

**The 15<sup>th</sup> IREN East Africa Media Forum**  
**Democracy – Fake News Industry - Economy**

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**The place of Authoritative Sources in the thirst for News and Decision Making**

**By Norah Owaraga<sup>1</sup>**

## **Thank You**

For the opportunities to practice active citizenship that you give me, I THANK YOU. The value addition is immense from IREN<sup>2</sup> forums and we, who have had the opportunity to partake of them, cannot but be the better for it. It is a privilege and an honour to know you and to engage with you. Our debates are legendary on phenomena and on issues of significant impact on our homeland. Today, we have yet another opportunity for intellectual nourishment and I THANK YOU.

## **Authoritative Sources**

Mr. James Shikwati<sup>3</sup>, you will recall the circumstances in which I first got to know of you. It was sometime back in the 2000s and you had given an interview to a German publication “*Der Spiegel*” in which you advocated against ‘aid’. Commenting on the G8 summit at Gleneagles during which the G8 claimed they would provide more ‘aid’ in order to eliminate hunger and poverty in Africa you are quoted as having said:

*“For God’s sake, just stop that ... Such intentions have harmed our continent for more than 40 years already.”*

According to *Der Spiegel* you were 35 years old at the time, “*founder of the economy promotion society* (one senses there is something lost in translation here) “*Inter Regional Economic Network in Nairobi (Kenya)*” and a “*passionate advocate of globalization;*” an authority, indeed you were considered. A daring African you were, speaking truth to power – undermining the authority of the G8.

Yes, you, Mr. Shikwati, and *Der Spiegel* commanded such power that your interview caused considerable discomfort among those in the ‘aid business’ in Germany, particularly so, the so called non-state actors. Your comments directly undermined the legitimacy and the authority of the ‘aid business’ - they were sanctimoniously angry.

At the time, of your *Der Spiegel* interview I was an executive of an ‘indigenous’ East African organisation, the kind through which such interventions that you bashed are often channelled. The organisation’s German funding partners – the first beneficiaries of G8 interventions - sought to neutralize your comments and so they asked us, the executives of their ‘partner organisations’, to respond to your comments so as to debunk them.

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<sup>1</sup> More about the author here <http://www.cparuganda.com/index.php/77-news-category/173-managing-director>

<sup>2</sup> For more on IREN please visit their website <https://irenkenya.com/>

<sup>3</sup> Mr. James Shikwati is the founder of IREN

I do not recall exactly my response, but suffice it to say I did respond. And yes, Mr. Shikwati, my response was cognisant of ensuring that I did not bite the hand that feeds me, so to speak. My response generated comfort among German non-state actors, the ‘funding partners’ of the organisation, for I distinguished between ‘aid’ that is channelled through the State and that which is channelled through non-state actors – the kind of argument that Dambisa Moyo makes in her book *“Dead Aid”*, I think. Among German non-state actors, I was an authority.

A couple of years later, Mr. Shikwati, after having participated in ‘putting out fires’ you had ignited, we met at a conference in Oslo. My recollection is that on the sidelines of the conference, over alcoholic beverages and cigarettes, we had so much fun dicing certain views and certain opinions that were shared by others - non-Africans on issues African.

We also had fun dicing views of those whom you are known to categorise as *“disoriented Africans”*, those you consider in possession of destroyed *“African software.”* Yes, suffice it to say, those whom we diced, nevertheless, each in their own right were considered an authority by organisers of that conference, at the very least.

