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The Shadow of the Sun

By Ryszard Kapuscinski



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In 1957, Ryszard Kapuscinski arrived in Africa to witness the beginning of the end of colonial rule as the first African correspondent of Poland's state newspaper. From the early days of independence in Ghana to the ongoing ethnic genocide in Rwanda, Kapuscinski has crisscrossed vast distances pursuing the swift, and often violent, events that followed liberation. Kapuscinski hitchhikes with caravans, wanders the Sahara with nomads, and lives in the poverty-stricken slums of Nigeria. He wrestles a king cobra to the death and suffers through a bout of malaria. What emerges is an extraordinary depiction of Africa--not as a group of nations or geographic locations--but as a vibrant and frequently joyous montage of peoples, cultures, and encounters. Kapuscinski's trenchant observations, wry analysis and overwhelming humanity paint a remarkable portrait of the continent and its people. His unorthodox approach and profound respect for the people he meets challenge conventional understandings of the modern problems faced by Africa at the dawn of the twenty-first century.



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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

When Africa makes international news, it is usually because war has broken out or some bizarre natural disaster has taken a large number of lives. Westerners are appallingly ignorant of Africa otherwise, a condition that the great Polish journalist and writer Ryszard Kapuściński helps remedy with this book based on observations gathered over more than four decades.

Kapuściński first went to Africa in 1957, a time pregnant with possibilities as one country after another declared independence from the European colonial powers. Those powers, he writes, had "crammed the approximately ten thousand kingdoms, federations, and stateless but independent tribal associations that existed on this continent in the middle of the nineteenth century within the borders of barely forty colonies." When independence came, old interethnic rivalries, long suppressed, bubbled up to the surface, and the continent was consumed in little wars of obscure origin, from caste-based massacres in Rwanda and ideological conflicts in Ethiopia to hit-and-run skirmishes among Tuaregs and Bantus on the edge of the Sahara. With independence, too, came the warlords, whose power across the continent derives from the control of food, water, and other life-and-death resources, and whose struggles among one another fuel the continent's seemingly endless civil wars. When the warlords "decide that everything worthy of plunder has been extracted," Kapuściński writes, wearily, they call a peace conference and are rewarded with credits and loans from the First World, which makes them richer and more powerful than ever, "because you can get significantly more from the World Bank than from your own starving kinsmen."

Constantly surprising and eye-opening, Kapuściński's book teaches us much about contemporary events and recent history in Africa. It is also further evidence for why he is considered to be one of the best journalists at work today. --*Gregory McNamee*

From Publishers Weekly

Colorful writing and a deep intelligence highlight these essays' graceful exploration of postcolonial Africa. A Polish journalist who has written about the continent for more than three decades, Kapuscinski provides glimpses into African life far beyond what has been covered in headlines or in most previous books on the subject. The dispatches focus on the awkward relationship between Europe and Africa. Kapuscinski, whose books have been translated into 19 languages (they include *The Emperor* and *The Soccer War*), makes this clear through his own personal struggle with malaria soon after he first arrived on the continent. This emphasis also comes through in his dispatches on African nations such as Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania and Rwanda, which detail how the giddy optimism of the immediate postcolonial era disintegrated into corruption, poverty and conflict. But even as he describes a familiar story, his keen observations make it fresh. Writing about the provincialism of Rwanda, he says, "A trip round the world is a journey from backwater to backwater, each of which considers itself... a shining star." But political observations are just one of the strengths of this book. Kapuscinski's seemingly effortless writing style makes daily life come alive whether he's covering an Arab vendor making coffee or the efforts made at night by lizards to catch their mosquito prey. (The lizards' "eyes are capable of 180-degree rotation within their sockets, like the telescopes of astronomers....") Ultimately, this book is a personal and political travelogue of one man's rocky love affair with a continent of nations. Those looking for an engaging, literary introduction to Africa or even for some additional knowledge should look no further. (Apr.) Forecast: Kapuscinski is a very popular writer in Europe but has never broken out here. With a cluster of books on Africa coming out this season, this will get some media attention and may sell better than his previous books.

From [Booklist](#)

Internationally renowned Polish foreign correspondent Kapuscinski has covered the Third World for more than four decades. During much of this time, he has lived and worked in Africa, establishing a reverential bond with a continent that continues to defy classification. In this enthralling memoir, he chronicles his remarkable 40-year odyssey through various African countries poised on the brink of massive social, political, and cultural revolutions. In an effort to capture and communicate the essentially unpredictable and ephemeral nature of Africa, he often traveled off the beaten path, encountering a wide variety of ordinary Africans willing to share their unique views and stories. This lyrically evocative patchwork quilt of memories, experiences, and adventures provides an intimate portrait of the dazzling mystery that is Africa.

Margaret Flanagan

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Users Review

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