

RESEARCH ARTICLE

WWW.PEGEGOG.NET

The European Slave Trade in African Slaves across the Atlantic from the 15th to the 19th Century: The Case of Senegal

Nabil Djabri ¹, Abdelbaki Brakni ²

¹ Tebessa University , (Algeria). E-mail: nabil.djabri@univ-tebessa.dz

² Tebessa University, (Algeria). E-mail: abdelbaki.brakni@univ-tebessa.dz

Received: 22/02/2025 Accepted: 01/06/2025 Published: 24/12/2025

Abstract:

This article analyzes the transatlantic slave trade from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries through the case study of Senegal, within the Atlantic world. Adopting a historical-analytical approach, the study examines how European geographical expansion contributed to the establishment of coastal trading networks that facilitated the systematic deportation of African populations to the Americas. It explores the economic, political, and religious motivations underlying European involvement in the slave trade and the mechanisms that led to its institutionalization over several centuries. Based on a critical reading of Arabic and European historiography, the article

investigates the processes of slave capture, transportation, and commercialization, as well as the interaction between European traders and local intermediaries. It further assesses the demographic, social, and economic consequences of the slave trade on African societies. The study argues that the transatlantic slave trade constituted a central pillar of European colonial expansion and played a decisive role in the formation of colonial economies in the Atlantic world, with enduring impacts that extended well beyond its formal abolition.

Keywords: geographical discoveries; Transatlantic Slave Trade; Senegal; European Colonial Expansion; Atlantic World.

Introduction

The subject of Africans and the slave trade is considered one of the most compelling topics in historical research. The European scramble for Africa clearly illustrates the superiority complex and oppression that characterized European treatment of Africans, who were viewed as commodities to be bought and sold. The slave trade grew exponentially following the geographical discoveries, driven by the search for new sources of financing. Europeans, with the blessing of the Church, did

not hesitate to engage in the trade of African slaves to secure profits. They thus sought to establish stations for transporting African slaves across the Atlantic Ocean, particularly to Europe and the New World.

From this perspective, the central issue arises: How did European powers contribute to the establishment of the slave trade system in West Africa during the 16th and 17th centuries? What were the consequences of this trade on African and American societies at the time?

Secondary questions also arise, including: What were the objectives of the geographical discoveries? How did the African slave trade begin? What methods did Europeans use to capture and enslave Africans? How was the African slave trade carried out across the Atlantic? What were its major stages?

To address the main issue and the subsidiary questions, a descriptive and analytical approach has been adopted. The following will be presented:

2. Geographical Discoveries and the Beginning of the Colonization of Africa

The fifteenth century marked the beginning of an extensive European movement aimed at exploring previously unknown regions of the world, motivated primarily by pressing economic and political considerations.(Na'na'i, 1983, pp. 18-19) The majority of Africa remained safe and largely unknown, beyond the reach of European hands, until the collapse of the Arab Islamic presence in Andalusia. The Arab Islamic kingdoms in Andalusia fell one after the other, and Portugal emerged as a political and naval power.(Al-Kahlout, 1992, p. 50) One of its first achievements was the conquest of the city of Ceuta on the Moroccan coast in 1415, which was considered the first step toward discovering the geography of the world and understanding its divisions and dimensions.(Na'na'i, 1983, p. 19) This event had a profound impact on the rethinking of the belief that the Arabs were not far from being defeated, after centuries of European fear of the Arab Africans who had blocked European movements in the sea. (Al-Azab, 2007, p. 64).

In 1418, the first Portuguese attempts to achieve these goals began, with the Portuguese successfully rediscovering Madeira that year, followed by the discovery of the Azores in 1444. The exploratory missions continued, and the Portuguese found that Africa was larger than they had originally believed and that Ptolemy's map was incorrect. (Al-Kahlout, 1992, p. 50) In addition, several stations were established along the African coast, such as

Cape Blanc and Cape Verde. (Haridi Farghali, 2008, p. 46).

Despite the Portuguese control of Ceuta, they failed to dominate the African gold trade and take it from the Moroccans. This failure led them to adopt a naval strategy aimed at finding the true gold route. Their plans began with an attempt to navigate around the African coast, from the northwest to the south along the western coast. (Al-Azab, 2007, p. 65) Henry the Navigator thought of opening a sea route around Africa, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea, and then to India, to control the Eastern trade and encircle Islam and Muslims in North Africa with Christian states.(Al-Kahlout, 1992, p. 50).

During the 15th century, the Portuguese began exploring the African coast more regularly. This paved the way for many discoveries that would open the path for contact and trade, including the slave trade, which began early in this historical context. (Hugh, 1997, p. 48).

For this reason, the accomplishments of the geographical discoveries continued throughout the 15th and 16th centuries. Vasco da Gama succeeded in navigating around Africa and reaching India by sea, establishing the first direct maritime connection between the western shores of Europe and the Far East. This led to the decline of Muslim and Italian influence over the trade route between Europe and the East and the establishment of a vast Portuguese empire in the Indian Ocean. Furthermore, the voyages of Columbus and those who followed him among the Spanish explorers revealed to mankind the New World, and the Atlantic Ocean hid behind it a great continent that they named America.(Na'na'i, 1983, pp. 18-19).

