

## Elegy for Sëriñ Masamba Mbakke

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In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful. May peace and blessing be upon Prophet Muhammad. The Murid, Shaykh Muusaa, son of Usmaan implores God to have Mercy upon them both. This is an elegy for Shaykh Masamba Mbakke.<sup>1</sup>

In the name of God, Bamba's bard,

Njamme, has begun to paddle his canoe in the ocean!

If you drown at sea a sailor will search for your body!

If you die on land, you will be buried in the sand [dune]!

Bamba is like an ocean and Murids are the fish!

What dies at sea is no luck for vultures!

A Murid will not be interrogated by Munakir and Nakir!<sup>2</sup>

For the intelligent mind, ponder over this true statement!

Njamme is the sailor paddling in the ocean of Bamba

showing others how to cross the bridge!

If you can't swim, then wait at the shore,

and a canoe will soon arrive and take you across with your belongings!

Know that [the saints] are still living among us.

Their corpses do not decompose. They are amazing!

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<sup>1</sup>*Shaykh Muusaa Ka* (1889-1963) is also known as *Cheikh Moussa Ka*, *Sëriñ Muusaa Ka*, or *Serigne Moussa Ka*, *Njamme* or *Njamme Ka*. He was a disciple of *Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba Mbakke* (or *Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba Mbacké* or *Ahmadu Bamba*). *Muusaa Ka* was the greatest of the Wolof Ajami poet. He was a hagiographer and a Murid historian who drew from Bamba's writings, Islamic sources, and the works of his senior colleagues. See Fallou Ngom, *Muslims Beyond the Arab World: The Odyssey of 'Ajami and the Muridiyya* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 22. *Sëriñ Masamba Mbakke* (1882-1942), also known as *Serigne* or *Shaykh Massamba Mbacké*, *Bacc*, *Bacc Mbakke* or *Bathie Mbacké*, was the youngest brother of Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba, and his scribe. He copied and vocalized most of the poems that Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba wrote.

<sup>2</sup> *Munkar* and *Nakir* or *Munakir* and *Nakiir* in Wolof are the two angels in Islamic eschatology who interrogate the dead in their graves and test their faith.

If you are not convinced, read "And do not say..."

till you reach the end "...not see them,"<sup>3</sup> then you will be persuaded!

Knowing and praising righteous people

will persuade their followers to emulate them.

Without writers, the charted paths would fade away.

Without orators, knowledge would be less widespread.

Without educators, the masses would be snoring,

and they would never wake up until it is too late!

"Should We Mourn Virtuous Masters?"

Bamba once asked!<sup>4</sup> Refrain from cursing!

Let us revisit the life of a giant! Please, listen carefully!

The champion has fallen in the middle of the sea!

By God, the day he passed away in Kawlax,<sup>5</sup>

both the oceans and the rivers were agitated!

Allow me to recount the legacy of Masamba,

the generous person who used to emulate Shaykh Bamba.

O Angel of Death, who strips away life

under the order of He Who gives life, the Ever-Living,

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<sup>3</sup> Here the poet uses part of a Quranic verse. The entire verse reads as follows: "And do not say of those who are slain in the way of Allah that they are dead. No, they are living, though you do not see them." Q 1:154.

<sup>4</sup> *Huqq al-Buka`u* is the short title of one of Bamba's poems titled *Huqq al-Buka`u `alā sadāti* (*Should We Mourn the Loss of Saints or Virtuous Masters*).

<sup>5</sup> *Kawlax* is also spelled *Kaolack*. It is one of the administrative regions of Senegal.

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since you took away the Servant of the Prophet,

why didn't you spare the youngest?

Indeed, what took away the Servant of the Prophet,

will not spare anyone. Where is the Prophet?<sup>6</sup>

Everybody living in Mecca or Tuubaa

will inevitably die one day.

No one can rush or delay the hour [of their death],

neither the virtuous nor the king and his servants!

When you arrive at your final train station, your receipt can be thrown away

as you will be welcomed, and your luggage unloaded!<sup>7</sup>

If you were a Muslim, then you will be welcomed in paradise.

If you were a nonbeliever, then you would go to hell.

O Angel of Death who strikes without warning,

please allow us to continue to serve Bamba!

O Angel of Death, you mercilessly took away Shaykh Masamba's life!

[Fortunately], he went to respond to the call of Bamba!

Bamba had called him on a Thursday night

in the month of Rajab. It was when he went to the afterlife.

Angels, jinns, and the notables of the celestial world

all offered his soul a special welcome!

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<sup>6</sup> Here the poet uses the Arabic phrase *Ayna Abū al-Batūli?* (*Where is the Father of al-Batūli?*) to refer to Prophet Muhammad. *Al-Batūli* was a title of *Fāṭima*, the daughter of Prophet Muhammad.

<sup>7</sup> Here the poet uses the metaphor of the train station to refer to the afterlife. Since the arrival of the railway in the Murid community in colonial Senegal, the metaphor of the train has been commonly used in their Ajami poetry.

He paddled his canoe to paradise

where he arrived the night of twenty-eighth.

I wrote this story in the year Unaysashin (1950),

when Bacc Mbakke, the last born, went to heaven from Kawlax.

It was in the room where he used to be hosted, when his time came,

it was from there that his soul returned to God, His Owner.

There he was like those who have exiled for the sake of God,

for he entered the room with the same purpose, without a doubt!

That year he had even confided to his brother

and heir, Shaykh Ibraahiima Lo.

He had measured the grave and gave to Cerno [his older brother]

the measurements, and he passed away that same year.

Let us mourn Sëriñ Masamba Anta Ceebo.

He left this world during the first rain of the season.

He was about to burn the weed removed from his farm.

His seeds were ready to be planted when he departed.

His farms and disciples became orphans!

He left everything behind to reunite with Bamba!

I know that the day he greeted Bamba [in the afterlife],

Riḍwān [the Angel of Paradise] opened him the door to meet the Prophet!

