

# Slavery

## And The Slave Trade in Africa

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*Disclaimer: For participants of the International Workshop for “Dealing with the aftermath of slave trade and slavery.” Elmina (Ghana) 10 – 17 September 2024*

# Outline

- Introduction
- Why slavery?
- Forms in Africa
- An assessment
- Some key personalities
- Conclusion

# Intro. cont'd

- Slave has been defined as;
  - a person who is being forced to work for and obey another and is considered to be their property
  - the state of a person who is a chattel (movable property) of another and
  - a person totally responsible to and dependent upon another person
- Slavery:
  - the state of being under the control of another person,
  - the practice or system of owning slaves
  - work done under harsh conditions for little or no pay,

# Intro. cont'd

Why did Africans engage in and support slavery, such that but for its abolition in the early nineteenth century, slavery would have probably continued into modern times?

## Objective

- At the end of the presentation, participants will deepen their understanding of the forms, rationale, effect and the legacy of slavery in Africa

# Intro. cont'd

- Oral tradition and documented sources suggest that slavery dates to the Neolithic (Late Stone) Age (10,000 BCE) when people used slaves for personal and domestic purposes.
- Egypt, Greece, Rome, Mesopotamia, Babylon and other earliest societies practiced slavery.
- The slave laws in Exod. 21: 1-11, Lev. 25: 39-55, Deut. 15: 12-18. Check also Eph. 6: 5-8, Col. 3: 22-25, I Tim. 1: 10 etc attest to its ancient practice

## Intro. cont'd

- Orlando Patterson writes, that, “...slavery **existed from before the dawn of human history**...no group of people whose ancestors were not at one time **slave** or **slave holders**.”

A. A.Perbi, *A history of Domestic slavery in Ghana*. p.13.

# Why did people own slaves?

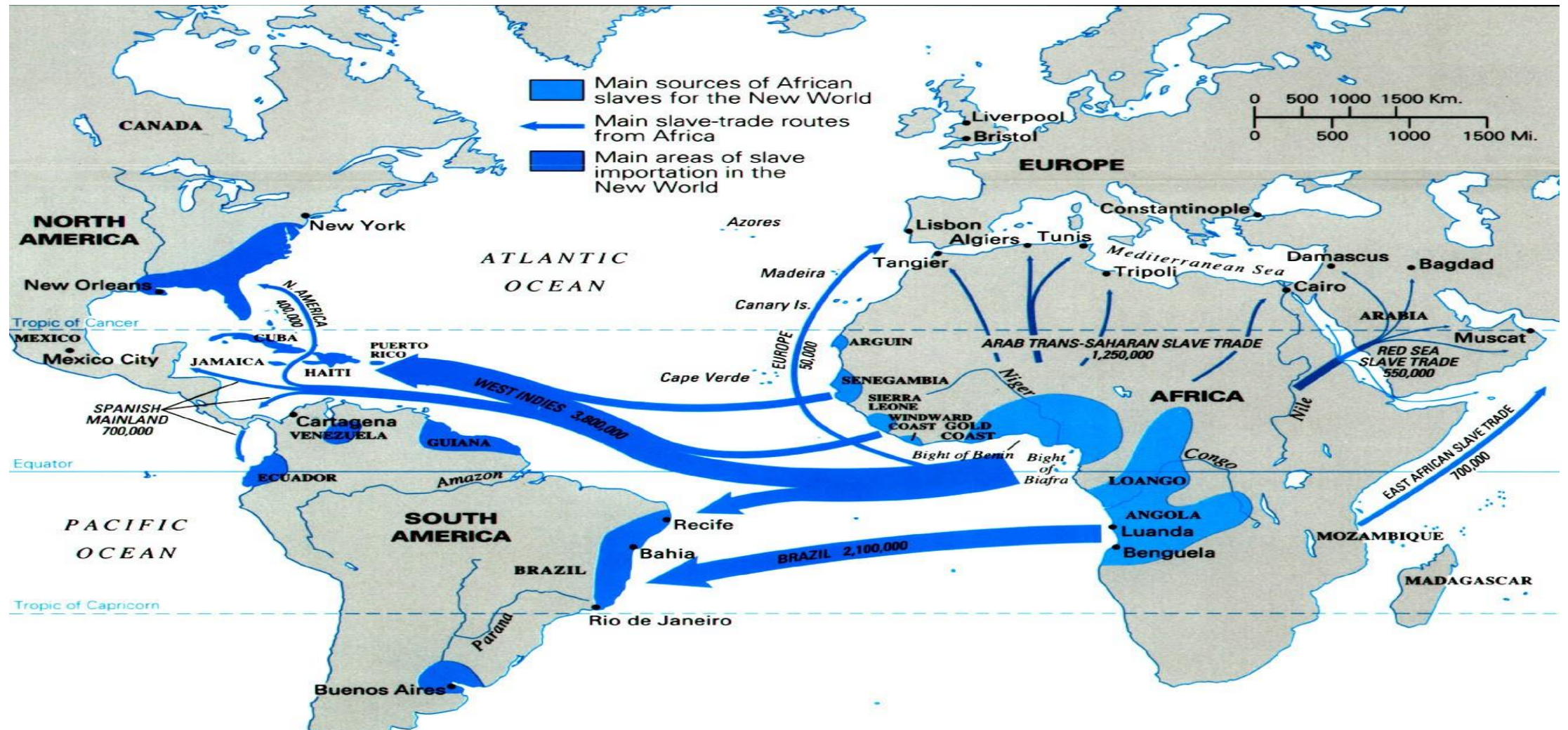
- Slaves were needed to perform domestic chores, or serve as porters in long distance trade
- Serve as the main labour force in gold mining, metal working, salt making, rubber production and in the art and craft industries.
- Victorious people wanted to sell off, rather than kill able-bodied men
- Lucrative business