In the few years following the discovery of the sea route to India around the Cape of Good Hope, the Portuguese expanded their control over the key centers along the eastern coast of Africa to secure their route to India. By 1507, all major coastal centers had fallen into Portuguese hands, such as Kilwa, Mombasa,

Sofala, and Mozambique. However, the Portuguese were unable to penetrate deep into the African continent except through the Zambezi River. Initially, they managed to establish postal centers in Tete, on the Zambezi River, and Quelimane, on the coast. (Aliyan & Kazem, 2012, p. 360).

Even in the 15th century, the Portuguese were cautiously making their way south along the western African coast, with little knowledge of the internal powers and societies in Africa with whom they sought alliances. Thus, the King of Portugal began carefully sending agents with messages to important rulers, presenting himself as a strong and trustworthy ally in their affairs and wars. In the latter quarter of the 15th century, he sent two envoys to the ruler of Tekrur (on the Senegal coast) and to the ruler of Timbuktu. He also dispatched a mission southward to Gambia and to Mansa Mundi, one of the strongest rulers in the Mandingo region, who was also the king of the vast Mali Empire, offering their friendship. (Al-Azab, 2007, p. 64)

Following the geographical explorations, the colonization of many parts of Africa began. Portugal established several trading posts along various parts of the western and eastern coasts and set up military garrisons. (Aliyan & Kazem, 2012, p. 357) The Christian missionary expeditions that penetrated Africa concealed political and economic motives, paving the way for the colonization of the regions they settled in through the construction of schools, hospitals, and care homes, as happened in Uganda, South Sudan, Cameroon, and Nigeria. (Aliyan & Kazem, 2012, p. 362).

Thus, Western colonization in the modern era began, with Portugal establishing the first colonial empire. However, it did not last long due to Spanish competition at the end of the 16th century, as Portugal shifted its focus from the East to Brazil, where the Portuguese brought African slaves in large numbers. This made them the founders of the modern slave trade. (Said, 1986, p. 58).

3. European Motives for Colonizing Africa

European expansion toward Africa was driven by a complex set of interrelated economic, political, religious, and technological factors. Although colonial domination reached its most systematic form during the nineteenth century, its roots extended back to the era of geographical discoveries, when Africa became increasingly integrated into emerging global trade networks. (Aliyan & Kazem, 2012, pp. 362-363).

To gain a precise understanding of all that preceded, it is essential to know the key motives behind the geographical discoveries and the European nations' drive toward Africa, as follows:

The economic factor is clearly evident when we know that Marrakesh was always associated in the minds of the Portuguese with the construction of the Portuguese empire's economy. The aim of the explorers and colonizers on the western African coast was to supply the Portuguese with wheat from Marrakesh and horses. These goods were used to purchase gold from African leaders who traded with Portuguese stations.

The newly emerging European industry required agricultural and mineral raw materials, as well as markets to sell its products. The Europeans found in the newly explored continent a solution to many of their problems. (Ali, 2008, p. 11).

- The improvements made by the Portuguese in shipbuilding led to the ability to create light vessels weighing 200 tons, capable of sailing in winds and harsh climatic conditions.

The use of the compass in navigation and the modifications made to the old compass -such as adding a pointer to indicate wind direction - helped advance maritime navigation.

Additionally, it became possible to overcome the difficulties faced by explorers in advancing south of Cape Bojador. The most notable of

these were the trade winds in the region, blowing from the northwest, which made the return journey difficult.

Religious factors played a significant role in the geographical discoveries, with the Church encouraging the movement. The Europeans were strongly driven by the desire to hunt down Muslims in West Africa and convert them to Christianity.

The Portuguese attempted to reach the Cape of Good Hope at the southernmost tip of Africa in an effort to access the Eastern trade, which was the lifeblood of the economy at the time. The Mamluk state was then extending its influence over the Levant, Egypt, and the Hijaz, and there was a need to secure new markets for industrial products. This was due to the increasing demand for materials to sustain industrial production, as well as the search for markets to dispose of these products and open the way for French and British investors.

The desire to control the vast agricultural and mineral resources available in Africa, particularly the extraction of gold, became the main artery for sustaining large-scale capitalist investment.

The use of colonies as an effective means to address the issue of population growth, which was one of the most prominent positive results of the Industrial Revolution in the industrialized countries. On the other hand, it was a human disaster for the colonized countries, which received waves of people for plunder, investment, tourism, and adventure.

The intense desire to invest surplus capital in France and Britain, as a result of the development of the Industrial Revolution. This was done by establishing factories that exploited Africans for labor, thereby completing the cycle of investment and enormous profit. Ultimately, the interest flowed into the banks of the two countries' governments.

The flourishing of the slave trade and the trafficking of African slaves, moving them to European colonies in Europe and the New World. (Aliyan & Kazem, 2012, pp. 363-364).

