

Title: "Virtual neighbors": Self-identification with Africa in Polish culture in the 1970s and 1980s and the Representation of Haile Selassie I's Court as Criticism of Edward Gierek's Rule in the Novel "Emperor" by Ryszard Kapuściński

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Abstract:

In October 1978, Ryszard Kapuściński, a Polish reporter, writer and poet, completed his novel, *Cesarz (The Emperor)*. It depicts life at Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie I's court and was published two months before Mengistu Haile Mariam's first official visit to Warsaw on December 10-12, 1978. Its publication could be seen as a parallel event to the official reception of the Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia. Nonetheless, Kapuściński did not want to participate in the welcoming of Haile Mariam, later known in Poland by the nickname "Czarny Stalin" ("Black Stalin"). Paradoxically, the novel provided criticism of the socialist regime. The paper provides a double analysis of Kapuściński's book. It will focus primarily on Kapuściński's characterization of the Emperor's rule. It will be compared to the image of Ethiopia constructed in the mid-1960s by Polish propaganda. It will refer to Haile Selassie I's speech during his first official visit to the Polish People's Republic in September of 1964 in which he defined Poland and Ethiopia as "virtual neighbors." Following the suggestion of Kapuściński himself during an interview published by the Polish journal *Gazeta Wyborcza* (January 2010), the paper will analyze to which extent the figure of the despotic Emperor was identified by Polish readers with that of Edward Gierek, the first secretary of the PZPR, the ruling Polish United Workers' Party, between 1970 and 1980. This process of drawing the parallels between Ethiopian and Polish authoritarian governance will be compared to the strategy of self-identification with African culture at that time, which was manifested by the young painters of the Polish *Nowi Dzicy* ("New Savages") from Warsaw and Wrocław. Their artwork consisted of multilayered images inspired by local politics, the Soviet visual propaganda, the Non-Aligned Movement, and the Rastafari movement.