I know that the day he departed Kawlax at night,

all the Murids were devastated!

I know that the day when he departed Kawlax at night,

his death deeply affected the righteous.

I know that day the Women of Paradise [the Ḥūru l-‘Ayni]  
were so delighted than they were before!

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On that day the pious residents in the cemetery of Tuubaa  
welcomed their honorable guest!

On that same day Bacc received his reward  
for his achievements in moral education.

He received them from Bamba, without effort.

He received the highest reward that is not due to partisanship!

He left a huge vacuum in Bamba’s Islamic path,  
a solid pillar of Bamba’s roof has collapsed.

On that day Islam shed tears in Tuubaa!

Even the mosque quietly choked up with tears!

“Should We Mourn”<sup>8</sup> is what led me to weep.

I mourn the virtuous leaders that I have trusted.

Please mourn with me the youngest who matched his elders,  
Sëriñ Masamba Mbakke, the sailor and his fishing net!

In the year Wamsashin (1927), I mourned Shaykh Bamba,

The Helper and Refuge for Humanity, and the servant of the Prophet.

In the year Ṭamsashin (1930), I mourned Shaykh Ibra,<sup>9</sup>

the bright light that enlightened this life and the next!

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<sup>8</sup> *Huqq al-Buka`u* is the short title of one of Bamba’s poems titled *Huqq al-Buka`u ‘alā sadāti* (*Should We Mourn the Loss of Saints or Virtuous Masters?*).

<sup>9</sup> *Shaykh Ibra* (1875-1931), also known as *Shaykh Ibraabiima Faal*, *Cheikh Ibra Fall*, or *Maam Cheikh Ibrahima Fall*, was the closest and most devoted disciple of Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba. He is the founder of *Baay Faal* (*Baye Fall*) movement within the Muridiyya.

In the year Ansashi (1933), I mourned my uncle,

Shaykh Moodu Ndumbe,<sup>10</sup> the Generous.

In the year Asashi (1941), I shed tears

for Siidi Anta Mbakke.<sup>11</sup> I was devastated!

This year, Unaysashin (1950), I am mourning

Sëriñ Masamba Mbakke who divorced this world.

O Life, enough with you! You took away all our Mbakke Masters!

You spared neither the youngest nor the oldest. How greedy you are!

You should have spared Shaykh Masamba

so we can emulate him and see Bamba through him.

Now, who will emulate Our Great Master

the way Masamba, his scribe, did?

You should have spared Shaykh Masamba

so that he continues to sermon us and cleanse our sins.

Now, who will talk to the Murids, waken their minds,

and fill their hearts with Bamba's teachings?

You should have spared Shaykh Masamba

for he was the mender of the people of the East and West.

Now, who will take the train with people

he trusts to Mbuur and Mbawoor?

You should have spare Shaykh Masamba,

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<sup>10</sup> *Shaykh Moodu Ndumbe* (1859-1933), also known as *Cheikh Modou Ndoumbé Mbacké*, *Shaykh Mandumbe Xabbaan Mbakke*, or *Cheikh Mandoumbé Khabane Mbacké* was one of Bamba's early disciples, and his paternal and his maternal cousin.

<sup>11</sup> *Siidi Anta Mbakke* (1867-1941), also known as *Sidi*, *Cheikh Anta Mbacké*, *Siidi Maxtaar*, or *Sidi Makhtar* was Bamba's brother, his disciple, and the richest Murid of his time.

for even his canton chief and his residents mourn him.

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Now, who would give away money and horses

to the factory leader, his employees, and the market vendors?

It would have been good to spare Shaykh Masamba.

The Mbakke and the Buso lineages have lost their pride.

In the spiritual race, it was Bacc who took the trophy!

And he was the trusted engineer of The Master [Bamba].

It would have been good to spare Shaykh Masamba,

for he used to mend people from Saalum to Tamba.

Now, who will take the train from Njurbel<sup>12</sup>

to Tamba to sermon Murids up to Kungel?

It would have been good to spare Shaykh Masamba.

He used to receive gifts from the residents of Sañoor.

Now, who will give away money to assist solicitors

while wearing his neck pouch stuffed with copies of the Quran?

It would have been good to spare Shaykh Masamba.

The mosque of Njurbel and its library mourn him.

Now, who will wear three turbans

in imitation of The Master of Tuubaa [Bamba], without hesitation?

It would have been good to spare Shaykh Masamba.

Both the mosque of Tuubaa and the mausoleum [of Bamba] mourn him.

Now, who will host devotional chanting of Bamba's odes in Tuubaa

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<sup>12</sup> *Njurbel*, *Jurbel*, or *Diourbel* is where Bamba lived under house arrest from 1912 to his death in 1927.

night and day while circling his mausoleum?

It would have been good to spare Shaykh Masamba.

Shaykh Mustafaa<sup>13</sup> mourned him for his father's sake.

In his beautiful outfit, Bacc used to host

one hundred twenty-five reading sessions of the Quran!

By God, who will take the lead again in Muharam

for three days and undisturbed by final donations?

It would have been good to spare Shaykh Masamba.

Quran readers from Galloga will miss him.

Now, who will offer herds to Quran reciters

during Tabaski [Eid al-Adha] without feeling burdened?

It would have been good to spare Shaykh Masamba.

The residents of Tuubaa will miss his beautiful face.

Now, who will give away bags of money to the poor

and give funerary baths at 'Ayn al-Rahmati?<sup>14</sup>

It would have been good to spare Shaykh Masamba.

Maam Cerno, his brother and father figure, will miss him.

Now, who will look up to Maam Cerno as a brother and father

and paying him yearly pious visits, like friends do?

It would have been good to spare Shaykh Masamba.

Murids in Ndar [Saint-Louis] used to open the bridge in his honor.

