

# Magool: The Inimitable Nightingale of Somali Music

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Bashir Goth

Man u saaray  
May arooryaad iyo  
Ma mooday  
Magool kaliileed

## I.

True to these seminal lines of Yusuf Xaji Adan Qabile, Magool has blossomed ever since, destined to enthrall the Somali-speaking peoples of the Horn of Africa and beyond with her captivating voice over the next forty-plus years...never to be silenced as long as a person who speaks Somali lives on the face of the earth.

On March 25, 2004, when Magool's remains were being laid to rest amid one of the largest funeral congregations that Mogadishu has ever seen, I was in Dubai conducting interviews about her with a small group of Somali artists. The group was led by Ali Sugulle, a renowned playwright and a man who along with Sahardid Mohamed Elmi (Jabiye) was instrumental in making Magool an icon by giving her lead roles in a series of plays in the 1960s. The cohort included Ahmed Yaasin, a former Waaberi singer; Ahmed Mohamed Guutaale, a former Waaberi actor; and Jaama Ahmad Ibrahim (Baqayo), a former Djiboutian actor.

In an effort to compile this article about the life and musical legacy of Magool, I subsequently spoke to Sahardid Mohamed Elmi (Jabiye), a celebrated playwright and lyricist; Mohamed Adan Da'ar, a famous singer and lyricist; Hassan Haji Abdullahi (Hassan Ganey), a playwright and poet; Shamis Abokor (Guduudo Arwo), the first woman whose songs were publicly played on Radio Hargeisa; Hibo Mohamed (Hibo-Nuura), a celebrated former Waaberi singer who co-acted in many plays with Magool; Saeed Mohamed Harawo and Abdulkarim

Farah Qaari, two renowned music composers and former Waaberi artists who both worked with Magool for a long time and set music to many of the lyrics for which she became famous; and Abdi Yusuf Du'ale (Boobe), a cultural researcher and literary critic.<sup>1</sup> I also spoke to Fadumo Khalif Omar, Magool's elder sister who lived at the time in Mogadishu.

Following her death in Amsterdam on March 19, 2004, the first question that crossed my mind was "What next?" Magool was not just a celebrity, a famous singer who came to the scene, entertained and enchanted the Somali people and then left, but she became one of the pivotal figures in the musical consciousness of the Somali people and a national cultural treasure. In the words of the artists I interviewed, she was a unique and inimitable voice.

To start with my own encounter with Magool, I first saw her at a concert held in Abu Dhabi, capital of the United Arab Emirates, at the beginning of 1986. That night she experienced one of her first bouts of sore throats that would later become her frequent visitor over the years. Coming on stage with the traditional explosive applause that was often reserved for her, she enchanted the audience when she uttered the first lines of one of her famous songs, "*Dhirtaa xididka hoosaa; dhulka loogu beeree.*" Its words were written in 1964 by Hussein Aw Farah, a legendary playwright and lyricist.

Yet when her voice climbed to her accustomed heights, she could not continue. She abruptly stopped and rubbed her throat in a futile attempt to clear her voice. To the majority of the audience it was a bad night for Magool, probably a spate of a cold and she would recover; but to the sensitive few of us who appreciated the true value of Magool, the incident represented an ominous sign of doom in the offing for the best female singer that Somali music had ever produced. My friend, the late Ali Darabulsi, a journalist and historian, and I went home with lumps in our throats. In hindsight I could say that our feeling was a premonition of the cultural apocalypse that was drawing closer to the Somali nation.

Deeply saddened by this incident, I was unable to fall asleep and kept recalling Abdi Sinimo's words:

Kollaba caawa seexan kari maayee  
Siraadku saliid ma leeyahay.

I wrote a long lyric glorifying the legacy of Magool and lamenting the destiny awaiting her and every Somali artist for that matter. Over-

whelmed by emotion after she listened to my lyrics, Magool thanked the mysterious composer of the song when she alighted on stage in her next concert. Quoting the last words of the audio recording in which I concluded with “Bashir, Abu Dhabi,” Magool expressed her gratitude to “Bashir Abu Dhabi” to which I got a nudge from Darabulsi who was again sitting next to me.

Unfortunately, I have since then misplaced the lyrics. Although I turned my house topsy-turvy in a frantic search for it after I learned of Magool’s death, I could not find it. All I can remember are the following lines:

...Iska daa caddaan iyo  
Kuwa loogu ciidmee  
Ku caweeya noloshee  
Hadday carab ka dhalatana  
Cagaheeda hoosiyo  
Ciidday ku joogtaa  
La cantoobsan laayo  
Maalmaha la ciidiyo  
Habeenada caruusyada  
Ciyi la isku siin laa...

## II. Magool’s Life Changing Trip to Hargeisa

Halimo Khalif Omar (Magool) arrived in Hargeisa in 1961. She came from Galkayo where she worked as a waitress in a tea shop (according to Jabiyé). Accompanied by a few friends who shared her love of the arts, Magool made what would be her fateful musical trip to the north. When they reached Erigavo, her companions decided not to proceed and returned to Galkayo, while fate and maybe a predetermined plan to seek stardom prompted Magool to continue her journey alone to Hargeisa (according to Sugulle, Gutaale, Jabiyé, and Fadumo, Magool’s sister). Guutaale mentioned Abdullahi Hamari as one of the people who accompanied her from Galkayo and returned from Erigavo, while Mohamed Adan Da’ar stated that Magool was accompanied by two men; one called Fanah (Fanax) and the other Yusuf Shaa’ir. They wanted to hold a concert but failed. Guduudo Arwo also agreed with Da’ar that Magool arrived with a man called Fanax. Jabiyé recalled that Magool was hosted by a woman called Halwo Tuuro (Xalwo Tuuro). It was there where she changed her *Guntino* to *Diric*.