My legitimacy as an authority in the context of this forum compels me to share some more of our past history. In the past IREN has invited me to the 10<sup>th</sup> IREN Media Forum and it assigned me the task to make a presentation on the topic:

***“Does the digital revolution have intrinsic and autonomous power to shape and transform society?”***

Truth be told, I searched my computer for the original text of that presentation that I made to the 10<sup>th</sup> IREN Media Forum, an authority, in the hope that I would copy large sections from it and re-brand them as new in the form of this presentation. I found no easy way out. The copy-paste-rebrand option was not viable. I have had to do the work and come up with a new presentation, this one. Reading my presentation to the 10<sup>th</sup> IREN Media Forum, however, refreshed my learning and provided me with the analytical framework that I have used for this presentation. I was particularly struck by comments made by an authority while she delivered the key note address for the 10<sup>th</sup> IREN Media Forum, as documented in my presentation:

***“Her Excellency, Margit Hellwig-Boette, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany, did not sugar-coat her words, when she informed the participants of the workshop that German business people, generally, do not have a cultural affinity to Africa, what the German business people want is to make money in Africa and they will only invest in Africa if they are certain that their businesses will profit from it. Her Excellency, clearly and as it should be, launched her interaction with us in East Africa from the German cultural centre.”***

Yes, the German Ambassador’s advice that she gave during the 10<sup>th</sup> IREN Media Forum is like those bitter pills that one who is ill has to take if they want to get better. Africans, take your pills and get better. German business people just want to make money; they are not necessarily interested in getting culturally close to you. Chances are they perceive their own culture as superior to ours, moreover, because we have allowed them to think so. The German Ambassador strengthened my conviction that it is us, humans, who are the authority and not machines through which we communicate. It is we, humans, who have the authority to shape society. That which makes the news; that which we tweet; shapes our software (way of thinking – beliefs and attitudes) – it either enhances it or destroys it.

The German Ambassador, however, also increased my anguish with the status quo. What will it take to transform the attitude of East Africans so that we may be like the German business people? Business is business – it is for making money; it is not for cultural appreciation, unless it makes money, that is. Yes, the questions that I asked at the 10<sup>th</sup> IREN Media Forum remain relevant:

- How are we as East Africans interacting with other cultural centres?
- Are we originating from our own centre to interact with others or are we originating from the centres of other cultures to interact with East African culture?

The views I expressed during the 10<sup>th</sup> IREN Media Forum I have updated by turning them into three blog posts that I have published on my blog: **The Humanist View**<sup>4</sup>, an authority in its own right. The titles of the three blog posts which I have also shared to my social media sites on Face Book, Twitter and LinkedIn are:

- Artificial Digital Revolution
- SIM Blocks = No Middle Income Country
- Digital Devices = Not Flesh & Blood

From what I have shared so far in this presentation one may deduce that there are different kinds of who is or what is considered “an authority” as follows:

<b>An Authority</b>		
<b>Persons</b>	<b>Institutions</b>	
	<b>Organised Structures</b>	<b>Ideas – Schools of Thought</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Norah Owaraga</li> <li>• James Shikwati</li> <li>• Dambisa Moyo</li> <li>• Margit Hellwig-Boette</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• G8</li> <li>• Der Spiegel</li> <li>• Local NGOs</li> <li>• International NGOs</li> <li>• Local Government</li> <li>• International Government</li> <li>• IREN Media Forum</li> <li>• Ambassador of **Federal Republic of Germany</li> <li>• The Humanist View Blog</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Aid Business’</li> <li>• Disoriented Africans</li> <li>• Destroyed African Software</li> <li>• Presentation 10<sup>th</sup> IREN Media Forum</li> <li>• German Business People</li> <li>• German Cultural Centre</li> <li>• African Cultural Centre</li> </ul>

An authority can be an individual person, group of persons, or an institution. An institution can be an organised structure or an idea, a school of thought. How does a person or institution become an authority, what attributes determine an authority? According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, which in itself is considered an authority, definitions of “an authority” include:

*“The confident quality of someone who knows a lot about something or who is respected or obeyed by other people”*; or *“A quality that makes something seem true or real”*

How is *“the confident quality of someone who knows a lot about something”* determined? What shows that one is confident? What shows that one knows a lot about something? Is it possible for one to appear confident when they are actually not? Yes, it is. Is it possible for one to appear to know a lot about something when they actually do not? Yes, it is. Can something – a news item – seem true