# Why cont'd

- The above evidence suggest that slavery existed and was widely accepted in many earliest societies because of the crucial roles slaves played.
- Africa
  - In Africa, the most discussed is the Trans-Atlantic slave trade

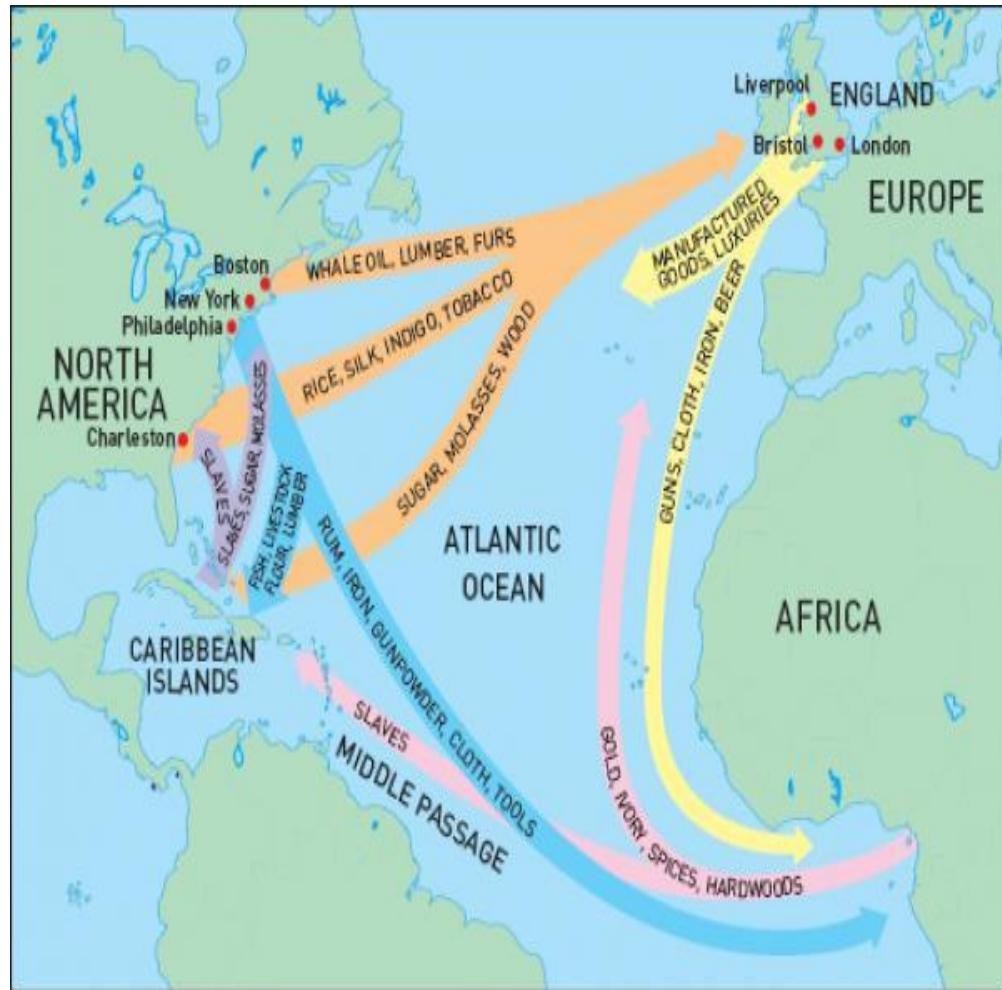