4. The Capture of Africans and the Beginning of the Slave Trade

From the beginning, the Portuguese considered the capture of Africans from the African shores and selling them in Europe and elsewhere a sacred task. After their abduction, they were taken to Europe, baptized, and then sold to work on the estates of feudal lords. The Europeans viewed this as a normal and natural act; Christianity was saving the souls of these Africans, while their bodies remained in slavery. Thus, the Portuguese viewed the Africans as masters viewing slaves, and the capture and abduction were done in the name of Christ and the saints. At this time, the Europeans did not think about converting or freeing the Africans but were primarily concerned with capturing them and forcing them into hard labor in the colonization and exploitation of the New World. (Al-Kahlout, 1992, pp. 50-51)

Around the middle of the 15th century, the first Portuguese began to roam the African coasts, and operations to transport Africans from these shores to Europe to be sold in its markets began. Their conversion to Christianity did not free them from slavery; the Europeans instilled in them the belief that Christianity would free their souls, while their bodies would remain in slavery as a form of penance for the sins and wrongdoings committed by the Black man. (Al-Kahlout, 1992, p. 09)

In 1440, one of the officers of Prince Henry the Navigator captured some Moroccans. The prince ordered their return, and in exchange, the Moroccans gave him ten Africans and a quantity of gold. This offer whetted the appetite of his compatriots, and they equipped several ships for this trade. Some adventurers sailed southward toward Cape Bojador in 1434, and in small skirmishes along the western coast, they captured about 165 men,

women, and children, in addition to those killed in these battles. They also captured 17 or 18 women and children who could not run. This expedition reached southern Portugal with the captives, and it can be said that the early stages of the African slave trade by the Portuguese began at that time.

This trade first materialized with the arrival of the first shipment of African slaves to Portugal in August 1444, numbering 235 slaves. Hugh Thomas mentions in his valuable work *The Slave Trade* that the arrival of this number of Africans was something remarkable. Many people went to see them, including Prince Henry the Navigator, who stared at them from his horse's back and took 46 slaves as a gift, representing the royal fifth. (Al-Azab, 2007, p. 66)

As the Portuguese advanced along the African shores, Henry the Navigator began to think about achieving a political gain for his country, trying to protect it from competition with other countries in these regions. He aimed to make the discovery of the African shores in the East a Portuguese monopoly, acquiring slaves with approval from the Pope. It is worth noting that this attempt led to a fierce conflict between Spain and Portugal to gain papal support for their colonial activities. (Suleiman & Muhammad, 1999, p. 18)

In the early stages, the act of capturing slaves did not represent a major difficulty for the European colonizers, especially since this operation took place near their commercial centers. As the demand for this human commodity increased, the slave trade took on massive proportions and used significant resources. (Abd al-Kamil, 2013, p. 185)

This expansion of the exploration movement, which was encouraged by Prince Henry the Navigator until his death in 1460, (Haridi Farghali, 2008, p. 47) did not stop with his death but was taken over by his nephew, John II, King of Portugal. In 1482, Portuguese sailors managed to cross the equator and reached the mouth of the Congo River. Five

years after this, the sailor Dias, who had previously participated in many expeditions, managed to reach the southern tip of the continent, known as the Cape of Good Hope. (Suleiman & Muhammad, 1999, p. 18)

In the late 15th and early 16th centuries, a lighter form of the slave trade spread in some parts of the Mediterranean. For example, the Turks and Moroccans used to capture Europeans and enslave them, while Spain and Portugal captured Arabs, Europeans, and Africans alike. However, with the discovery of America at the end of the 15th century, the slave trade gained significant importance and prominence as a highly profitable commercial activity. The Portuguese were the first to start the slave trade in the 16th century, but this trade reached its peak in Britain.

The slave trade in the 16th century began with a number of slaves not exceeding half a million, then jumped in the 18th century to six million Africans. British ships transported about half of these slaves to America and the Caribbean. Britain held the leading position in the slave market due to its control over the largest part of West Africa, especially the area between the Gold Coast and the Niger Delta, which was the most densely populated area of Africa. (Haridi Farghali, 2008, pp. 77-78)

At the beginning of the 16th century, following the European sailors' discovery of the African coast and the New World, Europeans began exploiting African slaves in ways never before seen in history. The visits of slave traders to the African coasts during the following four centuries became a highly profitable and extremely important trade. Not only for Europe, but it was also beneficial for the New World, especially after the extermination of many of the indigenous populations (the Native Americans). Due to this extermination and the decline in the numbers of Native Americans—either through killings or fleeing to the jungles of America—Europeans turned to Africa to supply cheap and abundant labor. The slaves were often brought from poor communities or from prisoners of war among

the tribes initially, and later, capturing and abduction became the dominant method for obtaining African slaves. (bin Omar, pp. 105-106)

Portugal and Spain were the first European countries to approve this trade by allowing settlers in their South American colonies to own African slaves as movable property. Initially, royal licenses were granted to the nobles of these countries, allowing them to import African slaves into the colonies. However, a hundred years after Christopher Columbus' voyages, these royal licenses quickly fell into disuse, making way for an unrestricted trade. Thus, the demand for forced labor in the colonies was strong. (Beckles Hilary, 2002, p. 33)

The possession of weapons by the Europeans allowed them to easily dominate African societies, as swords, spears, and arrows could not stand for long against firearms and guns. The Europeans then began to enlist the help of some local subjects or allies to assist them in this process. (Abd al-Kamil, 2013, p. 185)

