

The Evil Eye Belief Among the Amhara of Ethiopia¹

Ronald A. Reminick
Cleveland State University

Variations of the belief in the evil eye are known throughout much of the world, yet surprisingly little attention has been given to explaining the dynamics of this aspect of culture (cf. Spooner 1970; Foster 1972; Douglas 1970). The Amhara of Ethiopia hold to this belief. Data for this study were gathered among the Mänze Amhara of the central highlands of Shoa Province, Ethiopia. Their habitat is a rolling plateau ranging in altitude from 9,500 to 13,000 feet. The seasons vary from temperate and dry to wet and cold. The Amhara are settled agriculturists raising primarily barley, wheat, and a variety of beans and importing teff grain, cotton, and spices from the lower and warmer regions in the gorges and valleys nearby. Amhara technology is simple, involving the bull-drawn plow, crop rotation, soil furrowing for drainage, and some irrigation where streams are accessible. The soil is rich enough to maintain three harvests annually. Other important technological items include the sickle, loom, and the walking and fighting stick for the men; the spindle, large clay water jug, grindstone, and cooking utensils for the women. The most highly prized item of technology is the rifle, which symbolizes the proud warrior traditions of the Amhara and a man's duty to defend his inherited land.

The homestead is the primary domain of authority within the larger political structure. The homestead varies in size from that of a nuclear family to a large hamlet consisting of several related families and their servants, tenants, and former slaves. The system of authority can be characterized in terms of Weber's patriarchalism, where a group is organized on the basis of kinship and economics with authority exercised by a particular person controlling the resources upon which the group depends (Weber 1948: 346 ff). Obedience and loyalty are owed to the person rather than to the role or the rule, and this person rules only by the consent of the group members who stand to gain a portion of their patriarch's wealth as a legacy upon his death. This institution of patriarchal authority is reinforced by a cultural emphasis on male qualities of aggressiveness oriented around the acquisition and defense of land. Land is the fundamental requirement of the patriarchal system, for without it a man cannot fulfill his basic role of supporting his dependents and providing a legacy for his children as a reward for their loyalty and service. But land is a scarce re-

source, and there are often more claims to land than can be supported. Thus, closest siblings may unite against a more distant relative to maintain land among themselves or siblings may compete for scarce land among themselves, becoming bitter enemies and dividing the kinship or domestic group.

The Amhara peasant's supernatural world includes both Christian and pagan elements. Although Monophysite Christianity is the legitimate religion of the Amhara people, who in fact define their tribal identity largely in terms of their Christian God, the pagan or "nonlegitimate" systems of belief also play an important role in the everyday routine of the peasant's social and cultural life. There are essentially four separate realms of supernatural beliefs. First, there is the dominant Monophysite Christian religion involving the Almighty God, the Devil, and the saints and angels in Heaven. Second, there are the *zar* and the *adbar* spirits, "protectors" who exact tribute in return for physical and emotional security and who deal out punishments for failure to recognize them through the practice of the appropriate rituals. Third is the belief in the *buda*, a class of people who possess the evil eye, and who exert a deadly power over the descendents of God's "chosen children." The fourth category of beliefs includes the *čiraq* and *satan*, ghouls and devils that prowl the countryside, creating danger to unsuspecting persons who cross their path.

THE STATUS OF THE EVIL EYE PEOPLE

In contrast to much of sub-Saharan Africa, evil power is not attributed to a person occupying a status at a point of social disjunction within the structure of social relations. Rather, those people who are believed to have a dangerous power are not a part of Amhara society. The *buda* or evil eye people are a completely separate category of population of different ethnic origin, with a rather minimum amount of interaction with the Amhara people. The *buda* own no land and therefore work in handicrafts, making pots from clay, fashioning tools from iron, and weaving cloth from hand-spun cotton and sheep's hair. They are known generally as *ṭayb*. The term is derived from the noun *ṭebib* which means "craftsman." It is also associated with an idea which means "to be wise" or "to be very clever." The terms *ṭayb* and *buda* are synonymous. To be *buda* is to have the evil eye. The term "evil eye" is also known as *ayn og* and sometimes *kifu ayn*. It designates the power to curse and destroy and reincarnate, harnessing the labor of the dead for one's own ends.