When Sugulle met Magool for the first time at the end of 1961, Somali music was beginning its journey toward greatness, picking up from where Abdi Sinimo left off after founding the Balwo in 1943<sup>2</sup> and ushering in the age of the Somali modern song with his seminal words, “*Balwooy hooy Balwooy, waxaa i baleeyey mooyaaneey.*” Subsequently, the musical flame had spread from Borama to Hargeisa and Jigjiga and from there to Djibouti and finally to Addis Ababa, where his first song was recorded and played on Radio Addis Ababa.<sup>3</sup>

Helping the music boom in Hargeisa was the establishment of Radio Hargeisa, which started as Radio Kudo in 1943 and was renamed Radio Hargeisa in 1944.<sup>4</sup> Also assisting was the wave of patriotism that prevailed prior to the time of independence and was the cause of a plethora of nationalistic literature, mostly in the form of lyrics.

According to Sugulle, when Magool arrived in Hargeisa late in 1961, the need was great for female singers because Somalia, a Muslim and conservative society, did not allow girls to enter into the music world. Men even used to play female roles. The Walaalo Hargeisa Band made its first concert tours to Aden and Djibouti with men playing female parts. The first woman to take an acting role publicly was Sahra Nuur (Iftin) and she was later followed by Fadumo Abdillahi (Maandeeq). The artists and music composers were constantly scouting for new talent, particularly women, on the merit of their voices, acting abilities, and national spirit.

A panel of judges led by Sugulle was formed by Radio Hargeisa to give Magool a voice test. She introduced herself as Halimo Khalif Omar, saying that she came to Hargeisa to pursue a singing career. When the panel asked her what song she would like to sing, she chose to sing within the Banadir genre of songs (Banadir music at the time was later called Banadiri). Halimo had to face her first test before the judges who included:

1. Ali Sugulle, playwright and music composer
2. Mohammed Ahmed (Kulluc), (Maxamad Axmad Kulluc), singer
3. Ali Faynuus (Cali Feynuus), music composer
4. Mohammed Saeed (Gu’Roonjire), (Maxamad Siciid—Gu’Roon Jire), music composer

She sang “*Booqasho keliyaa, badh iga hadhayee, bagoo aanad ina soo bari-idayn.*”

“We were all frozen to our seats,” Sugulle said, recalling the panel’s first impression of Magool’s voice; “every single hair of our body stood up on its end and we were covered with goosebumps (*waan gariiray... waan gariirayba dee*). Everybody was enthralled by the intrinsic beauty of Halimo’s voice.”

The judges immediately introduced her to Abdi Du’ale (Cabdi Ducaale, better known as Abdi Ayub), head of Radio Hargeisa at the time, with a unanimous recommendation to recruit her as a singer and with a promise that the Band would provide her with songs.

Du’ale, who was very supportive of the music movement and encouraged women’s participation, immediately recruited her as a salaried singer. But like other female singers, Halimo could not use her real name and the need arose to find a stage name.

Abdi Du’ale announced a competition to find a fitting stage name for Halimo, with a cash reward of 300 Somali shillings (almost US\$42 at the time) for the winner. Yusuf H. Aden Qabile, a teacher and a poet, won the competition by sending a four-line poem encapsulating the impression he had about Halimo’s voice. The poem included the word “Magool,” which means fresh green foliage. Halimo was known ever since as Magool. Below are Qabile’s lines that won the competition and gave Halimo her striking stage name:

Man u saaray  
May arooryaad iyoo  
Ma mooday  
Magool kaliileed

Like a flower  
Awakened by a morning rain  
Don’t you mistakenly take her  
For fresh green foliage.

This concept of wishing Magool’s voice to remain forever fresh and green that Qabile expressed in his poem was also applied in a different way to Guduudo Arwo, the first Somali woman to sing on Radio Hargeisa. Once her songs had become popular, several lyrics were composed in tribute to her singing. One of these lyrics expressed a wish that she could forever stay as a maiden (damsel):

Gudoodo Carwooy  
Gugii la arkaba  
Allow yaa gashaanti kaa dhiga  
O Guduudo Carwo<sup>5</sup>

O by the grace of God  
How much I wish that in every spring  
You stay as a maiden

In fact, Du'ale's decision to run a competition for Halimo's stage name and the profundity and beauty of Adan's winning lyrics are a reflection of the people's refined taste for literature at the time.

With that unique stage name, Radio Hargeisa introduced Magool, that magical nightingale and jewel of Somali melody. She turned every song into a timeless piece of pure life, thus reasserting the power of singing in converting lyrics into an immortal art created by the harmonious fusion of the beauty of words and music. As Adonis articulates:

When we hear speech in the form of a song, we do not hear the individual words but the being uttering them. We hear what goes beyond the body towards the expanses of the soul. The signifier is no longer an isolated word, but a word bound to a voice, a music-word, a song-word. It is not merely an indication of a certain meaning, but an energy replete with signs, the self transformed into speech-song, life in the form of language.<sup>6</sup>

Magool, who excelled in this artistry of word-music fusion, had arrived at a time when music was in dire need of women singers, particularly as Iftin had quit music after she married and Guduudo Arwo had left for Ethiopia. Hargeisa Radio was left with only Fadumo Abdillahi (Faadumo Cabdillaahi or Maandeeq) and a few others who went by stage mononyms such as Beernugul and Noora.

According to Sugulle, women singers used to come to the radio station shrouded in a veil to hide their identities and they recorded songs in the studio under secret names. The general belief was that "only prostitutes sing love-songs."<sup>7</sup>

The public knew them only by their stage names and no one, not even their immediate families, knew their true identities. Guduudo Arwo used to go to Radio Hargeisa fully shrouded in a hijab. After she recorded the song, she used to listen to it on the radio without any-

one recognizing her.<sup>8</sup> Although the problem was still lingering when Magool started her singing career, some women, such as Mandeeq and Sahra Nuux (Sahra Badhabadha), were already singing in public, following in the footsteps of Khadija Eyeh Dharaar (Khadiija Ciye Dharaar or Khadija Balwo), the first Somali woman to join Abdi Sini-mo's (Cabdi Deeqsi Warfaa—Cabdi Sinimoo) Balwo group and take part in singing sessions without hiding her identity.<sup>9</sup>

Guduudo Arwo, the first Somali woman to become a professional singer, performed her songs on Radio Hargeisa until 1951, when she went to Addis Ababa to pursue a singing career away from the hostile Somali community. However, she returned to Hargeisa along with Zeinab Haji Ali (Baxsan) in 1963, thus starting the famous quartet consisting of Magool, Maandeeq, Baxsan, and Guduudo.

