

# Taking Sides: Heroes, Antiheroes, and Journalism of Attachment in Ryszard Kapuściński's *Imperium*

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The present article discusses the practice of journalism of attachment in *Imperium* (1993), one of the most important journalistic works of Polish reporter Ryszard Kapuściński. The paper analyses the presentation strategies the reporter appeals to in order to build a narration based on the opposition *victim-perpetrator*, a central aspect of this form of journalism focused on proposing moral evaluations and defending the oppressed in front of the oppressor. In *Imperium*, the journalism of attachment discourse is articulated around several prevailing themes: Russification policy of the USSR and construction of the *homo sovieticus*, decolonization and its consequences, Soviet Union's rapaciousness, and impoverishment of the subdued nations. Using strategies like thematic polarizations, cross-temporal analogies and *Us versus Them* dilemma, Kapuściński projects negative frames on the Soviet Union and the Russians, portrayed as the antihero in the "story" of decolonization and liberation of the former Soviet republics and their inhabitants, framed positively in their turn as heroes who survived the dictatorial regime. The article also discusses the concept of journalistic objectivity and the manner in which the reporter, when faced with accusation of subjectivity and manipulative intentions, manages to build a coherent and credible discourse for the audiences.

**Keywords:** credibility; journalism of attachment; Kapuściński; hero-antihero discourse; reportage.

Journalism of attachment is a concept launched at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the BBC war correspondent Martin Bell and it refers to a particular manner of approaching journalism in the case of major conflict situations (war, most notably) where objectivity, as one of the guiding principles of the profession, instead of revealing the truth, proves inefficient and erroneous. Bell's argument is that objective reporting is not always synonymous with truthful reporting, because in a conflictual context there is always an imbalance between the forces involved, with the more powerful one enjoying better media coverage than the less powerful one. Consequently, the role of attachment journalists would be to re-establish the unbalanced nature of the representations that media create. Bell, cited by Kingsnorth, explains: "It is no use pretending that the victims of a massacre and its perpetrators have an equal right to be heard. It is morally wrong to argue that the oppressor and the oppressed, the powerful and the powerless, the rich and the poor, are equal and equally deserving of attention. [...] it is up to us to decide who gets heard" (2004). Bell suggests the following working principle for journalism of attachment:

In place of the dispassionate practices of the past I now believe in what I call the journalism of attachment. By this I mean a journalism that cares as well as

knows; that is aware of its responsibilities; and will not stand neutrally between good and evil, right and wrong, the victim and the oppressor. This is not to back one side or faction or people against another; it is to make the point that we in the press [...] do not stand apart from the world. We are a part of it. (1997: 8)

Developed in the context of the Bosnian War (1992-1995), journalism of attachment has been perceived, on the one hand, as a threat to long-time strong journalistic principles like objectivity and impartiality and, on the other, as a clear attempt to improve the profession's standards, by adding some well-intended subjectivity. From a strictly chronological perspective, journalism of attachment formally appeared right after Kapuściński published *Imperium*, in 1993. But the practice itself was not something new, not for the Polish reporter, nor for other war correspondents. In fact, Kapuściński's disagreement with journalistic objectivity has been emphasised on different occasions, especially against the background of his experiences as a correspondent journalist in Africa and Latin America: "I do not believe in impartial journalism. [...] I do not believe in formal objectivity. A journalist cannot be an indifferent witness; he should have the capacity for [...] empathy. So-called objective journalism is impossible in conflict situations. Attempts at objectivity in such situations lead to disinformation" (*apud* Ascherson, 2012). Nevertheless, this recent tendency observed in war and conflict journalism has been severely condemned by some fellow journalists, imputing that it encourages a humanitarian perspective on facts, framing a sentimentalized reality and that its practitioners enlarge their own self-importance, by attributing to themselves the role of crusaders enabled to distinguish between right and wrong, good and evil, and to make dangerous moral evaluations based on personal, subjective distinctions (Hume, 1997; McLaughlin, 2002).