The beautiful craftsmanship of the *buda*'s work is one sign of his status. The finely made, well-proportioned water pots with their black finish are unmatched by any Amhara peasant who would deign to make one in the first place. Fashioning tools from iron takes considerably more skill and is not practiced by anyone but the *ṭayb* people. Although weaving is associated with the *ṭayb* people, many Mänze peasants have also taken up the skill, not as a trade but to accumulate needed cash. Yet the peasants say the *ṭayb* know a special form of weaving that the Amhara cannot learn. There is, though, a critical distinction made by the Amhara peasant that frees

him from the stigma of the craft, *viz.*, that he did not inherit the trade from his father.

There are, then, two major social categories. The *rega* are those people whose ancestry are *niṣu atint*, of "clean bone," unblemished by social stigma or bodily catastrophe, such as leprosy. They are the "noble people." Most Amhara trace their lineages to a near relative or ancestor who had wealth and status and who was patron of many who worked the land of their estates. A *rega* person is known by his community; his relatives and ancestors are known, and hence he cannot be suspected of being "impure." The *buda* person, on the other hand, is one who has inherited through his line the lower status. One may inherit status through either the mother's or the father's line, or both. One cannot avoid the status of *buda*. It is his destiny to be born into the tradition.

Anyone whose ancestry or kin are unknown may be suspect. If one is suspected of being *buda*, he may be liable to accusation by a family that fears that he "attacked" or "ate" or "stabbed" one of their members. Accusation must be carried out on one's own without the sanction of the courts. If one marries a person whose family is unknown, and it is later learned that the relatives were of *buda* status, the *rega* spouse will be forced to effect a divorce and another spouse of "clean bone" will then be found as a substitute. Sometimes the spouse who is *buda* will be driven from the community, or more rarely killed, for attempting to taint a family's line.

There is no sure way to recognize a *buda*, for their physical qualities may not differ discernibly from other people. They may be thinner than usual, because their blood is believed to be thinner than a normal Amhara person's blood. They may have an eye deformity or suffer discharge of tears or pus from their eyes. They may tend to look sidewise at people, or they may have very light skin, or they may be believed to have an ashen substance in their mouths and be unable to spit saliva. But these qualities are not, in themselves, sufficient to arouse suspicion. There are other more convincing characteristics, such as occupation. If a stranger comes to town and is overly friendly, suspicion may be aroused that he is too eager to befriend others, and hence, possibly over-anxious about concealing his true identity. The relations of *buda* people with *rega* people are in *status quo*, being neither overly peaceful nor overly combative. They mix with each other easily, as in court, in the shops, and in market places without repercussions, as long as their social relations are on a superficial basis.

THE ATTACK OF THE EVIL EYE

The real threat of the *buda* people to the *rega* people is the ever-present possibility of attack. Most people are fearful of even mentioning the *buda*, especially at night, because if they are overheard by a *buda* he will become angry and one of the family may be "eaten," thereby causing sickness or death. A person is most vulnerable to being "eaten" when the *buda* sees fear, worry, or anxiety in his potential victim. Therefore, it helps to maintain one's composure when in the presence of a *buda*, acting naturally as if the *buda* did not matter at all. The peasant who is especially good looking

or whose child is considered beautiful, or someone who does something extraordinary, may fear the attack of the evil eye because of the envy believed to be kindled in the *buda*. The attack is not limited to human beings. The evil eye can attack any living object. When a person is "eaten" he may know immediately that he has been attacked, for the consequences may occur at the same time as the strike. But the symptoms can just as easily be delayed for a few hours, a day, or a week, rarely longer. If a *buda* has planned an attack on some victim, but this victim suddenly falls ill before the strike is to be made, then the *buda* may merely wait patiently to see the outcome of the patient's illness. If the person recovers, the *buda* may then attack. If he dies, the *buda* will then attend to the activity that involves *buda* people with the dead. It is believed that when one is feeling ill the body is more vulnerable than ever to an attack by the evil eye.