Magool made her debut as an actress in Sugulle's play *Himiladeena* (*Our Aspirations/Dreams*) alongside Osman Mohamed Abdulkarim (Cusman Maxamad Cabdulkarim—Cusmaan Gacanloo), Baxsan (Zaynab Xaaji Cali), Abdillahi Abdi Shube (Cabdillaahi Cabdi Shube), Mohamed Omar (Maxamad Cumar—Huryo), and Abdillahi Qarshe (Cabdillaahi Qarshe). The band took the play to Aden, which had a large Somali community.

Magool's real fame came with the song "*Nin Lagu Seexdow Ha Seexan*" (O Man on whose Guard the Country Sleeps, You should not Yourself Sleep), written by Sugulle in 1962, a little after the aborted military coup in Hargeisa. The song was in the play *Gobannimo* (*Independence*), also co-acted by Maandeeq and Baxsan. The objective of the play was to boost the morale of the armed forces. When the band took the play to Mogadishu, Magool refused to accompany them due to her fear of reprisals from her people. Her role in the play was then given to Mandeeq. Even when most of the band members later relocated to Mogadishu, Magool still remained in Hargeisa. She was left with Sahardid Mahamed Elmi (Jabiye), who debuted in *Gobanimo* and had become a celebrated playwright and was the author of the famous independence song "*Maantay curatoy, mataanaysee, Aan Maalo Hasheena Maandeeq.*" Magool played a lead role in eleven plays written by Jabiye. Among her hit songs with Jabiye's lyrics was the following, which she performed in duo with Ahmed Mohamed Good (Axmud Maxamad Good—Shimbir):

Ubax la moodyoow  
Illiilo roob helay adaa u guuree  
Anna abaartiyo *agab* la'aantaa  
Igu ogoowe

This has become one of Magool's all-time top-list songs. The song coincided with a time when the Somali people had recovered from the euphoria of independence and become disenchanted with the post-independence government and the political elite. With the majority of the people being illiterate at the time and relying on the radio for news and entertainment, Somalis turned to poetry and song lyrics for solace. They started to search for political connotations in the songs and interpreted many of them as being critical of the performance of the successive civilian governments. "*Ubax La Moodyow*" was therefore one of the first songs to which Somalis gave a political twist.

The song says "*Markaad Udbaale iyo, Hir Doogle Aadaad*" and the sub-clan of Aden Abdullah Osman, the president of the country at the time, is called "Ubbaale." Therefore, people thought that the song was addressing President Osman. People particularly took note of the following lines in which the woman character compares the life of luxury and affluence led by the man she assumes had betrayed her love and the life of misery and penury that she lives. This was interpreted by the people as the president and the political elite of the country leading a life of opulence while the rest of the Somali people lived in dire poverty. The song "*Ubax La Moodyo*" (O You Who Look like a Flower) was interpreted as symbolizing President Osman's white hair.

Illiilo roob helay adaa u guuree  
Iftiinka noloshaadii way ku ahaatee  
Way kuu ahaatee ubax la moodyoo  
Ubax la moodyoo ana abaartiyo  
Agab la'aantaa igu ogoowe

Markaad udbaaliyo  
Hir doogle aadaad  
Ani asaagay  
Uub dheer ku tuurtee  
Ubax la moodyoo ana abaartiyo  
Agab la'aantaa igu ogoowe



To paraphrase the above lines, the woman character lampoons the man who claims to love her by saying:

You moved to valleys with green pasture,  
You dwell in a world of comfort and abundance;  
O you, who looks like a white flower,  
You should know that unlike you,  
I live in misery and penury

When you moved to Udbaale and to places full of greenery,  
Then you have thrown the likes of me into a deep abyss;  
O you, who looks like a white flower,  
You should know that unlike you,  
I live in misery and penury

Another popular song during these days was "*Anman badanow, asluub badanoo*," and again the lyrics were by Jabiye, which Maglool performed with Shimbir.

Recalling how she met Magool, Hibo-Nuura remembers that she went to a concert that Magool performed at the military officers' club in Hargeisa in 1966 and that she was astounded by the thunderous applause Magool received after finishing her performance. During that night, Hibo-Nuura said she had a dream of herself receiving the same applause in the same place. In a twist of fate, Hibo-Nuura was given the same applause one year later in the military officers' club.

Hibo-Nuura recalled that when she went for a voice test at Radio Hargeisa, she was tested with two of Magool's songs: "*Daahir arami-daadii*" and "*Asalkaba hurdada anigoon ku arag*." Magool was at that time on a trip to Sudan and when she came back she was told that another female singer who would be a threat to her had emerged. According to Hibo-Nuura, Magool demanded to hear the new voice before she even reached her home. When she heard Hibo-Nuura singing "*Naf Jacayl Haleelay*," she sighed in relief and said, "*Ma tan baa aniga khatar I gelinaysa...Anigu waxan ahay Kawkab Sharq Ifriqiya*" (Do you think this will pose a threat to me...No one can threaten me. I am the star of East Africa). That nickname was given to her by Sudanese admirers.

Hibo-Nuura said she and Magool relocated from Hargeisa to Mogadishu in October 1967. Hibo-Nuura was still a novice while Magool had become the unchallenged star of Somali music ever since her debut in 1962. With Sugulle alone she acted in seven of his notable plays with

such hit songs as “*Af-qalaad aqoonto miyaa.*” Plays written by Sugulle with Magool as the star character included:

