

# Ryszard Kapuściński as Nomad

## De-imperializing the Contemporary Travel Text

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**Jose Monfred C. Sy**

University of the Philippines

### Abstract

In the past, travel writing about the “new world” had fed the imperial ambitions of Europe. Today, the genre is reproached for cementing a “new imperialist order” by peddling the harmonizing effects of globalization. Nevertheless, travel writers face the opportunity of reworking the genre as an instrument of cultural critique, dubbed by some theorists as “countertravel” writing. As there apparently exists no defined poetics to typify this mode, Deleuze and Guattari’s nomadology, a model for addressing the genre’s teleological ties with imperial history, is a worthy wellspring from which critics and philosophers can draw the radical potential of contemporary travel literature. To demonstrate the nomad’s efficacy in cultivating countertravel writing, this study maps how an antiimperialist position is articulated in celebrated Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuściński’s *Shadow of the Sun* and *Imperium*. These emancipatory texts articulate an antiimperialist position by exhibiting how the colonized can undermine the colonizer’s territory through nomadic travel.

### Keywords

travel writing, countertravel writing, Deleuze and Guattari, nomad, spatiality, imperialism

Come, butterfly  
It's late—  
We've miles to go together.

— Bashō Matsuo

## Mapping the Terrain

Traditionally in travel writing scholarship, the genre is correlated to socio-political discourses because of its function in the facilitation and legitimization of European imperialism. This study aims to contribute to this developing field by cultivating Deleuze and Guattari's nomadology as a model that can address both evolving critical paradigms and the genre's ties with imperial history. Firstly, the rhizomatic approach takes into account *space*— seen as fluid, being both a medium and product of human experience. A geocritical model for studying travel writing is imperative because it can “help us to see how a theme is embodied, where a narrator stands in relation to his story, [and] what structure of imagery provides the grounds for symbolic meaning” (Mitchell 563). How a text constructs the space of the other can shed light on the emancipatory potential of a nomadic traveler-subject. Edward Said's concept of *imaginative geographies* is probably the most well-known juncture between alterity and space at the time. In accordance with Said's belief that orientalism is tied to the geographical knowledge of sameness and difference (13), imaginative geography refers to a universal practice of designation, where a familiar space is considered to be “ours” while unfamiliar spaces beyond “ours” become “theirs” (54). It means that geographical distinctions are arbitrarily imagined by those in power over space i.e. the state. Travel writing *is* an imaginative geography in written form, considering its descriptions as a discourse of space. These imaginative geographies are crucial to the discursive formation of the empire because their circulation cements binary oppositions that inspire the imperial ambition (Kuehn & Smethurst 1; see also Pratt).

Secondly, the nomad itself takes the discourse of empire as part of its inquiry. It asks, what are the ways of living, desiring, and *moving* that can serve as conditions for modes of production that deviate from capitalist and imperialist subjectivities? By resisting the tendency to exoticize or demarcate

borders between identities, ‘countertravelers’ take up the potential cultural critique (Edwards & Grauland 3). More so, these subjectivities resist the centrality of the (imperial) metropolis, articulating experiences removed from dominant hierarchies (2). However, there exists no standard typology for this mode, as it seeks to reverse the genre’s traditional focus and agenda in the West in diverse ways.

This theorization of space vis-à-vis countertravelling lays down the foundation for understanding the central concept of this study, the *nomad*, whose experience and (de)construction of space challenge the hierarchical meanings and relations inscribed in it. Known for their unusual metaphors and playful and innovative writing, (Best & Kellner 79) Marxist philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari appropriate the nomad and nomadism (which they refer to as *nomadology*) to mean various related concepts in their works, the most crucial of which is *A Thousand Plateaus*. The collaborative work garnered popularity during the same period that Lefebvre’s ideas of space production emerged (Tally Jr.<sup>b</sup> 136). The main objective of the book is to assert the non-totalized multiplicity of philosophy (and culture) through the concept of the *rhizome* (Best & Kellner 97). Rhizome refers to non-hierarchical systems of deterritorialized strands of thought that connect to other strands in unregulated relationships (99). It encapsulates a mode of thought that is not bound by fixed and often putative binary oppositions, hence the descriptor *deterritorialized*.

As a form of subjectivity, the nomad can be constructed (and studied) in cultural loci such as literature. Nomadic subjects are open to unconventional spatial orientations, making new connections in their comings and goings (Lorraine<sup>a</sup> 160). They are understood as such not only because of their often subversive border crossings, but also because of their conceptual demolition of the geographical boundaries imposed by the state (or any form of power, such as the empire), which include spatial measurement and a conceptual gridding that assign ‘stable’ meanings (Tally Jr.<sup>b</sup> 136). Differently put, the nomad’s movement transgresses the itineraries, routes and borders set by the state or empire. Its experience of space is not necessarily linked to a rational whole (Lorraine<sup>a</sup> 159).

That the so-called 'war machine' (Deleuze and Guattari's more aggrandized metaphor for the nomad) is exterior to state apparatuses is the first proposition of *A Thousand Plateaus*' 14<sup>th</sup> 'plateau' (351). As agents, nomads do not only inhabit but also territorialize and (im)mobilize space by means of consistent independence from *stratified space*, which is measured and arranged (and thus endowed with meaning) in order to be occupied (361-362). Deleuze and Guattari writes:

The nomads are there, on the land, wherever there forms a smooth space that gnaws, and tends to grow, in all directions. The nomads inhabit these places; they remain in them, and they themselves make them grow, for it has been established that the nomads make the desert no less than they are made by it. (382)

Incidentally invoking Yi-Fu Tuan's assumption that space is experienced, the two describe the nomad as both the contingency and the organizing principle of *smooth spaces*, which are beyond the hegemony's control (447-450). Consequent to the nomad's disruptive capacity, the smooth space is the locus of multiplicity, being a nonmetric and decentered space (484). This kind of representational space is by no means homogenous, which, on the contrary, is the form of striated space. Even when the traveler-subject necessarily moves across space at its topological and chronological levels, the subject becomes nomadic by dint of not moving or migrating. This is because they hold with them and stay in a smooth space which extends in the unfolding of the text and the constant transformation of space (482). It involves a remapping, not a creation of new maps.

Through the junction of the Deluzoguattarian *nomad*, my study aims to delineate the overlooked attempts by travel narratives such as Ryszard Kapuściński's to reorient the genre beyond its imperialist roots. One of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's most renowned journalists, Kapuściński made the foreign familiar to his people by writing for the Polish Press Agency under the country's Communist Party (Sabelli 1). The Ryszard Kapuściński Award for Literary Reportage is given away internationally to celebrate the genre and honor the author's name. Having an acute sense of belongingness to the

other, Kapuściński understands humanity from the vantage point of borders. I believe that, through a nomadic subjectivity and spatiality, his works *Shadow of the Sun* and *Imperium* articulate an anti-imperialist position, thus demonstrating the emancipatory potential of travel writing (“podróżopisarstwo” in Polish).

The juxtaposition of the domains of travel writing theory and geocriticism in this study proves more interesting (and complex) now that we understand that (a) travel writing is in varying degrees involved in the circulation of imperialistic ideology and (b) the nomad, as a geocritical framework, is not explicitly subversive. In these forays into geocriticism and nomadology then, the objective is to chop down the arborescent tree of thought. To do such is to grasp each idea, binary, hierarchy, concern and event as a dynamic process prone to change. In this scheme, space acts as a juncture where the relationship of the subject and the other can be observed. Here it is presumed that the traveler/nomad is neither a de facto accomplice of the state/empire nor a bandleader at the fore of emancipation. Instead, as the word ‘nomadic’ suggests, the traveler wanders.

### Becoming-Africa(n): Ryszard Kapuściński's *Shadow of the Sun*

For too long the world has been content to judge peoples and nations in distress  
largely on the basis of received stereotypes drawn from mythologies of oppression.  
- Chinua Achebe

In the *History of Africa*, Molefi Kente Asante muses that Africans are the victims “of probably the most uninformed educated people in the world on the subject of Africa” (xiii). Asante directs his disdain not only to the bevy of travel writers who write of African peoples as “poor buggers” thriving in “godforsaken countries,” (Williams viii) but also to readers who subscribe to such assumptions. Even after the height of decolonization in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, African nations remain concerned with decolonizing themselves by “demonstrating that Africa, far from being the primitive tribal

realm of European imperialist mythology, had a long and noble tradition of state-building” (Parker & Rathbone 19, 113).

To Susan Williams, one of the scholars behind the annual *Africa Bibliography*, many travel writers have failed to bolster this cause. The iconic Paul Theroux and Bruce Chatwin, for instance, pick up the overbearing (*Africa needs our help!*) and dismissive (*All news out of Africa is bad!*) tendencies of their imperious predecessors (*vii*; see also Dyer). These include viewing space in the so-called monarch-of-all-I-survey mode, where, in a fantasy of empowerment and social advancement, a travel writer describes space as if they are conquering it (Pratt 197-204).

This section navigates Kapuściński’s imaginative geography of Africa in his travel reportage *Shadow of the Sun* by exploring it with the Deluzoguattarian nomad in mind, so the movements and lapses might be fleshed out in *Shadow* that draw a different map of Africa. In this travel memoir, both the nomad-subject and the textually constructed Africa undergo a process of *becoming*. As a subjectified *contact zone*, the former vacillates between a European and an African subject position, and by doing so, conceives of the host nation (Africa) as a dynamic and manifold space. Ultimately, through a narrative strategy akin to a contact zone and a spatiality (and subjectivity) in the process of becoming, *Shadow of the Sun: My African Life* de-parochializes imperialistic cultural attitudes towards Africa and its people.

**Reporting on the Fall of an Empire.** Kapuściński’s *Shadow of the Sun*, written and first published in 1998, is compendium of the author’s travels, learnings, and reflections in Africa as the Polish Press Agency’s foreign correspondent. Roving Africa for more than 30 years, Kapuściński had witnessed 27 revolutions and coups that erupted in Africa, (Dyer “Journeys”) some of which is detailed in *Shadow*. The height of these revolutions was during the 1950’s and ‘60’s, when British, French, Dutch and other ‘white’ settlers-colonizers had witnessed the fruits of the seeds sown as early as the 1940’s, the decade that saw the first universities built in Africa (Parker & Rathbone 122). The University of Ibadan housed the first waves of African nationalist sentiment, which then rippled into the first euphoric wars for independence more than a decade later (124).

In 1957, Ghana, until then officially called the Gold Coast, became the first country to obtain full political and economic independence from Britain. Ghana's freedom is followed by the successful revolts in Guinea in 1958, and in Nigeria, Somalia and the Belgian Congo in 1960 (129). Kapuściński was then in Ghana to cover the hostilities for the Polish Press. *Shadow* begins right after the liberation. Instead of solely featuring independence movements against European colonizers, the text unveils exposés on coups against Africans who replaced the colonizers in their seats of power, such as that of Lagos in 1966, where multiple coup d'états across the country were held all at the same time (Kapuściński<sup>b</sup> 98-107).

Besides the continent-wide liberation movement, this assemblage of vignettes sketches the long-standing tension between the Arabs and the native Africans, with sections such as "Zanzibar" detailing in depth a conflagration staged by the Arabs in the island at the wake of the white settlers' departure. Sections such as "There Shall be a Holiday" and "A Day in the Village of Abdallah Wallo" act as windows to various African localities and their customs. Interestingly, many a nomadic tribe (that is, in the ethnic sense) is introduced to us in the narrative, like the Tuareg nomads in "Salt and Gold." On the other hand, "Dr. Doyle," the frequently excerpted "The Cobra's Heart," and like sections fasten on Kapuściński's tribulations both as a journalist and a traveler, faced with an obstacle such as malaria and a wild cobra along his way. Within the general theme, space or character cited as the sections' headings (for example, "The Cooling Hell," "The Hole in Onitsha," "Salim"), the narrative's field of vision jettisons from fast-paced reportage (on the civil war in Zanzibar, for instance) to a dilatory observance of local customs (like the ceremonial drinking of *marva* in Uganda) and back. The fact remains that the text constructs a coherent travel narrative as it reports events that, while arranged in a non-linear sequence, comprise a single spatial entity, Africa (Abbott 15).