# 1. Trans-Atlantic (c.1508-1800s)



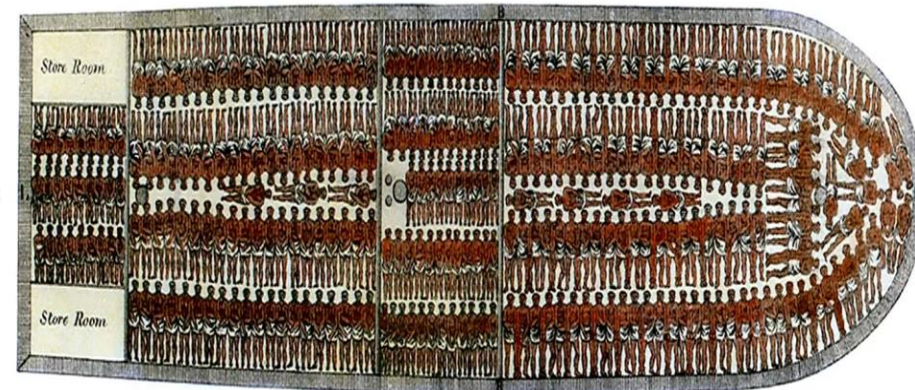






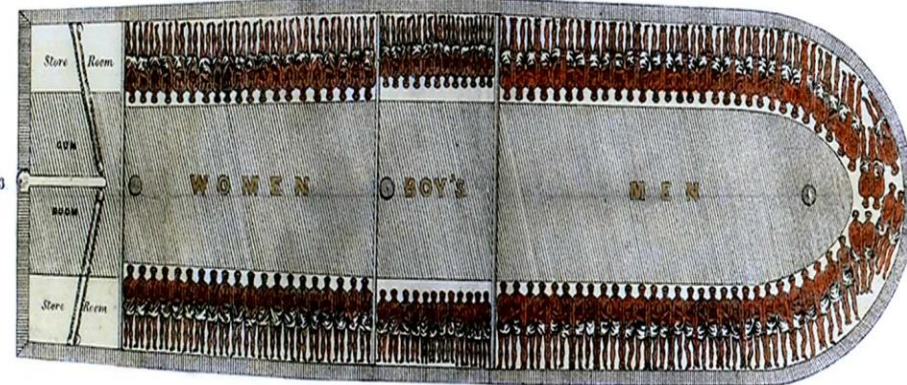
PLAN OF LOWER DECK WITH THE STOWAGE OF 292 SLAVES  
130 OF THESE BEING STOWED UNDER THE SHELVES AS SHEWN IN FIGURE B & FIGURE S.

