

A Wolof Poem Praising Maam Jaaratul Laahi¹

Composed by Sëriñ Muusaa Ka.

May God be pleased with both of them
and extend their baraka to us.

Amen.

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¹ *Maam Diarra Bousso*, or *Maam Jaaraa Buso*, *Maryama Buso*, or *Soxna Maam Maryama Buso* was Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba's mother. She was nicknamed *Jaaratul Laahi* (Arabic: *Neighbor of God*) due to her piety. According to Murid sources, she was highly educated, and by the age of fourteen, had already memorized and handwritten a copy of the entire Quran from memory. For more detail, see *Biography of Lady Maam Jaara Buso*, NEH Weblink: <http://sites.bu.edu/nehajami/the-four-languages/wolof/wolof-manuscripts/soxna-faati-ja-mbakke/>.

[Page 1]

In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful
May peace and blessings from God, the Highest,
be upon our master Muhammad.

In the name of God, let me rise and express gratitude, for the sake of God,
to the spiritual leader of the women in this world, Jaaratul Laahi!

Everyone is indebted to her and must sing her praises,
in addition to paying her pious visits and praying for her. Praise Jaaratul Laahi!

If it were not for Our Grandmother Maryam, our beloved Jaara,²
we would all taste hellfire. Thank you, Jaaratul Laahi, the Neighbor of God!

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If it were not for the shrine of Maam Jaara located in Poroxaam,
the kings who used to wage wars in the area would have no access to Paradise!

Please thank her, in the name of God, the Bountiful One! And believe in
the prophecy about those who lived in the era of Maam Jaaratul Laahi.³

The hadith said that anyone who lives in the era and followed [her son], Bamba,
The Master of Tuubaa, will be saved from hell, by the grace of Maam Jaaratul Laahi!

The period prophesied was 1400 AH, and
it was when Bamba was 30 years old, by the Grace of God!

² In Senegambia, it is customary to not refer to older or respected people by their first names. Rather, one would refer to anyone who has the age of one's grandmother or grandfather as *grandmother* or *grandfather* to show respect. This explains why *Maam* (grandmother in Wolof) has become part of *Jaaratul Laahi's* name as in *sunu Maam Maryama* (Wolof: *our grandmother Maryama*).

³ In Murid sources, *tūbā liman balagha* (*blessed are those who will live*), which the poet used here, is part of a hadith according to which the Prophet had said the following: "Blessed are those who will live up to the fourteenth century hijra." Murids believe that the son of *Maam Jaara*, *Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba*, was the blessing prophesied in the hadith.

Please send your greetings to Buso, our beloved Jaara!

You are the heir of Maryama (Mary).⁴ Praise our Grandmother Jaaratul Laahi!

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Īsā, son of Maryama, was offered the special gift of Kun,⁵

and Gabriel came to support him. Praise Jaaratul Laahi!

[Likewise], Bamba said: "God has offered me [special] gifts He has never offered to anyone,

and He will never offer such gifts to any human being!"⁶

I greet, pay homage to, and humble myself in front of you!

Our hearts, souls, and bodies belong to you, for the sake of God!

You are worthy of pious visits, lowering ourselves in respect,

and pious gifts, for the sake of God. Praise Maam Jaaratul Laahi!

Please accept our intentions and our deeds without reservation,

and entrust us to Bamba in heaven, for the sake of God!

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May we not be lost and may we not spoil Bamba's legacy,

and may we be sincere Murids who comply with injunctions, for the sake of Jaaratul Laahi,

the mother of the Servant of the Prophet [Bamba], Our Beloved Grandmother!

We are dazzled by Maam Jaara Busoo. Praise Jaaratul Laahi!!

Please go pay pious visits to Maam Jaara, our role model!

She is a role model in Poroxaan! Praise Jaaratul Laahi!

⁴ Here the poet refers to *Marie*, the mother of *Jesus* (*Īsā* in Islam), her namesake, who is called *Maryama* in Islam.

⁵ The poet refers here to the belief that some saints can make things happen with the power of words by activating the creative power of God embodied in the phrase *Kun fa yakūn!* (Arabic: *Be and it is!*). The short form of the phrase is *Kun*.