Our paper aims to analyse this trend (and especially the strategies reporters use in order to build their stories in positive and negative frames, by means of the hero – antihero polarization) from a discursive perspective, using the theoretical background offered by the practitioners of journalism of attachment. To do so, we have chosen as case study *Imperium*, a major work by Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuściński, where he describes and discusses the effects of the Soviet Union collapse in 1991. First published in 1993, the book is both a literary and a journalistic piece and it includes, broadly speaking, a mixture of travel journalism (or literature) and memoir. Despite worldwide acclaim, the book also met with disapproval for its biased approach, some critics evoking, among other things, fetishization of Russian nature and wildlife (Maxim Waldstein) and obsessive anti-Stalinism criticism (Anne-Marie Monluçon). From a journalistic point of view, *Imperium* has been criticized for its lack of objectivity in some of the depictions of the former Soviet Union, for presenting facts in a biased manner, and for fictionalizing reality (Domosławski).

In the case of this Polish author, journalism of attachment takes the form of what he calls a "personal report" (1996: 8), Kapuściński alluding to the fact that in *Imperium* we will not discover an objective and detached narration, but a subjective, intimate and personal one, based on the relationships he built with people he met during his journeys in the Soviet Union. He describes the conditions in which people spent their lives, explains the sufferings they endured during the Stalinist regime and comments on their superhuman ability to fight their way through hardships and misfortunes. As Domosławski explains, "Kapuściński puts forward a reading focused on today's challenges through the eyes of the pariah: he gave voice to those no one listens to and spoke in their name. He was a reporter and an advocate of conflicts nobody seemed willing to communicate or understand" (2008). This feature of *Imperium* is best illustrated in the second part of the book – "From a Bird's-Eye View (1989–1991)", which is, journalistically speaking, the most intense and the closest to what is generally labelled as reportage –, where Kapuściński builds a narration based on the stories he heard from those he met during his sixty thousand kilometre journey across the territories of the former USSR republics, right after it collapsed. Although in *Imperium* one cannot find the typical war context that represents the favourite *lieu* to practice journalism of attachment, it is the perpetual tensed atmosphere (omnipresent in the background) that enables

here a discourse based on journalism of attachment rhetoric. In any case, Kapuściński is no stranger to war and conflict. In fact, the first part of *Imperium*, “First encounters (1939-1967)”, is a retrospective episode where the author recollects memories from his childhood starting with the Second World War, as the opening paragraph of the book reveals: “My first encounter with the Imperium takes place near the bridge linking the small town of Pińsk, Poland, with the territories in the south. It is the end of September 1939. War is everywhere” (1996: 11). Some authors even consider that his decision to travel in the territories of the former USSR is based on the “personal relationship” he had with the neighbouring country: “I am referring to his origins, his dramatic experience with the Soviet occupation during Second World War and his previous trips there” (Serraller Calvo, 2011: 29).

In *Imperium*, the journalism of attachment discourse is articulated around several prevailing themes: Russification policy of the USSR and construction of the *homo sovieticus*, decolonization and its consequences, Soviet Union’s rapaciousness and impoverishment of the subdued nations. Kapuściński abandons the ideal of journalistic objectivity in favour of a more passionate reporting, documenting the violent and ironic relation between political power and everyday life (Platt, 2012: 6). Believing that “his intentional journalism could modify and improve the world” (11), Kapuściński embarks on a long expedition through fifteen former Soviet republics, aiming to save from oblivion the individual and collective dramas of the different peoples living for decades under Soviet dictatorship. His trip begins in the autumn of 1989 with “The Third Rome”, a metaphor the reporter used to refer to Moscow, the Russian capital. According to Kapuściński, this idea was suggested by Philoteus, a Pskov sage and visionary from the 16<sup>th</sup> century: “‘Two Romes have already fallen (Peter’s and Byzantium)’, he writes in a letter to the contemporary Muscovite prince Vasily III. ‘The Third Rome (Moscow) stands. There will not be a fourth’, he categorically assures the prince” (1996: 93). Thus, Kapuściński’s choice is not fortuitous. Encouraged by learning that “a climate favourable to democracy and freedom is increasingly prevailing across the world” (87), and by the fact that dictatorial regimes everywhere were starting to fall apart, the reporter plans to be the first one to go in the heart of the Soviet Union, in Moscow, which will represent the beginning of a story concerning the multilateral and multigenerational damage caused by what started in late 1917 with the Bolshevik Revolution. After he arrives there, the reporter witnesses the changes Moscow has suffered in time, as part of its rebuilding process and as a consequence of the forced urbanization and migration phenomena, giving birth to what was called the “urban peasantry”. The revolution inspired by Karl Marx enabled vast destruction in its most varied and terrifying shapes, allowing the reporter to not so kindly remark that the “old Moscow vanished from the face of the earth, and in its place arose heavy and monotonous, although powerful, edifices – symbols of the new authority. Fortunately, as was often the case under real socialism, disorder, laziness, and a lack of tools saved a part of the city from final destruction (94).