The Portuguese were unable to establish a permanent base, so they established one in the Cape Verde Islands. That was the starting point from where traders launched expeditions to Upper Guinea's coast to purchase slaves, after the slave trade flourished in the region. The Portuguese also established a base on the Gold Coast, which served as a center for the gold trade for several centuries, drawing gold for export from the remote Akan region. Additionally, Portuguese sailors bought slaves from the Kingdom of Benin after establishing trade relations with them. (Emmanuel Kwaku, 2006, p. 101)

The Portuguese maintained a monopoly on the slave trade until the end of the 16th century. Initially, they were the ones carrying out slave-hunting operations on the coast, with Africans skilled in navigation on their shores attacking the Portuguese and defeating them. When the number of Portuguese casualties increased, Prince Henry decided to change the methods of

slave hunting. Instead of the Portuguese risking this endeavor, they began to buy slaves from Africans. Rather than kidnapping them, locals would carry out the task, and some locals showed their willingness to cooperate with the Portuguese, believing that slavery was easier to conduct through trade than through war. Until then, tribal chiefs in Sub-Saharan Africa had acted as intermediaries in the slave trade from West Africa to the Mediterranean and Europe. However, they began to sell slaves directly to Europe. The Portuguese succeeded in one of their most important goals and broke the monopoly of African trade that had been controlled by Islamic countries in the Mediterranean region of Africa, which had dominated it for centuries. (Al-Azab, 2007, pp. 67-68)

Initially, the Europeans attempted to establish friendly relations with the inhabitants of West Africa for their own interests. Some of their interests were protecting maritime trade routes and securing supply stations to rescue sailors whose ships sank in the region. However, economic and political greed overtook them, and their need for labor to cultivate vast lands across the Atlantic became pressing. They sent missionary expeditions, and the mission's task was initially to strengthen the acceptance of those who had converted to Christianity to slavery by the white man. Thus, the trade in human bodies in West Africa was based on bringing the Black man closer to the white man and accepting his sovereignty. Then they made the Blacks convert to Christianity into slaves who would serve the white man in the New World.

Angola and Congo were the largest sources of slaves in Africa, with Luanda being the top port for exporting this commodity. The number of Blacks exported from the two colonies reached four million between 1580 and 1836, with Angola alone contributing three-quarters of this number. As for the export markets, Brazil accounted for 50% of them, the Caribbean region for 30%, and the Río de la Plata region absorbed between 10–15% of the total number.

The Europeans found fertile agricultural lands in the tropical and subtropical regions surrounding the Caribbean Sea and the West Indies, as well as abundant minerals. To enrich themselves quickly and abundantly, they demanded large numbers of workers. The Europeans who arrived in this region did not have a system to assimilate and control the Native Americans. It was customary for Europeans to kill the majority of the indigenous people in the regions they controlled, thus increasing the need for labor in the newly occupied territories. The Europeans found in West Africa a region where they could obtain the required labor for the New World, especially since it was cheap and had stations for ships heading to the East Indies. (Haridi Farghali, 2008, pp. 83-84)

Thus, the hunting of Africans began in the 15th century in the name of Christ, and Africans were transported and sold to different parts of the world in the name of Christ. Despite baptizing these Africans and forcibly converting them to Christianity, their slavery remained in place once they reached the ports for loading and unloading. They were exploited in tasks such as operating mills, machinery, pulling carts, building roads, digging mines, and carrying heavy loads, among other strenuous labor. From this point, the racist and superior attitude of the white man was formed. (Al-Kahlout, 1992, pp. 53-54)

5.The Impact of the Slave Trade on European and American Societies

After European colonial landowners found that they could not use white or Native American labor for forced labor on their farms and in the mines, they turned with a burning desire to enslave Africans from Africa. The ownership of African slaves became a common practice in the western half of the continent throughout the colonial era.

All colonial powers - the Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, French, and English - were involved in this vile process. The enslavement of Africans

was blessed by both Catholic and Protestant churches, and it was practiced by many liberal leaders, or at least they turned a blind eye to it. (Al-Azab, 2007, p. 38)

Africans were transported from their villages to the large plantations owned by Europeans in Europe, the Americas, or even within the same continent. European countries competed in the process of slavery and kidnapping, and European cities and ports flourished greatly as a result. (Al-Kahlout, 1992, p. 52) Each commercial center sent its catch of Africans to the ports of their countries. Soon, cities like Marseille, Nantes, Bristol, and Liverpool, as well as Seville and Lisbon, became storage depots for African slaves, preparing them for transport to the American colonies. (Al-Turmanini Abd al-Salam, 1979, p. 144)

Since the early 16th century, slaves had been shipped to America and Cuba. In 1521, the number of slaves sold for this purpose in the Lisbon market reached 10,000 in 1539. However, the usual Portuguese efforts could not meet the increasing demand for slaves, leading to the use of firearms for capturing them. (Abd al-Kamil, 2013, p. 185)

The slave trade was a crucial element in the colonial trade system, and it became a pressing necessity amid international competition at the time. All disputes over the control of the sugar trade were, at their core, about obtaining enslaved African labor and controlling trade routes.