Now, who will celebrate [Bamba] in Ndar

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<sup>13</sup>Shaykh Mustafaa or Cheikh Moustapha Mbaké (1883-1945) was also known as Cheikh Moustapha. He was the oldest son of Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba and the first Caliph of the Muridiyya.

<sup>14</sup>'Ayn al-Rahmati (Well of Mercy) refers to the first well that Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba dug in Tuubaa.

at the home of Ngaari Taahir Ahmadu Sey?

It would have been good to spare Shaykh Masamba

whose photograph was taken on a Wednesday in Dakar.

On that day Bacc had walked by the market

shining like a star. The French honored him saying: "Merci! [Thank you!]"

Followers of the Muridiyya praised his lineage saying: "Mbakke Balla Aysa!"

Followers of the Tijaniyya saluted him saying: "Welcome, Great Master!"

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Followers of the Qadiriyya and Limaamu<sup>15</sup> welcomed him.

They told him: "You are most welcome, our Shaykh Masamba!"

Now, who will shine like the sun

in the neighborhoods of Dakar fascinating the Tijans?

It would have been good to spare Shaykh Masamba.

The French used to say he looked like Bamba!

Now, who will withdraw money from banks

and giving it away to the poor without scolding them?

It would have been good to spare Shaykh Masamba.

He will be missed by his mentee, Ibraahiima Lo.

Now, who will tell Ibraahiima, his assistant

and his heir, to pay off people's debts?

It would have been good to spare Shaykh Masamba.

He will be missed by Shaykh Ahmadu, his oldest son.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Limaamu* or *Limamou* refers to the *Laayeen* (or *Layène*) Sufi community in Senegal.

<sup>16</sup> *Shaykh Ahmadu* is also known as *Cheikh Ahmadu*, *Moodu Faati Xari Mbakke* or *Modou Fati Khari Mbacké*.

By God, who will look after his siblings

like a father and give them financial support?

It would have been good to spare Shaykh Masamba.

His family will miss his beautiful face.

Now, I don't know who will fight over him anymore, for paradise women [Hūrul 'Ayni]

have already taken the man. There is no doubt about it!

It would have been good to spare Shaykh Masamba,

so that he leads the prayer at the mosque of Tuubaa we just started to build.

Now, who will lead the two Eid prayers<sup>17</sup>

and commemorate [Bamba] in many places?

It would have been good to spare Shaykh Masamba,

so that people in Luga, Pataar, and Njaañ continue to farm his farms.

Now, who will farm the farm of Maam Moor Anta<sup>18</sup>

or pay pious visits to Mbakke Anta in Njaañ?

It would have been good to spare Shaykh Masamba,

who outshined the chiefs, the Jaraafs and the Farbas.<sup>19</sup>

Mukhtaar, his caller to prayer, and Mustafaa,

his assistant and driver will both miss him.

Now, who will replace Shaykh Masamba

the nobleman who amazed both the Moor and Wolof people.

May Shaykh Bamba bestow on him blessings

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<sup>17</sup> *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha*.

<sup>18</sup> *Maam Moor Anta* is also known as *Mame Mor Anta Sali Mbacké* (1814-1883). He was the father of *Shaykh Masamba* and *Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba*. He served as a Quranic and Islamic sciences teacher and a Muslim judge and counselor to the Wolof king *Lat Joor Joob* (1842-1886).

<sup>19</sup> *Jaraaf* is also spelled as *Jarafou Diaraf*. It is the equivalent of the title of Minister in Lebu society. *Farba* is another high-ranking title in the traditional Wolof kingdoms of Senegal.

where he is headed and increase his privileges.

Allow me to tell you about Sëriñ Masamba's miracles,

which cannot be found with anyone, except with Bamba.

On the twenty-seventh day of the month of Baraxlu,<sup>20</sup>

on a Thursday, was when he was born. What an amazing man!

Bamba was the one who named him after Shaykh Masamba Anta,

who was Maam Moor Anta's teacher.

Bamba declared on that day that he was his father

spiritually for three things that his mother did.

On that day his mother combined the obligations of his two lineages

and gave them to Bamba who became his guardian.

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She then entrusted Shaykh Masamba to Bamba

as a way of renewing his father's allegiance [to Bamba].

On that day his mother made a significant statement

that I frankly dare not repeat, without any doubt!

If you don't believe me, then ask with Sëriñ Ndaam<sup>21</sup>

who told me the story. He was with Daam on that day.<sup>22</sup>

This was the first and last time Bamba did his purification

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<sup>20</sup> *Baraxlu* is the eighth month in the Wolof calendar corresponding to the Islamic month of *Sba'ban*.

<sup>21</sup> *Sëriñ Ndaam* also spelled *Serigne Ndame Abdurahman Lo* (1853-1944) was also known as *Shaykh Abdu Ndaam* or *Cheikh Abdou Ndame* or *Sëriñ Ndaam* or *Serigne Ndame*. He was Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba's disciple of the first hour, and one of the greatest Murid Quranic instructors who taught the Quran to Bamba's offspring and the children of many Murid dignitaries. The name of his famous Quranic school was *Dār al-'Alim* also known as *Daron Alimoul Kabir, Ndaam*, and *Ndame*.

<sup>22</sup> *Daam* or *Dame* is one of the many local names of *Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba*.

rituals with sand.<sup>23</sup> The place is the witness!

His birth was the brightest star in the night sky.

It was in the year Asashin (1883), the most beautiful year!

The light of his birth is confirmed with evidence.

He was born in the light of the solar calendar with the zodiac sign of a Lion.

Bamba was the one who named and raised him till he was a teenager.

He then entrusts him to Shaykh Abdu of Ndaam where he spent his early youth.

Dāru l- ‘Alīmi was the home of Sëriñ Ndaam.

There he wrote copies of the Quran that were presented to Bamba.