<sup>4</sup> The Humanist View <https://nowaraga.wordpress.com/>

or real when it actually isn't? Yes, it is possible. Who is or what is an authority seems relative. It is relative to what you know of someone or something and how much you know of someone or something. This is perhaps one of the reasons the media is powerful, for it can make or break you. The media can make a person look confident and knowledgeable however timid and uninformed the person may be. The media can also make the knowledgeable and confident look timid and uninformed. All it takes is 'creative' editing of words and images.

Since we base our judgements on what we know, a perspective of someone or something is self-reinforcing. And the more a perspective is reinforced the more it gains the quality of 'truth'; hence 'truth' is relative too. The quest for an authoritative source is daunting. Who can I trust? What can I trust? What is accurate? What is fact? Advice that is often given on how to navigate this daunting task is that an authoritative source is one that can be corroborated – has multiple references made of it and by at least more than one authority. Let us test this advice using the Putin-Trump Axis; documented comments of colonialists on Africa; and what is written about Africa by authorities of the global-west.

### Fact or Fiction

Putin-Trump Axis	Colonial Africa
<p><b>Today In The White House</b></p> <p>Hi Donald, what is up?</p> <p>I fear you've been laughing at me behind my back.</p> <p>And how did you hear this, Donald?</p> <p>The CIA has a guy in your office, so DON'T DENY IT.</p> <p>Oh really. And what is this guy's name?</p> <p>It's Viktor. Why-- he's not in trouble is he?</p>	<p>"I have travelled across the length and breadth of Africa and I have not seen one person who is a beggar, who is a thief such wealth I have seen in this country, such high moral values, people of such caliber, that I do not think we would ever conquer this country, unless we break the very backbone of this nation, which is her spiritual and cultural heritage and therefore, I propose that we replace her old and ancient education system, her culture, for if the Africans think that all that is foreign and English is good and greater than their own, they will lose their self-esteem, their native culture and they will become what we want them, a truly dominated nation".</p> <p>Lord Macaulay's Address to the British Parliament on 2nd Feb 1835</p>

### Uganda Today

“The key to agricultural growth in Uganda is in improving productivity, but most observers suggest this will be difficult without a radical change both in the attitude to land and in land policy. There are two main forms of land tenure in Uganda: registered land and land under what is legally known as “customary tenure”. Most of the land ownership in Northern and Eastern Uganda is under the customary tenure system. Customary ownership simply recognizes pre-colonial land ownership systems. This is a main constraint to investment. Overlapping rights (arising out of conflicting land tenure systems) significantly reduce tenants’ incentives to invest in land management practices, including afforestation, soil conservation structures and manure application. A conservative estimate suggests that investment disincentives from overlapping property rights alone can reduce productivity by up to 25% depending on the type of crop planted; Legal provisions aiming to give de facto ownership rights to tenants on lands held only under usufruct help to reduce insecurity of property rights, but fail to fully eliminate under-investment.”

*(Extract from A Call for Proposals 2017 from a Global-Western Institution)*

Of the three sources, the one that has had profound effect on me is the one that I have titled “Colonial Africa.” I was so convinced that it is real, but it turns out to be a hoax. A reason why it was believable to me is because of the influence of what I know – such influences that I have been exposed to, for example, of Mr. Shikwati’s thesis of ‘disoriented Africans’ whose ‘African software’ is damaged. What I know makes me gullible. The carefully selected image of Lord Macaulay that is consistent with the image of an authority that we, Africans, associate with those who colonised us, is very convincing. Contextualising the text as an extract from an Address given in the British Parliament is genius. Giving the hoax a precise date 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1835 is so clever.