⁶ The two verses come from Bamba's poem called *Jawartu l-Lāba* (*I Live in Allah's Vicinity*).

She was the one who showed us the one we trust and who is trusted by the Prophet

and The Lord of Creatures: Shaykh Bamba! Praise Jaaratul Laahi!

To rely on Bamba is to rely on the most reliable. We rely on him forever,

and he is the heir of the Best of Creatures [Muhammad]. I swear by God!

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Thank you [Maam Jaara]! Thank you, indeed, for you are the reason we have

a saint who has no rival, the Spiritual Pole of Creation! I swear by God!

He held the crown of miracles in the celestial realm of the saints!⁷

The followers of the Tijaniyya and Qadiriyya alike praise Jaaratul Laahi!

The best of blessings in the celestial realm and the decisions taken there

are all in the hands of your son! Praise Maam Jaaratul Laahi!

Those in the divine realms of Mulk and Malakut, and even those near the Divine Throne,⁸

used to show their esteem for Shaykh Bamba! Praise Jaaratul Laahi!

You are the heir of your namesake, Maryama! You have followed her footsteps!

You are living proof of the power of God (Kun fa yakūnu)! Praise Jaaratul Laahi!

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Be assured that you are full of victories and praises!

You combine esoteric and exoteric blessings. Praise Jaaratul Laahi!

You are the spiritual heir of Amina and Aisha,⁹

and you are the spiritual heir of Fatima. Praise Maam Jaaratul Laahi!

⁷ The poet used *dīwān* here to refer to the celestial realm, a circle for the saints who are the closest to God.

⁸ *Mulk* and *Malakut* are divine realms mentioned in the Quran 36:83 and 67:1, among other verses. The people near *The Divine Throne* (*‘Arsh*) may be referring to the angels known as the *Bearers of the Throne* (Arabic: *ḥamlat al-‘Arsh*). See Q 40:7 and 69:17.

⁹ *Amina* is the mother of Prophet Muhammad, *Aisha*, his wife, and *Fatima*, his daughter.

You combine esoteric and exoteric victories! You are the perfect role model!

Your footsteps are worthy of following. Praise Jaaratul Laahi!

You were born into a noble family; you are a person of honor with plentiful gifts!

You are blessed and your lineage is virtuous! Praise Jaaratul Laahi!

You are beautiful, generous and cultured. No one can slander your name!

You do not wrong people, nor will you be wronged. You are helpful, yet you do not meddle in the business of others. I swear by God!

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You turned your back to worldly affairs; you are diligent in all your tasks!

You did not seek riches. You were energetic even as you fetched water. I swear by God!

Your effervescence spreads everywhere and makes all countries resemble rivers!

The water containers that you filled at the well are the public works of God!

You are good-tempered, welcoming, loyal, and hospitable!

You are attentive to both God and to your social responsibilities. Thank you, Jaaratul Laahi!

You are perseverant and pleasant. You are slow to anger; you are energetic and never inactive!

You are dynamic and upright. You are flawless, O Jaaratul Laahi!

You perfected your character while serving both God and Mustafa [The Prophet] indisputably, until God confirmed it to the whole country! O Jaaratul Laahi!

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You have a good character and are elegant; you always cook enough meals to feed all, and do not discriminate between people! Praise Jaaratul Laahi!

You always follow religious orders and obey your Shaykh,¹⁰

¹⁰ The Wolof title *Sërîn* that the poet used here is translated as *Shaykh* also means *husband* and *leader* in this context.

and God genuinely. Praise Maam Jaaratul Laahi!

You combine self-respect and sound judgment

with a mind that is both bright and pure! Praise O Jaaratul Laahi.

Women ought to emulate you and follow your steps sincerely.

They must follow your example to be like you, Jaaratul Laahi [Neighbor of God]!

Pray for me and your granddaughter called Amina,¹¹

so that we may continue to truly emulate you, Maam Jaaratul Laahi!

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You did what nobody did before, and you possess what nobody else possesses!

You are capable of what nobody else is capable of, Maam Jaaratul Laahi!