It is there that he studied the history of prophets

till Bamba came back from exile [in 1902] to fill him up with *dirāya*.<sup>24</sup>

On the day Bamba came to Dāru l-Manān,<sup>25</sup>

his handwritten copy of the Quran reached the chapter Al-Raḥman.<sup>26</sup>

It was the year Mbaaxaan<sup>27</sup> was sent [to investigate Bamba]

and he came and found that there was no unserious person there.

On that day Masamba amazed his older brother,

Moor Isa Joob, so much that he became a disciple of [Bamba].

Bamba went to Mauritania in that same year.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> It is said that because Bamba’s water container (kettle) was not nearby and he had no water to purify himself, he used on that day clean sand to perform his ablutions as allowed in Islam.

<sup>24</sup> *Dirāyat al-Ḥadīth* is the discipline that deals with the narration and understanding of Prophet Muhammad’s traditions.

<sup>25</sup> This is also spelled as *Daaru Manaan* or *Darou Manane*.

<sup>26</sup> *Surat Al-Rahmān (The Most Gracious)*, Q 55.

<sup>27</sup> *Mbaaxaan*, also spelled *Mbakhane Diop* (1880-1956), was the son of former Wolof king *Lat Joor Joob* (1842-1886). *Mbaaxaan* later served as provincial chief under French colonial rule and was sent to investigate suspicions of weapon stockpiling in Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba’s compound in *Daaru Manaan*. *Moor Isa Joob*, also known as *Mor Issen Diop*, was *Mbaaxaan’s* older brother who became a Murid disciple following this incident between Bamba and *Mbaaxaan*.

<sup>28</sup> *Gannaar* is the Wolof name for the present-day Islamic Republic of Mauritania. This verse refers to the second deportation of *Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba* to Mauritania by the French colonial administration (1902-1907).

The Moors of Mauritania welcomed their honorable guest with ululations!

It was there in Mauritania that Bacc began his Sufi training in

Tarbiyya, Tarqiyya and Tasfiyya.<sup>29</sup>

Bamba is the one who personally trained him between Mauritania

and Jolof.<sup>30</sup> How amazing is Shaykh Bacc!

Like the Daymani Moors, he wore neither shoes

nor oriental slippers. He imitated Daymani Moors.

He used to grow his hair, wear mayluus outfits

and tie his waist till he completed his training.<sup>31</sup>

He used to read the Quran, study large volumes,

write poetry and perform exegesis of the Quran.

He never rested! Whatever Bamba compose

he copied it by hand. What an erudite!

He never took advantage of his Mbakke lineage in Sarsaara

and Jaraariya while he was with the son of Jaara [Bamba].<sup>32</sup>

He never treated Bamba like his paternal brother

since he was a child, for he knew he was his [spiritual] father!

He never treated Shaykh Anta or Boroom Saam<sup>33</sup>

as his peers, for he knew the two were the intercessors for the people of Sam.

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<sup>29</sup> *Tarbiyya* (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: The Odyssey of 'Ajami and the Muridiyya* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 92-94.

<sup>30</sup> *Jolof* is also spelled *Djolof*, *Joloff* or *Diolof*. This is the place in Senegal where Bamba was kept under house arrest after his return from exile in Mauritania (1907-1912) by the French colonial administration.

<sup>31</sup> *Mayluus* is a light fabric that Mauritanian Moors prefer to wear and use as turbans. *Tàkk ndig* (tying one's waist in Wolof) is a common practice in Senegambia and a symbol of determination and hard work.

<sup>32</sup> Both *Sarsaara* and *Jaraariya* are places where Bamba lived during his exile in Mauritania.

<sup>33</sup> *Boroom Saam* (*The Master of Sam*) is also known as *Borom Sam*, *Maam Moor Jaara Mbakke*, or *Mame Mor Diarra Mbacké* (1850-1921). He was Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba's older brother.

He never took advantage of his Mbakke lineage in Dār al-Quddūsi

and in Dār al-Raḥmān where he was distinguished.

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He never took advantage of his Mbakke lineage, rather he was a hard worker!

He led Quran reading sessions and never arrived late.

He never owned a comfortable large bed.

Instead, he used to sleep on the floor all his life.

He never kept money in a savings account.

On this, ask Sēriñ Malle or Moor Faal Deppo!

He never owned buildings when the Shaykhs were owning buildings.

Instead, he supported Mustafaa in building [the mosque].

He never settled his own place when the shaykhs were settling places.

Bamba had groomed, shaped, and trained him well.

Dār al-Karīm was his only home.

Maam Cerno Faati made this statement in Dār [al-Mu 'ti].

He never owned a car when the Shaykhs were honking their horns!

He was always between Bamba and Maam Cerno.

He never went to pilgrimage when Siidi Maxtaar

made it possible. Instead, he worked at the quarry [to build the mosque of Tuubaa].

He never owned a wallet, let alone a safe.

Instead, whatever he was given, he gave it to Bamba, The Best!

He never saved either wealth or assets for his heirs,

for he always shared all his possessions with his peers.

He never saved all his money in a bank,

for he gave all his possessions to the Mbakke and the Buso families.

He never purchased places or lands.

The only place he cleared was his small mosque where he would sit on leather mats.

He neither discriminated nor pitted people against each other.

Everyone was welcome in his home.

He has never disciplined, argued with, or chastised anybody.

He was respectful to the youth as he was to the elderly.

If you don't believe me, then ask Shaykh Gumba Ture or

Abdul Kariim Ture, the two erudite!

His generosity prevented him from having a corrugated roof in his home in Njurbel.

He used to address any problem that occurred. He was as balanced (fair) as a scale!

His generosity prevented him from building his home in Tuubaa.

Yet, he could have built a home that never breaks!

His generosity prevented him from having accounts filled with funds.

Yet, he could have millions in his accounts!

His generosity prevented him from building his own great mosque

like that of his friend, Siidi Ibraahiima Ñas.<sup>34</sup>

Bacc was like a lush and mellow tree that bears fruits

which ripen quickly and fall on the ground abundantly!

