

The role of geographical discoveries in the transatlantic slave trade: Portugal as a case study

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Abstract---This study aims to analyse the roots of slavery in Africa and its relationship to the era of geographical discovery, while highlighting the extent to which European governments, particularly Portugal, were responsible for expanding its scope, and examining its political, social and economic repercussions. The research relies on critical historical analysis through the study of relevant sources and documents. It concludes that slavery was not a direct consequence of geographical discoveries, but rather a deeply rooted phenomenon in African societies prior to European intervention. However, geographical discoveries contributed to its redirection and expansion on a global scale. The findings also demonstrate that Portugal played a pivotal role in organising the transatlantic slave trade by establishing centres to gather enslaved people and transport them to the colonies. Furthermore, the study reveals that European governments were instrumental in organising this trade within the context of systematic colonial policies. Furthermore, the study argues that the slave trade resulted from the interaction of local and international historical factors, and that its consequences persist in Africa's social and political structures to this day.

Keywords---Geographical Discoveries, the Slave Trade, Portugal, Africa, Colonialism.

Introduction

During the modern era, the African continent experienced one of the most horrific and inhumane phenomena in its history: the systematic and methodical practice of enslaving people on the basis of race. This trade contributed to the dismantling of the social and economic structures of African societies. The expansion of this phenomenon was closely linked to European geographical discoveries, which provided a foundation for increased European intervention in Africa. Portugal

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emerged as one of the earliest and most active states in this field, using geographical discoveries to transform slavery from a limited activity into organised global trade. This process was supported directly by European governments, driven by economic and colonial motivations.

Based on this, the present study addresses a key issue: To what extent was the phenomenon of slavery connected to geographical discoveries? Moreover, what responsibility do European governments, particularly Portugal, have for organising this trade and expanding its reach?

Within this context, the study considers several hypotheses, most notably that slavery predated geographical discoveries. However, these discoveries contributed to reshaping it and directing it towards global markets.

The study aims to analyse the roots of slavery in Africa, clarify the role of Portugal and European governments in consolidating it, and examine its political, social and economic repercussions on the African continent. To achieve these objectives, the study takes a critical, analytical, historical approach through collecting, studying and analysing relevant historical sources and documents related to the topic.

Previous studies and the research gap

The topic of the transatlantic slave trade has attracted significant attention in Arabic and Western historical studies. Researchers have approached it from multiple angles, primarily examining the historical roots of slavery, analysing geographical discoveries and their movement, and assessing the repercussions of enslavement on the African continent and the Atlantic world.

In terms of the historical roots, some studies have emphasised that slavery is an ancient human phenomenon that predates geographical discoveries. This is reflected in Ali Kassar al-Ghazali's study of the historical origins of slavery among ancient peoples, and in Ibrahim al-Mashhadani's works on social structures in sub-Saharan Africa and patterns of internal enslavement. These studies have helped to dispel the notion that slavery emerged alongside European intervention. However, they did not sufficiently expand upon the analysis of the structural transformation that the phenomenon underwent after the 15th century.

Studies addressing geographical discoveries, such as Ahmed Bousharb's research on the stages of the Portuguese discovery of the African coasts and Ahmed Abbad's works on European discoveries in West Africa, have largely focused on Portugal's economic, religious and geopolitical motivations. While they acknowledge the slave trade as an outcome of this movement, they have not conducted an independent analysis of it as a fundamental pillar in the formation of the Atlantic commercial system.

In the Same Context

In addition, specialized studies have addressed the slave trade directly. For example, the study by Amhmed Atiya Mohamed Yahya on Portugal's role in the slave trade and the extension of its colonial reach; the works of Sa'd Zaghoul on the impact of the slave trade on the colonization of West Africa; and the study by Ashraf salih Mohamed, which highlighted both the colonial and human dimensions of this crime. These studies have focused on the scale of the trade, its routes, and its economic and demographic outcomes. However, they often treat Portugal within a broader, general European framework, without sufficiently clarifying Portugal's founding role in organizing this trade and transforming it into a global economic system.