The process of attack may occur in one of several different manners. Because of the power of the evil eye, *buda* people can change into hyenas and roam the countryside at night. It is convenient for a *buda* to attack a victim in this form in order to conceal his human identity. The Amhara attach great salience to the hyena, partly because they believe in both the natural and the supernatural forms of this animal. If the *buda*, in seeking out a victim, assumes the form of the hyena, the transformation takes place by his first taking off the hair and then rolling in the ashes of the hearth. Once transformed into a hyena, he then searches for a victim, and on finding one, fixes the unfortunate person with an evil gaze, returns home, rolls in the ashes to turn back into human form, and waits for the victim to die. The second method of attack involves the evil eye person finding a victim, twisting the root of a certain plant and forming a loop with this root as if one were tying a knot. The loop is then drawn smaller very slowly, and while this is being done, the victim dies. After the victim is buried, the *buda* squats by the graveside and slowly loosens the knot while shouting to the corpse to arise. The body is exhumed and the grave is then closed up again by retightening the knot. The third method of attack involves giving the evil eye gaze to the victim and then waiting for his death. After burial the body is exhumed by carrying two round, thin, lentil-pancake breads to the grave, one lying flat and the other folded twice. Unfolding the one bread opens the grave and brings out the body. Folding up the other recloses the grave.

The people most liable to attack are those who have a bit more wealth than the average person, who are handsome, and who are proud of their beautiful children. Those who become especially liable to attack are those who become too familiar with the *buda* person, which heightens one's chances of succumbing to the gaze of the evil eye. One comes into physical proximity with *buda* people in daily affairs, but social distance is usually maintained. A likely danger to the *rega* people is the presence of a beautiful *buda* woman or handsome *buda* man. A *rega* who sleeps with a *buda* will grow thinner and thinner because the eye of the *buda* will suck the blood out of the victim, causing the victim to lose his or her appetite and to become weak and helpless. When a *rega* is attracted to a *buda* and the *buda*

wishes to draw the *rega* nearer, the *buda* will wait for a moment of privacy and then will utter to the *rega* something about seeing the genitals revealed through the *rega's* clothes. This will fill the *rega* with excitement and then the *rega* will "fall with" the *buda* lover. The warm affectionate relationship can be maintained without serious danger; but when there is a quarrel, the *rega*, already weakened by the blood given up to the *buda*, will be "eaten" and become seriously ill.

However the attack is effectuated and however the corpse is taken from the grave, the ultimate goal of the *buda* is to use the victim as a slave. After being exhumed, the corpse is taken to the house of the *buda* where it is brought back to life in order to serve the *buda*. But the slave is mute, unable to utter a single sound. The *buda* owns two switches. One switch is used to turn the slave into a pot when visitors come; and then when the outsiders have left, a rap on the pot with the other switch transforms the pot into a slave again. In this way outside interference is prevented. When the slave is treated cruelly, it will shed silent tears, desperately trying to weep. (It is interesting to note that to be silent in the presence of one's superiors and to suffer indignities in silence is the obligation of children and the traits attributed to the despised dog.) The slave of the *buda* does not go on indefinitely in its risen state. After seven years the body begins to disintegrate, finally turning into ashes and leaving the *buda* without a "helper."

The *buda's* distinctive activities are not fully intentional. The *buda* has within his body a quality or power known as *qalb*. *Qalb* is a subtle, internal, unconscious desire to perform those activities which make the *buda* so notorious. In the *buda's* daily interactions with the *rega* people of the community, there is really little difference between the two groups, both sharing feelings of love and hate, envy and covetousness, anger and aggression. But the *buda* has this additional power gained from the association with the devil that creates an illegitimate advantage over those of higher status and greater legitimate advantage. The *buda*, by his very nature, must "eat" others. He does this in order to better his chances for gaining opportunities and achieving success in his daily life among the *rega* people. He uses his power, then, to make himself equal with others who have more land, more "helpers" such as tenants, servants, and former slaves, and thus he attempts to acquire those objects, persons and, services that he covets among the *rega* Amhara people. There is a difference of opinion as to whether or not the *buda* himself can be the object and victim of evil eye attack. Some Amhara say that just as the *rega* fight among themselves for the wealth of the lineage, so the *buda* people fight and attack each other with the evil eye for more equal shares of wealth. But other Amhara say that this is not true; that the *buda* people have much more to gain from the *rega*, and furthermore, know how to protect themselves from each other's attack.

PRECAUTIONS AGAINST EVIL EYE ATTACK

Since amorous relations with *buda* are not condoned by the Amhara,

especially by the clergy, the priests teach that one's only protection against a *buda* lover is to crawl to church on one's hands and knees for seven days, the priest's intent being to frustrate the beginnings of such a relationship. Parents who fear their child is weak and vulnerable to the influence of the evil eye may, on the advice of a *däbtärä* (lower order clergyman), adopt the custom of addressing their child in the gender opposite to the child's actual sex. The custom of shaving the heads of children, leaving only a tuft of hair over the former fontanelle of the boys and a ring of hair around the heads of the girls, provides protection against minor attacks of lice, most often considered initiated by an envious *buda*. If an Amhara is worried about a child's imminent danger from an evil glance, a light, rapid spitting into the child's face provides a short-term protection. Compliments are always suspect if not accompanied with the invocation, "Let God protect you from the evil eye!" And at feasts all must be served equally lest someone deprived becomes envious and curses the food, making the participants sick.

Another precaution taken by the Amhara peasant against the possibility of attack is to be silent and guarded. When one expresses his emotions too freely and becomes too outgoing with others, he places himself in a position of vulnerability to the evil eye. This disposition is fairly generalized. When one is seen laughing and joking freely with others it is usually with close and trusted friends and relatives. At most other times the peasant presents a facade of stolidity and silence. In this way one does not attract the attention of an envious *buda*, who may resent persons enjoying themselves while he is not invited to share in the mirth. The custom of hiding one's face behind the large soft cloak, concealing especially the mouth and the nose, is one common way to avoid the penetration of the evil eye.

If a person succumbs to the attack of the evil eye, the family of the deceased may intercede and prevent the *buda* from wresting the corpse from its grave. A member of the family must watch the grave for forty days and forty nights (some say twelve days and twelve nights) after the body has been interred, allowing sufficient time to elapse so that the body will be adequately decomposed and thereby deprive the *buda* of a body to possess. If the grave is watched the *buda* will not come. In this way the family saves their relative from seven years of slavery.

DIAGNOSIS AND CURES FOR THE EVIL EYE ATTACK

Diagnosis of the symptoms and subsequent treatment may be carried out in one of four ways. In the first method, if the family is poor and they know a *däbtärä* of the local church, they may take the patient to him. For a modest fee, he performs a rite over holy water, praying and pronouncing words in the ancient language of *Giz* used in the Christian religious ceremonies. The patient then drinks the holy water and breathes in the smoke of a burning root. The *däbtärä* may find the diagnostic answer in his magic star book, while the holy water and inhaled smoke may effect a cure.

A second alternative is to bring the patient to a wizard, one who has powers gained through agents of the devil, to communicate with the *zar*

spirits and to effect cures for many kinds of illness. First, a silver bracelet is placed on the patient's left wrist. The wizard then goes into a trance, seeking possession by a devil who may reveal the appropriate cure for the illness. In seeking out the attacker, a very hot fire is made in the hearth and a piece of metal, a sickle or knife blade, is put into the flames and heated until glowing. The hot metal is applied to the patient's face, making a small pattern of burns. As the wounds heal, the scars will become transferred onto the face of the attacker in the same place and with the same pattern. The family must then seek out the guilty party.