Bacc was like a short tree with a cool shade

and succulent fruits, the envy of tall trees!

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<sup>34</sup> *Südi Ibraahiima Ñas* is also known as *Sidi Ibrahim Niasse* (1900-1975). He was a prominent leader of the *Niassène* branch of the *Tijanīyya*. He interacted with African presidents such as Kwame Nkrumah and Gamal Abdel Nasser, among others. His Sufi movement, *The Fayda (The Flood)* is one of the most widespread Sufi movements in West Africa. See: Rüdiger Seesemann, *The Divine Flood: Ibrahim Niasse and the Roots of a Twentieth-Century Sufi Revival* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

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He is the tree under which anyone can pick thousands of fruits.

If you climb on the tree and shake it, you will attract a crowd!

He once performed for me in Dāru Raḥmān

great miracles that were stunning.

I was ill back then till I almost died,

and he became my doctor who prevented me from dying.

He healed me with a cup of tea!

I swear that Bacc is the best!

He advised me and made me wear an outfit

that was yellow. It was a high-quality cloak.

“Muusaa, I enjoin you to fear God!

Never neglect worshipping Him, The Sustainer,

for Satan is only waiting for you to make the slightest mistake

so that he can distract you from God.

If you turn to God, the Peaceful Sovereign,

Satan would stay away and leave you in peace!”

These verses were the pieces of advice Sëriñ Masamba offered

Njamme Ka. Please, mourn with him, his beloved [friend]!

Shaykh Fadiilu<sup>35</sup> is also mourning Sëriñ Masamba.

If you do not believe me, then read the Arabic elegy!

He knew Masamba represented his father well.

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<sup>35</sup> *Shaykh Fadiilu* (1888-1968) is also known, among other names, as *Shaykh Fadiou Mbacké*, *Cheikh Falilou Mbacké*, *Elhadji Fallou*, *Alaji Fallou*, *Serigne Fallou* and *Galas Baayi Mbeen*. He was Bamba's son and the second Caliph of the Murids. He is remembered in the Murid communities for his legendary generosity.

Who will now replace the father and young brother of the father?

Shaykh Mustafaa and Shaykh Basiiru are also mourning him.<sup>36</sup>

Everybody is saying that his achievements are unique!

He and the Master [Bamba] were once discussing [religious] verses,

and his mind went to his wife called Faati

till he did not follow what Bamba was discussing.

When his mind came back, he repented.

On that day he divorced her and entrusted her to Bamba.

He stated: "I, Masamba, am beyond associationism."

Shaykh Bamba authorized the woman to remarry Siidi Mukhtaar,

the one who is blessed with both esoteric and exoteric acumen.

Bamba said on that day that Masamba is

a man of vision whose sins were pardoned.

Shaykh Bamba told him one day that God, the Creator,

has ordered him to go to the quarry [to work on the construction of the mosque].

He then left swiftly with Amsatu Lo, his young brother,

and they built a compound there comparable to the one in Ndaam Lo.<sup>37</sup>

All his achievements at the quarry cannot be listed,

but all the workers there have unanimously praised him!

When he came back from his assignment, Bamba stated:

"Masamba, you chase away misfortune and attract fortune!"

It is on that day that Shaykh Bamba said: "Shaykh Masamba

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<sup>36</sup> *Shaykh Basiiru* or *Cheikh Bassirou (Bachir) Mbacké* (1885-1966), is one of the sons of Bamba. He is also the father of Serigne Mountakha Mbacké (b. 1930) the current and eighth Caliph of the Murids.

<sup>37</sup> Here the poet uses *Ndaam Lo* to refer to the residence of *Sëriñ Sire Lo*, not to be mistaken with the residence of *Sëriñ Ndaam Abdurahman Lo*.

needs no more guidance for he has access to Ghayb!<sup>38</sup>

[Page 9]

If he was being breastfed, then he is now weaned.

If he was being prepared, then he is now fully prepared.”

Allow me to say more about Shaykh Masamba’s miracles,

miracles that are only found with Bamba.

Shaykh Bamba once buried a devotional poem he wrote

in which he privately asked God for a favor.

Sëriñ Masamba later wrote down the exact private request [that Bamba made]

and gave it to him, though he did not see the original poem!

In his note, he had asked Bamba what Bamba had privately ask God

word-for-word! What a grandson of Balla!

The Master [Bamba] then decided to consult God about him.

And God told him: “Bacc has surpassed his peers!

The seed you had planted has grown. And he has seen the lushness!

He possesses Başira<sup>39</sup> and knows the seeds planted after the first rain!

From now on, everything you plant and weed after the first rain,

let him finish the farming and pruning!” What an enlightened Murid!

It was on that day that the Master tasked him to copy

all the poems he had written that needed to be reread.

It was in that year that the Master tasked him to vocalize his writings.

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<sup>38</sup> *Al-Ghayb* (Arabic: special, mystical concealed knowledge or access to knowledge of the invisible realm).

<sup>39</sup> Here the poem used the Arabic *Başira* (access transcendental truth and knowledge). He also used agrarian local metaphors in this and the following verse: *tex* (to sow or plant after the first rain), *wolli* (to prune), and *raado* (to weed after the first rain).

He assigned him all his poems, starting with Fulku,<sup>40</sup>  
saying: "The unvocalized poems are beings without souls, and  
their souls come to life when they are written and vocalized!"  
In those days, the number of poems reciters  
was about twelve. Ask Ibra Buuba!  
It was in that year that Bamba told him: "Don't ask my permission!  
I have written about everything. It is in Fulku."  
Disseminate everything that needs to be disseminated  
and keep everything that needs to be kept."  
It was in that year that Shaykh Masamba copied  
the book for the Master of Gaawaan.<sup>41</sup> This is unforgettable!  
It was in that year that Shaykh Masamba released  
Wasīlat al-Rubūḥi <sup>42</sup> and shared it with us.  
He also released Ḥadā'iq al-Faḍā'il,<sup>43</sup>  
and Fulkihi l-Mashḥūni in Njurbel.  
I made a copy for Shaykh Moodu Ndumbe Mbakke.<sup>44</sup>  
That year no one complained about being broke!  
It was in that year that [Bamba] told [Masamba]: "I am in a spiritual retreat.  
You may issue orders and prohibitions, for you are in charge!"