To satisfy its "hunger for blacks" — as it was referred to at the time — Europe imposed the slave trade as a permanent reality, with the participation of local ruling aristocracies in the region. In this way, Europe paved the way for the economic, political, and cultural domination of Africa, which materialized in the second half of the 19th century. (Barry, 1988, p. 36)

A slave in the Americas did not own the land he farmed, the tools for farming, nor the crops he produced. He did not even own himself; he

was considered property of his master or part of the capital of the landowner, used in production or sold in the slave market according to the financial interests of the owner. As a result, slaves suffered greatly due to mistreatment and being sold from one master to another.

This economic status, where the slave had no control or power, affected all aspects of life around him, particularly the emerging characteristics of the new African culture that began to appear in the New World. This deplorable situation for the African limited the slave's ability to shape his future, or determine the framework of his life, family, or community. (Haridi Farghali, 2008, p. 81)

The number of individuals who settled in America over three centuries reached between 10 and 20 million, excluding those who died during the Atlantic crossing or were burned during raids by slave traders to capture slaves. The death toll reached several million. Most of these slaves were brought from Nigeria, while the region between Senegal and the Congo, as well as northern Guinea, contributed only a small number of slaves. (Barry, 1988, p. 85)

6. The Impact of the Slave Trade on African Society:

The European colonial era in Africa was divided into two phases: the first phase, known as commercial colonialism, which was limited to the occupation of several ports and trade stations along the coast; and the second phase, known as imperialism, which accompanied the Industrial Revolution in Western Europe. This phase led the colonial powers to not only occupy the coasts of the continent but also to penetrate its interior. The first phase targeted the slave trade and the deportation of slaves to work in Europe and the New World, while the second phase focused on enslaving Africans within their own land to extract natural resources. While the first phase witnessed the tragedies of the slave trade, the second phase saw the horrors of racial practices. The development of the Atlantic slave trade and the

expansion of colonial invasions paved the way for the loss of African social formations' independence, eventually leading to their complete subjugation. (Al-Azab, 2007, p. 72)

The undeniable truth is that the Europeans found African leaders willing to sell countless shipments of slaves. Slave buyers initially arrived in small numbers, but soon they began to flood across the Atlantic in waves. In 1500, just nine years after the first Europeans arrived in Mbanza Congo, a Portuguese expedition came and took African slaves to Brazil in South America. Within a few decades, the Western world became filled with African slave markets, and millions of Africans were put to work in the mines of Brazil, on coffee plantations, and in the Caribbean islands, as European powers began using the fertile land for sugar cultivation. (Al-Azab, 2007, p. 88) The repeated and flourishing slave trade over the next four centuries ultimately caused tragic and unfortunate changes to the population and society of West Africa. (Emmanuel Kwaku, 2006, p. 100)

The Europeans exploited old tribal wars and intensified them due to their desperate need for slaves, driving Africans to attack their own brothers, burn their villages, and seize their livestock for trade with slave traders. As the demand for slaves grew, the raids became fiercer and more violent, with invaders attacking villages, setting homes on fire, and shooting at the locals. If the inhabitants tried to flee, the besieging forces would capture them, hunting them like rabbits. Death was the fate of anyone who resisted, even the slightest resistance. (Haridi Farghali, 2008, pp. 87-88)

The majority of slaves came from the western coast of tropical Africa, the closest African shores for the export of slaves to the Americas. Colonial powers competed to acquire slaves, distributing forts along this coast and stationing military forces to capture them. Many ships conducted slave-hunting expeditions, and numerous regions were emptied of their populations, with entire tribes disappearing as a result. This was an

unparalleled process of exploitation, rarely seen in either ancient or modern history. (Al-Azab, 2007, p. 38)

This erroneous perception justified the Europeans' brutal actions. Adding to this were the circumstances and factors surrounding capitalist development, which allow us to understand the aggressive nature of the European character. The Church and the Bible played a crucial role in draining the continent both humanly and materially. These two factors played an even more dangerous role in stripping Africans of their identity, colonizing the continent, and linking it to European civilization, even after independence. African people adopted European languages as their own, thus marginalizing African culture and branding it as inadequate and deficient. As a result, Africa became subordinate to the Christian West, with all the meanings and implications that this carried. Missionaries played the biggest role in subjugating the peoples of the continent to colonial rule, being the pioneers and tools of colonization. (Al-Kahlout, 1992, p. 63)

The capture of Africans continued over the centuries to the extent that the population of Africa did not increase at all during the period between 1650 and 1750, with the population remaining at 100 million during this time. This was due to the draining of the continent's population, with many of the capable and reproductive-age individuals being transported to the Americas, Europe, and other regions to be used as a labor force. The mode of production at that time was heavily dependent on human labor. (Al-Kahlout, 1992, p. 10)

7. Conditions of African Slave Transport across the Atlantic:

After the Portuguese established trading posts along the African coast, they moved southward to the Congo coast and reached Angola, establishing temporary coastal points that quickly transformed into permanent settlements. Fortresses were also built along the coasts to serve as storage depots for

gathering Africans before they were shipped to the Americas and Europe.