A third method does not involve the use of specialists outside of an elder member of the family who knows the procedures and whose age gives him a bit better judgment. When a person begins biting his lip it is the first sign that he has been attacked by the evil eye, although this symptom does not always appear. If relatives are around they will first tie the victim's left thumb with string. Then the victim will be made to breathe the smoke from the dung fire. After taking in sufficient dung smoke, the victim gains the power to speak in the spirit and voice of his attacker. The victim begins recounting the chain of events of his attacker that led to the confrontation and the attack. Then the relatives ask the possessed victim what form of compensation should be given to counteract the attack. The victim, speaking in the voice of the attacker, demands some filthy matter such as beer dregs, ashes, a dead rat, or human or animal excrement. The victim eats this and soon cries, "I've left him! I've left my victim!" or something of this order. Then the family knows that the devil has left the body, and the stricken person may now recover. The cure involves active vocal participation. If the victim cannot speak, he will surely die.

The fourth method of diagnosis and counter-action involves the evil eye person in a more direct, mundane way. When the victim is attacked and he begins to bite his lip and to act strangely, he may appear to go into a daze and begin to jump and shout "in tongues." At this point, a relative must try to get the victim to utter the name of his attacker. If he does not, the family may tie a rope to the victim and then have the victim lead the relatives to the house of his attacker. If neither of these tactics are successful, they may have one other indication. If the victim begins crying suddenly, it is a sign that the attacker is in close proximity and that the relatives must only scout the area and seize the *buda* person they come across. If the suspect is found, he is brought to the bedside of the victim, by gunpoint if need be. The relatives take a lock of hair and a bit of clothing from the *buda*, preferably without his knowledge, and then the *buda* is made to spit on the victim and walk over him. A fire is built with the hair and cloth and the victim then breathes in the smoke. He continues inhaling the smoke until he cries, in the voice of the spirit, that the illness has left his body.

No matter what the method, if the *buda* gives up his victim there will be no reprisals by the victim's family. If the victim dies, the *buda* may be ejected from the community or killed.

THE MYTHOLOGY OF THE ORIGIN OF THE BUDA PEOPLE

According to the Amhara, the beginnings of *buda* status go back to Creation. It is said that Eve had thirty children, and one day God asked Eve to show Him her children. Eve became suspicious and apprehensive and hid fifteen of them from the sight of God. God knew her act of disobedience and declared the fifteen children she showed God as His chosen children and cursed the fifteen she hid, declaring that they go henceforth into the world as devils and wretched creatures of the earth. Now some of the children complained and begged God's mercy. God heard them and, being merciful, made some of them foxes, jackals, rabbits, etc., so that they might exist as Earth's creatures in a dignified manner. Some of the hidden children he left human, but sent them away with the curse of being agents of the devil. These human counterparts of the devil are the ancestors of the *buda* people. There occurs a pleat in time and the story takes up its theme again when Christ was baptized at age thirty. As told by an old Amhara peasant farmer:

The angry devils, envious of God's favoring Christ while they suffered God's curse, tried to kill Christ. But Christ ran and fled his enemies. He hid in the crevice of a great cliff, sharing it with the giant *gabalo* lizard. While hidden, many children were killed by the devils in their search for "God's child," but they were unsuccessful in finding Christ. All the animals were asked to betray the whereabouts of Christ, but they refused and they were beaten and tortured to no avail. But the lizard waved his head from side to side showing Christ's pursuers where he hid. Christ saw this and cursed the lizard so that to this day this lizard still sways his head so. No one could get Christ down out of the crevice in the cliff. They tried with ropes and ladders to no avail. Then, the clever *buda* people made giant tongs of wood and plucked Jesus Christ out of the crevice. The blacksmiths made the nails and the carpenters made the cross and while Christ hung on the cross he cursed those people whose skills made it possible to crucify him.