- 1) *Ma Huraan (Destiny)*: The lyrics included in this play that later became famous include “*Af Qalaad aqoontu Miyaa, Boqorkii Quruxda.*” These were long songs and Magool was the only one who could sing such exhausting songs, according to Sugulle, Saeed Harawo, and other artists. Foreign ambassadors, particularly the Egyptian one, protested against the theme of the play, claiming that it was derogatory toward Arabism. The Latino ambassadors wanted the Somali script to be written in Roman letters while Arabs wanted it to be written in the Arabic alphabet.
- 2) *Sheeg iyo sharer (Exposure and Concealment)*: songs included “*I madadaali daali, I maaweeli weeli.*” And “*Ma hadhin hadal la is yidhaah-daaye, Hubsiiimo hal baa la siistaa.*”
- 3) *Midnimadeenii mugday gashay (Our Unity Slipped into Darkness)*: among its songs was “*Waa baa beryey.*”
- 4) *Gobbanimo* (popularly known as *Dhagax iyo Dab, Fire and Stone*): songs included “*Gobannimooy waxaad gashiyo waxaad gudaba garanaye oo guurnayee, gubanimoo.*” Hassan Sh. Muumin Gorod (Xasan Sheekh Muumin Gorod), a genius playwright who later wrote *Shabeel Nagood (Leopard among Women)*, which was the first and only Somali play that was translated into English, made his acting debut in this play. The irony is that Gorod asked Magool to take the lead role when he wrote *Shabeel Nagood* but she declined for two reasons.<sup>10</sup> First, she did not want to work with an unknown playwright and, second, she did not want to infuriate Sugulle, with whom she had an unbreakable partnership. But to her surprise, *Shabeel Nagood* became not only one of the most successful Somali plays but also one that is characterized as an unrivalled masterpiece. Rejected by Magool, Gorod gave the leading roles to Hibo-Nuura and Maryan Mursal (a popular former Waaberi singer), who were both new to the field but whose careers skyrocketed after acting in *Shabeel Nagood*.
- 5) *Kala Haab/Kala Haad (Antipodal Views)*: Magool’s songs included “*Ma ifkiibaa, Ma aakhiraa, Intee baynu joognaa, intee baynu joognaa,*” performed with Mohammed Ahmed.

Besides joining the official band of Radio Hargeisa, Magool had become the lead female actress and singing star of the first Hargeisa Theatre for Performing Arts and Entertainment (*Golaha Murtida iyo Madadaalada*). It was founded in 1963 by Osman Gacanloo, Ali Feynuus, and Da'ar, among others. This same name was later given to the Somali National Theater in Mogadishu. According to Da'ar, they turned an abandoned garage into a theatre. They cleaned it, bought furniture for it, and built a stage.

Before this, theatre concerts were held in Hargeisa National Cinema, which was owned by an Indian businessman. Among the first members of Hargeisa's *Golaha Murtida iyo Madadaalada* were:

- 1) Osman Gacanloo, singer
- 2) Ali Feynuus, composer, musician and lyricist
- 3) Ali Dheere (Cali Dheere) drummer and actor
- 4) Ismail Yare (Ismaaciil Yare)
- 5) Mohamed Adan Da'ar, singer and lyricist
- 6) Sahardid Mohamed (Jabiye), playwright and music composer
- 7) Sahra Nuh (Sahra Badhabadha), singer

The first three members of the group, Osman Gacanloo, Ali Feynuus, and Ali Dheere, were members of the official band of Radio Hargeisa, while Da'ar, Jabiye, and Sahra Badhabadha were freelancers and had other vocations.

The play *Dan iyo Xarago Is Weyday (Indigence and Vanity Do Not Go Together)*, written by Jabiye, was the first to be performed in the new theatre in 1964. Playing the leads were Magool and Osman Gacanloo, while Sahra Badhabadha and Da'ar played the supporting roles. They also performed the play in Berbera and Mogadishu.

The second play was *Laguma Dhaamee Dhaqaaq (Carry On with your Life because No One is Better than You)*, which was also written by Jabiye, with Osman Gacanloo and Magool playing the leading roles. Among the songs in this play was the famous and philosophical "*Mid qun loo abuurroo, qurux loo dhammeeyaa, ka qalaalan hootood, qawaddaa hadhowtee, waa qayb adduunoo, waa qayb adduunoo, waa qayb adduunoo, qofna la isma raacshee, wax ku qaata weeyee, bal qiyaasa nimankaa, bal qiyaasa nimankaa.*" Also included were the catch words "*Nabaadaana muudsoo, naa maxaa tidhi.*"

The third play was *Booraan Hadimo Ha Qodin (Do Not Dig Ditches to Trap Others)*. It was written by Jabiye in 1967. By this time, Sahra Badhabadha had married and left the band. She was replaced by Hibo-Nuura, who was discovered by Mohamed Omar (Huryo) in 1967. He wrote for her the lyrics of the famous song “*Naf Jacayl Haleelay, Hawl waayi maysee.*” Music was set to it by Gu’Roon Jire.

Magool and Osman Gacanloo took the lead roles in *Booraan Hadimo Ha Qodin*, while Hibo-Nuura and Da’ar played the supporting roles. It is through this play that Mohamed Adan got his stage name: Da’ar (Dacar).

In addition to Sugulle and Jabiye, Magool graced the stage as a star in several other major plays, such as:

1. *Sidaa Ma Isku Qabnaa Mise Waan Qasanaa (Shall We Stay Married or Shall We Make a Spectacle of Ourselves)*, written by Mohamed Ali Kariye (Maxamad Cali Kaariye, a former Waaberi playwright.), in which Magool played the main character, along with Mohamed Ahmed (Kulluc), Hassan Adan Samatar (Xasan Aadan Samatar, a popular Waaberi singer), Saado Ali (Saado Cali Warsame, a popular Waaberi singer), and Khadija Mahmoud (Khadiija Maxamuud – Qalanjo, Waaberi folklore dancer and singer).
2. *Naaska Gulucda Leh (A Crooked Boob)*, written by Abdulqadir Ali Egal (Cabdulqaadir Cali Cigaal, Waaberi playwright), in which Magool shared the stage with Mohamed Saleebaan Tubea (Maxamad Suleymaan Tubeec), the most celebrated male participant in the original Hargeisa group and a Waaberi singer known as the King of Melody, as well as Fadumo Abdillahi (Maandeeq) and Abdi Khadar.
3. *Jacayl Boob Uma Baahna (Love Cannot be Won by Plundering)*, written by Abdulqadir Ali Egal, in which Magool was the star character and in which she sang her famous song:

*Minankiinii anigaa immidee heedhee*  
*Martiyo kale baan ahayee laba dheh*

4. *Hagardaamada Guurka Hadda Yaa Ka Masuula (Who will be Accountable for the Pernicious Effects of Marriage)*, in which Magool was one of the main characters along with Mohamed Ahmed (Kulluc), Ahmed Ali Egal (Axmad Cali Cigaal, Waaberi singer), Omar Rooraaye (Cumar Rooraaye, Waaberi singer), and Hibo-Nuura.

