defeated the champion of the union leader,

and thanks to you we are wearing back our preferred outfits!

You have beaten the champion in the race!

You have won the race and earned a victory lap!

You are the leader of creatures! Please, lead us forward!

Give us all we wish in these troubled times!

All the black and white people recognize you [as their leader]!

Some are praising you while others are following you. You are truly the king!

Guide us in the right path before we are too spoiled!

We should be thankful and look up to you!

[Page 22]

O weavers! Return to your craft!

Amateurish wrestlers take off all your charms!

O shepherds! Come submit yourselves and repent!

Subaltern wrestlers, remove all your gears!

Any poet who does not praise the man I am praising

is wasting his time praising a commoner, and not a king!

May his detractors get slapped in the face in broad daylight

or face the interrogations of Munakkir ak Nakiir!

May anyone who loves you become prosperous,

have blessings and live like a king!

[Page 23]

We believe in you! Offer us *tarqiyya* and *tarbiyya* trainings.³⁴

If you so desire, you may trade us for luxurious cars,
for you are entitled to [our extraordinary] pious gifts!

If you so desire, you may trade us for kerosene lamps,
for we are your property since we owe your father all we have!

If you so desire, you may trade us for outfits,
for you are the most senior of spiritual leaders!

Seniority trumps youth in Mbakke!

When the competition to lead Mbakke first began,

it was Balla Aysa, The Great (your paternal grandfather), who won!

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You are currently the oldest of Bamba's family.

A stranger should not win the trophy!

My champion wrestler has no challenger left!

The spiritual arena is now quiet. You are the greatest!

You are the champion wrestler of the spiritual arena!

You are the supervisor of the farm. No need to rush!

³⁴ *Tarqiyya* (spiritual and ethical training), *tarqiyya* (spiritual elevation), and *tasfiyya* (re-socialization) are the three tenets of Bamba's ethics-centered pedagogy. See Fallou Ngom, *Muslims beyond the Arab World*, 92-94.

I dislike those who oppose and hate you.

But they are not God, let them hate you,

for regardless of their political party or group affiliation,

God has already made His final decision!

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No spoiler can ruin His plan!

Bringing down an elder can lead to one's downfall!

We believe in you! Put us on task when you summoned us!

Show us no mercy and no leniency. Discipline us, instead!

You embed hidden blessings in whatever task you give us!

We are the blind, and you are the seer of the Lord!

Everyone is now farming their plot in the farm,

but building the mosque [of Tuubaa], your task, is the hardest,

a great mosque for Friday and daily prayers,

like the Ka'ba of God. Tuubaa is great!

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Bamba once said: "if human beings had refused to build [the mosque of Tuubaa],

angels would come down to earth to build it themselves,

and Angel Gabriel, the Quran, and the Prophet³⁵

would have been the building engineers!"

O Lord, we have timely accepted the terms.

Please, help us achieve our goal!

³⁵ The poet uses here the following Arabic phrase: *bi l-amīni l-amīni l-amīn*. According to Murid hagiography, the structure represents Angel Gabriel, the Quran, and Prophet Muhammad.

You are the heir of the heir of the Prophet!

Celebrate, pray, and call your people!

May we complete building the mosque!

May you become our imam, for you are the best!

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Long live your paternal [half] brothers!

May they build multistorey homes!

May you have a long life with boundless blessings!

May all your detractors fail!

May all [Bamba]'s recommendations be fulfilled

in your tenure with the support of the Prophet!

May the offspring of our Master, Bamba,

continue to inherit his mystical secrets!

May I continue to compose such poems

to celebrate my champion wrestler; for I am the bard and he is the nobility!

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May I continue to praise his deeds,

so that he can offer me exceptional benefits!

Let me tell you that I know your melody!

I, Njàmmé, am your Maysa Gély Baara!³⁶

I have invented this melody for my champion wrestler!

I have astounded great musicians and ended their fame!

I have completed my task! I can now end my poem!

³⁶ *Maysa Gély Baara* was a renowned Wolof drummer.

Like Yande Ngaan, I am playing my last trumpet!

We have now reached the end and have completed our task,

and have prayed in the name of the Great Prophet [Muhammad]!

[Page 29]

May peace and blessings be upon him,

the Announcer and the Warner!

May Allah be satisfied with our Shaykh, the Pole of the Universe!

The father of Fāḍil and Bashīr [Bamba],

please offer Soxna May [Maymuna Mbakke] the best reward,

and elevate her as a Queen endowed with blessings!

Offer too the servant of the Servant,

Njàmmè Ka [the poet], special rewards!

Amen, Amen! May God shower us

with blessings and elevate us as royalty!