You saw what nobody saw, and you knew what nobody knew.

From East to West, everyone marvels at Maam Jaaratul Laahi!

You gave birth to someone with no rival; you walked the untrodden path!

Your success made us successful. Thank you, Jaaratul Laahi!

Your perfection elevated your relatives to perfection,

along with all Black and White peoples alike! Praise Maam Jaaratul Laahi!

Maam Jaara, you are worthy of praise-singing; I swear that you have divine gifts!

You are pure. It is thanks to you that we are striving to be pure!

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Praise Jaara! Anyone who is praised owes it to you!

Your son is the best. Stand tall, Jaaratul Laahi!

¹¹ *Soxna Amina Mbakke (1923-1965)*, one of the daughters of *Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba*, composed the poem in honor of her grandmother, *Maam Jaara Buso*. After composing the poem, she asked *Muusaa Ka*, the most renowned Murid Ajami poet, to perfect it, as noted on page 22 of the poem.

Your son is the best among the Wolof people, and the best in Arab lands,

including Fès, Marrakech, and Baghdad! Praise Jaaratul Laahi¹²

Praise to you, Maam Jaara! You are not pessimistic and you do not speak behind people's backs!

You never answered anyone rudely nor did you instigate conflict. Praise Jaaratul Laahi!

You are neither inhospitable nor selfish; you do not discriminate or rebuff people!

You taught us good manners! Praise Jaaratul Laahi!

You taught us humility, gentleness, and soft speech!

You never engaged in futile disputes or arguments, Maam Jaaratul Laahi!

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You outshined flirtatious and querulous matrons in all aspects!¹³

You have shamed your enemies, Maam Jaaratul Laahi!

You hold the blessings of this world and the hereafter!

You have honored Black and White Moors alike; I swear by God!

You are the pride of the Mbakke and Buso families, and of all the Wolof people!

The people of Bawol and Kajoor all celebrate your name!

Thanks to you, the children of the Wolof people now save millions [of francs],

sums of money their grandparents never saw! Praise Jaaratul Laahi!

May God's blessings be with us and with your grandchildren,

from both the Mbakke and Buso lineages, Jaaratul Laahi!

¹² Both Morocco and Iraq are historically important centers of Sufi Islam. *Fes* and *Marrakech* mentioned in the poem are in Morocco. *Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani* (735–1815), the founder of the *Tijaniyya Sufi order* is buried in *Fes*. *Abdul Qadir Gilani* (1078–1166), the founder of the *Qadiriyya Sufi order*, was based and is buried in Baghdad, Iraq.

¹³ The Wolof word *njalde* used here refers to a married woman who has mastered the art of seduction. In other contexts, it can mean a woman who does not avoid quarrels and even physical confrontations.

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What Maam Samba Maryama once said, no one will say anything similar again!

“Praise be to God, The Maker,” became his song. I swear by God!

He was the grandfather of Amina, the one who requested this poem today.

It is customary for grandchildren to resemble their grandparents. Praise Jaaratul Laahi!

Offer us as charity, longevity, and baraka, and increase our faith

in the Shaykh [Bamba] so that we count among his chosen disciples. Praise Jaaratul Laahi!

Maam Jaara, we implore your endorsement, and beg

a privilege from you! Offer us a share [of your privileges], Jaaratul Laahi!

Offer us a generous share; serve us and our companions,

for we have all come to you as hungry beggars seeking to be fed, Maam Jaaratul Laahi!

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I am your son and your grandson who became your griot to sing your praises!¹⁴

My older man is the nobleman, please grant me the gift of several shares, Jaaratul Laahi!¹⁵

Offer me a generous portion today that can feed many people,

and increase the crowd and their bowls of nourishment, for the sake of God!

May our faith increase and may it never be spoiled!

May our luck increase and may it never decrease!

May our steadfastness increase so that we stay upright, worship sincerely,

and hold in high esteem Al-haji Fallu, for the sake of God.¹⁶

¹⁴ Here *Muusaa Ka*, the co-author, refers to a common understanding of kinship in Senegambia (also known as *fictive kinship* in the anthropological literature) whereby people one may call *mother*, *father*, *grandfather*, *grandmother*, *sister* or *brother* extend beyond biological kinship ties. Depending on the contexts, people choose to highlight various forms of kinship.