Despite the wealth of scholarship on this topic, a clear research gap emerges: the absence of a comprehensive analytical study linking geographical discoveries to the slave trade as a structural transformation that reshaped the phenomenon within an organised global system led by European

states. Attention to governmental responsibility, particularly Portugal's, remains limited, especially with regard to the ways in which governments gave the trade an institutional and legal character. This includes the establishment of forts and collection centres, the promulgation of supporting legislation, and the provision of political and religious justification for such practices. Furthermore, the relationship between this historical legacy and the structural transformations that Africa later experienced has not received adequate analytical treatment.

Accordingly, this study aims to address this issue by offering a critical historical analysis that highlights Portugal's pivotal role in transforming the slave trade into an organised global enterprise. It also discusses the responsibility of European governments in redirecting the phenomenon and linking it to the emerging structure of the Atlantic economy, situating it within the wider global historical context as a manifestation of the formation of early capitalism.

Significance of the study

This research is significant because it addresses a historical issue of global importance at the intersection of economic, political and religious factors: the relationship between European geographical discoveries and the transformation of the slave trade into an organised global economic system.

While many studies have focused on descriptive aspects of the slave trade or its humanitarian repercussions, this research highlights the importance of analysing the structural transformation that occurred with Portuguese maritime expansion in the 15th century.

This study is also significant in the following ways:

- Reexamining Portugal's role as a founding factor in establishing the Atlantic slave trade system, rather than merely considering it as one participant in broader European competition.
- Highlighting the institutional and legal dimensions undertaken by European governments in organising this trade.
- Contributing to the deconstruction of reductive narratives that confine the phenomenon to a local dimension or attribute responsibility to a single actor.
- offering an interpretive approach that links the emergence of early commercial capitalism to the entrenchment of the trade in human beings as a mechanism for capital accumulation.

The study also has a contemporary dimension, given the persistence of the consequences of this historical legacy within the social and economic structures of the African continent.

Research objectives:

This research aims to achieve the following scholarly objectives:

- To analyse the historical roots of slavery in Africa prior to European intervention.
- To study the structural relationship between geographical discoveries and the transformation of the slave trade into a global activity.
- To highlight Portugal's founding role in establishing Atlantic networks for the slave trade.
- To explore the responsibility of European governments for giving this trade a legal and institutional character.
- To interpret the long-term economic, social and political effects of this phenomenon on Africa and Europe.
- To contribute to closing the research gap concerning the weak link between geographical discoveries and the formation of the Atlantic economic system based on slavery.

Research Problem

The study is guided by the following central problem:

To what extent did European geographical discoveries, particularly those of the Portuguese, contribute to the transformation of slavery from a relatively limited traditional practice into an organised global trading system led by the state?

The following subsidiary questions arise from this problem:

Was slavery in Africa a direct outcome of geographical discoveries, or a pre-existing phenomenon that was redirected?

What kind of transformation did the slave trade undergo after the fifteenth century?

How did Portugal contribute to the institutional and organisational development of Atlantic trade?

To what extent were European governments responsible for legalising this trade and supporting it politically and religiously?

What is the nature of the relationship between the slave trade and the beginnings of European capital accumulation?

Research methodology:

The study takes a critical, analytical historical approach, involving:

- analysing classical and contemporary historical sources related to geographical discoveries and the slave trade;
- comparing Arabic and foreign scholarship to identify differences in interpretation;
- applying a structural approach to understand the transformation from traditional slavery to an institutionalised global trade.
- Using causal analysis to explain the relationship between geographical discoveries and the evolution of the Atlantic system.
- critically reading European legitimising discourses that rationalised and 'legalised' enslavement.

Additionally, the study draws on rigorous academic research and specialised university theses with the aim of constructing an integrated perspective that moves beyond mere description towards deeper interpretative analysis.

1. The Historical Roots of Slavery in Africa

Historians generally agree that it is difficult to identify the precise beginnings of slavery in Africa, given its intertwining with historical developments experienced by many societies since ancient times. It appeared in multiple civilisations, such as ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece and Rome, and also existed in various forms in China and other parts of the world. During these periods, slavery spread alongside piracy and military conflict, with enslavement resulting from wars and collective punishments being one of the most significant sources of servitude in ancient societies (Saoudi, 1978, p. 35).

