

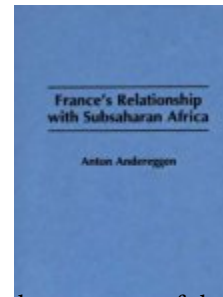
# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Anton Andereggen. *France's Relationship with Subsaharan Africa*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1994. xiv + 200 pp. \$55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-275-94756-9.

Reviewed by Andrew F. Clark (University of North Carolina at Wilmington )  
Published on H-Africa (January, 1996)



Since independence in 1960, the leaders and elites of former French colonies in West and Central Africa have fashioned and maintained remarkably close and stable ties with France and French officials. Even the government of Guinea-Conakry, which, under Sekou Toure, broke with DeGaulle and the French Community in 1957, re-established links with France in 1978. The evolution and continuation of these unusually solid and constant political, economic, cultural and interpersonal connections between the metropole and its former possessions have been much discussed, analyzed and debated.

How do the links between France and its former possessions compare to areas colonized by the British, Belgians or Portuguese? How and why were the relationships between France and francophone Africa maintained during and after independence? Have the close ties been beneficial or detrimental to the African countries involved? How has France influenced recent events in the region? What might the future hold? These are the questions that are debated in the relatively extensive literature on this topic.

The definitive answers have not yet been given. More work needs to be done on the African side of the relationship, especially in interviews with and research into the writings of key figures in the decolonization process and the early years of independence. One must assess the memoirs and correspondence scenes involvement on both sides in shaping and maintaining current relationships. France's involvement in keeping certain leaders and political parties in power as well as its intervention in the Chadian civil war and in Francophone Zaire, Rwanda and Burundi also merit attention.

This short book is an overview of the special Franco-African relationship from colonial times to the present,

with special emphasis on the cultural component of the relationship. The work covers both West and Equatorial Africa, although the treatment of Gabon, Chad, the Congo and the Central African Republic is rather limited. Charles DeGaulle emerges as the dominant figure in fashioning the relationship. He preserved French interests in Africa to the point that the author suggests that decolonization never really occurred.

DeGaulle's paternalistic attitude and close personal ties with several francophone leaders at independence continued through the 1970s, and his successors, such as Valery Giscard d'Estaing, Georges Pompidou, and Francois Mitterrand, followed in DeGaulle's footsteps. Even today, France dominates Africa as no other former colonial power has, and French leaders often have personal ties to individual African leaders, which profoundly shape the Franco-African relationship. France's main concern, according to the author, remains the maintenance of an image of international stature and influence, particularly in Subsaharan Africa.

The book, however, has serious weaknesses. It provides a rather pedestrian, dry, chronological, narrative account based on select secondary accounts, failing to break significant new ground or to offer any original insights. The author suggests that study of the cultural component of the relationship between France and its former colonies has been neglected, though his discussion of this topic is short and superficial. No new sources are revealed. The bibliography is perfunctory and heavily biased toward official French publications. There is no evidence of fieldwork in Africa, serious archival research, or interviewing of the participants, many of whom are still alive. Overall, this book is a disappointment, of limited interest to scholars or students in African studies.

The book manifests a predominantly Eurocentric perspective, focusing squarely on the French side of the relationship and the activities of French officials. It affords overwhelming primacy to Charles DeGaulle, casting his successors in France to mere perpetuators of his policies, and reducing African leaders to pawns in his game. While DeGaulle's precedents influenced French foreign policy even after his departure and death, other French and African leaders also actively shaped France's African policy. The author nonetheless views the French as THE dynamic actors in the relationship, with West and Central Africans reacting to events and currents.

A more balanced, nuanced account would have given considerably more weight to the interests, manipulations, successes and failures of the many and diverse African participants. The only African to receive much attention is Felix Houphouet-Boigny of the Ivory Coast, yet even the discussion of his role contains no new insights or understanding of his agenda or character. Major African figures were not interviewed, and some, especially Leopold Senghor and Sekou Toure, are either only briefly mentioned, or largely ignored. For example, no work by the prolific Senghor or any other African leader is even listed in the bibliography. No major figure from former French Equatorial Africa is discussed in depth. These omissions are striking examples of the author's Eurocentric bias.

The first three chapters, which cover the period up to the return to power of Charles DeGaulle in the 1950s, are much too cursory to be useful for the African side of the Franco-African relationship. Despite recent scholarship revealing that West Europeans were reluctant decolonizers, the author portrays the French as anxious to relinquish imperial control. The short chapters on de-

colonization and independence likewise skim too quickly over time and space. The Mali Federation and its breakup, for example, are not adequately discussed.

The differences among Senghor, Houphouet-Boigny, and Toure, to name only the major actors, are not clearly drawn or analyzed. The philosophies and strategies of different political parties, the role of Muslim leaders and clerics, the activities of the military and the plethora of military coups, and the role of the Cold War during the early years of independence are not examined.

In the chapters dealing with the post-independence period, the work avoids serious discussion of French military and intelligence involvement in francophone Africa, which has been considerable in many countries, including Chad, Central African Republic, Zaire, and Guinea-Conakry. The examination of economic ties between France and its former possessions are reduced to a few United Nations tables that shed little light on this critical topic. The evolution and functioning of the CFA zone, linking French and African currencies, are not adequately addressed. The author also tends to over-emphasize the French influence on culture, including language, in former colonies, by focusing on the Western-educated urban elite rather than on the majority of the population or the vast areas beyond the capital cities.

The author has attempted a broad overview of a large, much analyzed and important topic, but unfortunately he has fallen considerably short of making a significant or original contribution.

Copyright (c) 1996 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@H-Net.MSU.EDU.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-africa>

**Citation:** Andrew F. Clark. Review of Andereggen, Anton, *France's Relationship with Subsaharan Africa*. H-Africa, H-Net Reviews. January, 1996.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=258>

Copyright © 1996 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at [hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu](mailto:hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu).