

**THE CONCEPT OF POWER IN THE PRAISE POETRY OF THE BATORO**

**BY**

**TIBASIIMA ISAAC**

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## ABSTRACT

This research examined the concept of power in *Ebihaiso*, the praise poetry of the Batoro. It drew on Michel Foucault's theory of power and knowledge which sees power as a network of relationships working through whole social units and as a productive but diffuse force. The research was carried out using a qualitative research design with the use of interviews, observation and recording of the different praise poems that were performed. The research, based on the *Ebihaiso* investigated power as a complex social phenomenon that is not just in the hands of one person but moving and working through all the different individuals involved in both the process of performance and the performance text. The research looked at power as a dynamic force within the community and one that keeps shifting its positions particularly as demonstrated by the poetic renditions of the different poets we examine.

The poetry examined reveals and interrogates the positions and interactions of different individuals and groups in the society. The poetry demonstrated that behind the different characters and ideas such as kingship and heroism rests a whole world of traditional experience and learning. I examined the relationship of the king and his people as presented in the *Ebihaiso* and argue that the relationship is controlled by the notion of negotiation of power; even though the king is a figure of authority, he needs the support of his people. I also studied the concept of heroism and contend that this human attribute marks individuals from their peers, enabling them to have their performance and social space to themselves. Despite having this privileged position, they still need the people who listen and support, therefore, interdependence is a vital aspect in these relationships.

Further investigations of different forms of social power relations demonstrated the centrality of family institution in power relations of the Toro society. At the heart of the family, gender is used to organise power relations. I argued that the praise poems implicitly show the inequalities and imbalances of power between men and women in the Toro community, but still for full actualisation males and females sustain themselves in relation to one another. With regard to family and social classes, the praise poems showed that the traditional class structures regulated the perceptions of the people despite the development of new classes based on the influence of education and different economic activities. The analysis of the praise poetry shows different stereotypes that privilege one class against the other. There are sometimes dialectical tensions between what is portrayed in the world of the poems and the different changes and realities in the contemporary Toro community.

In conclusion, this study considers power as a complex and diffuse concept which cannot be defined within definite boundaries and needs to be understood within the context of the community and its different structures and relationships.