

# Anna Ratke-Majewska

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## "Stosunki polsko-zachodnioafrykańskie", Jacek Knopek, Toruń 2013 : [recenzja]

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Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej [bazhum.muzhp.pl](http://bazhum.muzhp.pl), gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach  
dozwolonego użytku.

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## REVIEW

**Knopek Jacek:** *Stosunki polsko-zachodnioafrykańskie* (eng. *Relations between Poland and West Africa*), Adam Marszałek Publishing House, Torun 2013, pp. 546

**Reviewer:** Anna Ratke-Majewska (Nicolaus Copernicus University, Torun, Poland)

In the publication by Jacek Knopek – a political scientist, associate professor at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun and Koszalin University of Technology in Koszalin, whose research interests include, among others, issues related to international relations, today's national political systems, as well as issues concerned with nationality and Polish diaspora – multithreaded analysis of the relations between Poland and the countries of West Africa has been conducted, including both the sphere of historical relations as well as those of political, economic and cultural nature. The monographic time range is extremely broad – this is due to the fact that the researcher situates issues in the history of the relations, followed by a thorough discussion on the dynamics and shape of these relations up to the present day. It is also worth noting that the reviewed work assumes that the West African region comprises 16 countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo, Ivory Coast and Cape Verde. Therefore, the monograph presents not only a vast range of issues and times, but also shows the extensive scope acquired by the author of the research.

The primary objective of the publication adopted by the researcher is to restore relations between Poland and West Africa. The author, however, has gone beyond pure description of facts, events and various initiatives, pointing to the pragmatics of these actions. One of the goals of work has therefore become answering the question whether Poland would be able in the future to play certain international roles in the region of West Africa. Also the research

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question posed in the monograph reflects the researcher's objectives, concerns the definition of the role and importance of international relations linking Poland and the existing West African countries in the interwar period, after World War II and in modern times.

The research questions posed in the publication relate to the following issues: the impact of historical experiences on shaping of Polish and West African correlation outbreaks, what was the role of political relations between Poland and the countries of West Africa with regards to their development, places of economic relations between Poland and the African region in question, as well as arguments used in the cultural relations, which are intended to bring Poland to the presented region. It is now vital to quote the author himself, who presented the principles of his work in the following words: *A leading research hypothesis lied in a somewhat stereotypical statement that West Africa, both in the past and now, was not a priority destination in the foreign policy at the time, which resulted in the lack of Polish presence in this region. Specific hypotheses are based on assumptions that the interest in this region of Africa was dependent on space and time, which both Poland and West Africa were strongly linked with. In the interwar period, they were generated by attempting to implement colonial aspirations. After World War II they came to life due to the political and ideological aspects. In turn, after 1989, it was claimed that there was no unequivocal Polish policy not only towards West Africa, but also the entire structure of other large countries defined as developing* (p. 14).<sup>1</sup>

The publication layout reflects the main areas concerned occurring in international relations – the history of international relations, political international relations, economic international relations and cultural international relations – and results from the questions posed by the researcher (and mentioned above) to which the answers were sought in the research procedure. The design of the monograph is therefore problematic, although the contents of the next four sections of the book have also been arranged chronologically. Each chapter was on top of that preceded by the introduction where the author has entered into theoretical and methodological aspects. What is more, apart from the introductory chapters, each chapter comprises five sections.

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1 Translation mine. Original quote: *Za wiodącą hipotezę badawczą posłużyło nieco stereotypowe już stwierdzenie, że Afryka Zachodnia, zarówno w przeszłości, jak i obecnie, nie stanowiła priorytetowego kierunku w polityce zagranicznej, co zaowocowało brakiem polskiej obecności na tym terenie. Hipotezy szczegółowe oparte zostały na założeniach stwierdzających, iż zainteresowanie tym regionem Czarnej Łądy zależne było od czasoprzestrzeni, z którą zarówno Polska, jak i Afryka Zachodnia silnie były powiązane. W okresie międzywojennym generowane one były poprzez próbę realizacji aspiracji kolonialnych. Po II wojnie światowej uzewnętrzniały się dzięki aspektom politycznym i ideologicznym. Z kolei po 1989 r. twierdzono, że brakuje całościowej polskiej polityki nie tylko wobec Afryki Zachodniej, ale i całej dużej struktury państw określanych jako rozwijające się.*

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The first chapter of the reviewed monograph is titled *Historyczna obecność Polski i Polaków w Afryce Zachodniej* (eng. *Historical presence of Poland and the Polish in West Africa*). It presents the impact of relations between Poland and West Africa that took place until the emergence of nation states in this region of Africa. The first section – *Płaszczyzny historycznej obecności* (eng. *Areas of historic presence*) – describes the main political processes that happened during the historical development of the Polish lands in the West African region in order to demonstrate their impact on the networking opportunities between relations of those two entities (i.e. Poland and West Africa). The second section is characterized by designs of the Polish government with respect to colonizing the region of West Africa. It shows desires of Poland to acquire overseas territories, while exploring the place of West Africa in the colonial aspirations of the II and III Republic of Poland. The third section – titled *Żywiołowy aspekt kontaktów* (eng. *Vivid aspect of the contacts*) – presents the process of learning about this region of Africa by Polish sailors, soldiers, airmen, clergy, missionaries, travelers, writers, journalists, academics and researchers. The fourth section – *Emigracja wojskowa i ekonomiczna* (eng. *Military and economic emigration*) – deals with the issues of emigration of Poles and people of Polish origin into the areas of West Africa. The last of the sections of the first part of the book (*Polskie inicjatywy dekolonizacyjne*, eng. *Polish decolonization initiatives*) focuses on the support of Poland for the idea of overthrowing the colonial governance, describing in detail what specific actions were taken during this period.