Some Amhara claim that the devil is the sole source of *buda* qualities and power. Others say the origin of *buda* existence is different from the source of their power. Although their existence is associated with the devil, their power comes from a different source only questionably related to the devil. Although there are several versions of the myth, the following example narrated by an adolescent Amhara student is typical:

The source of *buda* power is an ancient man who has immortality. He has no arms and no legs. He is like a lump of flesh and just sits at a place called Yerimma which is a cave of extremely great depth. He is, indeed, endowed with supernatural powers. Each year the *buda* people make their annual visit to this lump of man with their small children who are just learning to walk and to talk. This ancient man can distinguish between the *rega* who may come and the *buda* themselves. He rejects the former and accepts the latter. The ancient man then teaches the *buda* children all the "arts" to the *buda* trade and then presents the child with the leaf from an *is* plant (also used by devils to make themselves invisible so as to avoid being eaten by the hyena). And every year each *buda* must make a sacrifice to this ancient man of one human being. The sacrifice is like a tax, and if the *buda* cannot find a suitable victim by the time the sacrifice is due, he must sacrifice his own child.

INTERPRETATION

There are essentially three analytically separable levels of behavior upon which to focus. First, there is the overt and manifest level of verbal behavior that expresses the configuration of ideas and feelings recognized as the evil eye belief system. This level of behavior is explicated through ethnographic description. Second, there is the analysis of values and psychological predispositions, areas of positive attraction, indifference, anger, and fear or dread. The symbols in the cultural configurations, as expressed through the narratives of the Amhara, point out these areas of emotional salience and foci of concern. Through a symbolic analysis particular kinds of themes become evident. Some of these themes are based in the manifest functions of the belief, while others point to covert symbolic and latent functions of the belief system. Third, there is the social context that the symbols express and the social context of the actual behavior that expresses the evil eye belief.

With this approach it is possible to examine "the relationship between explicit cultural forms (symbols) and underlying cultural orientations" (Ortner 1973: 49), where these symbolic forms provide the vehicle for the analysis of the relationships between underlying cultural orientations and observable patterns of sociocultural behavior. Foster (1972: 166) offers a caveat that must be taken into consideration when analyzing the motivational significance of a particular belief or custom, which is, that original motives often disappear with the institutionalization of the belief or custom, and in its place, habit becomes the primary source for the reinforcement of the pattern. Also Kennedy (1969) argues against the more familiar teleological functional interpretations offered by social anthropologists when he proposes that these institutionalized beliefs and customs may themselves be the source of fears, or pathological responses to situations that present no real threat and could conceivably be defined in more innocuous terms. In his discussion of witchcraft belief, Kennedy (1969: 177) states:

. . . witchcraft systems are forms of institutionalized patterns of psychopathology which tend to be pathogenic and which create built-in self-perpetuating stress systems . . . (and) tend to regularly generate the hate and aggression which they allegedly function to relieve.

Including the evil eye belief within the purview of the problem of witchcraft is not without justification, for, although there are quite noticeable differences, the similarities demand some scrutiny. Spooner (1970: 311) notes how well known the evil eye belief is to us all, yet how little attention has been given to it by ethnographers:

. . . the concept of the Evil Eye is reported throughout Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa, and in so many cultures elsewhere that it may be regarded as a universal phenomenon. Further, it is reported in circumstances which show it to be undoubtedly of the same order of phenomena as witchcraft.

Douglas, in agreement with Spooner, identifies the evil eye belief as a special case of witchcraft belief which becomes expressed at critical social

disjunctions between persons who hold structurally generated enmity toward each other. Her definition (Douglas 1970: xxx) of a witch can be generalized to the Amhara's conception of the *buda*:

The witch is an attacker and deceiver. He uses what is impure and potent to harm what is pure and helpless. The symbols of what we recognize across the globe as witchcraft all build on the theme of vulnerable internal goodness attacked by external power.