Whoever fabricated that hoax hooked me from the word go. Without hesitation and with haste as soon as I saw and read it, I quickly shared it from the Face Book ‘wall’ of a Face Book ‘friend’ I have never met – but think he is originally Nigerian and who is living in the United States of America (USA). I shared it on my ‘The Humanist View Face Book page’, which simultaneously shared it on my Twitter handle, @nowaraga. I need not elaborate how this then went on to spread wider – those who consider me an authority likely bought it and shared it as well. But it is also possible that those who thought me an authority may have revised their view of me because I shared such a hoax that is easily verifiable. I am comforted, somewhat, for none of my social media ‘friends’ and ‘followers’ has pointed out to me that they know it to be a hoax.

Whereas, authoritative sources reveal that Lord Macaulay was a racist and a cultural imperialist, it is unlikely that he ever set foot in Africa; certainly not at the time he was alleged to have travelled the length and breadth of Africa. And I mean really? Travelled the length and breadth of Africa in the 1800s? Using what mode of transportation? But you see, the speed at which I read and shared it did not even allow for me to see how so obviously fake it is. Yes, it seems so fake to me now, but up until two days before this presentation was due, when I dutifully did an e-search to verify if it was an authoritative source, I did not recognise it as a hoax.

Authoritative sources reveal that the original hoax actually falsely claimed that Lord Macaulay made those comments about India. Yes, I saw the ‘original’ version in which in place of “Africa” is “country.” Similar to Africa there is no way he travelled the length and breadth of India in the 1800s. But at least he did set foot in India. Actually it is because authoritative sources show that he was in India on the date the hoax says that he was giving an address in the British parliament that confirms it as a hoax. It seems that the earliest reference of the hoax, according to authoritative sources, comes from a book titled: “*The Awakening Ray, Vol. 4, No. 5*”, which was published by the Gnostic Centre and subsequently picked up by the Indian magazine: *Niti*” in 2002; and the text was preceded by “*His words were to the effect*”; meaning the words were not his but an interpretation of his words by another.

The image of the ‘Putin-Trump Axis’ is instructive of how to make a person an authority or an authoritative source; and most importantly it shows how easy it is to have stuff misattributed. The image is from an authoritative source: **Occupy Democrats**; and which is known to be biased against Trump. What is the likelihood that the conversation between Putin and Trump took place? The ‘Putin-Trump Axis’, however, is much more than the mocking of individual personalities it is about a power struggle – the ‘neo-cold-war’ if you will – between Russia and the USA and by extension the global-west. As was the case with the ‘cold war’ Africans are right in our place – the pawns on the chess board. We are gullibly cheering on, either on the Putin side or on the Trump side. I recall criticism against Ugandans who claimed they are apolitical or are not interested in politics when they were asked about presidential and parliamentary elections in Uganda, but when it came to the USA Presidential elections they were more democrat than the members of the USA Democratic Party or more republican than the members of the USA Republican Party.

For example, due to time zone differences they would stay up late at night to the wee hours of the morning to dutifully watch USA presidential debates... etc.; am sure you catch the drift. The mind set of Africans who are actively and passionately involved in the 'neo-cold-war' is a classic case of a school of thought being considered as an authority; basically the thinking that USA elections are 'proper' and Ugandan ones, and by extension African ones are 'improper' and a 'waste of time'. Well, the jury is now out on how the election of the 45<sup>th</sup> USA President may not have been 'proper' due to undue influence of a barrage of fake news with origins from Putin's Russia. In order to hide the fact that a significant section of the population of USA was gullible enough to fall for fake news, it would appear that many citizens of the USA are producing fake news that presents their 45<sup>th</sup> president as the problem.