Before delving further into the discursive schemes that Kapuściński uses in his reportages, it is important to point out that throughout *Imperium*, the author prefers a *then and now* narrative perspective, explaining current facts with many references to past events (for better contextualizing) or to book excerpts, newspaper cuts, interview quotes or other type of items that work as remembrance devices. Thus, he is building cross-temporal analogies as a mean to help the reader establish links between past and current events; it is a device meant to facilitate understanding of the message, but, from a rhetoric point of view, through such analogies Kapuściński tries to determine the reader to make a choice (generally between right and wrong, good and evil) based on the information he provides. And in this case the strategy is to exploit the type of content offered, like the interplay between very detailed depictions (specific content) and vague presentations (general content), depending on the author’s intentions (positive or negative) to frame realities. Let us take for example the portrayal of the Palace of the Soviets in Moscow. After describing at length the Temple of Christ the Saviour and explaining how Stalin came with the idea of demolishing it, for the description of the building meant to take its place and to defy the grandeur of

the American Empire State Building, Kapuściński goes even further with his meticulous art of description: the height of the palace, together with the statue of Lenin at its top – 415 metres (around 150 floors); the weight of the palace – 1,5 million tons; the capacity of the palace – 7 million cubic metres, which equals the combined capacities of New York's then six largest skyscrapers; as for the statue of Lenin, other fine points: the length of the index finger of Vladimir Ilyich – 6 metres; the length of the foot – 14 metres; the width of the shoulders – 32 metres; the weight of the statue – 6,000 tons. The reporter wants to highlight the importance of the moment when the plan of building the palace was approved: June 1933. And then, without the scrupulous specifications one could expect, he explains:

June 1933 was one of those months when the fields and roads of the Ukraine were strewn with tens of thousands of corpses of people who had perished from hunger, and when there were incidents (exposed today) of women, crazed with hunger and no longer aware of their actions, eating their own children. Moreover, they were dying of hunger not only in the Ukraine. They were dying also in the Volga region and in Siberia, in the Urals and by the White Sea. Yes, all this was taking place simultaneously – the demolishing of the temple, the millions of people starving to death, the palace that was to eclipse America, and the cannibalism of those unfortunate mothers. (1996: 106)

Most often, verifiable facts suggest objectivity; however, it is not their presence or absence that matters the most here, but the way they are concatenated, namely what precedes and what follows. This manipulation in ordering the presentation is the one that enables building a negative frame around the Soviet Union and its policy. At a lexical level, word choices are also relevant for the general strategy of demonization of one and glorification of the other. For the Temple of Christ the Saviour, the reporter stays in range of the semantical macro-field of *good* (“the most impressive”, “magnificent”, “unique”, “the true glory of Russian art”, “dazzlingly sumptuous interior”, etc.), while for the action of demolishing the church and building the Palace of the Soviets, the shift to *evil* is swiftly made: “tremendous”, “destroy”, “primitive”, “horrificing”, “hammered off”, “chopped away”, “screwed off”, “forced out”, “gouged out”, “broken off”, etc. (101-103). Nevertheless, the reporter does not seem convinced that the reader truly understands his message only from exposition of facts painted with relevant details. Thus, alongside the contrastive description, he decides to address the readers directly (the conative function of language at its best) and asks them to perform some fictitious exercise in order to better understand his standpoint and to convince them to agree with it:

