

“STRIKING SCRAP”:

The Trans[Form]Ing Blacksmiths Ingenuity of the ‘Bakiga’ in Western Uganda.

Creativity, Artistry and Innovation

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Over the years in pre-colonial Africa, Blacksmiths’ ingenuity was ubiquitous in many communities in Africa and they socially, economically, and politically transformed most livelihoods. However, similar to other parts of the world, the industrial revolution that is said to have begun in the 1700s to the 1800s greatly impacted this long history of creativity, artistry and innovation (Core Knowledge Foundation, 2018).

Historically, in Africa, the origin of ironworking has hardly been dated and the Iron Age is thought to have begun around 1000 B.C (Sherby & Wadsworth, 2000). In the horn of Africa researchers in archaeology have stated that ironworking was scanty within communities (Mapunda, 1997).

In Buganda, pre-colonial Blacksmiths had a great history of creativity, artistry and innovation that transformed the Kingdom politically, socially, economically and geographically factors over the years. In reference to iron working as an art, while having forgotten the date when it was introduced in Buganda the hoe and the spear were the first innovative Blacksmith products Mythically, iron workers in pre-colonial kingdoms originated from the Bunyoro Kingdom that is to say the Banyoro were the first Blacksmiths from the south-west Uganda before Kabaka Kintu and Kimera of Buganda Kingdom. Therefore, the Banyoro taught the Baganda the art of Blacksmithing (John Roscoe, 1911).

Today the Uganda museum in Kampala exhibits the creative, artistic and innovative Blacksmiths’ material culture collections and photography of the ‘*Ciga*’ or ‘*Bakiga*’ of Kigezi, Kabale South – West Uganda. Geographically, Kabale is mainly mountainous with slopes filled with extinct volcano stones that is to say the name Kabale. Whereas the ‘*Rukiga*’ word means highland ‘*Kabale*’ means a small stone (Denoon, 1975). Since the pre-colonial era the Bakiga are mainly agriculturists due to the fertility of the volcanic soils along the Kigezi in Kabale. In history, Blacksmith have been socially, economically and politically quite essential in the production, supply of farming tools and implements in addition to weaponry that transformed and advanced many kingdoms.

However, with modernization the urge to search for knowledge, inspiration and influence outward of Africa alienated the inward search for knowledge, inspiration and influence that was disregarded as traditional craft, greatly affected the present day advances in creativity, artistry and innovation in Uganda.

Consequently, despite the creativity, artistry and inventiveness, of the Blacksmiths over the years, this tradition has hardly documented, disregarded, demonized and referred to as traditional ancient backward technology with the advent of colonization and present modernity. The creativity and artistry of the Blacksmithing technology has hardly been recognized and documented in order to inform the informal and formal art and design, in addition to technology innovations and creativity in Uganda.

Whereas colonization and technology have been regarded or referred to as civilization and modernity in many African countries, it is important to re-link and revitalize the creative, artistry and innovative ability of the Blacksmith in order to inform contemporary art, design and innovative knowledge and practices.

The deficiency of this knowledge and practice adversely affects creative, artistic and innovative minds that have been reduced to copycats, consumers, whole sum adopters of foreign technologies and thus a retardation of creativity and innovation over generations.

In reference to their historic context importance, the Blacksmiths product innovations greatly improved community livelihoods during the past and present-day communities. Over the years, these products have consistently transformed in terms of techniques, concepts, utility, structure and material and these have resulted into advanced variations of new products with a mix of the old and the new in terms of shape, function and context.