It is that status quo of a school of thought as an authority that allows for factoids such as those contained in the text that I have titled "Uganda Today"; which text is extracted from a call for proposals by an institution of the global-west. The call, claims authority from "**most observers**", but who are those "**observers**" and on what basis was the determination "**most**" arrived at? Was there some kind of poll in which "**observers**" were asked their view and on the basis of empirical data it was determined that "**most**" of them were of the same view? A discourse analyses of all the text that I have underlined in the "Uganda Today" text reveals the underlined text as problematic and possibly originating from a similar cultural imperialistic school of thought as that which was held by Lord Macaulay. As with the statements that were falsely attributed to Lord Macaulay the text on "Uganda Today" is riddled with falsehoods that are packaged as fact and moreover which can be easily verified and proven false. Take for instance the statement:

**"There are two main forms of land tenure in Uganda: registered land and land under what is legally known as "customary tenure."**

FACT: The Constitution of the Republic of Uganda clearly states in Chapter 15; Land and Environment; Land; 237. Land Ownership; (3):

***"Land in Uganda shall be owned in accordance with the following land tenure systems (a) customary; (b) freehold; (c) mailo; and (d) leasehold."***

For all the different types of tenure there is a record somewhere of who has ownership of or use-rights over it; what is contested is whose records are considered and classified as "registered" and whose records are classified as "unregistered". The different forms of tenure have different ways of knowing who has rights over the land; they are not uniform. It is those who want all to have a uniform way of knowing – cultural imperialists – that have issues with other ways of knowing.

The statement: "***Customary ownership simply recognizes pre-colonial land ownership systems***" is not fact, it is simply an opinion and an uninformed one, some might argue. The many proposals that 'Ugandan organisations' or organisations which claim to work for and on the benefit of Uganda will submit to the caller of proposals, however, will serve to legitimise the non-factual statement of the caller. It is fascinating how the caller for proposals alludes to pre-colonial land ownership systems and seems to imply that they are actually the problem. Without citing any empirical evidence to show how pre-colonial land ownership systems differ in intent from 'modern' neo-colonial ones, the caller seemingly blamed the original land tenure systems. Logic would follow, however, that if you imposed another system over an existing one and you want to override the old system and adopt a completely new system, there is bound to be conflict. So why isn't the caller pushing for the abandoning of the new system and strengthening of the old system?

It is the more fascinating when pre-colonial authorities, such as the Buganda Kingdom, assert their right to administer land which is geographically considered part of the Kingdom, such as the ***Kyapa Mungalo Initiative***<sup>5</sup> and the Government of the Republic of Uganda considers that illegal. The grounds for determining legality and illegality seemingly cease to be registration of land, but who administers and economically benefits from registering the land.

Fake news is simply a new name for propaganda; fake news is in the 'neo-cold-war' what propaganda was in the cold war. The intention of fake news is similar to the intention of propaganda - those in power promoting a certain view that removes power from others in a way that others think that it was good for their oppressor to have taken away power from them. It is in the realm of Karl Marx's "***Religion is the opium of the people***" school of thought.

Having appreciated how daunting it is to determine a source as authoritative, as news, and on which to base decision-making, I surmise that the place of authoritative sources in decision-making has remained the same from time immemorial. What is important is to appreciate that there are different cultural centres. One needs to be aware of whose central logic they are basing their thought processes and decision-making. For Africa and for Africans, it is important that we try as much as possible to locate within the cultural centres of our pre-colonial ancestors. For this to happen, we need to take the journey of self-discovery and to de-colonise our minds. We should embrace the wisdom of Ngugi wa Thiong'o that is contained in his book: "***Moving the centre – the struggle for cultural freedoms***".

Different people in the world have their different cultural centres and fake news is ammunition for 'cultural warfare'; it is what determines supremacy in the cultural Imperialistic war.

***Disclaimer: Whereas Ms. Owaraga is the Managing Director of [CPAR Uganda Ltd](http://www.cparuganda.com), her views herein expressed in this presentation are not necessarily those of CPAR Uganda Ltd.***

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<sup>5</sup> More on Kyapa Mungalo <http://www.cparuganda.com/index.php/blogs/212-right-colonial-land-injustice-reconstruct-uganda>