African societies were not immune to this phenomenon. Some regions of the continent experienced internal enslavement prior to European intervention, making the issue of slavery especially contentious and sensitive in contemporary African historical writing. Some local actors participated to varying degrees in networks connected to the slave trade, whether dealing with Arab or European traders. However, this should not imply that African societies bear an equivalent share of responsibility to external powers, which later reshaped and greatly expanded the phenomenon (Finest, n.d., p. 43).

Historical studies further indicate that slavery was a structural element of a number of ancient civilisations. Enslaved people were employed in agriculture, large-scale labour and the construction of public works and major infrastructure, reflecting the global nature of the practice even before the modern era. Yet the seventh century — following the rise of Islam — witnessed the emergence of a new religious approach based on honouring human beings and restricting enslavement practices. This

was expressed by encouraging the humane treatment of captives and enslaved people, and by affirming a set of human rights consistent with their broader historical context (Al-Mashhadani, 1978, p. 43).

As the fifteenth century approached, Africa entered a new phase in the history of slavery, which coincided with the onset of the European Age of Discovery. Europeans — above all the Portuguese — became involved in the trade of enslaved Africans, which became more organised and expanded compared to earlier stages. While European intervention did not create slavery, it did contribute to its expansion and integration into the emerging global economy, particularly as demand for labour increased in the New World.

Furthermore, while the slave trade was not confined to Africa, it was distinguished by its magnitude and reach. It evolved into an organised economic activity with its own mechanisms and structures, involving multiple actors such as merchants and slave traders, as well as some tribal leaders who participated under pressure from the new economic and political realities. This contributed to the spread of practices involving the trafficking of individuals in certain regions as the increasingly profitable trade produced incentives. In this context, the Portuguese — and later other Europeans — moved towards establishing specialised institutions and companies for the slave trade (Al-Alouri, 1965, p. 161), supported by legitimising discourses that sought to provide ethical justification for enslavement based on claims of civilisational superiority, or on the assertion that similar practices existed within African societies themselves.

One example of such a discourse is the statement attributed to ‘Alfonso González’ (of Portuguese origin), who encouraged his people by explaining that they could transform Africans into a commodity they could trade in (Araham, 1968, p. 128).

Many of them showed no moral qualms about promoting this trade and urging their governments, merchants and adventurers to encourage others to engage in it. Indeed, they even claimed that the enslavement of Africans by Europeans was beneficial to the latter. They based this argument on the alleged existence of the practice among Africans themselves, presenting it as natural and unobjectionable. Therefore, in their view, Europeans — who, according to them, treated Africans more justly than their ‘pagan’ owners — had no reason not to carry it out (Kili, 1979, p. 3).

As profits increased, these arguments were reinforced. European policies and agreements with local leaders intensified internal conflicts by supplying specific parties with weapons in exchange for captives.

Thus, the African individual was caught in a state of instability, either defending his presence against invaders or being drawn into internal conflicts that ultimately served European commercial and colonial interests. This confirms that, in its modern context, the slave trade was not merely an extension of traditional practices, but rather the result of a complex interaction between local factors and external pressures that reshaped the phenomenon according to an overarching global economic and colonial logic (Al Ameri, 1967, pp. 93–94).

2. The Relationship Between Geographical Discoveries and the Trade in Slaves

The Age of Discovery and other geographical discoveries made a significant contribution to the reshaping of the global trade map. During this period, the centre of commercial activity shifted from the Indian Ocean and parts of Asia to the Atlantic Ocean. Along with these geographical changes, the Atlantic Ocean became one of the most important global maritime commercial routes. (Khalifa, n.d., p. 10).

This shift was indirectly reflected in the growth of the slave trade. Shortly after the onset of geographical discoveries, particularly following the discovery of the Americas, the slave trade

witnessed a notable development characterised by rising demand for cheap labour. This labour was intended for employment in gold and silver mines, as well as on large-scale agricultural plantations. This enabled Portugal to achieve substantial financial gains. (Khalifa, n.d., p. 10).