***Moving across Borders.*** Kapuściński traverses this eclectic Africa outside a fixed spatio-temporal pattern, orienting himself to the movements of people and the events they occasion instead of following an actualized itinerary. These movements are best expressed in the narrative progression of the

text, which crosses temporal borders (Sims 36). Wavering among different time frames as if he were a desert nomad, the text's narrative discourse does not chart Kapuściński's travels in Africa chronologically. Although Kapuściński's account begins in 1958 and ends at around the 1990's, the encounters and events bookended by the time markers are not chronicled in a linear sequence.

In *Shadow*, "The Structure of the Clan" marks an early example of this nomadic framing of space. After his arrival at Kumasi, Kapuściński describes the town as the "self-enclosed [...] capital of the kingdom of Ashanti" (25). By way of mention, Kapuściński already returns Kumasi to a different era when centralized kingdoms run the continent. At that time, the map of Africa is vastly different, with Saharan, sub-Saharan, and Eurasian cultures developing in isolation from each other due to their kingdoms' borders (Parker & Rathbone 16).

Kapuściński continues his commentary by shuttling to a time more recent: the colonization era. He begins his account in 1884, the year when "the Berlin West Africa Conference divided the whole continent among themselves, a status that persisted until Africa won independence" (25). The subject goes on with a succinct historicization of African colonial history, which includes paragraph-length descriptions of the slave trade and the eruption of the World Wars. Like a loop, the historicization ends with Ghana's triumph in 1958, and in the next paragraph, we see Kapuściński buying the local newspaper, the *Ashanti Pioneer*, in the narrative's present, and then heading out to its editorial offices (28). This dissolution of temporal borders through movement is reminiscent of the nomadic preoccupation of crossing borders, setting up the stage for the creation of smooth spaces.

Aside from destabilizing the temporality of the spaces he has traveled to, Kapuściński-as-subject manifests a nomadic attitude towards movement by centering more on the events that take place in the journey, than the destinations. To better understand the subject's 'detours', it would be helpful to visualize the text's axes of movement. Figure 1 below is a narrative map of *Shadow of the Sun* that features the different spaces probed by Kapuściński. The map features the cities, towns and the countries the subject has trav-





**CONCRETE/PHYSICAL SPACES**

**COGNITIVE SPACES**

**FOCUS ON TRANSPORTATION  
(TRAINS, PLANES ETC.)**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Acra, Ghana (1958)</li> <li>2. Kumasi, Ghana</li> <li>3. Kampala, Uganda</li> <li>4. Dar es Salaam, Tanzania</li> <li>5. Nairobi, Kenya</li> <li>6. Kampala, Uganda</li> <li>7. Dar es Salaam, Tanzania</li> <li>8. Zanzibar (off the coast of Tanzania)</li> <li>9. Nigeria (Benin – center, Enugu – southeast, Kaduna – north, Lagos – southwest, Ibadan – west)</li> <li>10. Apartment in the Island of Lagos</li> <li>11. Ouadane Oasis, Mauritania (Sahara)</li> <li>12. Central Ethiopia</li> <li>13. Kampala, Uganda, border of Sudan</li> <li>14. Kenya (mental space)</li> <li>15. Rwanda (mental space)</li> <li>16. Uganda</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>17. Congo</li> <li>18. Cameroon</li> <li>19. Itang, Uganda-Sudan border</li> <li>20. Berbera and Laasqaanood, Somalia</li> <li>21. Abdallah Wallo, Senegal (end of Sahara)</li> <li>22. Sabeta Waterfall, Ethiopia</li> <li>23. Gondar, Ethiopia</li> <li>24. Ethiopia to Monrovia, Liberia</li> <li>25. Liberia</li> <li>26. Dakar, Senegal to Bumako by train</li> <li>27. Bumako, Mali (Sahara)</li> <li>28. Mopti, Mali to Timbuktu, Western Mali</li> <li>29. Port Harcourt, Niger</li> <li>30. Onitsha, Nigeria</li> <li>31. Asmara, Eritrea</li> <li>32. Debre Zeyit, Ethiopia</li> <li>33. Congo</li> <li>34. Tanzania</li> </ol> |
|--|--|

Fig. 1 A narrative map of Africa.

eled to either physically (denoted by red pins) or cognitively (denoted by blue pins). Some events in the narrative take place while the subject is in motion—in a train, plane, or truck, for example (denoted by green pins).

The pins placed on the map do not refer to the subject's precise location at a given part of the narrative, as it is not always the case that Kapuściński is in the town or city proper per se. Rather, they point to the range of the space Kapuściński moves in at a certain point in time. For instance, in Zanzibar (pin no. 8), the subject has been at the coast, in the city, and afloat the sea surrounding the island. There are three different zones of action, but for the sake of convenience, we refer to them as one spatial unit. Above all, the sequence inculcated in the map follows the narrative discourse and not the chronological order of Kapuściński's travels. The same considerations shall apply to the other narrative maps used in this study.

As a journalist, the traveler-subject is expected to move from one space to another in order to cover an event or to gather information about the next matter to write about, which we see in the movements from points 7 to 8 (Kapuściński goes to Zanzibar to cover the war), among others, and points 24, 26, and 28, which all occur in motion. In the narrative however, a number of the movements from one point to another come without an explanation or rationale. The subject mentions no significant event that necessitates his movement from point 30 (Nigeria) to point 31 (Eritrea), for instance. What he shows is the action that the space occasions. In point 17 (Congo), Kapuściński details the contours of the space—the physical landscape, the locals populating it, but he desists explicating the conditions that ushered him there.

Through this map, we realize that there are two modes of movement adopted by the subject: (a) movement by desire—the want to report about an event or a similar subject matter such as a certain cultural practice, a landmark, or important people; and (b) movement *for the sake of movement*. As explained by Deleuze and Guattari in their account on movement,

The nomad [...] follows customary paths; he goes from one point to another; he is not ignorant of points (water points, dwelling points, assembly points, etc.). But the question is what in nomad life is a principle and what is only

a consequence. To begin with, although the points determine paths, they are strictly subordinated to the paths they determine, the reverse of what happens with the sedentary. The water point is reached only in order to be left behind; every point is a relay and exists only as a relay. (380)

What the two mean is that a nomad does not settle into one place. Each station it passes through in the journey is but a temporary rest, which the nomadic subject shall leave soon enough. The second mode of movement corresponds to this attitude of the nomad. Having reported about the physical or cultural aspects of a place, Kapuściński moves to another space—the case with the movement from point 30 to 31.

Does this mean then, that all travelers demonstrate a nomadic relation to space given their transitory nature of travel? Not necessarily. As said by Deleuze and Guattari, “every point is a relay.” The desire to participate in an event, a cultural practice, a landmark, or a community propels Kapuściński-as-subject to move to another space, but this drive diffuses once the subject matter has been reported. Take for example the section “My Alleyway, 1967,” which is dedicated to showing the socio-political conditions of “the apartment that [Kapuściński] rent[s] in Lagos,” which “is constantly broken into. It happens not only when [he is] away for a longer stretch of time—in Chad, or Gabon, or Guinea. Even if [he is] going on a short trip to a nearby town” (108). Through Kapuściński’s incensed complaint about the theft that constantly occurs in his apartment, we discover that he has rented the apartment for a long time, definitely more than months, considering the distance between Lagos (an island) and the countries mentioned. However, nowhere else in the text has the apartment been cited. In fact, there is no need for the nomadic traveler-subject to do so because he has already reported about his experiences in the alleyway in that section; the desire to linger in that space has diffused, and so the narrative proceeds to other travelled spaces.

These ‘necessary detours’—for the lack of a better term, visualized in the narrative map, demonstrate the nomadic attitude of the subject towards movement. Instead of following an actualized itinerary, the subject navigates Africa based on desire, which alternates between the need to capture an event (being a journalist) and the want to continue the voyage (being a

traveler). Also, notice in the map that Kapuściński shows a preference for the left and right coasts of the continent. Even though Kapuściński has travelled to nation-states at the heart of Africa, such as Chad, and an assortment of other areas like Gabon and Guinea, the narrative discourse concentrates around Africa's waist. The significance of this habit shall be elucidated later in the chapter.

***Immersive Interactions.*** Within this deterritorialized spatio-temporality occurs another aspect of the subject's nomadic orientation of space: Kapuściński's deviation from the generic norm of featuring celebrities, politicians and other famous figures. In a satire, the African immigrant writer Binyavanga Wainaina cajoles (white) travel writers to include in their accounts "naked warriors, loyal servants, diviners and seers, ancient wise men living in hermitic splendor [...] corrupt politicians, inept polygamous travel-guides, and prostitutes," striking a chord in anyone guilty of such exoticization (93). *Shadow of the Sun*, like Kapuściński's other works, attempts to reverse the well-founded expectation.

More often than not, the text's field of vision fixates on spaces where Kapuściński interacts with poor, oppressed and/or marginalized people. The narrative does recount conversations with African personalities such as Minister for Education and Information Kofi Baako (8) and attendance in official gatherings like the United Nations-led convention on national development in Africa Hall, (226) but, "as befits a man from the borderlands, [Kapuściński] feels [more] comfortable in the world of the downtrodden and marginalized" (Ost 85). The section "Salim" centers on Kapuściński's ride across the Sahara with the help of Salim, a truck driver. The rationale and destination of the journey remain undisclosed. What Kapuściński provides us is a critique of the financial windfall of the country that urges the jobless "who doesn't [even] know how to open the hood" to drive trucks and ferry passengers (122-124). "Madame Duif is Coming Home" hinges on the presence of a boisterous Bamakoan fruit stall proprietress in the train compartment filled with European passengers including Kapuściński. "The Well" fastens on women and children who fetch water from a far-off well using plastic containers. The list goes on.

Critic Geoff Dyer argues that the narrative “is underwritten by an awareness of how politics complicates empathy, and of how sympathy implicates politics,” (“Journeys”) as evidenced by the above “sense of profound wonder vis-à-vis the other, as opposed to defensive fear and suspicion” (Gasyna 55). The text captures “the climate, the atmosphere of the street, the feeling of the people, the gossip of the town, the smell; the thousand, thousand elements of reality,” what would usually be curtailed in mainstream journalism (Tuhus-Dubrow 116). Deleuze and Guattari would chart Kapuściński’s nomadic traversal of Africa, manifested by his deterritorialization of space-time and preference for hearing other(ed) voices, as an occasion for smooth space: “a tactile space, or rather ‘haptic,’ a sonorous much more than a visual space” (382). To put it in another way, Kapuściński has woven an Africa that relies more on desire, action, empathy and feeling rather than observance at a visual level. A subject who orients himself with such movements, never settling into any one pattern, is a nomad (Lorraine<sup>a</sup> 166).

***Africa as Smooth Space.*** Kapuściński begins *Shadow of the Sun* with a moving (and frequently quoted) preface:

This is therefore not a book about Africa, but rather about some people from there—about encounters with them, and time spent together. The continent is too large to describe. It is a veritable ocean, a separate planet, a varied, immensely rich cosmos. Only with the greatest simplification, for the sake of convenience, can we say “Africa.” In reality, except as a geographical appellation, Africa does not exist.

In the previous section, Kapuściński-as-subject observes his premise by moving across Africa as if he is a Deluzguattarian nomad. At this point, we direct our attention from subjectivity to spatiality to traverse Africa’s ‘smoothness’. Unanimous with the text’s premise that Africa only exists as a gross simplification, the nomadic subject experiences most traveled spaces as smooth spaces, spaces that harbor no borders.