Fig 2



PLAN SHEWING THE STOWAGE OF 130 ADDITIONAL SLAVES ROUND THE WINGS OR SIDES OF THE LOWER DECK BY MEANS OF PLATFORMS OR SHELVES  
(IN THE MANNER OF GALLERIES IN A CHURCH) THE SLAVES STOWED ON THE SHELVES AND BELOW THEM HAVE ONLY A HEIGHT OF 2 FEET 7 INCHES  
BETWEEN THE BEAMS AND FAR LESS UNDER THE BEAMS. See Fig 1.

Fig 3



# Trans-Atlantic cont'd

- Generally, the era of the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade in Africa, spans from the 1500s to the 1800s
- Because of its lucrative nature, England, Portugal, France, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Sweden, Brandenburgers (Germany) and interlopers, all participated actively in the slave trade
- The reasons for the slave trade in Africa are three-fold.
  - slaves were needed to work in the gold and silver mines and on sugarcane plantations in the Americas
  - Europeans knew of the strength and abilities of Africans
  - The West Indian slaves were relatively weak compared to Africans

# Trans-Atlantic cont'd

- Taking or shipping slaves from Africa did not start instantly. In the Gold Coast (Ghana), for example, slavery to outside the region, first occurred during the Trans-Saharan trade.
- From the early 16<sup>th</sup> century CE, European merchants took back some Africans to serve in rich households in Europe, but for a century, Europeans prioritized trading gold, ivory, cloths and beads

# Trans-Atlantic cont'd

- From the 17<sup>th</sup> century, however, merchants in the Gold Coast, engaged Africans to kidnap for them youthful and energetic Africans.
- Gradually, more Africans became interested in kidnapping people and raiding villages.
- People engaged in waylaying of unwary travelers and traders
- Inter-state conflicts also helped in the expansion of the slave trade.

# Trans-Atlantic cont'd

- Warfare affected the gold trade, and kingdoms and states resorted to the slave trade
- Warfare caused the influx of more firearms, and acquisition and sale of more war captives to Europeans
- Other modes of acquisition were tributes and direct purchase
- Need for crops such as sugar, tobacco, cotton, and coffee prolonged the trade

# Trans-Atlantic cont'd

- Humanitarian and evangelical ideas, attacked the slave trade.
- The British anti-slavery campaigns against the ST., motions in parliament and the British proclamations against slavery in 1807, 1833 and 1874 helped to end the slave trade.
- Abolition was necessary due to the obnoxious and inhuman nature of slavery. Official records suggest that, of the 20 million slaves exported in the 300 years, only about 11mill survived.
- Others attribute abolition to economic reasons