Within the broader Portuguese interest in geographical discovery and their persistent efforts to find new maritime routes to India and the East, given that European trade required valuable commodities such as spices, gold, ivory, incense, coffee, textiles (e.g. silk fabrics and carpets), precious stones, timber and African gum (Zaghoul, 1973, p. 129), the Portuguese were able to expand their marketing alongside missionary activity.

Additionally, the Portuguese sought to break free from Arab and Italian influence over the traditional trade route through the Mediterranean, Egypt, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. This route was under Venetian control, enabling them to monopolise passage and restrict access for others, including the Portuguese. (Hassan, 2007, p. 38).

After the Portuguese Capture of Ceuta (1451) and Expansion Along the African Coast

Following the Portuguese capture of the Muslim city of Ceuta in 1451, King John I appointed his son, Prince Henry the Navigator, as its governor. This appointment marked the beginning of their exploratory expansion. As a result, the Portuguese were able to reach several regions on the African continent, including Madeira and the Azores. They continued their maritime voyages until reaching the mouth of the Senegal River and the Cape of Good Hope, extending as far as present-day Ghana. It was in this context that the Portuguese discovered a highly profitable commercial activity: the trading of people from these African regions. They captured and gathered enslaved individuals and transported them to European markets for sale. (Al-Hallawani, 1999, p. 60).

Initially, this trade progressed slowly, but it later expanded significantly and increased in activity during the eighteenth century. This was particularly evident after the Dutch entered the field in 1661 and began to control it, thereby surpassing Portuguese influence. However, this dominance was short-lived. The Dutch were later displaced from their commercial centres in Africa, while competition with the French and the British intensified — particularly after these two powers obtained new colonies, which required increasing numbers of slaves to exploit the available resources and wealth. (Khalifa, n.d., p. 10).

These transformations clearly demonstrate the pivotal role of geographical discoveries in establishing the slave trade as the primary global commercial enterprise of that historical era. The trade continued to expand and spread until it was officially prohibited in the nineteenth century following the decisions made at the Congress of Vienna in 1815. This shift is also attributed to Britain's loss of its American colonies and its subsequent efforts to combat the trade. However, Britain benefited from this new situation by keeping Africans in its African colonies and employing them in various economic activities to exploit those colonies' wealth (Khalifa, n.d., p. 10). (Khalifa, n.d., p. 10).

Although reaching India was the Portuguese primary objective in the early stages, developments in the situation nevertheless led them to establish colonial outposts on the African continent after the discovery of precious metals. They also recognised the great economic importance of the slave trade, regarding it as a profitable enterprise with relatively low costs. (Mohammad, 2014, pp. 68–69).

3. Portuguese Responsibility in the Development of the Slave Trade

Many European sources suggest that, in its early stages, the slave trade—including the Arab slave trade—was limited and conducted on an individual scale. Its volume did not increase significantly until Europeans reached the African coast. (Weidner, 1976, pp. 70–71).

Despite some European historians' attempts to avoid assigning ethical and historical responsibility to the Portuguese, the facts clearly show that they were the pioneers of the slave trade in the early modern period. They continued to engage in this activity throughout the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, generating substantial profits. These profits encouraged other European countries, such as Spain, England, the Netherlands, France and Denmark, to follow the same approach, establishing trading companies, commercial fleets, forts and trade stations along the African coast, particularly in West Africa. These stations soon became centres of coercion, where local populations were subjugated and enslaved (Zeghloul, 1973, p. 8).

From this perspective, it can be argued that Portugal was the first European state to contribute to the emergence and spread of the slave trade phenomenon. Lisbon became a major commercial hub, as reflected in the revival of trade through its maritime fleets. Enslaved people were shipped from West African ports — most notably Luanda, one of the largest ports designated for this trade — bound for Europe, the Americas, and other global ports. (Yahya, 2021, p. 17). Furthermore, after recognising the substantial profits it generated, Portugal was keen to provide legal and administrative protection for this trade. (Meriem, 2016, p. 31).