Besides truck drivers and proprietors, Kapuściński devotes much attention to the real-life anthropological nomads, who by nature demonstrate the smooth spatiality of Africa. There are, for example, the Somali nomads he

learns of by his encounter with Ahmed, a member of such tribe. Because “the land [t]here cannot be cultivated,” Somali nomads constantly wander the Saharan desert to find pastures for their camels and sheep, Kapuściński explains (206). Contrary to the impression that nomadic tribes are always engaged in a “homeless wandering [...] in which civilization [*sic*] is always represented as [they’re] end and salvation, (Campbell 268) in reality, those “lands are traversed by numerous trails and tracks, footpaths and highways, admittedly invisible against the sand and the rocks, yet nevertheless deeply etched in the memory of the people who have wandered [those] regions for centuries” (207). Mentioned earlier is the Tuareg nomadic tribe, and the subject considers them in the same way:

The Tuareg are eternal wanderers. But can one really call them that? A wanderer is someone who roams the world searching for a place to call his own, a home, a country. The Tuareg has his home and his country, in which he has lived for a thousand years: the interior of the Sahara. His home is just different from ours. (207)

By mention of the Somali and Tuareg tribes, the desert space inhabited by the nomads, the (in)famous Sahara Desert, expands from a sign of hostility and wilderness to that akin to home, charged with the memory and history of a people. Deleuze and Guatari explain that “nomads inhabit these places; they remain in them, and they themselves make them *grow*, for it has been established that the nomads make the desert no less than they are made by it” (382). Another tribe, the Kankwa people, do not recognize themselves as inhabitants of a country (137). An act of defiance, this *unrecognition* privileges the existence of their smooth territory over the striated space of the state and, by extension, the colonizers. The nomadic tribes invoked by Kapuściński spur the expansion and transformation of their territory due to their “endless wandering” in such space.

The reportage does not only feature nomads in the above ethnic sense; “it is possible to live smooth even in the cities, to be an urban nomad” (Deleuze & Guattari 482). As such, “the people who pass through [the Lagos apartment] are the city’s eternal nomads, wanderers along the chaotic and dusty

labyrinth of its streets. They move away quickly and vanish without a trace, because they never really had anything” (Kapuściński<sup>b</sup> 114). By treating the city as a *relay* in their continuous search for employment, the proverbial wretched of the earth experience the African city as a smooth space. Here African urbanites, despite not being ethnically nomadic, are nomadic by virtue of their movements in space.

The narrative invokes the presence of these nomads as models for Kapuściński to follow. What the subject learns from the observance of these nomads is that “the places he thought he knew, the labyrinths and compositions of signs that surround him, look one way when scorched by a drought, and another when they are covered by lush vegetation” (206). Simply said, space is in a *flux*; African space is a smooth space.

The vacillation of the text’s field of vision among assorted spatio-temporal loci destabilizes a striated conception of a homogenous Africa. “I traveled extensively, avoiding official routes, palaces, important personages, and high-level politics. Instead, I opted to hitch rides on passing trucks, wander with nomads through the desert, be the guest of peasants of the tropical savannah,” Kapuściński explains in the preface of *Shadow of the Sun*. Deviation from “official routes,” to Deleuze and Guattari is an affront to the state—the institutions and powers—that striate space by imposing what road or pathway people must follow: “in a striated space-time one counts in order to occupy” (477). As a nomad, Kapuściński-as-subject breaks down the borders of the spaces he explores.

***Smoothness as Boundlessness.*** Quite a number of spatial units constructed in the narrative display the boundlessness the nomad’s movements occasion. Upon seeing that “in all the dwellings, on the earthen floors, on mats, on bunks, lay silent, inert people,” Kapuściński imagines the village of Abdallah Wallo as “a submarine at the bottom of the ocean: it was there, but it emitted no signals, soundless, motionless” (218). The inhabitants of Abdallah Wallo, despite being at a sedentary state at that time, are shuttled into the image of an ocean, a space always in motion. Neither the minute movements nor the waves of the ocean can be considered striations, as they follow rhythms generated by their relation to other singularities, such as the weather,

marine animals, and nautical transportation. Due to the nomadic relations of their occupants, seas and oceans are known as the archetype of smooth space (Deleuze & Guattari 480).

Dry, arid spaces, established in the discussion as smooth spaces due to their nomad inhabitants, are also frequently allegorized as an ocean. “The desert, that motionless, petrified ocean, absorbed its rays, grew hotter, and began to burn” (Kapuściński<sup>b</sup> 124). While hitching in a truck with the stranger Salim, Kapuściński observes that while the desert seems motionless, it shares an affective relationship to the sun, making the space grow not in distance, but in temperature. “We were all being swept somewhere, Leo, the car and I, the roads, the savannah, the buffalo, and the sun, toward some unknown, shining, white-hot space” (46). The different occupants of the savannah—the two journalists, the roads, the animals, the sun, and the very space of the savannah itself—are described as if they are under the whim of an ocean’s surge. “The horizon receded and smudged, as if subject to the oceanic law of ebb and flow,” Kapuściński continues.

Being occupied by nomadic tribes and people constantly in motion, Africa becomes boundless and contingently *smooth*. The spatiality of Africa itself is akin to the nomad: “All of Africa is in motion, on the road to somewhere, wandering” (Kapuściński<sup>b</sup> 231). Unlike the overbearing (*Africa needs our help!*) and dismissive (*All news out of Africa is bad!*) attitudes of other writers, thinking that Africa is a scar in the conscience of the world, Kapuściński experiences a *becoming*-Africa, an Africa in all its multiplicity. Rather than exoticize the continent, the subject meshes the colonial history of the continent with current efforts towards progress, such as a developing educational system (discussed in his conversation with Kofi Baako and Kwesi Amu, as exemplified earlier). The reportage mode’s aspects of creative subjectivity (Kapuściński being a nomad) and immersion (allowing for the subject’s realizations about the continent) stage this spatial model.

Summing up the above analysis, Kapuściński’s cartographic method is rendered explicit: immerse and participate, (160-161) destabilize space-time, (25-28) move by desire and for the sake of moving (refer to this chapter’s narrative map), fasten on people who are in motion themselves (114, 137,



206-7). Through these steps, one can find himself wandering in spaces as open and unobstructed as the ocean and the desert. Upon encountering this kind of spatiality however, Mary Louise Pratt might turn tail and ask, is Kapuściński culpable of the monarch-of-all-I-survey tendency of early travel writers? Is he constructing Africa as a boundless space in order to conquer it? Is *Shadow of the Sun*, after all, guilty of harboring a Western writer's imperious fantasy?

**Vacillations: The European Subject Position.** *Shadow of the Sun* suggests that Kapuściński overcomes that tendency by engaging a different kind of movement: the subject's vacillation between a European subject position and an African one, in a process of *becoming-African*.

Although the above spatial categories (the desert, the nomad, the city etc.) are conceived by the nomadic subject to be boundless, they are rendered unconquerable due to the textually constructed hostility of their environs. This propensity begins in a spatial category we have yet to explore: the African jungle. In musing about the European traveler in Africa in "The Beginning: Collision, Ghana, 1958," Kapuściński comments that "among these palm trees and vines, in this bush and jungle, the white man is a sort of outlandish and unseemly intruder" (5). Only later in the narrative do we realize that the incensed way the journalist conceives of the hostile jungle—"a cocky, pushy abundance, an endless eruption of an exuberant, panting mass of vegetation, all the elements of which [...] have already become so interlocked, knotted, and clenched"—is historically rooted. Kapuściński points out that "if you look closely at old maps of Africa, you will notice a peculiarity: inscribed along the coastlines are dozens, hundreds of names of ports, cities, and settlements, whereas the rest, a vast 99 percent of Africa's surface, is a blank, essentially virgin area, only sparsely marked here and there" (56-57). The subject gazes at the colonizer's map of Africa, which at that time is still terra incognita.

Reflecting on the colonial history of Africa, Kapuściński speculates that the jungle's thick foliage obstructed colonizers from subjugating the interior of Africa. Africa's spatial hostility is a form of resistance. The jungle does not seem to be an obstacle to native Africans; they have learned that the

best way to traverse the bush is, simply, to walk in single file (21). To the European colonizer however, it is a complication. Instead of ascribing to this obstacle an overwhelming sense of wonder, which characterized European responses to the tropical geography of the “new world,” (Tavares & Le Bel 48) he admits surrender.

What Kapuściński achieves by writing the above-quoted passages is the extension of the scope of the ‘European’ to include him as a traveler. He does this not only by mentioning the standoffishness of the European tourist in the vastness of the African jungle, but also by assembling a narrative that does not focus on spaces in the African interior, such as Chad, Gabon and Guinea, as seen in the narrative map earlier. Here, Kapuściński stresses his position as a European-traveler-colonizer and its historical culpability in colonialism. He undermines what he has underwritten.

At the onset of the reportage, the subject assumes an imperialist’s position by claiming that the African people is a traveler’s most important discovery, “how they fit in this landscape, this light, these smells. How they are as one with them” (5). While the subject expresses a genuine admiration for the “complementary” and “harmonious” relationship of the locals—the other—and African space, he complicates *his* relation to both by ascribing to himself a more powerful and knowledgeable position, that of the colonizer who ‘discovers’ lands hitherto unknown to him by traveling there and subjugating its people.

Even though Kapuściński employs the above rhetoric of the empire in the beginning, he treats the discourse of colonialism with much contempt all throughout the narrative. He laments that the most painful and lasting imprints of the colonial epoch “were left upon the memory and consciousness of the Africans: centuries of disdain, humiliation, and suffering gave them an inferiority complex, and a conviction, deep in their hearts, of having been wronged” (26). This is what Kapuściński, in the colonizer’s subject position, discovers: the enduring scars and vestiges left by European expansionism.

As Zehle notes, “Kapuściński’s frequent self-identification as ‘white’ also indicates the ambivalence of the notion of whiteness, [as it] is itself the effect of violent colonial rule whose frail authority both at home and abroad called

for the creation of ‘whiteness’ as a coherent collective identity to facilitate and sustain colonial administration” (Zehle 282-3). While on the surface it seems like another generalization, the monolithic “white” European identity alludes to its imperial function. The traveler subject position may function as a strategy to displace the writer’s guilt for interfering with the cultures through which they travel, a guilt former colonizers now bear (Thompson). In *Shadow of the Sun* however, Kapuściński is not given slack. Akin to the colonizer, the traveler subject position ‘discovers’ Africa at the beginning of the narrative, and later suffers the guilt of the European colonizer. This is a reflexive evaluation of the European self—Kapuściński acknowledging his being part of the monolithic ‘West’ found guilty of colonization—as much as it is a historically conscious treatment of the traveler’s subjectivity.

The subject’s becoming-African relies on this reflexive denigration of the European self, because Kapuściński embodies his perception of the European traveler-cum-conquistador (who cannot completely subjugate African space due to its immanent hostility, as explained earlier) to poise as foil to the nomadic relationship *some* Africans share with space—“some,” because other Africans have assimilated the colonizer’s schema, as we shall see later. Kapuściński firmly believes that

The European in Africa sees only part of it, usually only the continent’s exterior coating, the frequently not very interesting, and perhaps least important, part of it. His vision glides over the surface, penetrating no deeper and refusing to imagine that behind everything a mystery may be hidden, and within as well. But European culture has ill prepared us for these excursions into the depths, into the springs of other worlds and other cultures—or of our own, for that matter. For historically, it was a fact of the drama of cultures that the first contacts between them were most frequently carried out by the worst sorts of people: robbers, soldiers of fortune, adventurers, criminals, slave traders, etc. There were, occasionally, others—good-hearted missionaries, enthusiastic travelers and explorers—but the tone, the standard, the atmosphere were for centuries set and sustained by a motley and rapacious international riffraff. Naturally, respect for other cultures, the desire to learn about them, to find a common language, were the furthest things from the minds of such folk. (321-322)

This reflection expresses dissent towards colonialism, which, Kapuściński argues, warrants violence and deceit against other cultures. Even though there later came more benevolent phases of colonial expansion, represented by missionaries, explorers and the such, one nation-state's power over a people is still sustained by "motley and rapacious international riffraff."