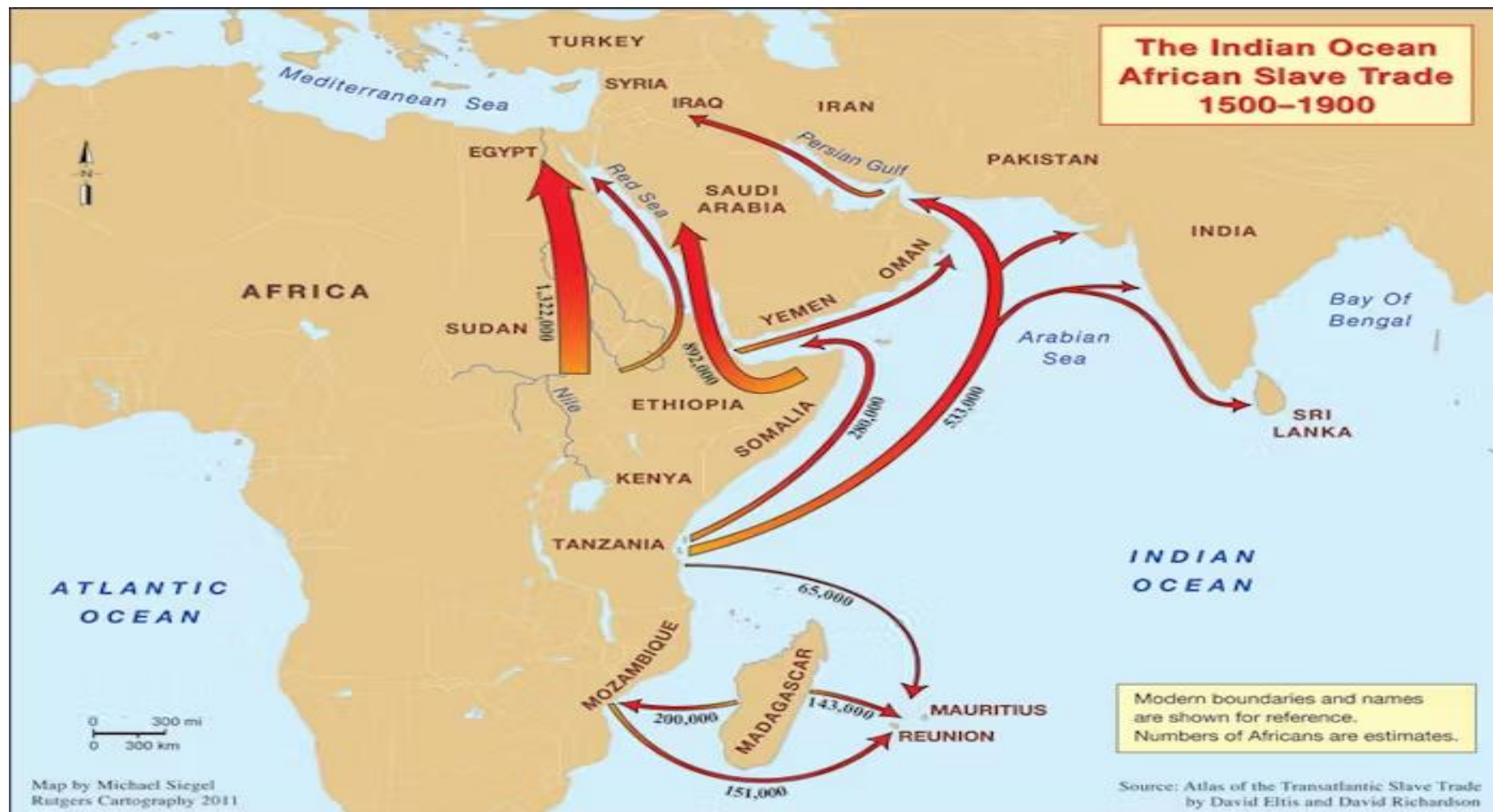
# Trans-Atlantic cont'd

- “If we consider how many other deaths among the Africans were caused by the slave trade, the sum total is nevertheless, very depressing. Many lives were lost in the battles or surprise attacks whereby native kings and traders procured their slaves. Some fell by the wayside during the endless marches along the narrow paths through forest and bush down to the coast. Next, some died at the forts, and many died on board the ships. Finally, after landing in America, quite a few died from exhaustion due to the sufferings they had undergone. **It seems fairly safe to say that, for every able-bodied slave put to work in the New World, at least one African life had been sacrificed on the way**”. Georg Norregard, *Danish settlements in West Africa 1658-1850*, (1966) p. 89

# Trans-Atlantic cont'd

- Freed slaves were settled far and near, including Sierra Leone (1787) and Liberia (1822).
- No wonder the trans-Atlantic slave trade dominates the literature
- But there were other forms of slavery in Africa

## 2. Indian Ocean/Arab slave trade





A SLAVE GANG IN SENEGAL.  
DESIGNED BY MR. W. A. CHURCHILL.