The Portuguese played a key role in strengthening the slave trade, as evidenced by the legal policies and administrative measures adopted to import enslaved people. For example, traders were exempted from paying customs duties, which increased their numbers. As a result, enslaved people accounted for around 10% of Lisbon's population. Portuguese interest in this trade increased further when they began exploiting the Atlantic islands and the Americas. (Boucharb, 1987, p. 62).

The first instance of capturing ten Africans is also noted to have been carried out by the Portuguese officer 'Antam Joner Al-Faz'. These individuals were transported in the first shipment from the West African coast to Lisbon. This practice intensified following the discovery of the route around the Cape of Good Hope in 1445, after which the Portuguese agency in the Argium region became the main hub for the slave trade along the West African coast (Zaghloul, 1973, p. 129). (Zeghloul, 1973, p. 129).

Furthermore, the Portuguese's advances in navigation, along with the support they received from Prince Henry the Navigator during the Age of Geographical Discovery, help to explain their dominance in this trade. Prince Henry directly encouraged these voyages by establishing a school for geography and cartography. (Hassan, 2007, p. 38). Henry the Navigator was motivated by both religious fervour and a passion for geographical exploration. He combined his commercial and religious interests, viewing geographical voyages as a means of maximising profits — particularly after the arrival of the first shipments of the slave trade (Abbad, 2018, p. 60).

As the slave trade expanded, the Portuguese started to build forts along the coast to capture enslaved people. This process began along the Gold Coast and then continued along the Bight of Benin in 1864. The aim was to secure their coastal commercial activity and caravans heading inland, as well as to establish centres for commercial exchange. The fort of São Tomé in West Africa is one example; it became a major hub for assembling enslaved people to meet the needs of Portugal and other European states. (Abd al-Razzaq, pp. 224–225).

It is reported that the number of enslaved people sent to Lisbon in the early sixteenth century ranged between 10,000 and 12,000. This figure raised concerns about a possible decline in the populations of the affected regions. (Al-Razzaq, 2012, p. 225).

The growth of the slave trade, including its rising prices and wider spread, has also been attributed to the discovery of the 'New World', which required an abundant labour force to exploit its resources and wealth. This was especially necessary after the plague epidemic in Europe between 1348 and 1350 killed half of the population. The Iberian region was among the most affected, with forests and uncultivated land encroaching on abandoned agricultural areas. Consequently, the number of

Europeans was no more than 60% of its 1330 level. The historian Choney (Chuney) considered the initial capture raids to be the main economic impetus behind geographical discovery. (Boucharb, 1987, p. 62).

The Portuguese, along with the Spanish and the British, also found what they were looking for in Africans, who were considered better able to endure the hardships of labour on plantations and in mines. They were also believed to be better able to adapt to the climate of the 'New America'. (Boucharb, 1987, p. 43).

From one perspective, the reliance of Europeans on black labour can be explained by the decline in population — especially after the widespread extermination of indigenous peoples — driven by direct exploitation and the spread of infectious diseases such as smallpox, measles and syphilis. Additionally, there were high mortality rates in the mines due to harsh conditions and brutal labour carried out with no regard for even the most basic standards of humane treatment. (Al-Razzaq, 2012, pp. 224–225).

This extermination occurred in multiple regions, including Mexico, Brazil, and Peru. In these places, Europeans continued to exploit gold and silver mines and cultivate fertile lands for growing tropical crops required in Europe, such as sugarcane, tobacco, cotton and grains. To illustrate the scale of this catastrophe, researcher Tzvetan Todorov notes that Mexico's population fell from approximately 25 million on the eve of the Spanish conquest to around one million by 1600 (Al-Razzaq, 2012, pp. 224–225; Saleh, 2014, pp. 68–69). (Saleh, 2014, pp. 68–69).

4. The Inhuman Dimension of Portuguese Explorers' Practices

Researchers have highlighted the extreme brutality of European slave traders in Africa. Slave caravans moved towards the coast on foot, carrying men, women and children who were tied together in pairs with ropes. An official supervised them, whipping anyone who fell behind in the march. As a result, the weak, overcome by exhaustion, would collapse; they were either killed or left to their fate. (Mahieddine, 1987, p. 87).