The second chapter of the publication is titled *Polsko-zachodnioafrykańskie stosunki polityczne* (eng. *Political relations between Poland and West Africa*). Here, the author focused on inter-state relations, analyzing the objectives of foreign policies preferred by the countries, official visits, participation of diplomacy in the creation of bilateral relations, as well as showing a conciliatory nature of military and preliminary missions. It is worth noting that, in his deliberations, the researcher has also managed to take note of the importance of informal relations, treating them as a complement for formal political relations between Poland and West Africa. The first section of this chapter (*Wyznaczniki stosunków politycznych*, eng. *Determinants of political relations*) is a description of the factors that contributed to the involvement of Poland and West African countries in the concrete form of the relationship. The second section (*Założenia polityki zagranicznej*, eng. *Foundations of foreign policy*) shows the effect of the formulated foreign policy on the shape and evolution of the political relations between Poland and West Africa. The third section is titled *Misje specjalne i obserwacyjne* (eng. *Special missions and observation missions*). The subject of its analysis are special missions that

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were created by the Polish and West African system of state bodies and the party system, as well as observation missions which were associated with the presence of Polish representatives in West Africa, without, however, any West African representatives present in Poland. The fourth section (*Przedstawicielstwa dyplomatyczne*, eng. *Diplomatic representatives*) describes the establishment of diplomatic relations between Poland and West Africa after World War II, the appointment of diplomatic posts and determining the rank of their representatives, as well as setting up of honorary consulates. The fifth section of the second part of the publication (*Nieformalne podstawy współdziałania*, eng. *Informal foundations of cooperation*) refers to the issue of unofficial initiatives that impacted the form of the relations in question.

The title of the third chapter of the reviewed book is *Polsko-zachodnioafrykańskie kontakty gospodarcze* (eng. *Economical contacts between Poland and West Africa*). This part of the book presents the specificity and areas of economic relations between Poland and the countries of West Africa. In the author's opinion, these relations not only gave a greater sense of political and cultural stimulation, but often determined the development of mutual cooperation. First section of this chapter (*Determinanty kontaktów gospodarczych*, eng. *Determinants of economical contacts*) describes the geographical, natural, scientific, technical, demographic and economic conditions that affected the shape of the economic relations between Poland and West Africa. The second section, titled *Formy wymiany towarowej* (eng. *Forms of goods exchange*), discusses trade relations between Poland and West Africa. It presents an analysis of both the import of goods from West Africa into Poland as well as the export from Poland to the countries in this region, at the same time paying attention to the very structure of trade, its orientation and the factors affecting it. The third section is titled *Przepływy czynników produkcji* (eng. *Production factors flow*). It describes in detail the issues related to the influx of Polish capital to the West African markets. It also presents considerations relating to different types of initiatives and projects in West Africa with the limited presence of capital of these countries in Poland. The fourth section (*Migracje zasobów pracy*, eng. *Migrations of vocational resources*) is focused on the movement of labor force. At the core of its deliberations lies the issue of migration of Polish scientific and technical specialists to the countries of the West African region. The last section of this chapter (*Możliwości inwestycyjne przedsiębiorstw*, eng. *Investment capabilities of enterprises*) focuses on investment experiences of Polish companies in West Africa.

The last thematic chapter of the reviewed publication is titled *Polsko-zachodnioafrykańskie relacje kulturalne* (eng. *Cultural relations between Poland and West Africa*). This part of the book illustrates the overall cultural relations

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between Poland and the countries of West Africa, presenting their specific aspects in the following sections. The first such section – *Uwarunkowania relacji kulturalnych*, eng. *Conditions of cultural relations* – shows the factors impacting directly the sphere of these relations between Poland and West Africa. The second section (*Instytucjonalne formy współpracy*, eng. *Institutional forms of cooperation*) focuses on initiatives taken in order to develop socio-cultural relations, such as: the creation of scientific and journalistic branches, setting up of institutions, organizational and associational activity, establishing scientific cooperation and organization of travels and expeditions. The third section is titled *Spontaniczne elementy oddziaływań* (eng. *Spontaneous elements of bilateral actions*) draws attention to the cultural relations that were established without prior designs. The fourth section (*Zaangażowanie w misje katolickie*, eng. *Engagement in catholic missions*) focuses on the activities of Polish missionaries in the West African region. The last of section (*Inicjatywy społeczno-kulturalne diaspory*, eng. *Social-cultural initiatives of the diaspora*) presents the activity of Polish diasporas and communities living in the countries of West Africa, as well as Africans living in Poland.

The reviewed publication is crowned with a section titled *Zakończenie* (eng. *Conclusion*) where the author summarizes his ongoing deliberations and obtains the results of the research process, referring to the previously formulated research questions and hypotheses.

An undoubted advantage of this work is the fact that it is based on never-before reviewed source materials. Furthermore, it describes in depth the – now largely marginalized in Poland – deliberations over Africa, focusing on one region and presenting it in terms of relations with Poland. It should also be noted that the book not only presents the analysis of selected aspects of the relations between Poland and West Africa, but it also explores the relations between Poland because West Africa as a whole, referring both to the realm of history, politics, economy and culture. The publication should, in this context, be assessed as highly recommendable, and not only because of its cognitive qualities and clear practical dimension.