Among the famous lyrics in this play was “*Sida Goryacawl Ama Guri Cidlaa.*”

5. *Dumistii Aqalkayga iyo Arooskii Inankayga (The Destruction of My Marriage and the Wedding of My Son)*, written by Hasan Haji Abdilahi (Xasan Ganey). She co-starred with the popular singer Hassan Adan Samatar. One of the songs in that play was immortalized by Magool’s and Samatar’s voices:

Samatar: *Dadna Adaa ugu qurux badaneey, deegaanta roobkiyo, adaa doogga ka udgoon, Dumarna waa adoo qudha, dookhna waa ka igu jira, duntuna iigu kaa xidhan...*

Magool: *Dadna adaa ugu qurux badaneey, waagoo dillaaciyo, dabna adaa ka muuq dheer, ragna doorki baad tahay, dookhna waa kan igu jira, duntuna iigu kaa xidhan...*

Another song was “*Ma ogtahay Curyaankaba cago looma waayine.*”

### III. Overseas Concert Tours

According to Da’ar, Magool went on her first overseas concert tour to Aden in the early sixties, playing the lead female character and singer in a play written by Abdi Handulle (Cabdi Xandulle—Afweyne). The opportunity came to Magool after the woman previously selected for the role, Sahra Badhabadha, refused to go to Aden and Osman Gacanloo, who was playing the lead male character, was left without a female star beside him. Handulle gave the role to Magool, who was living at the time in the Dunbuluq area.

Da’ar recalled how Magool impressed everyone by memorizing her lines and lyrics quickly, in the span of only three days, describing her as a woman of “*Cod baa ku jiray,*” meaning “an amazing voice was buried in her.” They took the play to Aden, which according to Da’ar was at the time like the Dubai of today. Among the songs Magool performed in the play was “*Dad haduu is qoonsado waa la kala dambeeyaa.*”

Da’ar said that when they returned, they brought with them all kinds of gifts, such as gold, perfumes, clothes, etc. He recalled how Osman Gacanloo used to tease Magool for having only one dress before the trip but coming back from Aden with a whole wardrobe.

Magool made her first concert tour to Sudan in 1965 as a member of a Somali band led by Sugulle. She again travelled to Sudan in 1966 with Sugulle and other members of the band as part of a government

delegation led by Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke, the Somali prime minister at the time.

In 1970, Magool went to Egypt accompanied by Hibo-Nuura and Maryam Mursal. They wanted to see Umm al Kalthoum, the Egyptian musical legend, and were told that she was engaged for one year. Instead, Farid Al-Atrash, one of the most celebrated musical icons of the Arab world at the time, received them and took photos with them. The story was published by the Egyptian newspapers.

Magool's Sudanese fans named her "*Kawkab Sharq Ifriqiya*," or the Star of East Africa. According to Da'ar, the Sudanese infatuation with Magool's voice started in 1964 when Sudanese artists came to Hargeisa for the first time. Members of the team who later became music idols in Sudan included Mohamed Wardi, Salah Ibn Al Badiya, and Asho Falato, who was the only female singer in the band.

Having seen Magool, they wanted her to sing with them. Mohamed Omar Huryo wrote lyrics for her and Mohamed Wardi set the music to them. Among the words of the song on which Magool breathed her magical fire were, "*Isna Ina Daryeelo, Anna Kama Dambeyee, Ma La iigu Daw Galay*." This song became popular with the Sudanese band and with the Sudanese people. This is why the Sudanese people, particularly the artists, used to call Somalis "*Nas Halima*" (people of Halima). Among the songs the Somali-Sudanese artists performed together was "*Cabuuud wa Aadan Cabdullah*," in reference to the presidents of Sudan and Somalia, Ibrahim Abboud and Adan Abdullah Osman, respectively. Da'ar said the Somali people in the north used to listen to Sudanese music while those in the south preferred Indian music.

This was the heyday of Somali music and the role of the Hargeisa artists in elevating music and playwriting to these great heights cannot be overemphasized. It was an unrivalled and unparalleled time of classical Somali music, as so eloquently phrased by Professor Ahmed I. Samatar:

For me, classical works are those who have stood the test of time, and they underscore the foundational basis of Somali song production. So *qaraami* songs in that sense would be, for me, classified as classical. And people who play or sing the *qaraami* always hearken back to another era, to another time. I can't think of any *qaraami* song, really, that has been composed, for example, in the last ten years. There are pretenders—young people and others who do try to do that. But Beethoven is Beethoven. People might try to go beyond him, but they will never be Beethoven. So it's the towering, pioneering pieces of work that have now

become part of the great, deep treasure of Somali musical culture—that’s what I mean by classical or *qaraami*.<sup>11</sup>

#### IV. Self-Imposed Exile

Magool clashed with the military regime because the sarcasm and satire in the themes of the character roles she played were unpopular with the regime, which favored advocacy and adulation. One of the rare songs she performed during the military regime consisted of the first lyrics that Sugulle had written on the second day of the military coup, which were sung by Magool on October 22, 1969. The lyrics of the song, which were critical of the ousted civilian government, went like this:

*Turunturootoo kuftay, dhacday*  
*Ayaad taqaan*  
*Taladii seegtoo luntay ayaa taqaan,*  
*Ee maxaad taqaan*

The “Who you know” government has stumbled and fell  
The “Who you know” government has failed and got lost  
And in has come the regime of “What do you know”

According to Da’ar, when the military government strengthened its grip on the production of literature and the national radio was dominated by government-peddled propaganda music and artists favored by the military junta, people like Magool could not take it anymore. She decided to leave the country in a self-imposed exile.

Da’ar was in charge of an emergency fund that the artists had raised through personal contributions. The word was spread that Magool wanted to go abroad for medical treatment. The artists decided to give her 2,000 Somali shillings out of the fund. (This was big money at the time.) She told everyone that she was going abroad for treatment and people had genuinely believed that. She camouflaged herself in order not to be recognized at the airport and left for Cairo. From Cairo she spoke to some of the artists and told them that she had left the country for good due to the government’s lack of respect for genuine talent and quality. She was away for eight years during which she lived in Abu Dhabi and Sudan.