Aside from this critical treatment of history, Kapuściński also establishes his conviction about African spatiality that only locals can *best* bear witness to the diversity of cultures, beliefs, habits and worldviews generated in African space.; 'best' because Europeans can see parts of what the continent cherishes, just not in its multiplicity. He expresses the same sentiment in his reflection on the difference between traveler and travelee:

Often, the native and the newcomer have difficulty finding a common language, because each looks at the same place through a different lens. The newcomer has a wide-angle lens, which gives him a distant, diminished view, although one with a long horizon line, while the local always employs a telescopic lens that magnifies the slightest detail. (171)

The traveler, who is supposed to have seen so many due to this constant movement, leaves something amiss: the multifarious details of the object he sees, which, conversely, can be perceived by those who linger in space. In a discussion on apartheid, the subject adopts an African voice and exclaims, "It is not only I [Kapuściński], the black man, who cannot enter your area, but you, too, the white man, if you want to stay in one piece and not place yourself in danger, you had better not come into my neighborhood!" (40). An expression of spatial resistance, this passage also denotes that segregation affects both parties. Since the two positions are limited in terms of spatial understanding (one sees macrocosmically, the other, microcosmically), one must negotiate both in order to develop an appreciation and comprehension of multifarious spaces.

To put this in another way, Kapuściński strives to assume an African subject position in order to understand the African imaginative geography as conceived by its locals, as "various clans, tribes, and villages have their own paths, which cross one another" (21). This African geography is constituted

by “intertribal friendships and hatreds, no less critical than those existing today in the Balkans” (69). Kapuściński believes that only inhabitation—or immersion, for the nomadic traveler who has no intention to stay for long—can untangle “the layout of these paths, their course and connections” (160). Kapuściński manifests his adoption of an African subject position through (a) the suspension of a foreigner/outsider’s disbelief of the cultural, spiritual, and spatial multiplicity brimming in African places, and (b) the centrality of African socio-political concerns in the narrative.

***Vacillations: The African Subject Position.*** One of the most apparent manifestations of the subject’s appreciation of African multiplicity is his treatment of spirituality. Kapuściński explains that “the spiritual world of the “African” (if one may use this term despite its gross simplification) is rich and complex [...] He believes in the coexistence of three different yet related worlds.” Here the subject begins to explain the importance of spiritual life to locals as-a-matter-of-factly, in the position of an outsider remarking about “he,” the African. As he continues the account, he dissolves this distancing:

The first is the one that surrounds us, the palpable and visible reality composed of living people, animals, and plants, as well as inanimate objects: stones, water, air. The second is the world of the ancestors, those who died before us, but who died, as it were, not completely, not finally, not absolutely. Indeed, in a metaphysical sense they continue to exist, and are even capable of participating in our life, of influencing it, shaping it. That is why maintaining good relations with one’s ancestors is a precondition of a successful life, and sometimes even of life itself. The third world is the rich kingdom of the spirits—spirits that exist independently, yet at the same time are present in every being, in every object, in everything and everywhere. (15)

By ‘gazing’ into these three ‘worlds’—two of which, the ancestors’ and the spirits’, only accessible to locals—the spatiality of Africa is rendered multifarious: each object and place, in this belief, is charged with (ancestral) history and (spiritual) energy. What is more, Kapuściński assumes an African subjectivity by speaking as if he is part of the African “us.” His association between good ancestral relations and success even sounds like an advice coming from

a local. He reflects that even though the African spiritual plane could not be given verbal definition, its existence and importance is “sensed instinctively and spontaneously” (262). Here, “the nomad appears in a state of spiritual becoming, as opposed to the material rootedness of the non-nomad” who privileges stasis over differences (Figuiera 79-80).

Kapuściński also problematizes globalization in his explication of African multiplicity. He claims that “our world, seemingly global, is in reality planet of thousands of the most varied and never intersecting provinces” (71). The multiplicity of the continent is hereby established: it is composed of thousands of spatial units—maybe even more because of the ancestral and spiritual worlds which augment the concrete spatiality of Africa. Moreover, he insinuates the homogenizing tendencies of the idea of the global, which encumber the spiritual and provincial multiplicity of Africa. This dispraise of globalization makes an appearance in *Imperium* as well.

Suffice it to say, the nomad subject and space “is localized and not delimited. What is both limited and limiting is striated space, the relative global: it is limited in its parts [...] divisible by boundaries” (Deleuze & Guattari 382). The assumption of an African subject position localizes the traveler’s subjectivity, which supposedly possesses a cosmopolitan personality. Kapuściński acquires “a filiative [*sic*] relationship by contagion,” by shuttling into a different subject position, “with a multiplicity,” which is Africa in this case (Young et. al. 43).

Furthermore, Kapuściński also reflects on colonialism through an African vantage point: “Officially, but not officially, colonialism reigned in Africa from the time of the Berlin West Africa Conference,” begins his account on colonial history (25). Izabela Kalinowska ascribes this empathy for the other to Poland’s commonly overlooked geopolitical position as a Soviet colony. Polish writers’ depiction of their travel experiences, she explains, offer revealing windows into Polish culture’s inbetweenness, (62) such as that demonstrated by Kapuściński’s views on colonialism. Similarly, Dyer muses that “there he is, a white man in Africa at the moment when countries are liberating themselves from the shackles of colonialism. But Kapuscinski is from a country that has been repeatedly ravaged by the imperial ambitions

of its neighbours [*sic*]. He knows what it means to have nothing [...] This is one of the reasons he feels at home in Africa, among the wretched of the earth (“Journeys”).

This empathy towards the victims of colonization, however, aims not to rework the colonizer-colonized hierarchy in a stark ethical framework where Africans are universal victims. In fact, Kapuściński denigrates Africans who, on the verge of independence, seek to take advantage of the furor and seize the state power to striate space. He looks down upon the Americo-Liberians who, freed from the slave trade system, return to Africa “proclaim that only they can be citizens.” As if on a higher station, “they deny that status, that right, to the rest—to 99 percent of the population. Laws are passed defining this majority as merely ‘tribesmen,’ people without culture, savage, heathen” (239). These deeply Westernized subgroups striate space through laws in the same way as their oppressors. Kapuściński also discusses the post-revolution phenomenon of *la politique du ventre* (politics of the belly) in which “so closely was a political appointment connected with huge material gains,” hence the handful of educated Africans wanting to seize seats in the revolutionary governments (36). In his becoming-other “he becomes many selves” instead of a singular homogenous (and victimized) becoming-African (Lorraine<sup>a</sup> 169).

Here, “the binary of self and other is reversed as the subject constructs [himself] as the other” (Kelley 362). Regardless of these, Kapuściński, of course, remains a European. These ascriptions of the African subject positions can only do so much as express Kapuściński’s nomadic desire for more avenues for movement; he admits that he does not know and might not even be able to understand such paths (22).

***The Nomad as Contact Zone.*** By avoiding an ethical binary between the two ethnic positions, Kapuściński does not reinforce an antagonism between European and African; rather, he constructs both as subjectivities scourged by colonialism. The nomadic subject is ‘prohibited’ from choosing an enemy (Deleuze & Guattari 335); rather, what can be considered as the antagonist arises from the negotiation of hitherto binary distinctions, the ‘European’ and ‘African’. This is done by articulating the European as foil to the African,

who appreciates the space it inhabits differently from the foreign European. A European subjectivity is “fashioned over and against a series of others who are denied the power of representing themselves” (Thompson 119).

To put it in Pratt’s terms, Kapuściński acts as a subjectified *contact zone*, a spatial category that serves as the site where disparate cultures, in this case European and African, meet, clash, or negotiate. The zone “is an attempt to invoke the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect” (Pratt 7). “Subjectified” is used to emphasize that the contact zone refers to spatiality and not subjectivity. Interestingly in *Shadow* however, the traveler-subject becomes a vector where the European and African subjectivities vacillate, thus intersecting their “geographic and historical disjunctures” and their “trajectories.” This episteme challenges the Western Cartesian outlook that a “radical schism [exists] between observing subject and observing object (Thompson 94). In this reportage, the vacillation becomes a negotiation of the European and African subject positions.

A few passages in the narrative show that Kapuściński recognizes his role as a contact zone. In most instances, though, the European and African particularities are dissolved altogether to make way for the reflection of the binarized ‘self’ and ‘other’ positions. In “The Cobra’s Heart,” Kapuściński and his journalist companion decide to pass the night over in an abandoned hut by the savannah. Hidden in the hut however, is “an Egyptian cobra, yellowish gray, neatly coiled on the floor.” Still in a state of lethargy, the cobra does not attack, but, posing a threat to the journalists (or so they think), it is crushed using an empty canister. While all this is taking place, Kapuściński contemplates that

The cobra was weakening, and the vibrations of the canister, which we felt the whole time and by means of which the snake signaled us about her pain and her hatred, vibrations that terrified and panicked us, were also diminishing. But now, when it was all over, when Leo and I rose and the dust began to settle and thin out and I gazed down again at the narrow ribbon of blood being quickly absorbed, instead of satisfaction and joy I felt an emptiness inside, and something else as well: I felt sad that that heart, which



inhabited the very pit of hell we had all shared through a bizarre coincidence only a moment ago, that that heart had stopped beating. (47-49)

The brooding tone of this passage demands readers to read it allegorically. The Egyptian cobra stands for the other, whose presence poses a threat to the European self. By feeling empathy, a oneness, towards the snake, Kapuściński negotiates the self and the other. To his dismay, his realization is too late; the snake—the other—is already subjugated due to a grave lack of understanding. Binaries such as European-African, traveler-travelee, colonizer-colonized, and self-other are treated in the contact zone not in terms of separateness, but of interaction and mutual understandings (Pratt 7). Kapuściński lives the life of the nomad, otherwise known as *intermezzo*, the inbetween (Deleuze & Guattari 380).

In one instance when Kapuściński rides a plane to Monrovia, Liberia (point 24 in the narrative map), he loses both his papers and documents in the rowdiness of the people crowding the plane (235). However, in that unconventional notion of space—a plane brimming with multiplicity—identities cannot be fixed (Lorraine 169; see also Bruns 711). As an *intermezzo*, fixed identities are unimportant. As in other contemporary works of travel writing, the traveler-subject in *Shadow* is “poised to split and unravel” (Musgrove 39) through a vacillation between the above subject positions, through identity is both deterritorialized (because the subject is no longer one or the other) and established (as the nomad, the *intermezzo*). In summation, Kapuściński affirms his European position (affirm because it is his original subjection) to reflect on his complicity in the colonial-imperial project. At the same time, he is in a state of becoming-*African*, because he shuttles himself into such a position whenever the opportunity arises i.e. in conversations and reflections invoking colonial history or local customs. The political tensions across the continent require this makeshift identity: the “multiethnicity of the contemporary moment, itself rooted in the twentieth-century experience of decolonization and the migrations enabled by it,” means that our previous historical experience will prove to be quite insufficient in understanding the explosive energies of the present (Zehle 285).

His vacillation between the two aims not to establish new forms of antagonisms between the two; rather, it is to lay bare the culpability of the colonial-imperialist project in shaping the asymmetrical relationship between them. This exposé is grounded in space. Contrary to the mythologies of the monolithic West, the continent is perpetually in motion, in a *multiplicity*, as revealed by Kapuściński's travels. It is in a process of becoming itself. Such is the spatiality of Africa and its relation to the nomadic contact zone-like subject, whose negotiated identity must root from the borderland character of the homeland: Poland "shares characteristics of the European, but also characteristics which the European would categorize as otherness" (Sabelli 11-12). This process of becoming, nevertheless, is in a fluid state; it is far from conclusion. Kapuściński is still learning "his first lesson: that the world speaks, and that it speaks in many languages, which one must always continue learning" (206). Despite Kapuściński's immersive participation in Africa, "he is inevitably alien, which makes the attempt to find a common language more urgent" (Dyer "Journeys").