Doctor Zouhir Riyadh states: "The weak would fall from exhaustion; they were either killed or left to their fate, and the skeletons of these poor people remained a sign of the roads they had taken until the nineteenth century." He also notes that the traveler "Livingstone," in his writings about the sources of the Nile, described the appalling condition of coercion and suffering endured by enslaved people while being transported toward the coasts. (Mohamed Yahya, pp. 24–25)

Perhaps testimony from those who managed this trade reflects the scale of the abuses. "Thomas Dodd," one of the British slave traders, told a parliamentary investigation committee that he transported 500 enslaved people across the Atlantic in three voyages; 120 of them died—an incidence of 25%—as a result of poor sanitary conditions. Even so, he attempted to justify his actions by claiming that he washed the enslaved people with vinegar every day in order to prevent disease from spreading. (Mohamed Yahya a., 2021, p. 87)

When the caravans arrived on the coast, the European slave traders would inspect the enslaved people and brand them with a distinctive mark using a heated iron. The enslaved people were then held in forts and strongholds in preparation for the sea voyage to the 'New World'. They were given only limited food. When they were loaded onto ships, they were forced to board naked and were subjected to brutality. Due to the length and cost of the voyage, ships were fitted with racks to confine the enslaved people while they were shackled. Women were separated from men, leaving them in conditions akin to "a box of sardines". One of the captain's most important tasks before departure was to ensure the ship had enough fresh water (200–250 litres per person), as well as bananas and lemons to prevent scurvy and palm oil to treat skin diseases. The loading and sailing

process was one of the most traumatic periods for enslaved people in terms of physical and psychological suffering. (Kacem, 1960, p. 8).

Outbreaks of rebellion and violent agitation were common during the voyage. These were immediately suppressed through brutal beatings or killing. Some enslaved people also attempted suicide to escape torture. Ships were therefore equipped with nets to stop them throwing themselves overboard. Many died from homesickness and the anguish of being separated from their families. In addition, malnutrition, filth and disease caused 10–20% of enslaved people to die on each voyage. Often, the dead were thrown overboard or dying enslaved people were left among the living until the end of the journey. (Kacem, 1960, p. 8).

5. Responses to the Abolition of the Slave Trade

By the late eighteenth century, awareness of the immorality of the slave trade was growing in Britain and the United States. Supporters of abolition emerged, including Granville Sharp, Thomas Clarkson, Richard Baxter and William Wilberforce. Organisations such as the Quakers in North America and the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in Britain also contributed to raising public awareness through boycotts, public appeals and publications depicting the harsh conditions endured by enslaved people aboard ships, in fields and in mines. (Khalifa, n.d., p. 15).

Following the French Revolution of 1789, the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen affirmed the equality of all human beings. However, in 1793, the French National Assembly exempted the colonies from these rights. A Black member of the Assembly, Vincent Ogé (also known as Vincent Oung), protested against the oppressive practices carried out against his fellow people. He warned the governor of the colony that he would fight for the freedom of enslaved people, but was defeated and executed. Nevertheless, this incident generated popular pressure in Paris, leading the Legislative Assembly to grant equal rights to Black individuals born in French colonies as well as to French citizens. The slave trade was later confirmed to be abolished in France at the Second Paris Congress in 1815. (Mahieddine)

Some colonies also experienced slave revolts, most notably the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804). This had a significant impact on the colonial powers, prompting them to take practical measures to curb the slave trade by enacting legislation that prohibited the sale of enslaved people. However, the full implementation of these measures took a considerable amount of time. For instance, slavery was abolished in Cuba in 1886 and in Brazil in 1888. (Mahieddine, 1987, p. 15).

Other reasons that led European states to abandon the slave trade included their satisfaction with the profits yielded by this trade, as well as the decline in financial returns over time. The Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 called for European states to cooperate in eradicating the trade. The British navy also played a part in combatting the last strongholds of the trade in Zanzibar and Sudan, having previously exploited the largest profits.