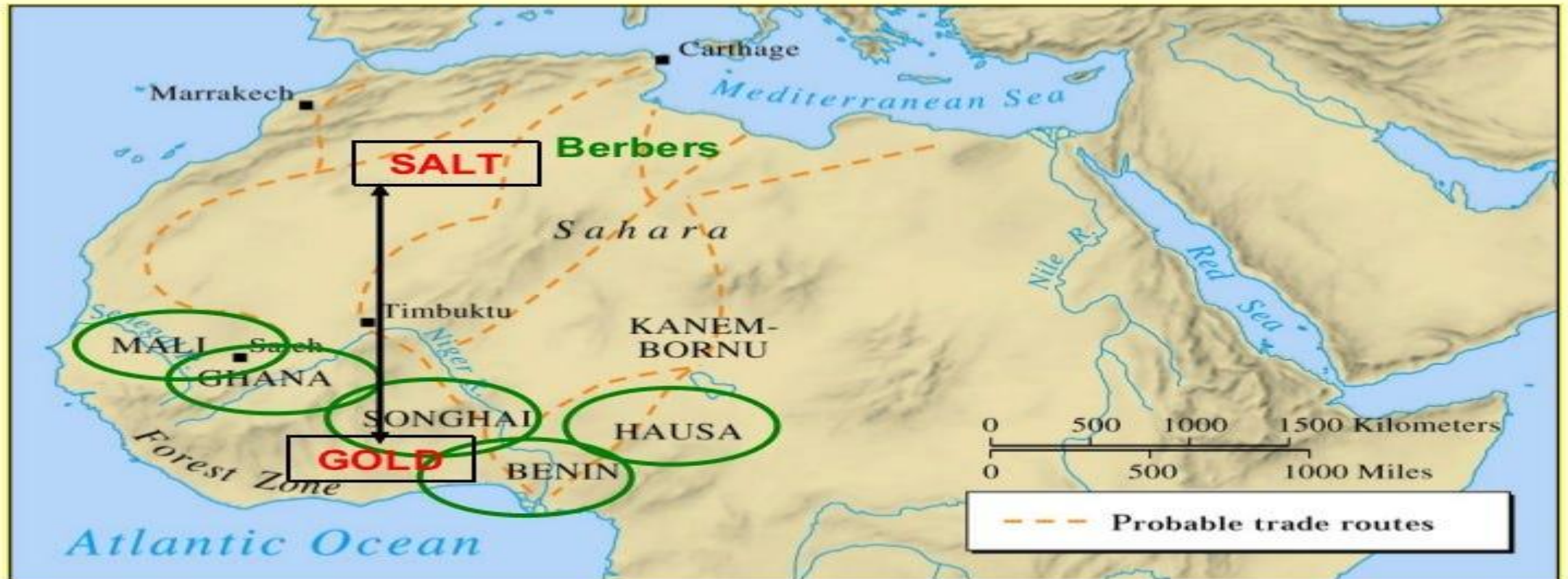


16  
16/7



### 3. Trans-Saharan trade(200BCE-1800sCE)

#### Gold-Salt Trade



# Trans-Saharan



## 4. Internal/indigenous c.10000BCE

- In Cape Verde, Africans were transported from the neighbouring mainland to provide slave labour in agricultural and trading activities
- In Sierra Leone, the Chief of Port Loko testified that prisoners of war were always put to work on the coast.
- In the Gold Coast (Ghana), slaves served as collectors from the wild, farmers, shepherds, hunters and fishers
- Provided service at owner's old age
- Slaves were caretakers of the royal mausoleum, dancers, drummers, horn blowers, soldiers, and 'soul washers'. They cooked, cleaned, fetched water and firewood, and washed.
- They were assistant linguists, heralds, sword bearers and soldiers.