Ultimately, in this reportage, travelled spaces are experienced historically and multifariously, and this allows for the emphatic, if not intimate, contact of the European self with the African other. This is how Ryszard Kapuściński articulates an anti-imperialist position in *Shadow of the Sun: My African Life*. The text sets itself apart from the travel writing pertained by Asante. Unlike in such works where the European model of civilization is juxtaposed to the countries which "lagged behind," (Elsner and Rubiés 51) in *Shadow*, Africa is spatialized in such a way that privileges its cultural, historical and developmental multiplicity without comprising the complicity its people must exact from the colonizers. With respect to this trajectory, it gives a semblance of *countertravel* writing.

This is not to say that he has revolutionized the outsider's conception of Africa. In fact, as this analysis has shown, Kapuściński still refers to Africa singularly. Notwithstanding, while "there were mistakes, misleading claims, assertions so categorical that they verged on anthropological diktats, [...] there was also much which rang true, truer than my [...] African friends will allow" (Wong qtd. in Zehle 281). Deleuze and Guattari would take

Kapuściński's empathy and genuine curiosity for the other as the foundation of a nomadic relationship which privileges multiplicity over stasis. Getting rid of all the complexities laid bare by this chapter, *Shadow of the Sun*, simply said, seeks to bring justice for the other. Suffice it to say, the marginalized (African) other can find—or better said, *recover* its voice in the travel reportage.

## Schizophrenic Soviet: Ryszard Kapuściński's *Imperium*

We call Communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things.  
The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence.

— Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels

*I cannot call this democracy—it is a repugnant, historically unprecedented hybrid.*

— Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

October 1917—amidst the ruins of a Russian empire, the Bolsheviks, a revolutionary socialist Party, regaled their first triumph, the seizure of Petrograd. In 1922, having defeated their adversaries in an apocalyptic civil war, the Bolsheviks proudly announced the birth of a new super-nation, the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics, which was the biggest and arguably most powerful country at that time (Lovell 1). This historical moment redrew a world map that would last for almost a century.

Despite the impenetrability of Soviet's iron curtain—the fence and other communication barriers that isolate the Communist state from its neighbors, visitors were still allowed, even though for a time, into the so-called utopia (see Babiracki, Lovell). Travel writers and journalists, as expected, seized the opportunity to cover the changes exacted by the new regime. The USSR's "size, diversity, history, and architecture were all noted and appreciated", but they were barely featured as more than a backdrop. These travelers visited the country in order to investigate Communism: in 1920's and '30's primarily to see how Communism worked, and during the Cold War, to see how it didn't. In the 1990's, travel writers like Kapuściński traipsed across the USSR to describe its collapse (Denslow 1114).

This thematic trend in travel literature on the USSR compels us to keep in mind the discourse of Communism even as we fasten to spatiality. Travel writers such as Dutchman Dick Walda and American socialist Angela Davis argued that Communism worked until late into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and while other writers chose to be inconclusive, their records of failure, incompetence and violence are very telling of their stance (Denslow 1114). One of these accounts rose to fame as “the most passionate, engaging and historically profound account of the collapse of the Soviet Empire” (Ignatieff “What about”). It is aptly titled *Imperium*.

In the previous section, I explained in detail how Kapuściński’s spatialization of Africa demythologizes putative Western assumptions by privileging the continent’s multiplicity. Here, the task is to assay how the nomad imagines the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics as a process of decolonization. The subject exposes the paradoxical (or schizophrenic, as Deleuze and Guattari would phrase it) state of the ossified Soviet “Empire” that is socialist in name only. This exposé is achieved through Kapuściński’s nomadic travel, characterized by his border-crossings, his subterfuges, and his fixation on the experiences of common people. It articulates an anti-imperialist position by exhibiting how the colonized can undermine the colonizer’s territory through travel writing. While *Shadow of the Sun* attains this by mocking the binary between the European self and the African other, in *Imperium*, Kapuściński assumes the position of the colonized, using the self as some kind of map for travelling the Soviet Union. This is what distinguishes him from the travel writers we have noted above, who, in their accounts on the USSR, have either lamented or condemned Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin, and the Bolshevik’s program. Instead of denigrating or emphasizing the failure of Communism, *Imperium* weaves the disintegration of the Soviet Union as a decolonization of—no, a *liberation for* colonized European nations.

**Reporting on the Fall of an Empire.** Unlike in *Shadow of the Sun* where Kapuściński relates his experiences as Poland’s foreign correspondent in Africa, in *Imperium*, written and first published in 1993, the narrating subject assumes three positions: first as a travelee, when Poland was occupied and

assimilated by the USSR in the 1930's; second as a traveler, who began his cycle of visits across the super-nation in 1989; third as a political commentator, reflecting on Russia in the aftermath of Soviet's collapse. Kapuściński was not Poland's foreign correspondent in the USSR. His career as a dispatch journalist is symptomatic of his aversion to the hands of the empire. In *Imperium*, he is simply an occasional visitor.

The section "First Encounters (1939–1967)" begins with young Kapuściński's first encounter with the Red Army as representatives of the empire in the chapter "Pińsk, '39." It is followed by "The Trans-Siberian, '58," which tells of the author's first trip to Moscow. Instead of explaining *why* he is on a trip to the heart of the Soviet Union, Kapuściński dedicates the chapter to his reflections on Siberia and the particular spaces of interest that the train passed through, such as the miserable schools in Zabaykal'sk and the thick foliage of barbed-wire fences in Chita. This section ends with "The South, '67," which offers refuge from the dread of the previous chapters. There he narrated his sojourns into Transcaucasia and the nations in Central Asia, or, at the time of his travels, the southern region of the Imperium.

The second part, "From a Bird's-Eye View (1989–1991)," details Kapuściński's cycle of travels across the Imperium. Its fifteen chapters do not only describe the spaces the subject had traversed; they also collect some significant bits of history, the author's observations and sentiments, and his conversations with common folk, artists, writers, and other journalists. Nonetheless, Kapuściński avoids making a clear verdict about how Stalin and his successors fared as leaders. Instead, he relates how the common folk and artists receive the regime, such as in the chapter "Russian Mystery Play," in which a theatrical performance in Irkutsk condemns the dissolution of Russia as a nation for the expansion of an empire. Kapuściński, witnessing it all, hardly commented on the political content of the play, allowing the performers to speak for themselves (178-9).

In the chapter "Kremlin: The Magic Mountain," the traveler-subject's curiosity draws him "towards that which was most impenetrable when power

still flowed through the veins of the empire,” the Kremlin<sup>1</sup> in Moscow itself (Richards “Biblical Thunder”). To Kapuściński, it is not enough to hear the horrors of the empire from the Arctic death camps in Magadan and Kolyma (narrated in the chapter “Kolyma: Fog and More Fog”). He goes there because he must know it for himself. At the end of this section, which spans more than 200 pages—the majority of the text—in the Granta edition, Kapuściński returns to this hometown, which was by then already part of Belorussia.

The final section, “The Sequel Continues (1992–1993),” is, as clearly noted in the preface of *Imperium*, a “collection of reflections, observations, and notes that arose in the margins of [the subject’s] travels, conversations, and readings” (Kapuściński<sup>a</sup> x). A reader can easily notice in this section that Kapuściński hardly refers to the USSR any more. He repeatedly calls his subject matter “Russia.” In spite of then Party leader Mikhail Gorbachev’s “perestroika” programme of 1985 (which reopened economic and socio-political relations with other countries), the Soviet Union collapsed after almost a hundred years of reforms, genocides and famines following a failed coup of the military elites. In those years, writes Kapuściński, Russians were “debating—what should be done” (note the play on the old Leninist question, “what is to be done?”) to address the cultural and economic damages left in the ruins of the collapse (329). Instead of attempting to synthesize his own reflections with the scattered opinions he reads or hears from the news, he enumerates whatever notes he has gathered in no apparent order and without closure. He closes *Imperium* quoting Leo Tolstoy: “Heaven only knows where we are going, and heaven knows what is happening to us” (331).

Kapuściński’s *Imperium* escorts us through the persona’s development from a boy of six, forced to learn Russian when the Soviet Union’s Red Army “travelled” to him in September 1939, “to a Sovietologist analyzing [...] the Empire’s dissolution at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s” (Moroz 177-8). The text reveals the subject’s attitude towards the Soviet “Empire” through his

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1 The Citadel of Moscow, which houses the Communist Party, particularly its Central Committee (cf. Malacañang)

travel. Figure 2 & 3 below are the narrative maps of the spaces traversed by Kapuściński in the course of the reportage. The first map shows Poland (and parts of today's Belorussia) a few years after its Soviet occupation. The second map shows the Soviet Union itself, with most, if not all of its colonies. The maps feature the cities and towns (except for pins 30 and 35, which refer to the Aral Sea and Russia in general, respectively) the subject has traveled to either physically or cognitively. Some events in the narrative take place while the subject is in motion, and the longest of these is Kapuściński's train ride across Siberia (pin 2).

Kapuściński begins and ends his travels in his hometown, sandwiching the immensity of the empire within the colonized space of Poland. In *Shadow of the Sun*, he assumes the position of a European-colonizer subject to emphasize its inability to fully explore Africa. Here, as seen in the narrative map above, the colonized subject demonstrates a mastery of the vast expanding space that absorbed his motherland, an imaginative geography only possible in retrospect, of course. Narrating the *Imperium* in the after-

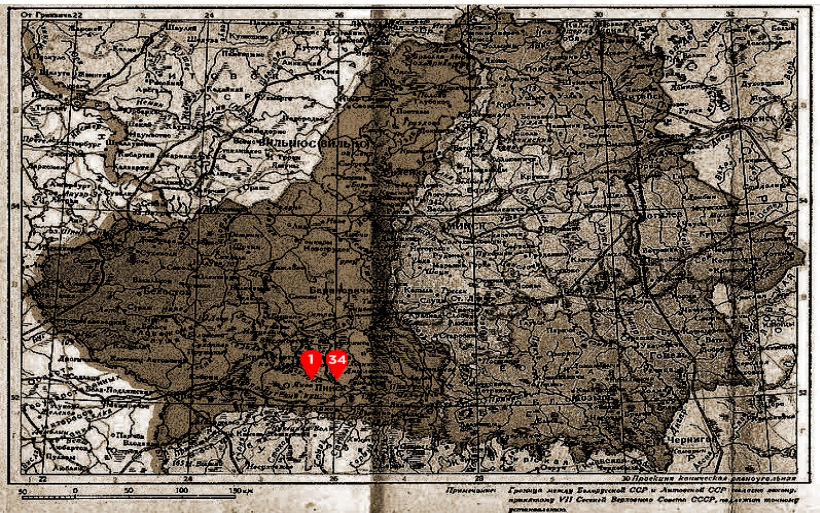


Fig. 2 A Map of Poland (and part of today's Belorussia) a few years after its Soviet



math of the USSR's collapse, the nomadic subject renders Soviet spatiality schizophrenic by *moving* in it, confronting “the enemy by shattering his territory from within, [...] another justice, another movement, another space-time” (Deleuze & Guattari 353). This “justice” manifests in the stacking structure of the reportage.



CONCRETE/PHYSICAL SPACES

COGNITIVE SPACES

FOCUS ON TRANSPORTATION  
(TRAINS, PLANES, ETC.)

Fig. 3 A Map of the Soviet Union and its colonies



*Encounters with the Schizophrenic Empire.* What sets *Imperium* and *Shadow of the Sun* apart is the former's progressive narrative structure that occasions the reportage's *schizophrenic* articulation of Communism as a critique of imperialism. A much-used term, Deleuze and Guattari's schizophrenia refers to the state in which contradictory states or positions seemingly coexist in a "unified" whole, which in this study's case is the USSR as a space (Curie 106). Originally referring to an aberrant psychological condition, schizophrenia is appropriated by the two philosophers in what they call as "schizoanalysis," a psychoanalytic methodology that focuses on the production of desire (Young et. al. 271). In this study however, the concept depicts the spatiality of *Imperium*.