Stalin orders the largest sacral object in Moscow to be razed. Let us for a moment give free reign to our imagination. It is 1931. Let us imagine that Mussolini, who at that time rules Italy, orders the Basilica of St. Peter in Rome to be razed. Let us imagine that Paul Doumer, who is at that time president of France, orders the Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris to be razed. Let us imagine that Poland's Marshall Józef Piłsudski orders the Jasnogórski Monastery in Czestochowa to be razed. Can we imagine such a thing? No. (102)

When illustrating the destruction of old Moscow and its replacement with the new one, the reporter does not forget about the conspiracy of silence as a social practice and decides to speak and write about it: “And what do the inhabitants of Moscow say about this? [...] They look, watch, and remain silent, for what is there to say? No one protests, demonstrates, pickets. And anyway, Stalin would not tolerate such things” (104). But this was not the case of Moscow citizens exclusively. Further on, in the chapter about Vorkuta, he explains what had happened in the Imperium: “Because interrogative language was appropriated by the police, by the so-called *organa*, by the dictatorship, the very inflection of a sentence expressing the desire to learn something

signalled danger, perhaps foreshadowed a sinister fate. This resulted in fewer and fewer people asking questions in the Imperium and the simply fewer and fewer questions” (145).

But the report does not stop here, because all the important themes in the history of the Soviet Union are discussed in *Imperium*: social phenomenon of queueing for products, extreme poverty, Soviet isolation policy, migrations, deportation, colonization and many other abuses people suffered because of the Soviet Union politics and its ambitions. In journalism of attachment, the reporter sees himself as a witness of the battle between good and evil, one who assumes the mission of representing the powerless. Consequently, he writes about individuals who lack the resources to defend themselves and have no possibility to change the world they live in. The journalist becomes a crusader whose mission is, by means of words especially, to share the sufferings of the people with the rest of the world, hoping that in doing so he will contribute to improve their life conditions and their general situation. In *Imperium*, according to this attachment policy, Kapuściński projects the USSR as the antihero, the evil that rose in the East and, just like a contagious disease, took over the territories around it, while, as for the people he met, his intention is to picture them as survivors of an oppressive regime. Evidently, this task is made easier, as the author exploits the idea that, *post factum*, no one could deny or defend the repressive nature and the atrocities of the Soviet domination. The effects of this are obvious everywhere in the former USSR republics, and Kapuściński only reveals aspects of it from the 15 countries he travelled in. In Ukraine, the dramatic consequences of the Bolshevik occupation are no secret, and the brutality and intensity of the Russification had almost no match in other Soviet republics: here is where the genocide called the Great Famine started in 1929 – when Stalin starved to death around ten million people –, building of the kolkhoz system in tandem with collectivization of agriculture, killing of the intelligentsia, etc. According to a document that the reporter obtained from some “lovers of Old Kiev”, there was a map of the city and a list of purposefully demolished buildings, churches, palaces, cemeteries meant to produce a final obliteration of Ukrainian culture (history, language, traditions, etc.). The conclusion? “Ukrainian culture was better preserved in Toronto and Vancouver than in Donetsk or Kharkov” (264).