# Indigenous cont'd

- On 30<sup>th</sup> November 1906 the chiefs and headmen of Adanse wrote to the Commissioner responsible for the Southern District of Asante as follows:
- “The freedom of every slave we beg to say that is impossible for we Ashantis to do so...what could the kings, chiefs and Headman do if these are set free, all our drums, blowing horns, swords, elephant's tails, basket carrying and farming works are done by these, as we have no money like Europeans to do necessaries for us...and how we kings and chiefs can attend any calling by the government at Obuasi or Kumasi while we have nobody to carry us, beat our drums, blow our horns, carry our swords, and other necessary things”.



# Palace attendants





# Attendants





# Attendants



# Indigenous cont'd

- In Dahomey (Benin), domestic slavery was a well organized institution. Most of the slaves were war captives and were given to the king.
- Of these captives, he sacrificed some to the god of iron and war, gave some out as gifts to any warrior whose conduct had impressed him, presented some to the principal chiefs to sell or retain, and set large numbers aside for the requirements of the annual customs and the daily and other sacrifices of the king
- Some were set aside to replace Dahomeans who had been killed during the campaign and the rest were employed on the plantations and fields of the kingdom

# Indigenous cont'd

- Fadibe asserts that among the Yoruba, slavery was an important institution up to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century CE
- The principal work for male slaves was farming, some acted as stable boys and grooms for their master, others acted as retainers and servants of the kings and chiefs while others followed the same crafts as their masters
- Some collected tolls at the principal gateways into the towns
- Were caretakers of temples and lodges of the *Ogboni* (secret society) and male slaves were employed in combatant duties in wars.
- Regarding female slaves, some accompanied their mistress on their trading journeys, while others went trading by themselves. Some did household work such as pounding and grinding of foodstuff, others acted as companions for their mistress's children and some acted as caretakers of the '*orisa*' family shrines.

# Effect/Legacy

- The legacy of slavery on Africans is very significant and must be comprehensively discussed.
- First, slavery promoted integration – of the weak, vulnerable, endangered and poor.
- Slavery saw the expansion of villages into vibrant market centers – Elmina, Salaga, Sofala, Timbuktu and Zanzibar, Kilwa, and Mombasa,
- The intricate trade route system opened up the continent and growth and prosperity of states and kingdoms
- Kingdoms became wealthy and used their wealth and power to protect weaker states, their people and territories. Eg. Asante.
- Towns obtained firearms, textiles, and alcohol.

# Legacy cont'd

- Slavery/slave trade created avenues to sell off criminals and lazy people. Pawning enabled individuals and families to settle huge/chronic debts
- Slavery fostered friendship between states and strengthened inter-state relations in Africa
- Abolition of the slave trade boosted legitimate trade and growth of Christianity
- Eg. In the Gold Coast, the Basel and Wesleyan missions, supported slaves and promoted agriculture and legitimate trade to end slavery, and partly to create an independent middle class of farmer-planters.
- The missions grew rapidly in membership
- Spread of Islam in Africa

# Legacy cont'd

- Whereas the above appear as gains Africa derived from the ST era and its abolition, other developments during and after the ST adversely affected Africans.



# Legacy cont'd

- Era of mass depopulation of communities – Thousands were taken out of Africa yearly. For example, between 1690 and 1706, the Cape Coast castle alone exported about 10,198 human beings, Anomabo exported 5,000 annually, and by the mid-1700s, they had exported millions of slaves.
- On the battlefield, slaves fought in the vanguard division of armies and endured brutalities and heavy fatalities.

# Legacy cont'd

- Slaves were deemed as 'property', goods or chattel of their owners.
- They endured whipping, mutilation of bodies (burns, cutting, piercing etc.) and were made to perform menial and risky jobs in homes and palaces.
- Some were chained in the scorching sun, rain and in other bad weather conditions awaiting bargaining and purchase at slave markets

# Legacy cont'd

- Some communities sacrificed presumptuous (arrogant) slaves”. Many others were made to work for long hours without pay
- Kidnapping, raids and attacks caused fear, panic, widespread insecurity and destruction of Africa’s labour force, property and skills.
- Some scholars assert that Europeans introduced tobacco and rum to debase Africans, and ruin their economies.
- Slavery became institutionalized and reinforced social hierarchies in North Africa and the Middle East, with a lasting impact on race and ethnicity.

