

## Book Review

# 'Mine to Win': a Book that Binds Aspects of Ethiopian Christianity Education and Philosophy

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Received 28 June, 2018; Accepted 14 August, 2018

## 'Mine to Win': A Book that Binds Aspects of Ethiopian Christianity Education and Philosophy

The author of this book, Hiwot Teffera, is among the vibrant politers of the then generation called '*YaTiwulid*'. This period extends from 1972- 1992<sup>1</sup>, and many of them were young and involved in different political factions of the time. She and some of her friends are destined to share their experience, knowledge and reading; however, many could bear fruit because of Red and White Terrors of the time. She is a social anthropologist by profession and has worked as a caregiver for a long time. She is known by many by her first book 'Tower in the Sky'. The book is about the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and imparts the Ethiopian Revolution in a well-articulated manner.

'Mine to Win' is the second book by the author. The book can be classified as creative nonfiction. The book consists 204 pages, and eleven chapters. It includes a glossary and reference sections. The aims of this book review are therefore to overview the unique quality of the work and discuss what the main themes she tries to convey. Besides, we were motivated to review the book to recommend the book to readers and enable them to research and investigate further. The setting of the story takes us back to a century and recounts church education in the midera of *Aste Yohannis IV* and the beginning of Emperor *Minilik II*'s. The main character, Tewanay, had spent a lot of time attending church education in *Gojjam* and *Gondar*, where many famous *zema* (rhyme), *qene* (Poetry) and tiriguame (interpretation/ commentary) schools are found. He is the incarnation of the theological debate held in the famed place, *Wello, Boru-medda*, where the two sects called the *tewahido* and *qibat* of Ethiopian religious liturgy contested on the divine nature of God during *Aste Yohannis IV*. Undoubtedly, the selection of the setting has made the story striking and breathtaking.

The author of the book tries to build the stories in the life of the major character, Tewanay. He aspired to become a *Qeneliq* (poetry intellectual) and became successful in the end. He later became a chronicler of emperor *Minilik II*. The author is successful in conveying several themes by depicting a few characters. She mainly talks about the life of '*Ye KoloTemari*'- a student at a traditional Christian school. In addition, the traditional education system, the distinctive bodies of knowledge in Ethiopia, history, philosophy and the culture of its folks are embedded in the very story. We can understand that the writer is an admirable researcher that she has brought themes that are among the overlooked areas of investigation, and shows them from the broad and depth. The story depicts the divergence between living a life of a herder and a scholar in the church. The young Tewune in the story is passionate about following his uncle's (*Awoke ZeMotta*) footsteps, yet thwarted by his parents' desire to keep their son near and married. Children in rural Ethiopia are destined to become part of their parent's lives and relive it; usually, the life has a lot to do with agriculture. On the contrary, studying *zema*, *qene* and *metsehaf bet* equals leaving one's family behind and not providing for them. To be precise, one fails to meet parents' expectations.

The arguments between the illiterate father and the learned uncle of Tewune reminds us of the many folks of the time who were God-fearing and believed in fate and the scholars in the church who struggled to overwhelm these unscientific

<sup>1</sup>It may be the period existing prior to this time or to continue after this period.

and naïve beliefs through the quest of knowledge. This marks the flourish of modernity in Ethiopia, and the efforts of the few to modernize their nation by inducing education. Similarly, the book clarifies the illusion people have about *qene* and other traditional schools where all its students are left with two options: living a secluded life as *qene* elite or live a married life and still study and teach *qene*.

One of the strong messages conveyed includes the connection between nature, one's environment and learning. Besides, one is not supposed to travel far and learn the ways of others to enlighten one's own self. One can imply that advancing the self and a nation requires a close examination of what is available and making use of that. Studying *qene* best works if one has the eye to observe his/her surroundings.

Studying starting from the lower levels (alphabets, reading and rhyme) to the highest levels (poetry interpretation and commentary) takes almost four decades. The celebration of the contribution of women as *qene* students/teachers is one of the important matters in the story. Women have long been deprived of the chance to study in both traditional and modern schools. However, the author dared to honour the revered female *qene* teachers in the history of traditional Christian religious schools in Ethiopia. From a feminist point of view, it reminds female readers of the possibility to study and teach *qene*.

The author also imparts the moral values of an individual to succeed in Christian religious education. She tells us that personal conscience is our guide to life and education even if our journey laden with different pains and sacrifices. As the author stated in the book, life is unwritten code and restraint, but courage is a means to change the things that we can. "Endurance and resilience are required to succeed in our studies. Modesty should be our companion. The most important thing in life is the strength of spirituality."

Besides the moral values, it communicates teacher-student relationships and their goal as they are key to success. Students are purposeful and solemn, and teachers are strict and serious. There is strictly organized structure to balance and maintain the bond between them. Both have equal share to achieve predefined goals. To most of us the goal of *YeKolo Timihirt* seems merely to serve the church and to custody the religion. However, from the reading, we can understand that the impact of *Ye KoloTemari* in shaping political and social values of the community and censor the misdeeds of the society are admirable. Furthermore, scholars of the church had a respected status in the government structures. They were; for example, consultants, advisors, chroniclers and decision makers as well. However, after the isolation of church from state, albeit they pass through all these indigenous schools, if they want to join the modern schools, they will have to start schooling from scratch.

The book is beautifully written in plain English- short paragraphs, but with varied kinds of sentences. It helps internationalize Ethiopian literature and promotes Ethiopian thoughts and philosophy. To sum up, 'Mine to Win' is no ordinary fictional work. It goes beyond narrating a character's experience to revealing the rich cultural and religious values of the nation. Considered as a cradle of mankind, Ethiopia embraces various long-established indigenous schools where, in the old days, students start to identify the Geez alphabet, to think independently and to enhance their creativity, and to be critical and interpret others work. The book recounts the orthodox Christian faith and its contribution in educating the youth and the nation at large.

### **A Book Review**

**Author:** Hiwot Teffera

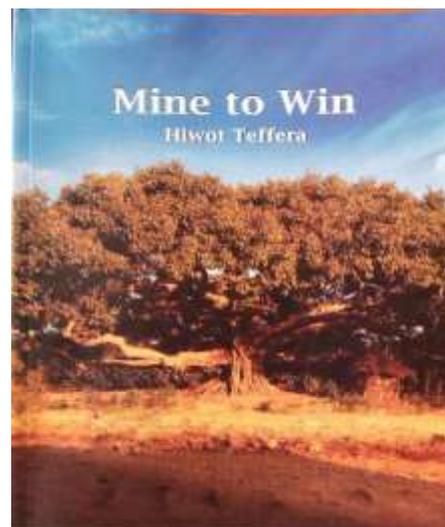
**Title of the book:** Mine to Win

**Date of Publication:** 2016, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**Publisher:** Eclipse Printing

**Price:** 150 birr (6 €)

**Number of pages:** 204



### **Reviewers**

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