Some European explorers of the nineteenth century were praised for their role in preventing the slave trade. For example, the French explorer Paul Soleillet opposed enslavement and introduced initiatives aimed at rescuing enslaved people by purchasing them and transporting them to the desert, where they would be resettled in agricultural projects that would grant them freedom in return for their commitment to work. (Zaki, History of Review, 11/02/2023).

These measures continued; in 1794, the United States banned the import of enslaved people, and in 1807 it prohibited the slave trade altogether, to be implemented from 1808 onwards, despite smuggling persisting for some time. International efforts against slavery continued until the San Francisco Conference in 1945, at which the member states of the United Nations Charter reaffirmed

human rights and the dignity of the individual. On 10 December 1948, the United Nations General Assembly issued the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which prohibited slavery in all its forms in Article 4, along with subsequent supportive steps intended to strengthen and reinforce this ban. (Zaki, History of Review, 11/02/2023).

6. The consequences of the slave trade for Europeans and African peoples

The effects of geographical discoveries and the slave trade varied among those involved, whether they practised the trade or were its victims. On the one hand, this phenomenon represented strength and prosperity for European states; on the other hand, it produced catastrophic outcomes on multiple economic, social, political and cultural levels for African societies.

A. Economic outcomes

The geographical discoveries contributed to radical transformations in Europe's economic structure. They helped the continent to overcome crises endured for centuries and reshaped the prevailing economic, political and intellectual systems. The position of the commercial bourgeoisie was strengthened at the expense of the feudal class, and a capitalist mode of production emerged. Consequently, industry became the dominant economic activity, alongside the expansion of global trade. These changes also paved the way for the adoption of modern financial instruments such as banking transactions and cheques, as well as a shift in commercial power towards the western and southern seas. This was in contrast to the decline of the Mediterranean and Italian ports, which benefited Western European states that were experiencing the dynamism of the Industrial Revolution. (Khalifa R., n.d., p. 12).

Conversely, regions in the East, particularly Egypt and the Levant, suffered a decline in economic resources due to trade routes being redirected around the Cape of Good Hope. This shift was linked to Portuguese control over maritime passages and the tightening of a blockade on the Arab internal seas (Mohmed Yahya A., 2021, p. 20).

In Europe, this trade directly contributed to the 'primitive accumulation of capital', laying the groundwork for the Industrial Revolution. England is a prime example of this, having dominated the slave trade during the 18th century and owned hundreds of ships that employed tens of thousands of sailors and workers between 1680 and 1786. The ports of Liverpool, London, Bristol and Lancaster were vital hubs for this trade. By facilitating the exchange of goods used to barter for enslaved people, the slave trade accelerated industrial production, leading to the growth of the arms, gunpowder, shipbuilding and iron smelting industries, as well as textile and spirit production. This is reflected in the economic boom that Britain experienced, as Catherine Savage emphasised, highlighting the central role of the slave trade in achieving British prosperity.

In Africa, however, the slave trade disrupted the local economy and drained its human and natural resources. It deprived the continent of its productive forces, particularly in agriculture and artisanal industries, resulting in a sharp decline in agricultural output and delaying the growth of traditional economic activities (Khalifa R., n.d., p. 15). (Khalifa R., n.d., p. 15).

Furthermore, this trade contributed to the dismantling of regional commercial networks due to the wars and conflicts that erupted between different tribes and regions in the pursuit of capturing enslaved people. In this context, Michel Dufour summarised the outcomes of this phenomenon, stating that Africa was losing a significant portion of its resources to other continents every year. America gained the labour force, while Europe reaped the profits of this inhumane trade ((Mohamed Yahya A., 2021, p. 32).

B. Social and religious outcomes

The slave trade led to the breakdown of social structures in Africa. It targeted young people, who were the most capable of working and enduring, resulting in families being torn apart and tribal and

social ties being severed. Over a period of nearly four centuries, millions of Africans were forcibly deported. This disrupted the continent's demographic and social development, causing a severe population decline.