Through the interviews I conducted, both Da'ar and Baqayo affirmed that after she left the country and settled in the UAE, the Somali government sent her appeals and envoys through the Somali Embassy asking her to return home. She refused them all. As she traveled on a diplomatic passport, she was frightened of being abducted by the Somali government and taken back home by force. Subsequently, she was arrested by UAE authorities in 1986 for illegal stay in the country, and deported to Djibouti.

Da'ar, however, recalls that even long before Magool's departure many of the pioneer artists felt let down by the government and scores of them were taken to Halane in 1972 for military training and indoctrination in the government's socialist ideology. The majority of the illustrious Hargeisa music group, which was responsible for laying the firm foundations of Somali music and refining the people's taste for good literature, was transferred to Mogadishu. And it did not take long for the artists to turn away from mainstream music. A prolific playwright like Sugulle rarely produced anything after the revolution and he had to spend many years in jail for lyrics and plays that were interpreted by the heavy-handed and ignorant government censorship board as anti-government propaganda.

Others turned to religion as a sign of protest and began composing religious songs. Among the first of the religious protest lyrics was "*Intii Raacday Nabigee, Rafiiqiisi Noqotee, Aan Rumaysay Noqonee, Ku Saliya Rasuulkii.*" Written by Da'ar and set to music by Cabdulkarim Jiir, it and has become yet another of Magool's hits.

### **V. Magool's Spectacular Homecoming**

According to the following account narrated to me by Guutaale and Baqayo about Magool's return, the government ordered the Somali Ambassador to Djibouti to send Magool home with a governmental pardon.

The Consul met her and informed her that she was a national icon and the government was ready to redress all her grievances. He asked her to prepare herself to go home and gave her some cash. She accepted the offer and the Consul sent word back home about Magool's imminent return. A delegation of artists led by Tubea was sent to escort Magool home.

Baqayo, who was in Hargeisa at the time when the delegation arrived with Magool, said the troupe performed a concert in Hargeisa



without Magool's participation because she had a sore throat. But the audience protested and demanded that Magool appear on stage.

Magool was brought from her place of residence to the theatre. She spoke to the people and told them that she could not sing because of a sore throat but offered that she would remain on the stage and would be by the side of all the singers throughout the concert.

Magool arrived in Mogadishu to a warm welcome. She was received at the airport by a delegation of artists including Khadija Abdillaahi Dallays, a celebrated singer considered to be the first female singer in the south of Somalia;<sup>12</sup> Abdi Salad Beerdillacshe, a well-known singer; Saada Ali Warsame, a famous singer; and Guutaale, an actor. Also present to receive her was Mohammed Omar Jess, Minister of Information. On arrival, Magool was overcome by emotion; she kissed the soil and started crying. She was crying for a couple of days. She was taken straight to Villa Somalia (the Presidential Palace) and later to the Juba Hotel.

The government gave her two houses, one in Xamar Billa and the other in Fiora, where she remained until she left the country for the last time in 2004.

## **VI. Grand Finale of a Glamorous Musical Life: Singing to the Last Minute**

Almost forty-three years after Magool made her debut at Radio Hargeisa during the Golden Age of Somali music—a singer that Somali artists almost unanimously agree to be the inimitable nightingale of Somali music and the Sudanese dubbed as the Star of East of Africa—she appeared on stage for the last time in a concert organized by Somali artists in Dubai on February 26, 2004, under the title "*Habeenkii Fanka iyo Fagaaraha Dubai*" (The Night of Music at Dubai Square). Loved by the Sudanese, it was a strange serendipity for her to end her glamorous musical career at a Sudanese Community Club.

Among the artists who took part in the concert were Ahmed Yasin, a singer; Jama Baqyo, an actor and composer; Ahmed Nur Jango, a singer; and Abdillahi Xalwo, a singer.

Magool left Dubai a few nights after the concert for Amsterdam. She did not notify any of her fellow artists about her trip and intentions as she was traveling with a forged identity. Four nights later, she contacted Baqayo by telephone, saying that she left the country in secrecy and she did not want anyone to know her destination. She apologized

to him and asked him to convey her apology to every one of the artists and she asked for forgiveness.

Baqayo felt that something was wrong with her voice as she could not talk properly. Three nights after that call, Magool died, like any nameless stranger dies in a foreign land. Just as her life symbolized everything beautiful about the Somali people, her death as a refugee in a foreign country symbolized the ugliness that beset the Somali nation. She shared that gloomy fate with other great artists with whom she shared the glory of Somali music. They included Cabdillahi Qarshe, Xasan Sheikh Muumin, Maxamad Suleyman, Tubeec, Faadumo Qaasim Hilowle, and others who all died in a state of despair and desolation.

## VII. Magool's Voice and Personality

To measure what value Somalis have lost in Magool's death, I asked all the artists I interviewed how they would rate Magool's voice and legacy as an artist and as a person. Here is what they said.

Describing her as an affable person with a great spirit for teamwork and a great desire for music, Sugulle said of all other singers: "*May dhallan, dhabarkana laguma sido*" (A voice like hers never existed and never will be). He said the Sudanese had dubbed her as the "Umm al Kalthoum of Africa." He underlined that besides her unrivalled voice, Magool had the advantage of the ability to memorize lyrics and play script lines in a short time. This was especially helpful for a person who was illiterate, as most Somali artists were at the time. Not being able to write, she had to have a good memorizing ability in order to learn her lines by heart. Sugulle said she was exceptional in that. He attributed her success to her passion and love for music and her refined taste for lyrics. He said that she had a burning desire for music and that made composers and musicians alike enjoy working with her.

