



Ethiopia – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 25 July 2014

What is a BUDA in Ethiopia? What treatment do people regarded as BUDA receive from the State and neighbours. Is it a stigma? Why?

An entry for Buda in the Amharic-English Medical Dictionary defines this term as follows:

“In Ethiopia the term *buda* ('evil eye') is associated with craftsmen, especially endogenous iron workers. Those with *buda* are were-hyenas, and use their spirit aspect to attack victims at night by tearing at their innards, resulting in a progressive and lethal disease. *Buda* also includes the power to produce the same effects through a malevolent stare. The initial symptoms are nausea, vomiting, and torpor, and may develop into strange behavior associated with the hyena-like character of the *buda*. Because of the association with iron workers, women in some Ethiopian cultural groups carry metal objects at all times to protect from *buda*, and may wear place them in their hair. Ethiopian mothers also cover baby bottles to prevent the evil eye from striking their baby's milk.” (The Amharic-English Medical Dictionary (undated) *Clinical topics – Buda*)

An article published on the Hakim Warqnah & Melaku Beyan Society website states:

“Almost all physicians who practiced in Ethiopia must have come across, a case of *yebuda beshita* and *yebuda medhanit*. For those born in Ethiopia, they have grown up with *buda* as part of their vocabulary and part of their cultural heritage. Many know it from the dire warning of parents to avoid certain people or situations that might put them at risk of becoming victims of *buda*. Many also grew up with *kitab* or amulets with small leather packets of either some sort of herb or a scroll of parchment with incantations tied around their necks with the hope of being protected from *buda* and other malevolent spirits that abound in the environment. Those whose parents are more careful than others loaded their children with a string of *kitab*s as part of the jewelry of childhood and a folklore vaccine strategy to prevent illness and possession. Most knew what type of people to avoid and who to suspect if one is struck by an illness that smelled of *buda* possession. The influence of *buda* as part of the folklore of Ethiopia may be declining with the increased education of mostly the urban population. But it remains a significant part of the psyche in the countryside and the less educated members of Ethiopian society. Surprisingly, many who apparently are educated still harbor some reservation about rejecting such occult thinking as a modicum against totally selling out to the western propaganda of science as the only answer to mans ills.” (Hakim Warqnah & Melaku Beyan Society (undated) *Buda Belat*)

In an article published in Lissan Online, a magazine for Ethiopian art, culture and lifestyle, the author states:

“Whilst undertaking an archaeological survey in the area around the northern Ethiopian town of Aksum in late 1995 I spotted what appeared to be an obvious short cut on our map. Suggesting to my Ethiopian colleague that we could take this route, he dismissed me with the statement: 'we cannot go through that village. They are all Buda there.' What, I asked, was the Buda? The answer came back that these people were variously mad, dangerous, strange, outcast and had the power of the evil eye; they would be liable to curse us. This was not the first time that I had come across such a belief; it was well known in the town itself that many of the artisans engaged in metalworking possessed the power of the evil eye, and walking past green pea fields, what I had mistaken to be simple scarecrows (pieces of rag and plastic tied to poles) actually turned out to be amulets protecting the crop from those with the power to blast it.” (Lissan Online (11 August 2009) *Ethiopian Evil Eye Belief*)

This article also states:

“Within highland Ethiopia—a predominantly Christian environment although with sizeable Muslim populations—guilds or castes of artisans (be they weavers, hide workers or metal workers) are often held to possess magical powers and are known in Amharic as Buda. The notion of the Buda is actually hard to define; it has been suggested that they are not simply bearers of the evil eye, but in terms of magical complexity and social standing are rather nearer to witches” (ibid)

In a thesis submitted to The Norwegian Lutheran School of Theology (in section 2.2 Who are the 'evil eye people?') the author states:

“They are people with a special gift of glancing at others and attack. There is no way of recognizing *Buda* from their physical qualities. Reminick has suggested some characteristics to distinguish *Buda* in the Amhara context. He claims that the *Buda* people 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 an ashen substance in their mouths and be unable to spit saliva. Even for Reminick (cf. 1985:179f) these features are not enough to recognize them. They are empowered by evil spirit and attack people. Most people are fearful of *Buda*; even some Christians are afraid to eat together or share mutual life with *Buda* people. A person is most vulnerable 'to being eaten' (which means 'to be attacked') when the *Buda* sees fear, worry, anxiety in his potential victim. What is noteworthy here is that the *Buda* people are possessed people who can also create problems on others to the extent of killing them. 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 to conceal his human identity.” (Geleta, Amsalu Tadesse (2000) *Case Study: Demonization and the Practice of Exorcism in Ethiopian Churches*)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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