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<sup>40</sup> *Fulku* is the shortcut of Bamba's work *Fulkihi l-Mashḥūni* (*The Full Trunk*).

<sup>41</sup> *Boroom Gaawaan* (*The Master of Gaawaan*), is one of the titles of *Shaykh Anta Mbakke* (1867-1941) who is also known as *Sidi*, *Cheikh Anta Mbaké*, *Sïidi Maxtaar*, or *Sidi Makhtar*, *Sïidi Makhtaar* or *Sïidi Mukhtaar*. He was Bamba's brother, his disciple, and the richest Murid of his time.

<sup>42</sup> *The Path of the Righteous*. It is one of the poems of Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba.

<sup>43</sup> *The Receptacle of Bounties*, another poem of Bamba.

<sup>44</sup> *Shaykh Moodu Ndumbe Mbakke* (1859-1933) is also known as *Cheikh Modou Ndoumbé Mbaké*. He was also known as *Shaykh Mandumbe Xabaan Mbakke* and *Cheikh Mandoumbé Khabane Mbaké*. He was one of Bamba's first followers and also his paternal and maternal cousin.

It was in that year that he told him: "I will be in a spiritual retreat  
for twenty-eight days in solitude!"

It was in that year that he sent him to Ndar [Saint-Louis]  
to offer condolences to his brother Shaykh Coro, and meet the Master of Ndar.<sup>45</sup>

On that day, his Murid disciples chanted poems in the palace of the Master of Ndar.  
They chanted Muqaddimāt and Jadhbu<sup>46</sup> and broke a glass frame there!

[Page 10]

With truth I repelled falsehood.

To truth I return and hold firmly.

With truth I tore down the walls of falsehood.

Truth is not falsehood.

And every day that comes, he sent

fifteen thousand [francs], without doubt!

On that day, if the Great Master did not intervene,

The French would have arrested and dishonored him.

When he returned to Njurbel and told Bamba what happened,

he replied: "God and His Prophet shielded you.

The Prophet said: "As long as you are sitting and writing

devotional poems, you will not be shamed in your lifetime.

May peace and blessings be upon him,

and upon his family and honorable companions.

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<sup>45</sup> *Shaykh Coro*, also known as *Cheikh Thioro* or *Cheikh Balla Thioro Mbacké* (1874-1941). He was Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba's paternal young brother, secretary and interpreter in his interaction with the colonial administration. His only brother who received French education. *Boroom Ndar* or the *Master of Ndar* (Saint-Louis) is the Wolof name for the colonial French Governor-General based in the city of Saint-Louis, the former capital of French West Africa.

<sup>46</sup> *Muqaddimāt* or *Muqaddimāt al-Amdāh* (*The Beginning of Praises*) and *Jadhbu* or *Jadbb al-Qulūb* (*The Attraction of the Hearts*) are the titles of two poems by Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba.

Satan wanted you to be arrested

and handcuffed to prevent you from ever writing.”

May God protect us from Satan,

and from the wickedness of all his associates.

It was in that year that the Master asked him to find

over one hundred and ten knives!

It was in that year that the Master asked him to sharpen

over one hundred thousand wooden pens!

It was in that year that the Master asked him to make

copies of the Quran he had ordered other scribes to write.

It was in that year that the Master asked him to decorate write

and draw lines in a picture of the Prophet’s shoes.<sup>47</sup>

Square decorations were added to the drawing and folding book stands were made

to honor the Prophet’s shoes. What a great designer he was!

May God, the One who creates from nothing, blessed them both [Bamba and Masamba],

along with the disciples who used to build fences in Mbakke-Baari,

and the disciples who used to build corrugated roofs in Njurbel,<sup>48</sup>

as long as door frames are preferable to mouse holes!<sup>49</sup>

Let me tell you more again about Masamba’s

miracles that will remind you of Shaykh Bamba,

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<sup>47</sup> It refers to the picture of the shoes of Prophet Muhammad that circulated in Senegal. It has inspired many Muslim poets and scholars who wrote poetry about the benefits of holding them or looking at them.

<sup>48</sup> *Mbakke-Baari* is also spelled *Mbacké Bari*. This is the village where Bamba was first escorted by the troops of the French colonial administration that led to his trial in Saint-Louis (*Ndar* in Wolof) and his seven-year deportation to Gabon (1895-1902).

<sup>49</sup> The poet uses the Wolof phrase *feek kaadaray folli nubéeri mburgal* (as long as door frames are preferable to mouse holes) as a metaphor to mean *forever* since mouse holes can never replace door frames.

and tell you more about the miracles of Sëriñ Amsatu Lo,

his good young brother and the pride of Sire Lo's family!

Who will now replace Soxna Isa Jeey's two sons?

I mourn Sëriñ Amsatu Lo who deserves to be mourned.

I tried to mourn him with an elegy in the year Dansashi (1936),

but my admiration for him had overwhelmed me till I became ill.

I did not know that I would mourn him and his older brother

in one elegy. These two were my two eyes!

Today I am a blind man whose eyes are infected.

The eyes of my heart and my physical eyes are all ill,

for Sëriñ Masamba was the light of my heart,

and Shaykh Amsatu was the pupil of my physical eyes.

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Now, I don't know who to emulate for the sake of the Great Man of Mecca [Prophet],

and I don't know who to emulate for the sake of the Great Man of Mbakke [Bamba].

Sëriñ Masamba used to teach me who Shaykh Bamba was,

and Shaykh Amsatu used to praise the Prophet for me.

