Through a rare autobiographical act, Zara Yacob, who acquainted himself with the teachings of the Catholic Church introduced by Portuguese Jesuit missions in Sixteenth-century Ethiopia, becomes the first self-conscious founder of a philosophical tradition in Ethiopia. Indeed, it is a mild exaggeration to assert that it is Zara Yacob who gave the continent of Africa an original autobiography, something that was at that time confined to literate traditions outside of Africa. His treatise is a masterful example of self-presentation, clearly and powerfully expressed in a captivating literary style.

“By locating Zara Yacob somewhere between classical Ethiopian philosophy and Descartes, Teodros Kiros succeeds brilliantly in making very clear the originality and modernity of this seventeenth century Ethiopian philosopher. This is indeed a path-breaking achievement that shows us a different side of African philosophy, particularly its long and complex connections to the larger field of world philosophy. It is a must read!”

—Paget Henry, Professor of Africana Studies, Brown University

“Challenging the conventions of “reason,” “rationality,” and our understanding of the poetics of what it means to feel from the life force of compassion, from the embodied site of joy and despair, Teodros Kiros offers us, in this poignant study, the thought of Zara Yacob, one of the greatest East African thinkers of the early modern era. The importance of this work for a more global understanding of “enlightenment” thought and the limits of where religious thought ends and philosophical thought begins cannot be overestimated. Whether layperson or professional scholar, this work is a must-read for anyone interested in the history of African philosophy and the growing scholarship on the complex relationship of notions of mind to those of body.”

—Lewis R. Gordon, author of Existential Africana: Understanding Africana Existential Thought and the Laura Carnell Professor of Philosophy at Temple University

“Teodros Kiros has written an eloquent book about the most important thinker of classical Ethiopian philosophy. This detailed exposition of the thought of Zara Yacob (1599-1692) is at once informative, interpretative and reflective. The work should contribute mightily to the reshaping of the image of African philosophy in our time.”

—Kwasi Wiredu, Professor of Philosophy, University of Southern California

Teodros Kiros teaches at Brown University and is a fellow at the W. E. B. DuBois Institute at Harvard University. He is a writer and journalist. He received his B.A. at University of Wisconsin, as well as a Ph.D. in Political Philosophy, Kent State University. He is author of the books Toward the Construction of a Theory of Political Action; Moral Philosophy and Development: The Human Condition of Africa, The Promise of Multiculturalism, Self Construction and the Formation of Human Values (Winner, 1999 Michael Harrington Book Award for an outstanding book that contributes to human progress.) and Explorations in African Political Thought. Other forthcoming books are a novel titled Cambridge Days and a collection of short stories and essays. He is also a columnist of The Somerville Journal and editor and writer-at-large for The Ethiopian Reporter, an English-speaking newspaper in Addis Ababa.