By 1630, the port of Dembio-Jocao, south of the Congo River, became a hub for exporting slaves, with approximately 5,000 slaves being shipped annually across the Atlantic. In the following century, 15,000 slaves were exported annually from the Kingdom of Congo. European traders left behind detailed records of their exploitations. (Al-Azab, 2007, pp. 87-88)

Slave hunters would chain the slaves together, often forcing them to march for hundreds of miles, branding them with heated seals like livestock to mark ownership. They were transported across the seas in slave ships, packed tightly in unimaginable conditions of hunger and cruelty—many perished during the journey. Upon arrival, they were sold to colonial masters as livestock. Rebellions aboard the ships were frequent. The depravity of human nature in pursuit of profit had never sunk to such depths as in the transatlantic slave trade. (Al-Azab, 2007, p. 38)

After being captured, the slaves were bound with chains around their necks, guarded by overseers who used whips to strike their bodies. Food and drink were rarely provided, and those who collapsed from exhaustion were abandoned to die. Slaves were typically branded with a mark on their bodies, and upon reaching the shore, they were kept in pens until the ships that would transport them across the Atlantic arrived.

The cruelty of African slave traders sometimes surpassed even that of European and American traders. Slaves were not bought or sold without permission from the local African chief. Explorers reported that for every ten slaves, only one would make it to the coast, with the other nine dying during the march due to mistreatment and starvation. Once gathered at the ports, the slaves were loaded onto ships, and the journey was horrendous, with bodies packed so tightly together that they could barely move.

The transatlantic journey is considered the most horrific phase of the slave trade, deserving to be called “the greatest torment.” Anti-slavery humanitarian writings from the time describe in painful detail the unsanitary conditions aboard the ships, which were unsuitable for carrying living beings. Additionally, the brutality of the officers and sailors was overwhelming. After a grueling journey of five to eight weeks, depending on the weather, only about 75% of the slaves would survive to reach Brazilian ports.

By the 17th century, the supply depots for ships and missionary settlements along the West African coast had turned into fortified points for holding slaves before they were shipped to the New World. It was from these fortified points that the organized slave trade began. It expanded into a comprehensive system with humans as its core commodity from Africa, and guns, ammunition, manufactured goods, food, gold, and minerals from Europe. (Haridi Farghali, 2008, pp. 88-91)

It is difficult to accurately estimate the total number of slaves transported across the seas due to the high mortality rate among them, which ranged from 7% to 26%, not including deaths from disease, murder, or being thrown into the sea when the ships could no longer carry them. (Abd al-Kamil, 2013, p. 188) The whip was used to force slaves to stay packed tightly together in the smallest space possible, making it impossible for any of them to move. Cries of pain could be heard from the slaves on the upper decks of the ships. Despite all these losses, profits from the slave trade could reach up to a thousand percent per journey. (Abd al-Kamil, 2013, p. 189)

These ships would travel from West Africa to North and South America. The slave trade continued for over 400 years, during which millions of West Africans died either due to disease, injury, or the overcrowded, inhumane conditions. It is estimated that at least 100 million people perished during capture or while being transported. The profits from this

trade were so substantial that they could absorb such losses of life. When the ships finally reached their destinations, the surviving slaves would be unloaded, and there were slave markets in the Caribbean islands. (Haridi Farghali, 2008, p. 52)

The slave trade began with the Spanish and Portuguese, but soon the British, French, and Dutch joined in. Most of these European nations went on to establish their empires in the New World, beginning with the northern coast of South America. Slave reception stations and markets were later expanded to Central America, particularly Panama and the Gulf of Mexico, and then to the northern part of what would later become the United States of America.

The third leg of the triangular trade represented the shipping route from the New World ports to European markets and factories. It carried the goods produced by West African laborers in the New World’s plantations, such as sugar, coffee, tobacco, cotton, gold, and silver. (Abd al-Kamil, 2013, p. 189)

8. The Slave Trade in Senegal:

Following the geographical discoveries made by Westerners in Africa, the scale of slavery expanded to new and larger dimensions. Although Europeans worked to free European individuals from slavery, they maintained the institution of slavery for non-European populations, particularly Africans, to supply the New World and Europe with large numbers of laborers. (Yahya, 1999, p. 177)

In 1444, the Senegal River was discovered, marking the first large tropical river encountered by Europeans at that time. It was certainly the largest river the Portuguese had encountered since leaving the Mediterranean. This waterway led to some of the richest gold fields in West Africa, where the “silent trade” of gold took place. (Hugh, 1997, p. 59)

The Portuguese were the first Europeans to explore the African coast. They occupied

Arguin in 1445 and settled at the mouths of the Senegal and Gambia rivers. Initially, their goal was to shift the gold trade from Sudan (from within Africa) toward the Atlantic Ocean, attempting to benefit from the trans-Saharan gold trade coming from Sudan. The Portuguese navigated the Senegal River Valley and made greater efforts to reach the upper Gambia River. (Barry, 1988, p. 36)

On the northern bank of the Senegal River, slaves formed a known social class, considered the lowest in society. However, they were not deprived of the rights and protections afforded by local traditions. A slave could marry, live in the master's home, and could be disciplined by the master -but not to the point of humiliation or degradation. (Salamani, 2016, p. 280)

Although the Senegambia region may not have been a major supplier of slaves, it was not immune to the effects of the trade. It continues to suffer from its long-term consequences, which disrupted the region's paths to progress. (Barry, 1988, p. 61)