Douglas fits the evil eye belief into a typology she develops from the cases written up in the volume she edited. She (Douglas 1970: xxvii) proposes two general categories of witches: (a) the witch as outsider, and (b) the witch as internal enemy. Each of these categories has subtypes. The outsider type can be either (1) a witch not identified or punished, or (2) a witch expelled from the community. In this outsider type, the primary function of accusation is to redefine the boundaries of social solidarity. The witch as internal enemy appears in the more complexly organized societies, where two or more factions are involved within the community. The body of the victim is usually symbolized in the image of the betrayed community, where the internal strength is sapped or polluted by one in very close contact with the other members of the community. Where the witch is conceived as an internal enemy, the witch can be identified (1) as a member of a rival faction, where the function of the accusation is to redefine faction boundaries or the faction hierarchy; (2) as a dangerous deviant, where the function of the accusation is to control the deviant in the name of community values, or (3) as an internal enemy with outside liaisons, where the function of accusation is to promote factional rivalry, split the community, and/or redefine the hierarchy. Given this typology, Douglas (1970: xxx) then suggests an hypothesis for further testing:

. . . when the source of witchcraft power is thought to come from inside the witch, particularly from an area beyond conscious control, the social situation will correspond to type 3 above, where the witch is seen as an internal enemy, not as a member of a rival faction.

In the Amhara case, we can recognize similar qualities between the witch defined by Douglas and the *buda* as conceived by the Amhara peasant. However, the correspondence that Douglas suggests is not borne out in the Amhara case. The *buda* with internal and somewhat uncontrollable powers is not conceived of as a person internal to the Amhara group. The Amhara conceive of the *buda* as an outsider who nevertheless lives, geographically but not integrally, within the social networks of the Amhara people. Thus, the *buda* does not quite fit into any of the categories that Douglas has proposed. This exception to her typology suggests that much wider comparison is still necessary.

The dominant theme expressed in the Amhara evil eye belief system is one which is shared by possibly all those societies that maintain a belief in the evil eye: the fear of being envied and the interpretation of certain misfortunes as the consequences of another's envy. In Spooner's (1970: 314)

discussion of the evil eye belief in the Middle East, this theme is especially salient:

. . . the concept of the Evil Eye appears to be an institutionalized psychological idiom for the . . . personification of misfortune, . . . insofar as misfortune, or the fear of it, may relate to the fear of outsiders and their envy.

In his careful analysis of the concept of envy Foster (1972: 167) defines envy as the act of looking maliciously upon someone; looking askance at; casting an evil eye upon; feeling displeasure and/or ill-will in relation to the superiority of another person. Foster (1972: 168) states that envy, along with the closely associated feeling of jealousy, "involves a dyad . . . whose relationship is mediated, or structured, by an intervening property or object." Thus, a jealous person is jealous of what he possesses and fears he might lose, while an envious person does not envy the thing, but rather envies the person who has it. Foster considers the predisposition to envy to be most apparent in peasant societies, or in what he calls "deprivation societies" of scarce resources where people hold to the "image of limited good" and where social interaction and transaction is defined and perceived as a "zero-sum" game, and where one's advantage derives from the other's loss. Foster (1972: 169) maintains that in those societies where the "zero-sum" game is the definition of the situation, it is the relative differences between two parties that triggers the omnipresently latent envy into overt expression. He further notes that in primitive and peasant societies, food, children and health, those things most vital for the survival of the family, rank at the top as objects of envy. Cattle and crops have some, but lesser, salience.

Congruent with sub-Saharan witchcraft belief in the context of well-defined and enforced rules and norms, envy and its consequences are mitigated to a considerable degree, primarily because both the structures of the family and of the class/caste system involve cultural definitions stipulating that the relationships between status classes or between the generations are noncompetitive. Foster (1972: 171) maintains that the function of this kind of definition is to eliminate or mitigate rivalry between persons in different categories of status or between persons in different social classes, thereby lubricating interclass and interpersonal transactions. Among the Amhara, the principle of patriarchal domination maintains order in domestic and political groups. The absence of the patriarch or of a mediating superior authority generates, or is believed to generate, anarchy within a group having no mediating authority among equals. Although this principle holds among the Amhara, the *buda* people are of non-Amhara tribal identity, and hence can only pose a threat to the Amhara by virtue of their being different. This difference, I maintain, is symbolic of what the Amhara detest, fear, or dread.