Such narrative progression does not mean that one can easily extricate a palpable plot from the text; as in any reportage, *Imperium* collates a handful of episodes upon which the subject can reflect or prove a point. However, in this particular text, the order of the first two sections is vital to the delivery of Kapuściński's argument that the Soviet Union is schizophrenic and thus unstable, as the first section sets up the stage for the next. The preliminary section of *Imperium*, "First Encounters (1939-1967)," centers on the construction of Kapuściński-as-subject. There, he develops unorthodox notions of (a) space and (b) the other in his experience as the colonized traveler, which later frames USSR as a schizophrenic space. As he says so himself, "man is created for the kind of space that he can traverse at one try, with a single effort" (30). "First Encounters" weaves a nomadic subjectivity that can master or, as Deleuze and Guattari phrases it, shatter the territory of the Imperium.

In the foremost chapter "Pińsk, '39," the subject frames the daily life in colonized Poland as a schizophrenic experience. Poland is positioned by the text as a colony as the Imperium conquers and controls the nation's lands and goods (Loomba 20). As historicized earlier, Poland was "saved" by the Red Army troops of the USSR from the hands of the Germans, but instead of liberation, the fatal events of August to September of 1939 ended up with the country being partitioned between Stalin and Hitler (Cohen 72). One of the areas annexed under the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republics

territory is Kapuściński's hometown, Pińsk. Regardless, he experiences these phenomena unknowingly, being only six years old at that time. The *Imperium* begins with him and his family coming from his uncle's place for the holidays back to their apartment. The subject notes in retrospect that at that time, war was already being waged across the country, not by Poles, but between Germans and Russians. Nonetheless, the child that Kapuściński was recounts his first-ever encounter with the Russian other almost innocently:

After days of wandering we are near Pińsk, and in the distance we can already see the town's houses, the trees of its beautiful park, and the towers of its churches, when suddenly sailors materialize on the road right by the bridge. They have long rifles and sharp, barbed bayonets and, on their round caps, red stars. They sailed here several days ago all the way from the Black Sea, sunk our gunboats, killed our sailors, and now they don't want to let us into town. They keep us at a distance—"Don't move!" they shout, and take aim with their rifles. My mother, as well as other women and children—for they have already rounded up a group of us—is crying and begging for mercy. "Plead for mercy," the mothers, beside themselves with fear, implore us, but what more can we, the children, do—we have already been kneeling on the road, sobbing and stretching out our arms, for a long time. (4).

From the point of view of a child, this encounter is nothing less than traumatic. The narrative's field of vision first fastens on the familiar—the houses, the trees, the park—and then suddenly shifts to the traveler: the soon-to-be-colonizers of Poland. Their identity as the Red Army is not even mentioned; it is signified only by the red stars on their caps. As a child-subject, the narrator curtails his knowledge of the event. The subject, at this point a travellee, first encounters the traveler as a savage conqueror, a schizophrenic encounter where his innocent and provincial reality as a child is distorted beyond his comprehension<sup>1</sup>. Contradictory states of innocence and experience coexist. At this point, the subject suspends the tone of retrospection, narrating the rest of chapter as a child and thus only recounting what he can comprehend when he was six years old.

A more macabre instance of Kapuściński's schizophrenic encounter with the empire is the series of disappearances in his neighborhood. "The

first in class to disappear was Paweł. Because winter was approaching, the teacher suggested that Paweł had probably caught a cold and was staying in bed. But Paweł didn't come the next day or the next week, and in time we began to understand that he would never come". The student must have been deported to Moscow with his family to work for the Imperium. Or worse, they might already be dead. The child Kapuściński must live the rest of his days studying in Pińsk watching his classmates disappear one by one. "Soon no one even asked why they didn't come or where they were. The school grew empty." One day, their teacher himself vanished, and the only thing Mr. Lubowicki, the principal, can declare is the cancellation of classes. Despite these disappearances, the schoolchildren "still played ball, hide-and-seek, stickball" after their lessons, which include the life and works of Stalin (12-3). This, to a child, is a schizophrenic phenomenon: to witness the bane of colonialism in the face of disappearing friends and neighbors, and still go to class the following day. Quotidian, provincial life and the terror of the colonized experience coincide in the space of Pińsk. Trauma—evidenced here by the disequilibrium of the child's reality—is in itself "a deterritorialization of the subject that makes social living difficult" (Lorraine<sup>b</sup> 130). The colonial subject's schizophrenic experience is a deterritorialization of his homeland, "the displacement of identities, persons, and meanings [a] moment of alienation and exile (Kaplan 119). This schizophrenia, Deleuze and Guattari would note, is the site where the nomadic subject *reterritorializes* his displacement (381), a phenomenon that I shall explicate in a while

The succeeding chapter in "First Encounters" is "The Trans-Siberian '58," After the subject develops the notion of schizophrenia, Kapuściński proceeds by recounting how he was shuttled across Siberia in a train, which displaced his experience of space. In this chapter, the nomadic subject describes his second encounter with the Imperium through the windows of the Trans-Siberian Railway (19). The extent of the railway's route can be visualized with the narrative map provided earlier. Its whisks through the townships and districts of Zabaykal'sk, Chita, Ulan-Ude, Krasnoyarsk, Novosibirsk, Omsk, Chelyabinsk, Kazan until Moscow. Instead of featuring each space individually, the narrative refers to them connectively, as "Chita—Ulan-Ude"

and “Kazan—Moscow,” resembling the progression of the train. These pairs of spatial units are compressed in my narrative map as pin 2, as this chapter is the first of the many instances in the *Imperium* which almost completely fastens on the act of travel itself, on *movement* in the most literal sense.

“Everywhere, red banners joyfully welcome us to the Soviet Union,” the Polish traveler remarks, and below those gaudy banners are the “inspectors, men and women, without exception fierce looking, severe, almost as though they were bearing some sort of grudge” (23). This dismal chapter does not at all labor to explain the rationale behind Kapuściński’s journey to Moscow or the circumstances that allowed him to go to a heavily guarded space. The economy of this portion of the text is dedicated on describing how the experience of the Soviet Union displaces spatiality itself.

Kapuściński sums up his trans-Siberian adventure in one remark: “what can one see of the so-called reality of the country? Nothing, really” (33). This comment intends not so much to belittle the landscape of Siberia as to describe the displaced reality the subject experiences. In between Omsk and Chelyabinsk, he mentions that there must be a handful of sights that can attract his attention. However, he writes as if “all around [him] is emptiness; all around [him] is scorched earth; all around [him] is a wall. It is no mystery why,” he says, because he is a *foreigner* (32).

At that point in the narrative, he is no longer the travelee; he is the *other-traveler*. “A foreigner gives rise to mixed emotions. He gives rise to curiosity (one must quash this one!), to envy (a foreigner always has it better; it suffices to see that he is well dressed), but above all to *fear*” (33, emphasis mine). In the preceding chapter, he learns the same phobia in school after the Soviet occupation: “an enemy is a terrifying figure” (12). The relationship previously established (that the Red Army “travelers” strikes fear in Polish “travelees”) is reversed: even when Kapuściński acts as the traveler—whose mobility is a show of agency (Kuehn & Smethurst 7), Siberia, the colonizer’s territory, continues to pose a threat. The USSR is a system that depends on isolation, and the presence of the other undermines this principle; “contact with a foreigner Stalin would condemn a person to five, ten, years in the camps” (33-4). That is why the “wandering of the deportee is not only a

displacement in space and in time,” the subject explains as he details the life of another Pole, General Kopeć. “It is accompanied by a process of dehumanization: the one who reaches the end (if he doesn’t die along the way) has already been stripped of everything that is human” (28-29).

Kapuściński ascribes to himself the spatial displacement the deportees of the preceding chapter (such as his teacher and friends) experienced. Adverse to the multiple axes of movement (note the 9 pins on the narrative map), the subject can only imagine Siberia as a state of schizophrenic displacement; movement coincides with stasis: “man lives [in the Soviet Union] in something like a state of collapse, of numbness, of internal paralysis.” Collapse (a dynamic movement) concur with paralysis. Take note of the pair collapse-paralysis; this reappears later in the text as the depiction of the empire.

These occasions of the nomadic subject’s schizophrenic condition—the unstable position of a colonized-child (in “Pińsk, ’39”) and the spatial displacement of the deportee (in “The Trans-Siberian ’58”)—are set to frame the subject in the textual construction of his travels. Before moving on, there is one more notion internalized into the subject: an optimistic perception of the *other*. In the last two chapters, the other, incarnated as the foreign or the traveler, is identified (even taught in school) as a terrifying presence, “outside all possibilities of naming and comprehension, who marks a limit of cognition and representation as the *foreign*” (Deleuze qtd. in Bruns 705). We see the incomprehensible other in “Pińsk, ’39” as the unnamed invaders (whom we recognize as the Red Army) and in “The Trans-Siberian ’58” as *the subject himself*. The Russians on the train avoid even looking at the other, as they are at risk of execution should they engage in “foreign travel or acquaintance with foreigners [...] or the patronage of those exposed as ‘enemies of the people’” (Lovell 39-40).

In the final chapter of “First Encounters,” “The South, ’67,” a contrasting appreciation of the other is illustrated. Here, Kapuściński purports to see “how the tremors of a historical earthquake [the Soviet Union itself] are felt thousands of miles from the epicentre” [*sic*] (Ignatieff “What about”). Nine years after his ride on the Trans-Siberian Railway (again, he acknowledges the train ride but not what he did in Moscow), the traveler-subject embarks

on a third encounter with the Soviet Union. While in its first encounter, the colonizer travels to the colonized, and in the second, the colonized travels through the colonizer's territory, in "The South," Kapuściński encounters the other colonized nations under the USSR, namely the Soviet Republics of Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan (pins 3-9).

What is interesting in "The South" is the shift in tone and mood supplementing the narrative. In contrast to Soviet violence emphasized earlier in the reportage, this chapter boasts of the wealth of culture, knowledge and history the southern Soviet Republics have to offer. Whereas a few pages ago, Kapuściński speaks of the sheer emptiness and the massive blank walls of Russia, (33) here, he "saw the city. It is nothing strange to see a city, even country people are accustomed to the sight today, but I saw a city on the open sea, on a stormy, turbulent, vast sea" (59-60). He describes the socio-economic center of Azerbaijan, noting the Muslims and Russians coexisting in the area, in its multiplicity. The ever-changing, nomadic relations of the multiethnic occupants resemble the sea, the archetype of smooth space (Deleuze & Guattari 480).

He even derogates the romantic belief that Paris is the center of the world, comparing it to equally multifarious spaces in Transcaucasia (31). "Paris is the center of the world, the point of reference. How does one measure the sense of distance, remoteness? To be far from what, from what place? Where is that point on our planet from which people, as they move farther from it, would have the impression that they are closer and closer to the end of the world?" Kapuściński sallies almost angrily, blaming Europe and its imperial project (which we shall read more later in the text) for proffering the centrality of a single city. The subject's preference for the under-represented is quite pronounced. Kapuściński later refrains his newfound appreciation of the other:

What was most surprising in this third encounter with the Imperium? In my imagination, the USSR constituted a uniform, monolithic creation in which everything was equally gray and gloomy, monotonous, and clichéd.

Nothing here could transcend the obligatory norm, distinguish itself, take on an individual character. (37)

The first two chapters in “First Encounters” highlight the Soviet Empire’s striation, the state’s monopoly of control over space. In “The South,” we get to see the first semblance of multiplicity in the Soviet through the “colonies” of the Imperium, described to be transcendent, taking on their own individual character. What these trips to Transcaucasia etch into the subject is the soul of the nomad, a character wedded to the very concept of multiplicity, which is “acentered” (manifested by the above derision of Paris) and “can be explored only by legwork” (Deleuze & Guattari 371). The latter attribute is accomplished through Kapuściński’s immersion in Transcaucasian life, as demanded by the reportage mode (Kuprel 383).

Reading about his youth and preliminary encounters with the power that captured his father and deported his neighbors, depicted is the process by which Kapuscink’s nomadic subjectivity is constructed, how he lived through a schizophrenic life and how he earned an eye for the multiplicity of the other.

*The Smoothness of Communism.* The nomadic subject employs the above notions, especially schizophrenia, in “From a Bird’s-Eye View (1989-1991)” to contextualize his travels, reflections, and attitudes towards Soviet Communism and imperial expansion. *Imperium* becomes a textual space that allow for the representation of a colonized subject. Having established Kapuściński’s colonized status, to be investigated now is how a colonized Polish subjectivity conceives the territory of the colonizer.

Deleuze and Guattari, in their reference to Communism quotes Marx and Engels for a definition: “Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust. We call [it] the real movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence” (Marx & Engels 56-7). This mode of production, which pervades Kapuściński’s construction of space, is the stage set by the revolutionary clash between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie (the Bolshevik revolution in the case of the

USSR), where the former abolishes the authority of the latter. Positioning this definition in nomadic terms, the Communist perspective, which necessarily includes socialism as its transition period, is a process of continual engagement with the flows and constraints of the current order of society towards overcoming it (Thoburn 3). In other words, Communist space is structured as a *smooth* space, the locus of *newness*, of reversals and multiplicity (Tally Jr.<sup>b</sup>).

Despite the foreboding images depicted in “The Trans-Siberian, ’58,” the nomadic subject *appears* to perceive Communist Russia as the smooth space insisted by Deleuze and Guattari above, in the same way as he constructs the spatiality of the southern Soviet Republics in “The South.” In “From a Bird’s-Eye View (1989-1991),” Kapuściński once again conceals from us the circumstances that stage his cycle of travels to the Imperium, beginning the section by only saying that the journey was a great revelation for him (83). He does mention, however, that “[his] contacts with this power, although sporadic and individually brief, already had their long history,” referring to the three disparate instances told in “First Encounters.”

Earlier, Siberia is ascribed to emptiness. Later in the chapter “Pomona from the Little town of Drohobych,” Siberia is re-described as the “the largest prison on earth,” because “the czar deported hundreds of thousands of his subjects here; here the Bolsheviks imprisoned millions of innocent people.” Regardless of this dismal picture, Claudia Mironova, a deportee the subject encounters, considers Siberia to be “a place of sanctuary, an island of liberty. The immeasurable distances, the enormous taiga, and the lack of roads facilitated isolation, provided refuge, enabled one to vanish from view” (268). The whiteness of Siberia occasions protection for the refugee—in this case, one of its impoverished citizens—from the striation of the Bolsheviks. Community of dissenters survived in the desolate area, Claudia continues. In a way, these communities are themselves nomadic as they array themselves in an open space, holding and maintaining its possibilities. Their movement is not “from one point to another, but becomes perpetual, without aim or destination, without departure or arrival” (353). Their immobility eludes the



violent measures of the Kremlin against its enemies. In meeting these refugees, the nomad renders a part of the USSR in its multiplicity.

Another example is when Kapuściński wanders around Vorkuta at night, “not knowing where [he] was or what to do next.” He is able to select one of the mountains to consider as destination, but “the mountain would vanish. It was the continuing gale, that pernicious polar purge, that moved the mountains of snow from one place to another, changed their location, their composition, changed the entire landscape” (151). This parallels the mobile desert landscapes in *Shadow of the Sun*, which mutate whenever the weather whips the sand. What saves him from the storm is the stars. He encounters a woman out of the blue, who shouted to him, “You are walking in the wrong direction, man [...] you should be walking...that way,” indicating with her hand one of the millions of stars that compose the Milky Way (151-2). The stars embody a new way of mapping the Arctic’s hostile space. In these situations, Kapuściński first comes across unwelcome spatial conditions (the barrenness and isolation of Siberia and the hostile weather of the Arctic region) and to overcome them, he learns new ways of conceiving space, of looking at them in various aspects. The nomad constructs the smooth spaces promised by the “Communist” Soviet Union.

Besides looking at the stars or finding the silver lining of exile, the subject calls attention to places charged with history to depict them as smooth spaces. In the chapter “Central Asia—the Destruction of the Sea,” (another favorite of mine, because of its concern for the environment) Kapuściński contemplates how bodies of water can be the loci of memory:

Water the prerequisite for life, especially valuable in the tropics, in the desert, because there is so little of it. If I have sufficient water for only one field, I cannot cultivate two fields; if I have water for one tree, I cannot plant two trees. Every cup of water is drunk at the expense of a plant—the plant will dry out because I drank the water it needed to live. An unceasing battle for survival takes place here between people, plants, and animals, a battle for a drop of water, without which there is no existence. (256-257)

The desiccating Aral Sea is conceived as an occasion of human life, and thus human history. The chain of ecological necessity stemming from water establishes its significance in the creation of the world's first civilizations. Knowledge of these implications is important, the subject adds. He then proceeds to describing how the water collectivization program of Khrushchev and later Brezhnev destroyed a whole sea.

In the above instances, Kapuściński maps a number of spaces beyond their physical features or functionalities. Even though sedentary space “is striated, by walls, enclosures, and roads between enclosures” (as we shall see in the discussion of borders), Moscow, and the Aral Sea, among other examples, are marked by “‘traits’ that are effaced and displaced with the trajectory” of the subject and the other personalities involved in changing space, such as Grekov, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev (Deleuze & Guattari 381). Employing the notion of multiplicity imbibed by the subject in “The South,” the subject expresses the smooth spatialization of the Soviet Empire.

***The Empire of Schizophrenia.*** Given the Soviet “Union’s” measures to striate space (striation is an understatement to the cruelty of the NKVD), readers of *Imperium* cannot blame Kapuściński from questioning the validity of the USSR’s socialism and Communism. In this decayed condition, he asks, “which will prevail within us, determine our relation to life, to reality? The civilization, the tradition in which we grew up, or the faith, the ideology that we possess and profess?” (213). In this inquiry, he juxtaposes reality, referring to the treacherous conditions inflicted by the imperial Soviet, and “the ideology that we possess,” referring to Communism. This self-reflexive interrogation is necessitated by Kapuściński’s travel to the USSR as a *schizophrenic* space, a model the subject constructs in the text by emphasizing both homogeneity and paralysis (markers of striated space), and multiplicity (the marker of smooth space). The striated space of the empire and the smooth space of the Communist utopia make up the two opposing conditions of the Soviet Union’s spatial schizophrenia.

The boon and freedom promised by Communism (in theory) is occasionally contrasted to the striating tendencies of imperial expansion, which the subject finds culpable of famine and other manmade calamities across

the region. Novgorod seems to embody the smooth spatiality promised by Communism's continuous engagement: "Novgorod was a democratic city, open to the world, maintaining contacts with all of Europe. Moscow [the Kremlin] was expansionist, permeated with Mongol influences, hostile toward Europe, already slowly entering the dark epoch of Ivan the Terrible. Therefore, if Russia had gone the way of Novgorod," it might have become different (298). Russia, led by Moscow, is unequivocally represented as an *empire*. Empires can be understood "to be an age-old form of government between the subjects and the objects of political power, involving two or more national entities and territorial units," the metropole and its colonies," in an unequal political relationship" (Cohen 1). This is Russia expanding to Transcaucasia, and even Poland, Kapuściński's homeland. The nomadic subject laments that the energy of the expansive Russian nation is used to carry out the will of the ruling elite, from the earliest tsar to Gorbachev (87).

Even though Kapuściński's Soviet Union is a schizophrenic space, it is only in the text that smooth spatiality is constructed. The subject as a nomadic traveler, armed with the optimistic notion of the other developed in "The South," looks for Communism in the USSR, evidenced by how he assigns multiplicity to spaces. The material "reality" that the text asserts is mapped otherwise. The Union of Socialist Soviet Republics is an expanding empire, with Moscow/The Kremlin as the metropole, and the other nations, homogenized and paralyzed, as its colonies. The subject's schizophrenic childhood and displaced notion of spatiality, developed in the section "First Encounters," function as Kapuściński's maps in traversing the Soviet Union. Even the humblest factory worker "will realize that he derives no benefits from this gigantic and ever-so harmful chemical production, for the Imperium pays nothing to its internal colonies" (168).

Russian space, therefore, cannot be divested of its imperial politics. Siberia, for example, "in its sinister, cruel form, is a freezing, icy space [...] plus dictatorship" (26). Man must not only battle the cold and hunger in Siberia; one must also defend against the armed forces of the state. This space holds up a "boundlessness that crushes you and leaves you wanting air,"

(36) not only because of its dismal climes, but also due to the NKVD officers who pursue any suspicious passerby in sight.

How does this “empire” expand its territories? Through homogenization and paralysis, the Imperium is able to perpetuate its expansion:

A civilization that does not ask questions, one that banishes from within its compass the entire world of anxiety, criticism, and exploration—the world that expresses itself precisely through questions—is a civilization standing in place, paralyzed, immobile. And that is what the people in the Kremlin were after, because it is easiest to reign over a motionless and mute world. (146)

The Soviet Union renders the nations lining its borders mute, and a mute world is a space too easy to conquer and striate. Sarcastically, the text’s subject remarks that the world used to be “roomier” before expansionism (56). Colonialism, in the Roman era, even meant the building of roads and temples, when now, in the collusion between capitalism and imperialism, expansion means draining other nation’s resources and labor (118).

Articulating the complexity of Kapuściński’s Soviet Empire in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms, the USSR’s schizophrenic spatiality is where striation takes place in smooth spaces and vice-versa. “And no sooner have we done that than we must remind ourselves that [smooth and striated] spaces in fact exist only in mixture: smooth space is constantly being translated, transversed into a striated space; striated space is constantly being reversed, returned to a smooth space” (Deleuze & Guattari 474). Smooth and striated space do not only coexist, but they alternately spring out from each other, such as in *Imperium*, where at one point, space is described to be under the striation of the state (like the emptiness and barrenness of Siberia explained earlier), and later, this striated location becomes the smooth space of nomadic movement (such as the refugees surviving in Siberia).

To Kapuściński, Russia—the metropole of the Soviet Empire, lends itself to this schizophrenic condition. He echoes a Ukrainian in saying that that which dwells in Russians is the “spirit of expansion and domination”

(282). The subject meditates in the section “The Sequel Continues (1992-1993)” that

The Russian land, its characteristics and resources, favor the power of the state. The soil of native Russia is poor, the climate cold, the day, for the greater part of the year, short. Under such natural conditions, the earth yields meager harvests, there is recurrent famine, the peasant is poor, too poor to become independent. The master or the state has always had enormous power over him. The peasant, drowning in debts, has nothing to eat, is a slave.

Simultaneously, it is a land rich in natural resources—in oil, in gas, in iron ore. But these are natural resources whose exploitation and profits are easy to monopolize, particularly by a strong bureaucratic-authoritarian state. In this way both the soil’s poverty and its riches undermine the people and bolster the regime. It is one of the great paradoxes of Russia. (330)

Russia boasts of a spatio-temporal expanse; it spans various climates and time zones. Thus, it harbors a multifarious distribution of flora, fauna and natural resources, some of which—oil, gas and ore in particular—attract the attention of capitalists for the profit such resources might provide. The subject implies that the Communist state fails its anti-imperial promises due to the sway of the riches of Russia. As such, “we shape our landscape, and it, in turn, molds” us (Kapuściński<sup>b</sup> 5). Politics cannot be removed from spatiality because the land shapes its people. Its soil, resources and the Communist state are “one of the great paradoxes of Russia” (“Kapuściński<sup>a</sup> 5”).