Gorée Island emerged from the mid-fifteenth century as one of the early coastal centers of the slave trade in West Africa, following the Portuguese settlement there in 1444, before control successively passed to the Dutch and later the French (Barry, *La Sénégalie du XVe au XIXe siècle*, 1988, pp. 203-205). During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the island became integrated into the system of the Atlantic triangular trade, serving as a transit point for the collection of captives brought from the African hinterland and their forced transportation to the American colonies, particularly the Caribbean islands (Curtin, 1969, pp. 116-118). African and European intermediaries played a central role in this trade, while specific buildings -most notably the House of Slaves- were used to confine enslaved individuals prior to their deportation across the Atlantic (UNESCO, 1998). Although the volume of human exports from Gorée was smaller compared to major ports in the Bight of Benin, the island's historical and humanitarian symbolism made it a powerful

witness to the structural violence of the slave trade, whose consequences persisted beyond its official abolition in the French colonies in 1848 and remained embedded in historical memory into the twentieth century (Pétré-Grenouilleau, 2004, pp. 92-95)

Statistics on the export of slaves from the Senegambia region, based on shipping ports from the late 17th century to the early 19th century, show annual fluctuations in the number of slaves exported. Notably, the highest export rate was recorded between 1724 and 1735, with a total of 49,080 slaves. The distribution of slaves across loading ports was estimated at 259,900, with a significant concentration at the Saint-Louis port, especially in the years after 1716, and varying contributions from the Gambia River. Both the French and the British played roles in exporting slaves. The timeline shows a gradual increase in slave exports from the early 18th century to its end, with intense activity between 1724-1735 and 1768-1778. However, there was a noticeable decline in the first decade of the 19th century, with the number of slaves falling to just 7,000 between 1801 and 1810—likely reflecting the beginning of the decline of the slave trade due to European pressure to abolish it. (Barry, 1988, p. 62)

Noteworthy is the story of Ben Said, the Senegalese African who was forcibly taken from his homeland and transported across the Atlantic to California, where he was sold on its shores. Like many other Muslim Africans, he was torn from his homeland, forced to renounce his religion, and convert to Christianity. He later wrote his story on the prison walls from his childhood, which was later used by historians as a historical text to document such human cases. (Abd al-Hamid, 2019, p. 08)

The French presence in Senegal was relatively minor, despite France's interest in the region. France sought to partially replace its lost colonial empire in England during the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Era. In the first

half of the 19th century, the British were more active than the French in West Africa, with clearer commercial goals. Their operations aimed to abolish the African slave trade and open the region to free trade. (Yahya, 1999, p. 260) France later became the most active European power in West Africa. This activity began with expeditions to Senegal aimed at establishing trade stations in the region, leading to the formation of French West Africa (A.O.F.), which consisted of eight colonies: Senegal, Mauritania, French Sudan (Mali), French Guinea, Ivory Coast, Upper Volta (Burkina Faso), Dahomey (Benin), and Niger. (Abd al-Razzaq & Al-Jamal, 2002, p. 280)

Certainly, statistics on the shipment of slaves are not completely accurate. One reason is that the sources themselves were keen on secrecy. Another reason is the existence of numerous trade channels, with each country maintaining its own network. The transatlantic slave trade - including the slaves captured in Senegal- was the most influential factor in the population decline in the region, especially when dealing with statistics and evidence that do not align with the true scale of the trade at the time. (Barry, 1988, pp. 65-67)

France retained from its former empire the Senegal region and the Senegal River, which was considered a trade gateway to the independent regions of West Sudan. However, France's attempts to establish agricultural projects on the Senegal River were unsuccessful. Over the years, Senegal became more important, especially after the conquest of Algeria and the beginning of French expansion into the southwestern desert. This allowed for the possibility of French forces in Algeria operating alongside others coming from Senegal. (Yahya, 1999, p. 260)

By the early 18th century, the abolitionist movement -calling for the end of the African slave trade- regarded Africans as peaceful and striving individuals. However, the Haitian slave rebellion had tainted this idea, and the abolitionists' arguments were discredited. France then began considering making Senegal

resemble Australia's status for the British as a colony. France, however, was cautious about imposing its control over the neighboring countries of Senegal and Gambia, as it lacked the political and military means. As a result, treaties and agreements focused only on transatlantic trade. Senegal had abolished some forms of slavery even before the law was enacted. (Salamani, 2016, pp. 351-353)

By the end of the 18th century, some governments took a clearer and firmer stance on the abolition of the slave trade and issued stricter laws against involvement in any form. In 1797, the United States passed a law prohibiting any resident from building or equipping a ship for the purpose of trading slaves to any foreign country, under strict penalties. Similarly, in 1807, the British Parliament passed a law banning the slave trade. Sweden followed suit in 1813, banning the trade in slaves, and France, Austria, Russia, and Prussia expressed their disgust with the trade and declared their intention to cooperate in abolishing it. (Religious Society of Friends, 1851, pp. 05-07)

On August 11, 1845, a law in the Senegal River stations prohibited kings and leaders from buying slaves, whether for sale locally or to send them to Saint-Louis as temporary soldiers. Anyone who violated the law was prosecuted and punished, and the slave trade became illegal for the French. (Salamani, 2016, p. 353)

9. Conclusion:

It is evident from the above that the African slave trade was an intensely active phenomenon for centuries, involving a variety of sources. A summary of the key findings can be outlined as follows:

- Slavery continues to evoke strong sensitivities among Africans, and what complicates this further is the fact that some African leaders enslaved each other and facilitated the slave trade, either for Arab or European traders.