The *buda* people are "strangers" to the land of the Amhara. Originating from a different region, they are landless and make a living with their manual skills of smithing, tanning, weaving, and pottery-making. *Buda*

status contrasts with *rega* or "nobility" status. Both statuses are inherited consanguineally on a bilateral basis. The origin myth of the *buda* people expresses the basic themes found in the belief system in general and in certain actual social situations: envy and conflict between siblings who are treated differentially by a superior authority. In the myth, envy and conflict are generated by the curse of God for the sins of the mother Eve. Added to this is God's favoring of His child, Christ, the "chosen" son of God. The story of the envious siblings' hunting down of Christ in order to attain equality among siblings has a strong parallel in real-life situations where a father favors one child with the lion's share of land, creating sibling conflict over the equalization of their rights to their father's land.² The myth and the belief have it that the *buda* people inherit their *qalb*, a power gained from the devil which gives them the uncontrollable drive to "eat" the *rega* people, who happen to be the Amhara, to cause their death and to bring them back to life as slaves. It is a conception that expresses a dominant theme of envious status inferiors using illegitimate means to gain an advantage over status superiors who possess a legitimate means of domination.

The *buda* belief suggests that the *buda* are the symbolic expression of the latent consequences of unmediated equal status relationships between men and between a man and a woman. Without pyramidal control mechanisms, this form of relationship generates the anxiety of unstable and unpredictable consequences between two dependent and self-oriented egos, the ultimate consequences of which are symbolized in the logically extended extreme of domination—the relationship of master and slave. The function of the evil eye belief in maintaining the social system can be teleologically interpreted as the displacement of a threat and its projection onto an outgroup. The threat of equal status rivalry between kin and siblings outside of well-defined situations is projected onto the *buda* people, thereby preserving the internal solidarity (what there is of it) of the Amhara people. *Buda* belief appears to be a function of a power superiority among status equals based on the model of the eldest son as the object of envy by his less fortunate younger siblings, for it is the eldest son, in Mänz, who normally is the favored one and who inherits the lion's share of the father's land.

Belief in the evil eye among the Mänze Amhara, then, has a projective function which, through the transformation from personality trait to cultural configuration, becomes manifest as a form of domination anxiety expressed through culturally legitimated ideas of reference. This projective process is by no means complete, for it is known that the most serious concerns of the Amhara involve sibling and other kin conflicts over unequal usufructory rights to land. The landless *buda*, who is dependent upon others for his livelihood, is the symbolic reflection of the threat of becoming landless and without authority, *ergo*, without identity, because of the ambitions of a more powerful relative or the father's curse of disinheritance.

NOTES

1. The research upon which this paper is based was carried out in the central highlands of Shoa Province, Ethiopia from July 1, 1967 to March 1, 1969. I wish to acknowledge

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2. Within the structure of this myth a Freudian oedipal theme is present which employs universal types of symbols. The favored son seeks refuge and security in a crevice of a large cliff which is the opening to a deep cave. The crevice and cave are classic symbols of female sexuality and maternal succorance. The lizard's phallic function is obvious here. Its presence in the cave and its defense of its abode have very sexual connotations. And, the lizard's betrayal of Christ, because of its wish to rid itself of this interloper, is also quite significant in its oedipal function. But the role of the envious and hostile siblings, and Christ's death rather than the lizard's, complicates the problem. It may be that we must look at this theme with more generalized symbolic significance, where the cave represents patriarchal sanctuary and domestic security, and where the lizard could represent the male's jural and sexual rights of domain. Christ is then put in a less favorable light, for the message then becomes one of equal rights among siblings, where Christ has been given unfair advantage by the all-powerful patriarch. The custom of favoritism existing within the structure of patriarchal authority in this Amhara region is, in a very subtle way, under criticism for its tendency to generate tension and conflict among the sib group, since it is the sib group which is vital for the protection of the extended family and domestic group.

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