Sugulle noted that singers and composers had a problem with musicians who were mostly ignorant about the Somali culture and Somali poetry. Most of the musicians were of mixed Arab-Somali and Bajun origins. They could play musical instruments but could neither read music nor fully understand the language: "For example, when I was trying to teach them to put the song "*I madadaali daali*" to music, they could not understand it. They could, however, understand "*Miyarkay-gii adigaa haa, maskaxdiisii la boxoo hoo, heedhe Magool hoooy, Ina abti macaaneey hoo.*"

Sugulle then tried to make them understand by saying:

Talyaani Poorko, Poorko,  
Toobe handaare, Rooma,  
Antaka Roma puke,  
English butaano, butaano  
Toobe handaare, landara

In this broken Italian language, Sugulle said he managed to make Hussein Baajuuni and Hassani understand the tone. Magool used to first memorize the words and tone at one go and then went to the musicians to teach them how to play. It is easy for the musician to follow a good singer like Magool because the musician had to enjoy the voice and movements of the singer in order to put the words into music. Otherwise it would be like throwing stones at the head of the musicians, according to Sugulle. He continued, “Magool and Mohammed Ahmed had a flare with music and used to correct even my words to synchronize them to the music. *Magool qof burburaya ayey ahayd* (Magool was full of passion). She was the only woman who could sing with the longest notes and high vocal ranges. She used to sing at the tone of the male voice.”

He concluded by saying, “*qof wuu dhintaa, eraygiise ma dhinto*” (A person dies but his/her words remain). “Magool will forever live through her music.”

Sahardid Jabiye described Magool’s voice as “*cod jowharad ah, noqno-qonaya, masraxana aad bay ugu fiicnayd*” (she had a precious and elastic voice. And she had a majestic and captivating presence on the stage). As a person, Jabiye said she was a decent woman with a great personality. He also could not resist saying that she had “a photographic memory.” Guduudo Arwo summed up Magool’s voice and musical role as simply, “*Horyaalka Fanka, boqorada codka ayey ahayd*” (she was the trailblazer of music and the queen of melody).

With unreserved adulation of Magool, Hibo-Nuura described her as “*Waa tiriigga aan soo eeganaynay, fanaanadda dabka u shidday fanka, uguna codka wanaagsanayd*” (She was the beacon that was guiding us, the artist that rekindled the fire of Somali music, and the one with the most beautiful voice).

Da’ar simply said that “*Hayabad bay lahayd, cod baana ku jiray. Ma qarin karaysid markuu qofku hibo leeyahay. Markiiba xiddig bay noqotay*” (She had such a charisma and there was a majestic voice buried in her.

You cannot hide when someone has a talent. She instantly became a star).

While all artists agree on Magool's ability to memorize scripts quickly, Da'ar narrated a story that while they were working together in Hargeisa, Magool used to skip the rehearsals. When the deadline of the concert came closer, other actors used to worry about her ability to deliver if she never came to practice. "I remember one time," said Da'ar, "when Osman Gacanloo, who always played the lead roles with her, suggested that she had to be replaced because he was worried that she might never come. However, she appeared at the last minute, told the taxi driver to wait for her, sat with Ali Feynuus, the musician, in *kadaloob* (while squatting). And she memorized the songs (four or five of them) and the music that took others two months to memorize and she returned with the same taxi. This is how fast she was in memorizing things."

Xasan Ganay said that Somali music had lost a giant voice in Magool's death. He characterized her as a generous person with a good heart: "*Hiil iyo hooba way lahayd.*"

With a sorrowful tone, Guutaale noted that, "in Magool's death, the Somali people have lost a great singer." He described her as a person with a great national spirit, generous and helpful. He recalled that she sent money for the funeral of Mohamed Ali Kaariye, one of the Waaberi playwrights, and Hussein Aw Farah, a distinguished playwright and the co-founder of the Walaalo Hargeisa Band with Abdillahi Qarshi.

Describing Magool as "a national treasure," Ahmed Yasin portrayed her as a person loved by all Somalis wherever they were: "Her death touched every one of them. Magool was a pioneer and an example to be followed by new generations of singers."

For his turn, Abdi Yusuf Duale (Boobe), a cultural researcher and distinguished literary critic, described Magool in the following words when I asked him about her:

Actually she was not my most favorite woman singer. Yet I admired her as many other Somalis did or even some of the Sudanese public. Of course she was one of the first and foremost Somali singers of all time. I would rate her as one of the first graduates of Hargeisa School of Arts. Thanks to those who brought her to Hargeisa and honed her talents to become a solid and creative artist. She shared many talents with other singers and actors, but her voice and her actions were unique to her.

The way she used to manipulate her eyes and neck in harmony with the music in order to engage with the audience was a unique style to her.

She sang with the greats of Somali music and melody. In the sixties she sang with Osman Abdikarim (Osman Gacanlow). She beautifully shared Jowhara Luul with Mohamed Yusuf Abdi. She sang with King of the Somali Melody, Mohamed Saleebaan Tubeec. She shared the beautiful lyrics of Ali Sugulle with Mohamed Ahmed, Kuluc. In 1974, she sang with the great Martyr Mohamed Mooge Liban when they co-acted in the play of Axmed Saleebaan Bidde, *Laaca aragtaye, laagga ma og tahay*. She was an actress, a singer, and a creative artist of many talents.

Magool was an outstanding singer of Sudanese songs. Hadrawi's lyrics "*Jacayl dhiig ma lagu qoray*" could be the best witness to how the Sudanese public reacted to her performances.

Two periods of Magool's artistic life have to be emphasized: The series of plays written by Jabiye in which she played the lead along with Osman Abdikarim (Gacanlow) and the series of plays written by Ali Sugulle that she shared the lead with Mohamed Ahmed (Kuluc). These were the plays and songs that shaped Magool's artistic personality and her continuous leading role in singing and acting.

She also sang with Qasaalli<sup>13</sup> in the sixties. He was a teacher who turned to music and had become a celebrated singer in the category of Mohamed Mooge.

Magool had three *Qaraami* genres she usually sang. They included *Subcis*, *Jowhariyo Luul*,<sup>14</sup> and *Benaadiri*. All three were played with traditional musical instruments, the best of which was *Jowhariyo Luul*, one of the rare tunes that were created in Borama, as I found later in my research.

On her personality, Boobe described Magool as "Open minded and outspoken. She was an honest person, never a hypocrite. She did not hesitate to say what was in her heart. We have been together in Nigeria for two months as part of the Somali Troupe of African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC 77)."