Another rhetorical device used extensively by Kapuściński is playing with the reader’s expectations. When introducing Yakutsk, a former Soviet Union city that had diamonds and gold resources known all around the world, one would expect a depiction charged with hyperbolic metaphors and exquisite epithets in order to fully illustrate the richness of such city. But the readers’ expectations are to be disconcerted, because Kapuściński is not interested in that exported richness, but in the poverty that portrays the place from where the diamonds go to the rich ladies of New York, Paris or Amsterdam. Thus, instead of describing some rich ladies wearing their diamonds on the streets of Yakutsk, we witness, through the reporter’s eyes, the extreme poverty that Tanya, a ten-year old girl, and her family live in (178-179). Also, the city’s depiction follows the same stylistic pattern:

Like the slum neighbourhoods in Latin America (*favelas* in Rio de Janeiro, *callapás* in Santiago in Chile, and so on), Zalozhnaya in Yakutsk is a closed structure. Poverty, dirt, and mud create here a homogeneous, coherent, consistent landscape in which all the elements are linked to one another, are correlated. As far as the eye can see, there are no contrasts here, no symbols of prosperity rising above the panorama of penury. The essence of such a closed structure is that one cannot improve one individual thing – the other links in the chain will immediately stand in the way. Nothing can be done, for example, to help people have clean shoes: the ubiquitous muck will not allow it. (182)

By using this polarization pattern, Kapuściński’s intention is to clearly frame before the eyes and mind of the reader who the oppressed is (hero status) and who the oppressor is (antihero status). As a matter of fact, all across the book, the reporter tries to cement this distinction between the good (hero, victim, oppressed, colonized) Ukrainian/ Armenian/ Georgian/ Bashkir,

etc. and the evil (antihero, perpetrator, oppressor, colonizer) – *homo sovieticus*, creation of the Soviet Union. Being aware of other person's undeserved misfortune, Kapuściński reacts accordingly. He develops a victim-oriented discourse of compassion (Nussbaum, 2001) meant to endow his characters with heroic features. For the matter, the strategy is to hyperbolize them and their actions, while diminishing the grandeur of the antihero, as he does when describing the conflict simmering between the Russians and the Bashkirs: "There are around a million Bashkirs. What sort of place are they to occupy, what sort of posture are they to adopt in the contemporary world? Are they to acknowledge that after three hundred years of Russification, they are no longer Bashkirs? That is impossible! No amount of terror, of persecution and camps, could extirpate from the Bashkirs their Bashkirianness. Russification is itself in retreat, increasingly fewer little Bashkirs want to learn Russian" (164).

In journalism of attachment, the discourse of compassion is associated with another two important concepts, of which Kapuściński himself spoke in various occasions: empathy and otherness. It is impossible to create journalism at the margin of our relationship with other human beings, he adverts (Platt, 2013). His encounters with the other provided him with the omnipresent idea in his journalistic work of identifying himself with the unfortunate ones. "He felt an emotional link with the other. He mentioned many times that the most important topic for him was the poor and that his mission as a journalist was to give voice to those individuals who lacked one" (86). Understanding the others implies living close to them, experiencing what they experience, sharing their problems, sorrows, and joys. It is the only way for an honest reporting (Torres Kumbrián, 2010: 10-11) and this is exactly what Kapuściński is doing in *Imperium*. As Silvia Platt comments, this was a guiding principle for all the reporters belonging to the Polish school of reportage starting with 1990. All of them were interested in those who were forgotten, poor, devastated by war and who, for one reason or another, could not speak for themselves (195). It is what Kapuściński promoted under the name of intentional or attitudinal journalism, a type of media practice in which the reporter has a social responsibility that requires him not to be a neutral actor, but to react and fight injustice. Without using a discourse of hate or suggesting revenge, the journalist has to try to generate some sort of change in society. It is important for a journalist to not stay indifferent. Intention is licit and effective if it is enveloped by credibility and not by some ideological message (Lladó, 2012).