***Impero-Communism.*** The schizophrenic condition of space, being imperial in nature, is articulated through Communism. The Kremlin governs an empire it calls Communist. Because of this, many writers and ideologues deem that “Communism [...] wrought the greatest destruction upon people’s consciousness” (140). Note that Kapuściński ascribes “the greatest destruction” not to any physical space, like the lands conquered or destroyed by the Soviets, but to the consciousness of the super-nation’s citizens. “Bolshevik ideology favored the creation of a global communist state as the programme-maximum [*sic*]” (Cohen 152). This lofty dream ends with a scarcity of pantaloons (Kapuściński<sup>a</sup> 187). The perpetuation of this

ideology coerces the colonized to be “voluntary victims” of Communism, allowing themselves to participate in society’s web of problems (110). Some people however, resist the label, knowing its polemic implementation in Russia. Recalling a conversation with an unnamed female photographer in Petersburg, he relates that “they made [her] hands like a man’s, they made [her] a Stalinist, but they never made [her] a Communist!” (300)

This spatialization of a striated imperial nation that still harbors a semblance of freedom and multiplicity, although paradoxical, is rendered possible with Kapuściński framing his cycle of travels across the Imperium with the notions of schizophrenic experience, displaced space, and a lack of fear for the other.

*Nowhere to Go but...Collapse.* Since the schizophrenic spatiality cannot be reformed, the subject reveals to us the upshot of a state chockfull of contradictions: a widespread collapse. Over a few decades, the post-war economic decline of the USSR has been alleviated by “enterprise directors would establish more elaborate reciprocal relationships with shops, farms, and warehouses” to address the conditions of the shortage economy for their workers (Lovell 69). Later on, Leonid Brezhnev’s Communist regime lurches to a more successful standardization of living across classes. He is replaced by Yuri Andropov, who led the revitalization of the Imperium for only a year, being replaced by Konstantin Chernenko (who shot Andropov to death). Following him is Gorbachev with his more liberal (and thus too removed from Communist practices) programs. However, “the collapse of Soviet institutions in Moscow after the failed communist coup of 19–21 August 1991 removed all [of these] equivocations: three days later the Ukrainian parliament voted for independence (115). 1991 saw the fall of the world’s largest empire at that time, after a decades-long balancing act of economy and social welfare (which they apparently failed).

The above is not how *Imperium’s* nomadic subject witnessed the fall of the empire<sup>2</sup>. Kapuściński depicts its collapse as a “disintegration,” another

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2 For the specific details and statistics on the collapse of the Soviet Empire (which is not much of a concern in this thesis), refer to Steven Lovell and Ariel Cohen’s

schizophrenic phenomenon. To him, in the ungraspable boundlessness, the “formlessness” of Russia, “everything falls apart” (35). The text makes it to a point that, despite the association of the USSR with expansion and boundlessness, there stand many borders (including the very concept of which, besides the concrete border) that delineate its territory.

For a traveler like Kapuściński, crossing borders heighten tension, as it marks the threshold of the self; past the border of your home(land), you are the other (19). Entering the USSR, the subject believes that the miles of barbed wire fencing in the Trans-Siberian Railway offers a caveat: “Be careful, you are crossing the border into a different world” (22-3). Crossing borders do not only mutate the traveler’s subject position (from the familiar self to the foreign other); they are also hazardous. Under the USSR’s impero-Communism, borders “were always taboo, a murky topic...simply a magical affair,” (Babiracki 8) because borders, a measure for striating space, complicate the liberties of Communism. Even the nomadic subject is continually “barred, inhibited, or banned by the demands and conditions of [the] state” (Deleuze & Guattari 362). Hence, Kapuściński resorts to a sporadic cycle of travel, treating the many Soviet Republics as relays, instead of staying within the Imperium’s borders for a time.

Kapuściński seems to assert that the USSR fell due to its incapability to cope with the expanse (or “boundlessness”) of imperial territory. Inflecting a Russian named Bierdayev, Kapuściński explains that,

To rule over such boundless expanses, one had to create a boundless state. And behold, the Russian fell into a contradiction—to maintain the great expanses, the Russian must maintain a great state; on the maintenance of this great state he expends his energy, of which not enough remains for anything else—for organization, for husbandry, and so on. He expends his energy on a state that then enthralls and oppresses him. (35)

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works. The publication details of their historiographies are available in the “Works Cited” section of this study.

The topographical “boundlessness” of Russia necessitates the existence of a powerful state, and the flipside of this structure is that all the efforts of the Russian citizenry must be expended on maintaining a boundless state to match a boundless expanse. The contradiction here is that, to execute this mode, the state also expands its territories, making it more difficult to sustain the cohesion and stability of the empire. In contrast to what historians would assert, Kapuściński argues that the disintegration of the USSR is based on the interplay between politics and spatiality. This collapse does not only manifest economically; it reaches the depths of cultural life, because it entails a schizophrenic destabilization of (national) identity. Social interactions in an empire so homogenized must depend on the determination of nationality (Kapuściński<sup>3</sup> 134).

Similarly, to defend your geographical borders i.e. territory, a nation must first establish cultural borders and instigate the cohesion of national identity (246). “Now, after the fall of this state, such people are searching for a new identity,” and Kapuściński blames the Russification (as said earlier, a form of striation) of the Soviet Empire, which forced even non-Russians into being *Homo Sovieticus*. Those whose identities have been left unfazed must experience, rather than displacement, a trauma: a collective guilt, for Russians, and a “hell [...] inscribed in the consciousness” of non-Russians (137-9, 144). Deleuzian scholar Tamsin Lorraine explains that the destabilization of “designated identities can precipitate disorientation when one encounters difficulties in not being able to take up the subject positions available [...] as well as the hostile responses of others” (135). Russians, at the collapse of the empire that drained their energies, must struggle to recover their identities, but this is to no avail because through Russification, no subject positions are left available. Are the actors onstage in Irkutsk at fault in crying “Russia for Russians”?

With the nomadic subject however, this collapse of the empire is an avenue to represent the colonized-Polish-self, “as the nomad reterritorializes on deterritorialization itself” (Deleuze & Guattari 381). The problem of his colonized past is “satisfied by a self-induced uprooting, by homelessness, displacement, and exile” (Oakes 36) into the territory of the colonizer at



the time of its collapse. Crossing the border to Soviet territory is not a lack of identity but rather a shifting identity “for both landscape and traveler” (Musgrove 39). In *Imperium*, Kapuściński has not only brought the collapse of the empire to a Polish audience, who were under the power of such a super-nation, but he also transforms its landscape by revealing its schizophrenic model of spatiality. Within its striated space is multiplicity, and the subject is able to show this to readers by nomadically travelling across the Soviet Empire. While in *Shadow of the Sun*, subjectivity and spatiality are constructed to be engaged in a parallel state of becoming, in *Imperium*, it is the subject that more primarily molds space, searching in the striated landscape the remnants of the Communist promise.

***Shattering the Territory.*** For the nomadic traveler, “even the elements of his dwelling are conceived in terms of the trajectory that is forever mobilizing them” (Deleuze & Guattari 380). To put it simply, the spatiality of his colonized homeland is informed by the space of the colonizer. Through a reportage mode (exemplifying immersion, participation, among other aspects), the nomadic subject equates the fall of the Imperium as a decolonization of non-Russian Soviet nations. By entering Soviet territory and reporting about his travels, Kapuściński reterritorializes the colonized Poland.

For the *Imperium*, its internal colonies “exist for only one reason—to ensure the durability and development of the Imperium [...] And even if it should disintegrate, their task will be to set it back on its feet as soon as possible” (161). As a rejoinder to how the Soviet Empire treats its sovereign, Kapuściński represents the latter through the Polish literary reportage mode. Writers of the reportage would utilize foreign subject matter to write about the situation at home; conversely, the Polish audience would “read” the reportage about some distant land in relation to its own situation (Kuprel 385). The reportage is directly about the bane of Poland, its exploitative metropole. What Kapuściński does is to talk about the home situation in only two chapters, in “Pińsk, ’39” and in “Return to my Hometown,” which bookend his travels across the Soviet Union. The subject’s Poland’s subtends the expanse of the USSR. The literary reportage, naturally written

in the vernacular, targets as audience those from the homeland. In the case of *Imperium*, the nomad's presence in the dissolving empire "was an act of defiance against the slow pace of change at home" (278). Through the narrative's continuous immersion in the empire's colonies (another necessity of the reportage mode), readers get to see the political situation of Poland in other Soviet states. Lorraine explains this phenomenon as a moving beyond any current self-representation project to explore the "gift-giving power of will" as it actualizes separate but related experiences, such as that of a Ukrainian, a Turk, or a Polish, who, although homogenized and paralyzed by the state, still possess a degree of similarity and difference from each other (131). Whereas much of postcolonial theory draws from the clash between West and East, "Kapuściński insists that the world behind the Iron Curtain too shared a history of colonization, expanding our sense of [...] 'post-colony'" (278).

The text itself is the actualization of this objective. The emancipatory self-representation does not only mean the entry of the self into the colonizer's discourse and spatiality of empire; it also means introducing to readers unanticipated forms of lived experience. The nomadic subject himself attests to this theory of subjectivity: "I look at my earlier life as on an island receding in the distance. The frantic acceleration and mutability of history, which are the essence of the times we live in, dictate that many of us are inhabited by several personas, practically indifferent to one another, even mutually contradictory" (283). In *Imperium*, the nomad walks the paths of all that are decolonized in the disintegration of their colonizer.

Ultimately, Kapuściński's travel reportage forms a semblance of countertravel writing through schizophrenia. To Deleuze and Guattari, schizophrenia spells a "revolutionary" state of affairs (Bonta & Protevi 271). While their statement is elusive, *Imperium* indirectly testifies to it. By spatializing schizophrenia, the text refutes the charge that all travel writing peddles the acceptability of the empire (Lisle 278). Surprisingly, Kapuściński attains this by reversing the expectations of some travel writing critics discussed earlier. Instead of resisting the discourse of borders, (Edwards & Grauland 3) the text directly tackles and mocks the excessive bordering of the empire. Moreover,

rather than rejecting the centrality of the imperial metropolis, (2) the subject finds it imperative to travel to the heart of the empire and dismantle it from there. The travel writer is indeed “more socially conscious of the ruin left by colonialism” (López Ropero 52).

### The Nomadic Subject

Travels to the imperial centers, as these reportages have just proven, can be purposeful. After all, the texts, with their argument against imperial domination, targets the readers back at home, showing them how a Pole can confront the pace of the decolonization projects of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. All things considered, *Shadow of the Sun* and *Imperium* can be read as profound, eloquent registers of a colonized subject’s encounters with their horrible, imperial colonizer.

Through a nomadic subjectivity and spatiality, the two reportages exhibit a journalistic exposure without assumption, an “opening of the self to the other” in “a relation wholly different from the occupation of a site, a building, or a settling [of] oneself” (Levinas qtd. in Zehle 283). As such, the nomadic subject always moves, treating each space as a relay. In a sense, these texts, by articulating this anti-imperialist position, converse with the institution that produced and promoted their predecessors. They feature what Lisle calls a *meta-conversation*, an interrogation of the literary history of travel writing here achieved through the spatialization of the author’s empathy for the figure most marginalized in the genre: the other. *Shadow of the Sun* and *Imperium* to put it simply, demonstrate how a Deluzoguattarian nomad would map and, possibly, emancipate its world.

## Notes

1. “Schizophrenia,” as I use hereon to describe a human being, refers to the Deluzoguattarian positionality as well, not the clinical-psychological condition.
2. Although Deleuze and Guattari by no means *identify themselves* as Marxists, their analyses, which are highly critical of capitalism, heavily rely on traditional Marxist categories. Considering this, many scholars acknowledge their contribution to Marxist philosophy (Best & Kellner 77-78).
3. *Africa Bibliography* is a guide to works in African studies published under the International African Institute since 1984.
4. As mentioned in the earlier sections of this study, I shall treat the travel text as an explicit, written form of an imaginative geography, Edward Said’s term for the cultural figuration of foreign places.
5. Kapuściński details his experiences in Ghana as an eyewitness reporter in *Another Day of Life*. Unlike the *Shadow of the Sun* which spotlights the author’s travels in post-war Africa, *Another Day* juxtaposes the author’s unwelcome stay in the country with the violent contours of war. The memoir features stasis rather than movement.
6. This study shall use the distinctions established by Potter Abbot in his study of narrative. *Narrative discourse* shall refer to the order in which events are recounted. *Story* and *event* both refer to the action being represented in the text (19).

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