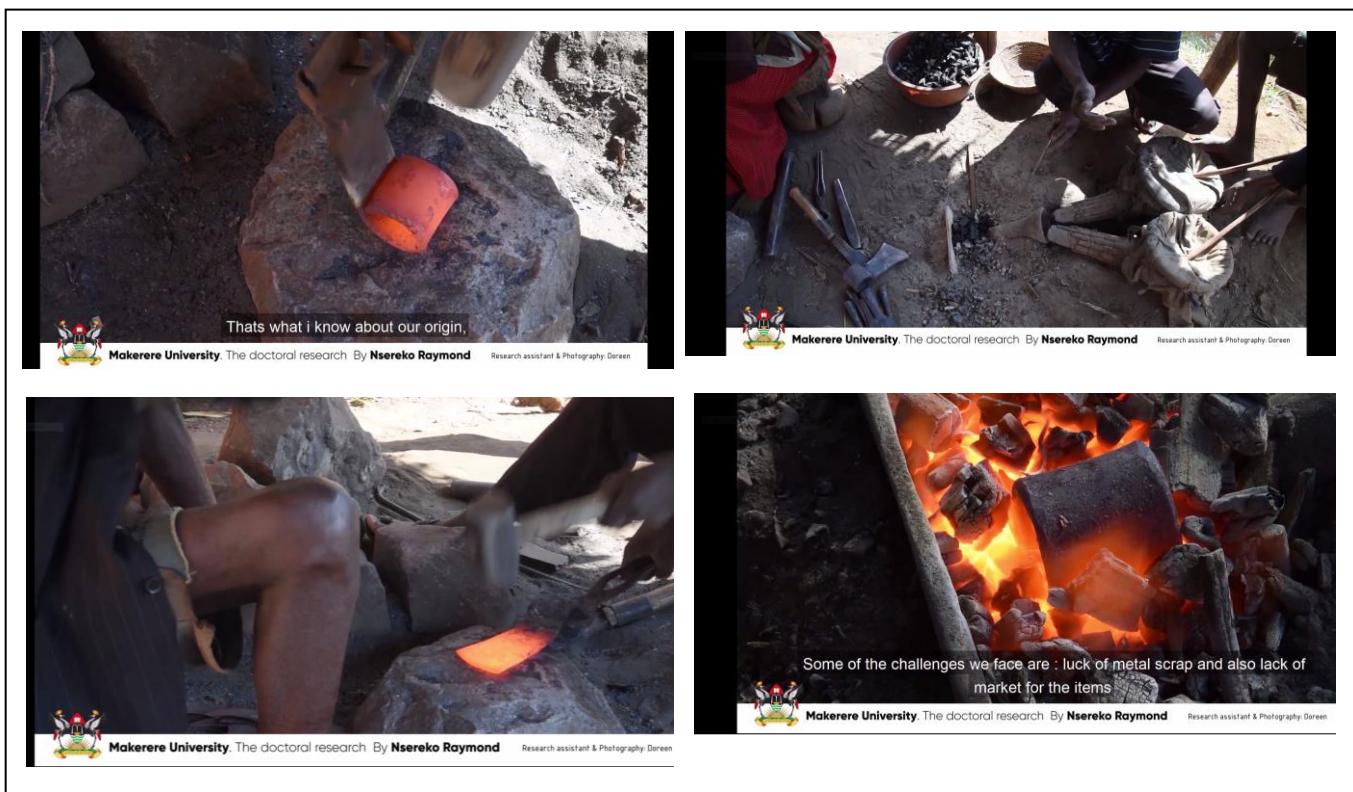
In this article it is argued that the era of Blacksmiths' extinction and resurgence is a transformation of continuous creativity, artistry and production of innovations that can be embraced as advancements in technology.

In conclusion, Pre - Colonial Blacksmiths in Africa had a great history of ingenuity that has transformed over the years. However, modernity and the urge to search outward of Africa for inspiration and influence superseded and alienated the inward that was regarded as traditional craft rather than vital in informing, advancing creativity and innovation in art and design.

The colonial and post-colonial blacksmith; a collection in the Uganda museum;



The '*Abahesi*' of Kabale present day Blacksmiths; Sections of the Abahesi Blacksmiths audio-visual documentary



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