Large-scale enslavement during the period following geographical discoveries was tied to the rise of commercial capitalism (mercantilism) and had devastating effects on economic, political and social levels. This trade caused a genuine demographic catastrophe, with the relative weight of Africa's population declining compared to the rest of the world, as noted in A. M. K. Sundar's study of the world's population.

African societies also suffered from the spread of poverty and illiteracy, as well as new diseases introduced by Europeans that the continent had not previously encountered. In the same context, European powers exploited geographical discoveries to bolster missionary efforts and spread Christianity among local populations. These practices have left a deep legacy of racism and negative stereotyping, portraying Africans as inferior. As a result, the lasting psychological and social effects are still evident today. (Mohamed Yahya A., 2021, p. 32).

C. Political Outcomes

Politically, the intense European competition over the discovered territories led to the outbreak of wars and conflicts among the major colonial powers. This occurred in the context of efforts to control primary resources and open new markets for industrial exports. The high cost of this rivalry was borne by vulnerable peoples, who were subjected to brutal exploitation and enslavement. (Khalifa R., n.d., p. 13).

The exploratory voyages can also be seen as an indirect continuation of the Crusades, as economic objectives were accompanied by clearly defined religious aims. Upon reaching regions such as Ethiopia and India, the Europeans sought to spread Catholicism through commercial activity and missionary efforts. In this context, the Dominican friars succeeded in establishing educational and theological institutions designed to prepare local people to contribute to the spread of Christianity (Suleiman, 2013, p. 52). (Suleiman, 2013, p. 52).

D. Cultural outcomes

Culturally, geographical discoveries contributed to the development of geographical sciences and related theories by revealing areas that had remained unknown for centuries. These discoveries also supported the advancement of other fields, such as botany, through the identification of new plant species in Africa and the Americas. Contact with diverse peoples also promoted the development of sociology and the emergence of new concepts and theories for understanding human societies.

Furthermore, communication between Europe and the Americas opened up vast opportunities for the advancement of knowledge and science. The discoveries encouraged reliance on reason and the experimental method, as well as advocating freedom in scientific enquiry. This contributed to the decline of the rigid theories that had dominated European thought during the Middle Ages. This interaction also enriched geographical and historical heritage through the writings and travel accounts of explorers, which became a key source of knowledge during this period (Abbad, 2018, p. 11). (Abbad, 2018, p. 11).

Conclusion

This study concludes that Portuguese exploratory activities during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were not confined to a geographical or intellectual framework. Rather, these activities quickly evolved into a comprehensive colonial project that established one of the most dangerous and atrocious racist phenomena in human history: the enslavement of human beings and their

transformation into commodities governed by the logic of supply and demand. Portuguese policies and practices played a key role in establishing the slave trade as an organised global economic activity. This resulted in millions of Africans being subjected to inhumane and coercive conditions, leaving deep and enduring effects on the structure of African societies.

The research findings further demonstrate that the current conditions affecting the African continent, such as chronic poverty, economic marginalisation, unemployment and accumulated debt, cannot be divorced from the violent historical legacy of the dawn of commercial capitalism in the fifteenth century. Portugal was among the earliest pioneers of this era, driven by interwoven political, economic and religious considerations.

Based on this, the study's key conclusions are as follows:

The slave trade contributed to the large-scale depletion of the African population, depriving the continent of a significant proportion of its labour force and productive capacity.

This phenomenon led to the decline and disappearance of many African civilisations, thereby depriving later generations of access to an important part of their historical and cultural heritage.

Even after the abolition of formal slavery, Africa did not escape the repercussions of enslavement. New forms of domination continued through modern European colonialism and then through economic control mechanisms, including the influence of multinational corporations and patterns associated with contemporary imperialism and capitalism.

Finally, the issue of slavery in Africa remains an open field for further in-depth research, particularly in terms of addressing the long-term psychological and social dimensions. Such work should also critically examine selective narratives and writings that seek to assign responsibility for this phenomenon to specific parties, especially Arabs, apart from its full historical and global context.

Thus, this study confirms that an understanding of slavery in Africa is incomplete unless it is considered within a comprehensive historical framework as a product of interconnected global economic and political structures rather than as an isolated practice or the responsibility of a single party.

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