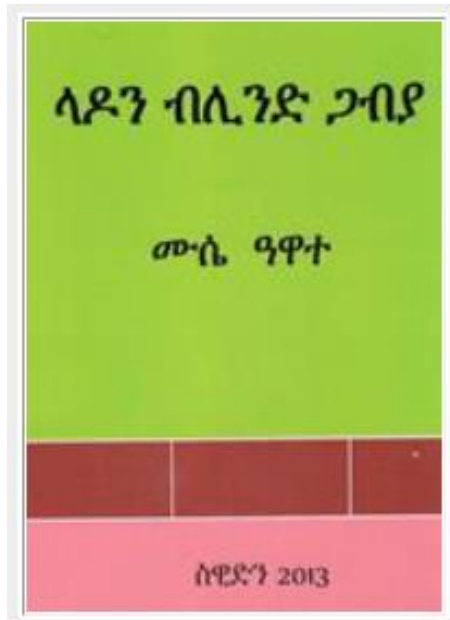


A Book Review: “ላደን ብሊንድ ጋብያ” (I will speak once in Blin)

Author: Mussie Awate, Year 2013

By Kiflemariam Hamde, Sweden



This publication is a second in a series of published poetry books in Blin¹, after Bogos Goitom’s pioneering poems of love, እንክሊ *enkeli* ^[III]. In 25 poems running several paragraphs or entries, Mussie describes how his competence on writing poems in other languages convinced his inner intuition and motivation to do so in Blin script. “Encouraged by the growing literature on Blin for the last two decades, I also take the real step to write in Blin”, asserts the author (2013: 9). Another implicit reason for taking this initiative is his critical stand on the socio-political life on Eritrea, his reaction to the continued domination of the public space by Tigrigna and Arabic, while ‘participants speaking other languages’ are often ‘expected to use their own languages only at home, continuously stripping them off their vitality in the

Eritrean public space’ (Forward). According to the author, this phenomenon is also apparent in literature and communication among Eritreans in general. The author capitalizes on his rich experience (from the liberation period) when he participated in the liberation movement as a fighter between 1976 and 1981, and even after that period, continued working in the opposition movement from the diaspora.

It is impossible to comment on all of the poems in this short review but I have selected a few so that the reader can get an idea of the contents. Attending to the titles, I can identify five groups of poems: Poems based on Blin *proverbs* (p. 14, 28, 30, 48, 58, 61), *idioms* (p. 23, 37, 63, 69), *famous or notorious actors or special events* (p. 33, 39, 42, 45, 56, 76), *riddles* (p. 48) and poems with *general contents* (the rest). Moreover, there are critical rhetoric illustrative of current events, at times challenging the status quo in the socio-political impasse in Eritrea (p. 23) and victimhood (p. 30), shaky communication (p. 56), on care and judgement, (p. 76) on economy and war (p. 23, “Don’t provoke in your communication with each other – literally, ‘don’t throw words), comments on the sad situation facing the Eritrea youth in different corners of the world, etc.

In the first Poem (p. 14), Mussie invokes a Blin proverb ኒመሓርኒ ዩኸ ቀጥብ ሰምበር ጎደ! (*Ni meHarini yuxw QTum sember Gwede!* (p. 4-19). It is based on a factual event about a man who ploughed his farm in a forbidden day, Sunday, because he did not own oxen. After farming on Sundays a couple of times, he asks *God for forgiveness*. As for my reading, the greatness of the poem lies in its allegory for a value that is often difficult for human beings to acknowledge their mistakes, and ask for forgiveness, especially for Eritreans. Reversely, the

poet abhors people who are inconsistent in their behaviour, hypocrites, and those who hurt, rebuke, or sell their brethren, gradually only fool themselves. He laments particularly the loss or lack of respect, dialogue and understanding, consequently everybody losing together! The author reminds Eritreans and the Blin people that interdependence, care and compromise should be the end (goals), rather than bickering on the means.

Mussie also describes the linguistic situation of Blin speakers both in the private and public arenas, alluding to future trajectories for the development on Blin writing as well as the expected Blin speakers' active participation in Eritrea's socio-political life and literature (p. 48-50). The author illustrates issues of language domination and power (p. 49), the impact on ordinary Eritreans lives of the cultural fragmentation and socioeconomic underdevelopment caused by the atrocities during the Ethiopian domination in Eritrea (1961-1991) , particularly the legacy of massacres and imprisonment of civilians in urban and rural areas in Eritrea in general, etc., for example, of almost 1000 civilians who were killed by the Second Military Division of Haile Selassie's regime in Besikdira and Ona in November 30, and December 1, 1970, respectively^{III}, and since 1991.

The poems reflect deep-rooted values, norms, and respectful communication that tends to be weakening or completely lacking among Eritreans, politicians, and in the general public, and calls for tolerance, respect, and justice, and thereof equality among Eritreans. Mussie is a good example of the growing number of authors on Blin language^{IV} and culture. Anybody who is interested to understand how an author understands the past events, ongoing current happenings, and future trajectories about language, culture, politics and economy is advised to read this book. My only complaint is that the poems are not numbered, and we have to quote the page number or title in quoting them. However, that does not affect the quality and legitimacy of the language used and richness of values invoked and the call for future development of Blin language. As a reader, I recommend the book for anybody who wants to know about the mentioned values and norms within the context of past and current Eritrean situation is encouraged to read the book. Finally, it is a good starter for (Eritrean) language students and literature, it is a good addition to the growing poetry on and in Eritrean languages^V ^[vi].

A father of three, Mussie Awate lives in Stockholm, Sweden. Anybody interested to know more about the book, or read Blin poems, can contact the author at mrwet58@hotmail.com

^I Since mid-1970s, more than 40 literature in Blin ብሊንጽጽ and on Blin ብሊን has increasingly emerged both inside Eritrea and in the Diaspora, specifically Sweden, Norway and also London. or many – old and new - works on Blin language, culture, history, music, etc., read at the Blin Language Forum website www.daberi.org and www.debanma.com. The entries are mainly in Blin, and on Blin in English, Tigrinya, and a few in Arabic (on History).

^{II} Bogos Goitom (1992). እንክሊ (Love Poems), Nyna Tryckeri, Uppsala, Sweden.

^{III} For a succinct narrative of the painful massacre, and its consequences, at Besikdira village, and the general situation at that period, see Abba Teweldeberhan Geberemedhin and Abba

Zerayakob Okbamikael, Capuchin friars: መሪርግፍዲኦብስክዲራንከባቢኦን (A Painful Massacre at Besikdria and its Environs), ትምጃእመንግስትክ (Adveniat Regnum TUUM), 44th Year, Nrs 73/74, page 1-14

^{iv} A couple of them will be reviewed in English during the coming few months so that readers might get information on the type of literature that is emerging in local languages (i.e., Eritrean languages).

^v See for example “*Who needs A Story?*” by Charles Cantalupo & Ghirmai Negash (2005), and “*We have a voice, Selected Poems of Reesom Haile*”, by Charles Cantalupo (2000), and many more.