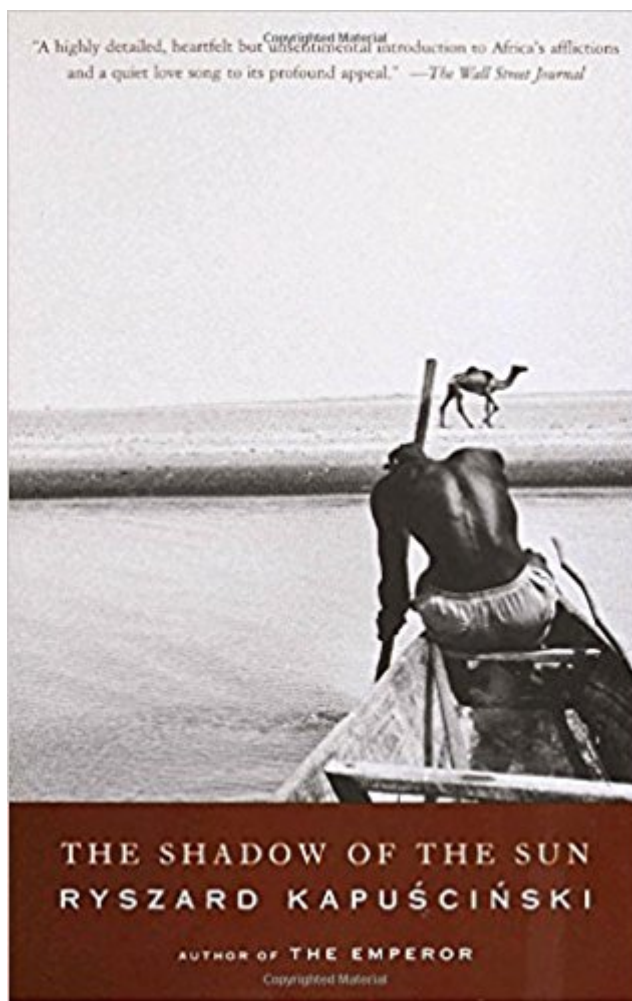


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The Shadow Of The Sun



Synopsis

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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Customer Reviews

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 Kapuscinski helps remedy with this book based on observations gathered over more than four decades.

Kapuscinski 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," Kapuscinski 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, Kapuscinski'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 --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

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. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Dawn and dusk. The only bearable times in equatorial Africa. The Mango tree. If it dies, a village dies with it. The time frame is post-Colonial Africa through the 1990's, reported by Poland's most celebrated foreign correspondent. Each chapter describes a different culture he visited, and extreme danger is inherent in every one. Determined to see the diversity of life, he risks his own life to get the story. The idea put forth is that Colonialism reduced Africa from ten thousand cultures to fifty countries. Before foreign countries ruled and borders were drawn, tribes that wandered were able to. Tribes that were rooted to the earth stayed put. The occupation of Europeans destroyed the many different native cultures of Africa, and millions survive with only shade and water. The stories are almost too much to take in. Man's inhumanity to man is shown in so many settings, in so many different ways, that the reader is left bereft.

The journalist Ryszard Kapuscinski provides three broad types of reporting in *THE SHADOW OF THE SUN*. In general, these examine civil and social dysfunction in sub-Saharan Africa, the mentality of Africans living in this region, and the overwhelming effects of their inhospitable climate. Certainly, the great subject of *SHADOW* is dysfunction. Here, the types of this dysfunction, as well as their associated causes and effects, are depressingly familiar. In no particular order, these include greedy and unscrupulous elites, failed traditions and social structures, frequent coup d'État, ethnic hatreds, warlords, the legacies of slavery and colonialism, the paradox of international relief efforts, impoverished internal refugees, child soldiers with automatic weapons, and gargantuan urban areas without industry or jobs. Kapuscinski's treatment of dysfunction is highly skillful. Primarily what he does is to write about dysfunction in a particular country at a particular time, often attaching a malaise or tragedy to a news story he covered in his thirty years of journalism in Africa. The effect is that these well-known problems are vitalized by Kapuscinski's direct encounters with them. Through his journalism, you are there to witness first-hand the effects of cupidity by the elites, brutality, or widespread joblessness. It's first-rate work. Kapuscinski's second theme is the mentality of the people in sub-Saharan Africa. In this case, there's much to learn from Kapuscinski as he