# Legacy cont'd

- Abolition also disorganized and displaced slaves and their families. They became strangers if they returned home
- The elderly in traditional societies know the *Nnonkofo asefoo* (slave descendants) and often mistreat/disrespect them.
- In some communities in Ghana, slave descendants live modestly to avoid public ridicule

# Legacy cont'd

- The slave trade caused the decline of most earliest economic activities in Africa, such as iron smelting, gold mining and food production
- The wars to capture slaves retarded the growth of emerging kingdoms.
- The slave trade also corrupted traditional rulers and the elite.
- To ensure abolition, even kings were punished to deter them from practicing slavery.



# Legacy cont'd

- After abolition, rulers/kings did not know what to do with slaves, how to pay for firearms, for which they had normally paid with slaves.
- Abolition also intensified atrocities.
- Difficult to enforce abolition. Perbi, p.196 observes that dealing with one's servile origins came up time and again in the Traditional and Regular courts
- The British Colonial Authorities gave no guidelines on the relationship between owners and freed slave families. Often, the freed slaves' rights, privileges, obligations and social status were abused.

# Legacy cont'd

- Slavery has continued **quietly/secretly** after abolition.
- Undoubtedly, slavery benefited some people, but more seriously, its damaging legacy has survived into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

# Some Key personalities

- Several figures played significant roles in the slave trade:
  - **Seyyid Said (1790–1856):** A Sultan of Oman, he established his capital in Zanzibar in 1840 and established the city as a major center for the slave trade, with large slave markets and plantations worked by enslaved Africans. The island's economy was heavily reliant on the export of slaves and goods produced by slave labour, such as cloves.
  - **Tippu Tip (1837–1905):** He was a prominent Zanzibari trader, governor, and a notorious slave trader of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He controlled vast territories in Central Africa and led numerous slave-trading expeditions, capturing and selling thousands of Africans at coastal markets. Tippu Tip became a powerful figure in the region, even establishing his own fiefdom in what is now the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.
  - **Belgian King Leopold (1835-1909),** he obtained as personal possession a huge territory in the heart of Africa. To consolidate power, he received the services of a former powerful slave trader from Zanzibar, who he appointed governor of the Stanley Falls District. The population was subjected to a taxation to pay for his slave trading activities.

# Personalities cont'd

- **Mansa Musa (c. 1280–1337):** A ruler of the Mali Empire, is perhaps the most famous figure associated with slavery in West Africa. His pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324 highlighted the wealth and power of the Mali Empire, which was heavily involved in the gold and slave trades. Mansa Musa's empire was a major supplier of slaves to North Africa via the Trans-Saharan routes.
- **Sonni Ali (c. 1464–1492):** Sonni Ali was a ruler of the Songhai Empire, which succeeded Mali as the dominant power in West Africa. Under his rule, the empire expanded its control over key trade routes, including the Trans-Saharan slave trade.
- **Samori and Babatu** – notorious slave raiders in West Africa

# Conclusion

- Slavery dates back several 1000 years before our common era when powerful and rich people obtained, used and mistreated some innocent, vulnerable and less-privileged people.
- In Africa, slavery was indispensable because of slaves role in the society, including providing industrial, economic and domestic labour. Slaves were useful especially to royals and the rich.
- The coming of Europeans resulted in large scale purchase, mistreatment and massive death of slaves. Because of the benefits derived, its lucrative nature, and its long-term practice and institutionalization, the abolition, emancipation and proclamation laws and ordinances did not completely stop slavery.
- Obviously confused, some freed slaves remained in servitude because they suffered variously if they left their masters.
- The attitude of many Africans toward slavery suggest that they would never again encourage any such obnoxious and inhuman practice on the African continent or any part of the world!



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