As expected, Kapuściński has not escaped accusations that, with *Imperium*, he created a multi-layered piece disguising his own socio-political beliefs. Maxim Waldstein, one of the most vocal critics of Kapuściński's *Imperium*, even launched the idea that the Polish journalist was so eager to demonize Russia that he used both wildlife and nature to reinforce his own ideological beliefs about this country. Thus, in *Imperium*, nature itself turns into the antihero, into an enemy. For Waldstein, an example of the fetishization of Russian nature by Kapuściński is his description of Siberia, the writer being accused of using the desolate landscape as means for contemplating tsarist and Russian slavery (Zajas, 2014: 247). Waldstein believes that similar landscapes in Canada or the United States would not cause similar associations in Kapuściński's mind, who forges a historically problematic continuity between "Siberia" and "despotism" or "the prison of the people". Waldstein concludes that "Russia" is methodically pictured as collectivist, authoritarian, nationalistic and immobile, with Europeans as individualist, liberal, patriotic and historical (2002): "Waldstein quite rightly notices that even though nature is not in a central position in Kapuściński's narrative, when it does appear it draws all the attention to itself. Based on his impressions of the landscape, Kapuściński dreams up far-reaching historical and sociological deliberations. Russian space is contrasted with European and in delving into the white, boundless desert landscape which accompanies a 'feeling of falling into nothingness and disappearing'" (Zajas, 2014: 247).

This oppositional presentation is part of another discursive strategy meant to reinforce the hero – antihero polarization: the dialectics *Us versus Them*. From a communicative perspective, the rhetoric of *Us versus Them* needs to be analysed in a wider context by answering a key-question:

what public did Kapuściński have in mind when writing *Imperium* using the *Us versus Them* strategy? Analysing the book, Anne-Marie Monluçon (2012) wonders if it was written for the Polish people or for the public from the traditional Western societies, with no or inadequate knowledge of the Soviet Union and its annexation and Russification politics. She suggests that an answer to this question should bring more light to the *Us versus Them* dilemma and to that we add at least three possible interpretations:

(a) If the book was written for the people of Poland, a former Soviet dominated nation, the anti-Stalinist approach would enable Kapuściński to symbolically set himself free – as the reporter himself is a Polish whose family suffered from the Russian expansionist policy – and also set free his people. From this perspective, the reporter gains a hero status, as he speaks a truth his fellow countrymen could not speak.

(b) If the book was written for the people of the Sovietized republics, who mostly suffered from the Russian domination and from the USSR installation, the *Us versus Them* takes a more humanitarian turn, in the sense given to the term by journalism of attachment. Due to his capacity for empathy, the reporter establishes a sense of communion with the people of these nations that, despite the “stiff, rigorous corset of the Soviet power, the local, small, yet very ancient, nations had succeeded in preserving something of their tradition, of their history, of their, albeit, concealed pride and dignity” (43). From this point of view, the book seems dedicated to those who managed to fight their transformation into the desired *homo sovieticus*. But there is also another contribution to his ability to empathize. Despite considering himself a foreigner in the former Soviet Union, ironically, Kapuściński could easily connect with people from the republics that he travelled in because all were speaking a common language they knew: Russian.

(c) If the book was written for the people of the traditional Western societies, who have no or inadequate knowledge of the Russian annexation and Sovietization policy, the *Us versus Them* takes a more political turn, thus Kapuściński opposing democracy to communism. Most relevant is the discussion the reporter has while on a plane to Baku with “a democrat from Moscow”, because Kapuściński confronts here two thought currents or, more widely, two social systems. After concluding that he could never agree with the Muscovite’s view about democracy, the reporter explains (to the Occidental reader):

There exists an insurmountable contradiction between the rigid and peremptory nature of imperium and the elastic and tolerant nature of democracy. The ethnic minorities inhabiting an imperium will take advantage of the slightest whiff of democracy to tear themselves away, make themselves independent, make themselves autonomous. For them, there is one response to the slogan “Democracy” freedom. Freedom understood as detachment. This of course provokes objections on the part of the ruling majority, which, in order to maintain its privileged position, is ready to resort to the use of force, to authoritarian solutions. (112)

