

# UNIT 6

## Africa and the Outside World 1500- 1880s

### Introduction: Africa's Contact with the Outside World

This unit explores the interactions between Africa, particularly Western and Central Africa, and European powers, focusing on the initial contacts, the impact of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, and the rise of "Legitimate" trade. It also examines European exploration, the establishment of white settlements in South Africa, and the role of missionaries.

#### Key Concepts:

- **Voyages:** Early European explorations along the African coast.
- **Legitimate Commerce:** Trade in African commodities post-slave trade.
- **Commodities:** Goods traded, such as palm oil, rubber, and cotton.
- **Exploration:** European expeditions into the African interior.

### Early European Contact and Exploration

Portugal was the first European nation to establish significant contacts with Africa, starting in the 15th century. The Portuguese aimed to bypass North Africa's Muslim-controlled trade routes and access West Africa's gold. Prince Henry the Navigator sponsored these explorations with goals to spread Christianity and secure trade routes. The conquest of Ceuta in 1415 marked Portugal's first major step into Africa, followed by further explorations along the coast, including reaching Cape Bajador and Cape Blanc.

#### Key Regions of Contact

- **Senegambia:** One of the earliest regions affected by European trade, known for its gold and as a source of enslaved Africans.
- **Gold Coast (Ghana):** The Portuguese built Elmina Castle in 1482 to secure their trading interests. This region became a significant point of contact for European traders.

### The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

The discovery of America in 1492 and the establishment of plantations created a high demand for labor, leading to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. This trade connected Africa, Europe, and America in a triangular route: African slaves were sent to the Americas, where they produced goods like sugar and tobacco, which

were then shipped to Europe. In return, Europe provided goods such as firearms to Africa.

The slave trade passed through three phases:

1. **Piratic Slave Trade (15th century):** Conducted by individual merchants and adventurers.
2. **Monopolistic Slave Trade (1580s):** Managed by government-backed companies.
3. **Free Trade (1690s):** Involving competition between various traders.

The impact on Africa was devastating, leading to economic disruption, political instability, and significant social consequences, including the loss of millions of lives.

## Legitimate Trade and European Expansion

As the slave trade declined in the 19th century, Europeans sought "Legitimate" trade in African commodities like palm oil, rubber, and cotton. However, this new trade pattern did not empower African states but instead paved the way for European colonialism.

## White Settlement in South Africa

In 1652, the Dutch established a settlement in South Africa to facilitate trade with the Khoisan. This led to conflicts, such as the Khoi-Dutch wars, and eventually, the establishment of Boer farms using enslaved Africans. The British later took control of the Cape Colony, leading to further displacement of indigenous peoples.

## European Explorers and Missionaries

European interest in Africa surged in the 19th century, driven by exploration and the abolitionist movement. Explorers mapped the continent, often serving colonial interests. Meanwhile, Christian missionaries from Europe aimed to convert Africans but faced resistance due to their perceived threat to traditional authority.

## Summary

Portugal was the first European power to establish significant contacts with Africa, motivated by the pursuit of wealth and the spread of Christianity. The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, driven by European demand for labor, had profound and tragic effects on Africa. As the slave trade declined, "Legitimate" trade in commodities emerged, leading to increased European influence and eventual colonization. The settlement of white Europeans in South Africa and the activities of missionaries and explorers further deepened Africa's contact with the outside world.