- The African slave trade, which began in the 15th century and lasted for the following four centuries, is one of the rarest phenomena in world history. It represents the largest forced migration in history, and in addition, the trade and enslavement of Africans played a crucial role in building European colonial empires and generating the wealth that later fueled the Industrial Revolution.

- The removal of the scars of slavery from the hearts and minds of Africans and freeing the African mind from its trauma does not mean erasing the history of slavery from memory. It is wise for Africans to embrace their history of slavery with pride and honor, to commemorate its victims, celebrate their heroic resistance, and highlight the weakness of human values and conscience during the age of slavery.

- West Africa was forced to export its most valuable resource—its labor force. Millions of Africans were transported to work as farmers and artisans in the Americas, generating huge profits and wealth for Europeans, which contributed to the prosperity of Europe and America.

- African societies suffered severe consequences due to these processes, leading to constant wars and violent upheavals that shattered the relationships that once existed within communities and disrupted the tribal systems that governed the relationships among individuals.

- The transatlantic slave journey was marked by horrific mistreatment of slaves. They were shackled with iron chains, crammed into ships, and many perished due to disease, suffocation, and malnutrition. Their bodies were thrown into the sea along the way to the new lands. Sailors' accounts of these voyages are filled with descriptions of these dreadful conditions.

References

1. Abd al-Hamid, O. (2019). The African Slave Trade After the European Geographical Discoveries. *Al-Ma'arif Journal for Historical Research and Studies*(22).
2. Abd al-Kamil, A. (2013). The European Slave Trade and Its Impact on the People of West Africa Between the 15th and 19th Centuries. *Al-Hikma Journal for Historical Studies*, 01(01).
3. Abd al-Razzaq, I. A., & Al-Jamal, S. (2002). *The History of Modern and Contemporary Africa* (02 nd ed.). Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: Dar Al-Zahra.
4. Al-Azab, A. M. (2007). *The Slave Trade in Africa* (1st ed.). Cairo: Al-Shorouk International Library.
5. Ali, F. M. (2008). *In the History of Modern and Contemporary Africa*. Beirut: Dar al-Nahda al-Arabiya.
6. Aliyan, A. H., & Kazem, K. S. (2012). *British-French Colonialism in East Africa in the 19th Century and Early 20th Century*. Tikrit University Journal of Sciences, 19(04).
7. Al-Kahlout, A.-A. (1992). *Christianization and Colonialism in Sub-Saharan Africa* (02 ed.). Libya: Publications of the College of Islamic Call.
8. Al-Turmanini Abd al-Salam, A.-T. (1979). *Slavery: Its Past and Present Series of World Knowledge*. Kuwait: The National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters.
9. Barry, B. (1988). *La Sénégal du XVe au XIXe siècle*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
10. Barry, B. (1988). *Senegambia and the Atlantic Slave Trade*. New York, USA: Cambridge University Press.
11. Beckles Hilary, M. (2002). *Voyages d'esclavages: La Traite Transatlantique des Africains Réduits en Esclavage*. Paris: University of the West Indies.
12. bin Omar, A.-O. S. (n.d.). *The Slave Trade Among Europeans Until the End of World War I*. Adab(18).
13. Curtin, P. D. (1969). *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
14. Emmanuel Kwaku, A. (2006). *Themes in West Africa's History*. U.K: Ohio University Press Boydell & Brewer.

15. Haridi Farghali, A. T. (2008). *The History of Modern and Contemporary Africa: The Discoveries, Colonialism, and Independence*. Egypt: Al-'Ilm wa al-Iman for Publishing and Distribution.
16. Hugh, T. (1997). *The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade 1440-1870*. London: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks.
17. Na'na'i, A.-M. (1983). *Europe in Some Modern and Contemporary Crises 1453-1848*. Beirut: Dar al-Nahda al-Arabiya for Printing and Publishing.
18. Pétré-Grenouilleau, O. (2004). *Les traites négrières: Essai d'histoire globale*. Paris: Gallimard.
19. Religious Society of Friends. (1851). *African Slave Trade, From the Year 1840 to 1850 Inclusive*. Philadelphia: J. Uakestraw Printer.
20. Said, S. H. (1986). *The Phenomenon of Colonialism in Africa and the Arab World*. African Studies(02).
21. Salamani, A.-Q. (2016). *Colonialism and the Phenomenon of Slavery in West Africa: The Case of Senegal (1854-1960)*. PhD Thesis in Modern and Contemporary History. Algeria: Faculty of Humanities and Islamic Sciences, University of Oran 1.
22. Suleiman, N. A.-A., & Muhammad, J.-D. M. (1999). *The History of the United States of America from the 16th Century to the 20th Century*. Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-Arabi.
23. UNESCO. (1998). *Gorée: Island of Memories*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing.
24. Yahya, J. (1999). *The History of Modern and Contemporary Africa*. Alexandria: Al-Maktab Al-Jami'i Al-Hadith.