¹⁵ Here, *Muusaa Ka* may be referring to *Maam Mor Anta Sali*, the husband of *Maam Jaara Buso* and *Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba's* father as *the older man*.

¹⁶ *Al-haji Fallu*, also known as *Al-haji Faḍlu Mbakke*, *El Hadji Fallou Mbacké* or *Serigne Fallou* (1888-1968) was one of Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba's son who served as the second Caliph of the Muridiyya (1945-1968).

May we hold in high esteem your grandchildren until all the Mbakke and Buso families imitate us.

They are characterized by serenity, nobility, and generosity, for the sake of God!

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May we and our properties be safe and protected against any harm,

and may we and our properties be purified. Praise Jaaratul Laahi!

Elevate us into Shaykhs for you are the one who elevated the Fula,

Mandinka, and Lawbe people into Shaykhs!¹⁷ Thank you, Jaaratul Laahi!

You are most hospitable, the owner of granaries [of blessings], you deserve praises!

You made the land of Blacks proud; thank you, Jaaratul Laahi!

The best of blessings is in Tuubaa, and your grandson has inherited it today:

Al-haji Faliilu is the caliph, by the grace of God.

You are a light upon light, from a light: enlighten us!¹⁸

He is the son of Maam Hawwa Buso, a perfect heir of Jaaratul Laahi!

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His mother and father are related on the maternal and paternal lines.¹⁹

He inherited the esoteric and exoteric knowledge of both sides. I swear by God!

He is the light upon light that resulted from the light of Soxna Hawwa, which originated

from the light of the lineage of our beloved Grandmother Jaaratul Laahi!

He is the shining light from the Buso and Mbakke lineages, the light that became a sun

that enlightened this world and beyond! Praise Jaaratul Laahi!

A mosque like that of Shaykh Bamba will never be found in Wolof lands [again],

¹⁷ The *Fula* and *Soose* (Mandinka) are Senegambian ethnic groups whereas the *Lawbe* refers to the caste of woodworkers.

¹⁸ This is reminiscent of the verse 35 of Chapter 24 (*An-Nūr*, *The Light*) of the Quran.

¹⁹ An illustration of endogamous marriages, which are common among religious families. The original verse says literally that *the mother is the father in their lineage and the father is the mother*.

nor will it be found in Arab lands, thanks to Jaaratul Laahi!

Minarets like those in Mecca, Tayba [in Saudi Arabia], and

Bayti l-Muqaddas [in Jerusalem] exist here [in Tuubaa], by the grace of God!²⁰

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The minarets [in Tuubaa] tower over everything, projecting their lights onto the Divine Throne!

Those in the celestial realms of Mulk and Malakut all praise Jaaratul Laahi!

The people of Mecca, Medina, Shaam,²¹ and Yemen are all coming!

Everybody is coming to pay pious visits to our Grandmother Jaaratul Laahi!

From Tambaakunda, Bamako, Kaay, Segu, to Abidjan,

everybody is coming to pay pious visits to our Grandmother Jaaratul Laahi!

The people of Banjul and Kumasi and the Joola people are also coming!²²

The Fula Firdu and Susu people are also coming to Tuubaa, seeking God!

Maam Jaara, your gifts are boundless! Your day is like the day of pilgrimage to Mecca!

People from all countries are coming for the sake of Jaaratul Laahi!

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The day of the Prophet's night journey to the Divine Throne,

is the day of commemoration in Poroxaan to honor Jaaratul Laahi!²³

²⁰ The reference here is to the *Al-Aqsa Mosque* in Jerusalem, the third holiest place for Muslims.

²¹ In the earlier days of Islam, *Sham* meant *Damascus* and the surrounding territories.

²² *Tambaakunda* (or *Tambacounda*) is located in southeastern Senegal, *Bamako*, *Kaay* (or *Kayes*) and *Segu* (or *Ségou*) are in Mali. *Abijaa* (or *Abidjan*) is located in Côte d'Ivoire, *Banjul* in The Gambia, and *Kumasi* in Ghana. The *Susu* are a subgroup of the Mande speaking people. The *Joola* live primarily in the southern Casamance region of Senegal, Guinea Bissau and in parts of The Gambia.

²³ The poet refers here to the *Isra'*, Prophet Muhammad's night journey from Mecca to Jerusalem and the *Mi'raj*, the Ascension of Prophet Muhammad into heaven on the 27th day of the *Rajab* in the Muslim calendar. The *Màggal of Poroxaan* is the yearly commemoration of the life and work of *Maam Jaara* held in the city of *Poroxaan* where she rests. The event's date is now set by Murid authorities based on the *Isra'*.

Sëriñ Bashiir was the one who started the commemoration!²⁴ May the day

bring good news, and may it be welcomed and blessed, by the grace of God.

May we never see hellfire with our own eyes!

Save us from ever disobeying God's command, for the sake of God!

Save me forever from evil mouths, evil eyes, and envious people!

Chase Satan away from us, Maam Jaaratul Laahi!

Maam Jaara, your divine gifts are boundless, and your victories cannot all be listed on paper!

All the good that occurred in the land of Blacks [thanks to you] cannot be recounted!

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All the good things that occurred in Tuubaa, Daaru and in the land of Mbakke-Bawol,

without exception, are due to your miracles from God!²⁵

Locomotives, trains, and planes will come

to Tuubaa thanks to your hard work, Maam Jaaratul Laahi!

Tap water is now flowing, and all the houses are flourishing: they look like gardens!

Fresh fish is now available in Daaru Rahman. Praise Jaaratul Laahi!

See the water tanks and the roads [under construction], as if the rivers of the city of Ndar

are now what separate Mbakke and Tuubaa! Praise Jaaratul Laahi!

Yet, the area used to be such a wild land where one [lost in it] could easily get thirsty!

It is your divine flood that quenched our thirst, Jaaratul Laahi!

²⁴ *Sëriñ Bashiiru Mbakke* also known as *Basiru*, or *Serigne Bassirou Mbakke* (1895 -1966) was one of Bamba's sons. He is the father of the current Caliph of the Muridiyya, *Sëriñ Muntaqa Mbakke* (also spelled as *Serigne Mountakba Mbacké*).

²⁵ Here *Maam Jaara* is credited for the achievements brought about in *Tuubaa*, *Daaru*, and *Mbakke-Bawol* by the Muridiyya Sufi order that her son, Ahmadu Bamba, founded. The underlying cultural belief here is that a child's success is the result of the mother's hard work and virtues.

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The corrugated fences, tall buildings, and the shops that surround us,

it is thanks to you that we have them in Tuubaa, Jaaratul Laahi!

There may be flawed people who are now seeking honor and showing off,

and it is thanks to the kindness of Maam Buso Baale, Jaaratul Laahi that they can do so.

Men and women now look as elegant as plant, flower, and river spirits

thanks to your work! You made us proud, Jaaratul Laahi!

We used to wear rags and had to frequently adjust our unsuitable loincloths.

Those who could not properly cover their intimate parts were not like Jaaratul Laahi!²⁶

You covered people's private parts, made countries to thrive, and elevated the Wolof people

above the Moors and the Europeans! Praise Jaaratul Laahi!

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People from the East, West, and Mauritania are all coming [to pay tribute to you]!

The people of Fuuta Tooro are here too, so are those of Ñooro, for the sake of God!

The people of Banjul, Sigicoor, and Kaasamaas are coming!²⁷

The Portuguese-speaking people [of Guinea Bissau] also want to know Jaaratul Laahi!

The Tjaniyya and Qadiriyya followers, and people from Mecca came this year!

Ask Sayyidina al-Burhan! I swear by God!

He is the flag bearer in Mecca and Medina today,

and he came to Tuubaa himself for the sake of God! I swear by God!

No one has ever seen, since the beginning of the world,

²⁶ Here the poet used the Arabic word *awra* to refer to people's private/intimate parts. In Islam, the word refers to parts of the body that must be covered in clothing when appearing in public or to those not one's spouse. There is a disagreement as to the exact body parts that constitute *awra*, as illustrated in the debate surrounding the Islamic veil.