Also, there are interpretations that promote the idea that Kapuściński suggests in *Imperium* Poland’s affiliation with Europe, and not with Russia. “Kapuściński wants us only to know that he is a *foreigner* and a *European* (or a Westerner). Meaning, he wishes to convince the reader that he has no other ties to Russia other than those of a distanced, ‘calm, attentive and sober’ observer to its object”, explains Maxim Waldstein (2002) in an article published in *Social Identities* revue. He chooses as an example an episode from the first part of the book where Kapuściński mentions the “impermeable and heavy curtain” (43). In Waldstein’s opinion, “this would sound very natural if written by an American or a French traveler. Yet, the point for this strange phrase is precisely to challenge both the Soviet and Western senses of where this curtain is hanging. Kapuściński implies that Poland is not behind but ‘really’ outside the curtain” (2002). Waldstein concludes that Kapuściński wrote *Imperium* at a time when Western Europe was ready to “take over the trio of Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary”, thus explaining the existing need to demonstrate

that intellectuals of Central Europe “did not have anything in common with the great emptiness to their east” (Zajas, 2014: 241).

The Polish reporter is seemingly focused on projecting a negative image on the Soviet Union at all times and costs. Discursively, he uses an entire arsenal of stylistic and rhetoric devices meant to build an antihero that both Western and Eastern nations could easily recognize and condemn. The map comparison suggesting the USSR desire for world domination is relevant to the antihero image the author dexterously pictures – the Soviet Union is rapacious, atrocious and egocentric, and it is the opposite of what (the Western) democracy means:

There are two kinds of global maps printed in the world. One type is disseminated by the National Geographic Society in America, and on it, in the middle, in the central spot, lies the American continent, surrounded by two oceans – the Atlantic and the Pacific. The former Soviet Union is cut in half and placed discreetly at both ends of the map so that it won't frighten American children with its immense bulk. The Institute of Geography in Moscow prints an entirely different map. On it, in the middle, in the central spot, lies the former Soviet Union, which is so big that it overwhelms us with its expanse; America, on the other hand, is cut in half and placed discreetly at both ends so that the Russian child will not think: My God! How large this America is! These two maps have been shaping two different visions of the world for generations. (163)

From a journalistic perspective, this may look like an attempt to manipulate the public, although throughout *Imperium* the reporter takes the necessary precautions using “collage journalism”, that is, combining different reporting and documenting techniques and different disciplinary approaches: book excerpts, newspaper cuts, quotes, dialogues with regular people, interviews with officials, verifiable facts, and so on, making it difficult to guess if, when endorsing a certain idea, by using one of the techniques mentioned above, he is also a supporter of that idea (adding his personal opinion to it), or just a neutral promoter of it. Although sometimes the author seems “unable to separate thought from reality” (Platt, 2012: 5), a manipulative discourse cannot be perceived as such unless placed in the adequate context. As linguist Teun A. van Dijk explains, it can “only have such functions or effect in specific communicative situations and the way in which there are interpreted by participants in their context models. [...] This means that in principle the ‘same’ discourse (or discourse fragment) may be manipulative in one situation, but not in another situation. That is, the manipulative meaning (or critical evaluation) of text and talk depends on the context models of the recipients – including their models of the speakers or writers, and their attributed goals and intentions” (2006: 372).

Although not entirely dismissed, in any case, in *Imperium* the manipulation premise remains secondary, as more likely Kapuściński's discourse is one in which the reporter challenges the ideal of journalistic objectivity and replaces it with moral evaluations concerning an oppressive socio-political system. From the journalism of attachment perspective, the Soviet Union portrayal as the antihero in the “story” of decolonization and liberation of its former republics is nothing of a surprise, nor incorrect. Due to his ability to empathize and to the importance he attaches to the “Other”, Kapuściński speaks the language of compassion and builds a story in which the voices of the powerless and unfortunate are heard, listened, and represented. It is the language that objective journalism, in its rigidity, never speaks.

*Note: For accuracy reasons, in the excerpts from Imperium quoted in this article, we kept the English translation made by Klara Glowczewska with slight alterations, although the page indications refer to the Romanian edition published in 1996.*



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