Going through her attributes, I could not but search for comparisons. It dawned on me that if the Arabs had Umm Kalthoum and Feyruz, India had Lata Mangeshkar, Pakistan had Noor Jehan, America had Aretha Franklin, and South Africa had Miriam Makeba, then the Somali people had Magool as the epitome of vocal beauty.

## VIII. Personal Life

According to Fadumo Khalif Omar, Magool's elder sister, Magool was born in the 1940s in Galkayo. Magool's father was a religious cleric and a revered Sufi, thus comes his title "Khalif," which means a Sufi imam

in the south of Somalia (while in the north, the word “Mureed” or “Sheikhu Tariqa” is usually used). Growing up into a beautiful, vivacious young woman, Magool became fond of folklore dances and she used to dance in weddings and festive occasions. But as music was not yet developed in the south, she used to listen to the songs played on Radio Hargeisa and developed a voracious appetite for singing. She aspired to go to Hargeisa to start a singing career.

She made the trip to Hargeisa in 1961 with the company of a few colleagues but the others returned from Erigavo while Magool continued her journey to Hargeisa.

Magool was married in 1962 to Lt. Mohammed Nur Galal (Oorfano),<sup>15</sup> who was transferred to Hargeisa after the failed coup of Hassan Kayd. Sugulle, who worked as a clerk at the Military Officers’ Club, had played matchmaker between the two and according to Sugulle, Magool’s marriage laid to rest rumors circulating in Hargeisa at the time about her identity and social status.

There is another story that says Magool was also at one time married to a man called Yusuf Shaa’ir. This was denied by Sugulle, Jabiye, and Magool’s sister, who all stated that such marriage had never existed.

When she returned from her self-imposed exile in 1986 until she left the country on her last trip abroad in 2004, Magool lived in the villa given to her by the government in the Xamar Bila area. She shared it with her mother, Madino Dabay.

After the collapse of the central government and the start of the civil war in Somalia, Magool was reported to have been appointed by General Aideed as the director of the National Theatre. It was at this time when Sugulle and others organized a get-together for Somali artists in a concert called “Somali Gallery in Dubai.” Abdulqadir Hirsi, who was Somali Consular in Dubai, played a significant role in tracking down most of the artists and arranging visas for them to come to Dubai. The concert was inaugurated by the UNDP Representative in the UAE. The artists came from Mogadishu, Sana’a, Addis Ababa, Djibouti, and Germany. Magool was invited from Mogadishu, but many of the artists threatened to boycott the concert if Magool was invited. They accused her of taking sides in the civil war in Mogadishu, but Magool vehemently denied such accusations in several interviews with Somali media outlets. She re-emphasized her role as a popular Somali singer who would never betray the people’s trust and love for her. Regardless of the argument, the undeniable truth about Magool is that she would remain the immortal nightingale of Somali music. Margaret Laurence

said presciently that, “Perhaps to some extent the literature of the Somalis compensates them for the bleakness of their usual life.”<sup>16</sup> One may say that the songs of the Golden Age of Somali music—from Abdi Sinimo’s *Balwo* through the giants of *Walaalo Hargeisa* to *Waaberi*, the era in which *Magool* was its forever fresh green foliage—would compensate the Somalis for the bleakness of their current cultural bankruptcy.

I would like to conclude this essay with the following lines that are part of a poem I wrote when I was given the daunting task of welcoming *Magool* on stage during a wedding ceremony in 1986:

Codkii lagu dikriyayee  
Soomaali deeqiyo  
Magool baa mar dhaw danan  
Luuq macaan ka soo dayn...

And yes, her immortal melodies will forever entertain us and stir mixed emotions in those who grew up with her music and in the younger generation, who ponder how a nation that produced such beauty has succumbed to cultural barrenness and identity crisis.

#### **List of Interviewees:**

1. Ali Sugulle Duncarbeed, a renowned playwright and a man who could be said was the discoverer of *Magool* as a singer.
2. Saxardiid Maxamuud Climi (Jabiye), a celebrated playwright and lyricist; and Maxamed Aadan Da’ar (Dacar), a famous singer.
3. Shamsa Abokor (Guduudo Carwo), the first Somali woman who sang on a national radio station in *Hargeisa*.
4. Hibo Maxamad Hoddoon (Hibo-Nuura), a celebrated former *Waaberi* singer who lived in Minnesota.
5. Xasan Xaaji Abdillaahi (Xasan Ganey), a playwright and poet.
6. Siciid Maxamad Xarawe and Cabdulkarim Faarax Qaari, two renowned music composers of former *Waaberi* artists who both worked with *Magool* for a long time and set music to many of the lyrics for which she became famous.
7. Axmad Yaasin, a former *Waaberi* singer.
8. Axmad Maxamad Guutaale, a former *Waaberi* actor.
9. Jaama Ahmad Ibraahim Baqayo, a former Djiboutian actor.



10. Cabdi Yusuf Ducaale (Boobe), a cultural researcher and a literary critic.
11. Fadumo Khalif Cumar, Magool's elder sister who lived at the time in Mogadishu.

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## Notes

1. I conducted the follow-up interview in July 2014 on the tenth anniversary of Magool's death.
2. Johnson 1996, p. 53; Goth 1989, p. 12.
3. Goth 1989, p. 37.
4. Johnson 1996, pp. 50–51.
5. Boobe 1997, p. 24.
6. Adonis 1992, pp. 13–14.
7. Laurence 1993, p. 27.
8. Boobe 1997, p. 24.
9. Johnson 1996, p. 55, Goth 1989, p. 34.
10. Source: Dr. Omar Ibrahim Hussein, who was working as a broadcaster at Radio Mogadishu at the time.
11. Ahmed I. Samatar interview, *Afropop Worldwide*.
12. Johnson 1996, p. 76.
13. Maxamad Warsame Qaasaalli was a former popular singer. When I tried to interview him I was told by his son that he was seriously sick and was in hospital.
14. This is a later version of *Jowhara Luul*, not the original words written in Borama, however the music is the same one composed by Cumar Subagle who was a member of the later Balwo bands (Goth 1989, p. 40)
15. Mohammed Nur Galal (Maxamad Nuur Galaal) later reached the rank of general.
16. Laurence 1993, p. 24.

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