²⁷ *Banjul* is the capital of The Gambia. *Sigicoor* is the local name of *Ziguinchor*, which is in the southern region of Senegal known as the natural region of *Kaasamaas* or *Casamance* in the French-based spelling.

people traveling beyond Mecca, Medina, and Misra [to Black Africa] for the sake of God!

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No one has ever seen people taking planes, ships, and trains

to West Africa for the sole purpose of paying pious visits, for the sake of God!

So, you have met all your obligations, O Maam Jaara!²⁸ Your victories are terrific!

It is thanks to you that I have good manners, Jaaratul Laahi!

Let me stop here, for your divine gifts cannot all be listed on paper!

I swear that you are unblemished, Maam Jaaratul Laahi!

I, Soxna Amina, your granddaughter, composed this praise song in your honor,

following the example of [my sister], Soxna May.²⁹ Praise Jaaratul Laahi!

An imitation cannot rival the original! Otherwise, I could have composed an Ajami poem

that would dazzle Arab poets! Praise Jaaratul Laahi!

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Muusaa [Ka], Servant of the Servant of The Chosen [Bamba], perfected the poem,

adding more of the wonders of our Grandmother Jaaratul Laahi!

May the Lord of the Creatures reward [him] with good fortune and good health.

Let us tell her: "Thank you, thank you, Jaaratul Laahi!"

And let us thank Shaykh Fallu and his younger siblings,

Shaykh Bashiiru who first celebrated Jaaratul Laahi!³⁰

²⁸ Here the poet used the Wolof word *selenglu* (to be free of debt, to pay all one's dues) to emphasize that *Maam Jaara* has fulfilled her mission in life and met all her obligations.

²⁹ *Soxna May* or *Soxna Maymunatu Mbakke* (1925-1999), was another daughter of Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba who was known for her commitment to Quranic education, devotional events in the month of Ramadan, and the celebration of *Laylat al-Qadr* (*The Night of Destiny*).

³⁰ It was customary for Shaykh Ahmadu Bamba's senior disciples and sons to found villages and promote the teaching of the Quran and farming in their respective areas. *Sëriñ Basiiru Mbakke* (1895 -1966) settled in *Poroxaan* where Bamba's mother, *Maam Jaara*, rests. *Sëriñ Basiiru Mbakke* presided over the first *Màggal of Poroxaan* (*commemoration of Maam Jaara Buso's life and work*) in 1952. Upon his death, his son *Sëriñ Mustapha Basiiru Mbakke* continued the tradition.

and his companion, Shaykh Ahmadu Ñañ,

son of Ahmadu Ñañ, for the sake of Jaaratul Laahi!

Also, please pay pious visits to Tuubaa and Naawel,

and go pay pious visits to our Grandmother Jaaratul Laahi [in Poroxaan]!

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Grandmother Asta Waalo rests in Naawel. Her bright saintly light³¹

has illuminated the people of Poroxaan and Jaaratul Laahi!

What a light upon a light, the source of the light of Shaykh Bamba that filled

the land of Tuubaa, brightening all countries, for the sake of God!

May the Lord shower her with endless blessings,

and may peace be upon the Chosen [Muhammad], for the sake of God!

O Lord, bless Our Master Muhammad, the Unlettered
Prophet, his family, his companions, his Servant [Bamba],
and his community and offer them the best of peace.

³¹ *Soxna Asta Waalo Mbakke* (or *Sokbna Asta Walo Navel Mbakke*) was *Maam Jaara's* mother. She too was reputed for her love of the Quran and is said to have personally introduced *Maam Jaara* to Islamic learning at a very early age. The village of *Naavel*, where she lived, is located in the department of *Birkilane* in Senegal. For more on her, see Translation from Wolof to English of "Biography of Lady Asta Waalo Mbakke" NEH Weblink: <http://sites.bu.edu/nehajami/the-four-languages/wolof/wolof-manuscripts/soxna-faati-ja-mbakke/>.