Sëriñ Masamba was Shaykh Bamba's scribe,

and Shaykh Amsatu was our reciter in the Mawlid.<sup>50</sup>

Sëriñ Masamba was the perfect companion,

and Shaykh Amsatu was the most handsome.

Sëriñ Masamba was the accomplished scholar,

and Shaykh Amsatu was the best guardian.

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<sup>50</sup> *Mawlid*, also known as *Maouloud* or *Gammu* in Wolof, is the celebration of Prophet Muhammad's birthday.

Sëriñ Masamba was the best in *dirāya*,<sup>51</sup>

and Shaykh Amsatu was the best in *riwāya*.<sup>52</sup>

Sëriñ Masamba attained the highest spiritual station,

and Shaykh Amsatu had the best mystical wonders.

Sëriñ Masamba was the pride of [‘Abd al-Qādir] al-Jīlānī,

and Shaykh Amsatu was the delight of the Tījānī.

Sëriñ Masamba was the delight of the white Moors,

and Shaykh Amsatu was the best friend of the black people.

When Sëriñ Masamba spent the night with saints in the celestial realm,

Shaykh Amsatu was at the divine spring where the elect of God drink.

When Sëriñ Masamba was responsible for appointments and dismissals,

Shaykh Amsatu was his younger brother and was always gracious.

Sëriñ Masamba was the man with access [to divine knowledge],

and Shaykh Amsatu was an admirer of the Prophet’s legacy.

Sëriñ Masamba was the servant of the Servant [Bamba],

and Shaykh Amsatu was a sincere Murid and the son [of Soxna Issa Jeej]?

Sëriñ Masamba was the disciple of the son of Jaara [Bamba],

and Shaykh Amsatu pledged his allegiance [to Bamba] in Jaara.<sup>53</sup>

Sëriñ Masamba did his *tarbiyya* training with Bamba,

and Shaykh Amsatu did his *Tarbiyya* training with The Light [Shaykh Ibra Fall].<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> *Dirāyat al-Ḥadīth* is the discipline that deals with the narration and understanding of Prophet Muhammad’s traditions.

<sup>52</sup> In Islamic studies, *Riwāya* is the science of narration.

<sup>53</sup> *Jaara* also spelled *Diarra*, *Maam Jaara*, or *Mame Diarra Bousso* (1831-1864). She was the mother of *Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba*. The second *Jaara* or *Boppu Jaara* is the name of a place located in Gandiole, Saint-Louis, where Shaykh Ibra lived.

<sup>54</sup> *Tarbiyya* (spiritual and ethical training). *Lampa* or *Lamp Faal* (The Light) is one of the names of *Shaykh Ibrahima Fall* also known as *Shaykh Ibraahiima Faal*, *Shaykh Ibra* (1858-1930), the closest disciple of *Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba*. He is also known as the apostle of hard work and the founder of the *Baye Fall* or *Baay Fall* branch of the Muridiyya.

Let me then tell you about the miracles of Shaykh Amsatu Lo

so you know that he had surpassed everyone but Shaykh Sire Lo!

Shaykh Amsatu was the sincere Murid

among the followers of Shaykh Ibraahiima Faal, the virtuous.

Ibra Faal nurtured him when he was young.

For this reason, he swiftly surpassed his peers!

Everything exoteric and esoteric that a person needs to know

was taught to him by Shaykh Ibra so he experienced Kun!<sup>55</sup>

He spent years there till he returned to his older brother

who taught him Na'ju Qada'il Hāji.<sup>56</sup>

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He was taken to Bamba in Dāru l-Raḥmān

where he stayed on his side all the time.

For this reason, he excelled swiftly in tarbiyya

till he satisfied [Bamba] before undergoing tarqiyya.<sup>57</sup>

Bamba trained him in tarbiyya using his beautiful voice.

He used to spend the night reciting till the last hours of dawn.

When he was young, he used to be lifted and handed to Bamba

in order to recite Jadhbu<sup>58</sup> before Sëriñ Masamba.

When he was young, his handsomeness was stunning,

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<sup>55</sup> *Kun*, refers to the creative power of God. See Q 16:40: "As for the possibility of resurrection, bear in mind that whenever We do something, We have to do no more than say: "Be," and it is!"

<sup>56</sup> *The Path of Satisfaction of One's Wishes*, a book written by Bamba about the rules of good conduct.

<sup>57</sup> *Tarbiyya* (ethical and spiritual training), *Tarqiyya* (spiritual elevation), and *Tasfiyya* (re-socialization) are the three tenets of Bamba's ethics-centered pedagogy.

<sup>58</sup> *Jadhbu* or *Jadhb al-Qulūb* (*The Attraction of The Hearts*) is the title of one of Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba's poems.

so were his recitation skills, sophistication, and beautiful voice!

He focused on these areas till Bamba went to Mauritania.<sup>59</sup>

He remained with Maam Cerno and continued to impress people  
till Bamba sent for him to come to Dāru l-Raḥmān.

It was there he completed his education and received God's approval.

It was in that year he was sent to Ndaam Lo

where he spent two years before he was asked to relocate.

He then left and went through Kokki,

and founded the village of Kër Masamba, without hesitation!

He also founded Arash Mapaate and Diiwaan.

They were a couple of astounding people who spent the night in the celestial realm.

He spent years mesmerizing the people of Kokki-Guy.

He used to pay pious visits to Deqle and Mukhtaar.

It was in those years that the people of Bawol and Njambuur

fought over him, each group claiming him as their wrestling champion!

He used to pay visit to Cerno in Mbakke-Kajoor,

bringing with him pious gifts and asking for his prayers.

Laayabi, Jeey, Ndanq, and Ngeey-Ngeey,

it was Shaykh Amsatu who trained and enlightened them spiritually. What a talented man!

He has brightened them, for they will no longer stop celebrating the Mawlid!

Ask Masamba and Maxuja who now celebrate the Mawlid there!