discusses the spiritual and communal traditions in this region. But the issue he implicitly raises in these discussions is: Do these traditions enable Africans to cope with modern life? Overwhelmingly, his answer is an unambiguous NO. Kapuscinski's third theme is the heat. In writing about Somalia, for example, he observes: "These are the hottest places on earth... Daytime hours ... are a hell almost impossible to bear. All around, everything is burning... even the wind is ablaze... [in this] people grow still, silence descends, a lifeless overwhelming quiet." Likewise, a visit to a Mauritanian village elicits: "It was noon. In all the dwellings... lay silent, inert people. Their faces were bathed in sweat. The village was like a submarine at the bottom on the ocean; it was there, but it emitted no signals, soundless, motionless." The heat affects everything. Kapuscinski does provide one upbeat chapter. This describes opportunistic entrepreneurship in the town of Onitsha (Nigeria), where men pull trucks from a sinkhole that is on the road to a huge open-air market. Nonetheless, the content of this book is mostly depressing. Malnourished people, he points out, protect themselves from the heat with their lassitude, since a person "...toiling, would grow weaker still and in exhaustion easily succumb to... tropical diseases. Life here is a struggle, an endlessly repeated effort to tilt in one's favor the fragile, flimsy, and shaky balance between survival and extinction." Recommended.

Somewhat difficult to get started, but the essays reveal an "on the ground" view of mid-1960's era Africa when colonialism was on its way out and new governments had optimistic plans for the future. There is an ongoing theme of the effect of heat and aridity on people and development of the towns and cities in comparison with the vast "outback" areas of middle Africa.

A diverse ramble through Africa as its former colonies are gaining independence. Kapuscinski is a keen observer, and since this book was written mostly in the sixties it does not include the disasters that most of the colonies lapsed into later as the result of governance by people whose only thought was enriching themselves. To this day Africa is mostly governed by corruption and thievery.

"Oh, no," you may be thinking, "another 'I Found Africa...' book" by a white journalist who's poked around a bit, extruded the steamy and the exotic, romanticized this, excoriated that, along the way raised a few primordial terrors to jolt his well-meaning liberal readers, and all in all, told a few ripping yarns. This man is different, beginning with his more than forty year relationship with the African continent. Great writers like Kapuscinski--and he IS a very great writer, assisted by a great translator, Klara Glowczewska--teach us how to see, how to find the right context, how to set out the proper perspective. Most of those who read this book will be Westerners in search of a window. As

an introduction, as an intimation of the myriads of Africas--because, as Kapucinski freely acknowledges, it's unfair, and somewhat insulting, to speak simply of "Africa"--and, yes, as an interpretation for Western minds, readers could do no better than *The Shadow of the Sun*. For all his vivid prose and artistic control of story elements, Kapucinski is a scholarly observer, a man who sees through the deep ice, seemingly an anthropologist refitted as a journalist--his eye is uncanny, his descriptive powers precise and powerful, and his range of experiences and depth of understanding makes this a uniquely valuable tutorial. He writes with clarity and fresh insight on familiar topics like Amin, Sudan, and the Rwanda genocide--his "lecture" on the events of 1994 is one of the book's many highpoints--but also on the sensations, struggles, and states of being that accompany the simple act of living in so challenging an array of environments as Africa's geography provides. Yes, Kapucinski does include exotica, but without sensationalizing: there are harrowing encounters with flora, fauna, disease, the elements and, again and again, the terrible heat (which he finds as many ways of describing as the proverbial Inuit has of describing snow). But Kapucinski always returns to human dimensions and conditions and, above all, to the patterns and rhythms and variations of human exchange around which life in the many Africas organizes itself. And, always, he seeks to convey and to understand the point of view of his many interlocutors, rather than to make facile attributions or easy generalizations. This is superb reportage and an essential document by a true master. It is to me staggering that, published by the same house as Robert Kaplan (of *The Coming Anarchy* fame) and sensitively covering the very turf that so alarmed Kaplan, Kapucinski remains comparatively unknown. Fix that.

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