It is thanks to him that Kajoor now celebrate the Mawlid, along with Waalo

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<sup>59</sup> This refers to the second deportation of Ahmadu Bamba to Mauritania by the French colonial administration from 1902 to 1907.

Bawol, Mbawoor, Mbuur up to Jiwaalo!

He has hosted Mawlid celebrations in Kees, Luga and Sakkal,

as well as in Ndakaaru, and Ndar. Do not disparage him!

He has hosted Mawlid celebrations in Kawlax, Gosaas, and Njurbel.

He treated Islam as his farm! So he always farmed it and hosted celebrations!

He went to Jolof and celebrated the Mawlid in the home of Tijaniyya followers.

It was on that day that Sëriñ Daawuda gave him [special] prayers.

Shaykh Amsatu led the mass prayer that Friday,

and he also read them the Ḥadīthi l-Arba ‘īn.<sup>60</sup>

Didn't you know that when Bamba arrived in Njurbel

in the year Lasashin (1912), it was Shaykh Amsatu who hosted us?

Bamba had sent for him and Sëriñ Masamba,

and they spent months there building barriers.<sup>61</sup>

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If you don't believe me, then ask Cerno Gey, the supervisor.

He was the first to hit a hammer in the building project!

When the house was completed, he [Bamba] sent them to Tuubaa,

asking them to build a room in Dār al-Quddūs.

Sëriñ Masamba and Sëriñ Ndaam prepared for the trip,

along with an unknown number of Murids. They spent that night in Ndaam.

The next morning, they left and went to Daaru.

They swiftly built twelve rooms till they astounded the residents of Tuubaa!

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<sup>60</sup> These are the forty prophetic traditions compiled by Imam al-Nawawī (1234-1277 CE).

<sup>61</sup> These barriers were meant to keep Bamba safe from the large crowds he attracted.

They built there a home they called Daaru Kaskare,<sup>62</sup>

along with Daaru Naar. How trustworthy are these two men!

They packed all the clothes they stored in the buildings of Njurbel

and they moved them to Tuubaa, without anyone seeing them!

It was on that day that Bamba wrote a poem

that delighted the builders of Tuubaa's new settlements.

"Rewarded on the Day of Reckoning will be those who built my homes

and those who moved all my belongings."

I only quote this one verse as evidence.

They are the words of the Master of Tuubaa. Do not ignore them!

It was when they returned and settled in Njurbel,

that Bamba called for Bacc Mbakke, the last born,

Shaykh Moodu Ndumbe and Qaadi Baaba,

and asked them to build another home in Ngaabu-Taaba.

It was where Bamba prayed once in the year Mbaaxaan visited his home.

Sëriñ Masamba Kura was its permanent keeper.

[Bamba] said that, if he was stop from performing his ritual prayers,

he would call the Badr fighters who would destroy his foes.

He said what he did there can brighten the entire country,

let alone Ngaabu where it happened!

It was for this reason that Sëriñ Masamba Mbakke

sent there Amsatu Lo, the successful,

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<sup>62</sup> *Daaru Kaskare* is also spelled *Darou Kaskare*. *Daaru Naar* is also known as *Darou Nar*. It is currently called *Kër Sëriñ Subaibu* (also spelled *Keur Serigne Soubaibou*) or the *Home of Sëriñ Subaibu Mbakke* (1916-1991). He was a great educator.

along with a Murid called Sëriñ Maajeŋ Ja

who used to chant devotional poems endlessly.

Shaykh Amsatu was the one who built a mosque there

with a corrugated roof in the direction of Mecca.

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He celebrated there Nişf Sha‘bān

and Laylat al-Qadr involving black people.<sup>63</sup>

Shaykh Amsatu used to host celebrations in Ngaabu

at the place of prayers till all the people there repented.

The people of Ngaabu and Laa have now repented their ignorance.<sup>64</sup>

If it was not thanks to him, the angels would interrogate them.

He used to host celebrations of Kazu Rajab<sup>65</sup>

or of the Mawlid. He was one of a kind!

He used to slaughter cows and camels for the sake of God,

Mustafaa [the Prophet], and Shaykh Bamba. What a grandson of Balla!

Shaykh Amsatu was a great admirer of the Messenger of God.

May the blessings of God be upon him!

Shaykh Amsatu was a great admirer of the servant of Mustafaa [Bamba].

May the blessings of God be upon him, the elected one!

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<sup>63</sup> *Nişf Sha‘bān* in Arabic refers to the middle of the month of *Sha‘bān* (eighth month of the Muslim lunar calendar). Muslims treat it as the time when God distributes to humans their fortune for the upcoming year and when He may forgive their sins. *Laylat al-Qadr* in Arabic is referred to as *The Night of Power*, *The Night of Destiny*, *The Night of Measures*, or *Night of Value*. It is the night that the Quran was first sent to the world and the night when the first verses of the Quran were revealed to Prophet Muhammad. It is one of the nights in the last ten nights of Ramadan when Muslims believe that God sends angels closer to earth with abundant blessings for believers.

<sup>64</sup> Here the poet used the Wolof words *rəgg ak laagaa* which are associated with poor health resulting from malnourishment. He equates these illnesses with the ignorance of religious knowledge.

<sup>65</sup> *Kazu Rajab* or *Kassou Rajab* is the celebration of *Sëriñ Fallu Mbakke*'s birthday in Murid communities.

Shaykh Amsatu used to recite during the Mawlid till his tears flowed.

If you do not believe me, then ask Sëriñ Makani from Jeey!

What a great faith Shaykh Amsatu had in God,

the Prophet, and Bamba! He knew what was crucial!

During the nineteen years and more

that he has lived in Ngaabu those were his activities. Amsatu is loaded [with blessings]!

He lived there for all those years preaching

and building towns. What an amazing man!

May peace and blessings be upon our master Muhammad, and upon his family and companion!

Two hundred sixty-three (263) verses.