

UN-supervised referendum in 1956 finally led to the incorporation of British (Western) Togoland into the neighbouring Gold Coast to form the nation state of Ghana. The unification leadership criticized this result, especially since it degraded the Ewe to an ethnic minority within Akan-dominated Ghana and further removed them from the Ewes in French Togoland.

5.1 Precolonial Era & Introduction of European Rule

5.1.1 From 'Gold Coast' to 'Slave Coast'

In 1471, the Portuguese were the first Europeans to reach the coast of West Africa, where they encountered several African kingdoms, some of which controlled territories with significant gold deposits, which is why the Portuguese navigators named the coastal strip "Gold Coast," where they built their first fort called "El Mina" (the mine) in 1482. Eastwards along the coast of the Gulf of Guinea,² only a few rivers manage to break through the sandbank that has been thrown up by the strong surf over centuries. One of these main rivers, 250km east of Elmina, was called by the Portuguese "Volta" (leaping water) because of its striking rapids.³ Lagoon systems formed along the coast where the rivers did not break through the sandbanks. Because of these Lagoon systems the Portuguese would call one of their settlements 600km east simply "Lagos" (lake/lagoon). The Ewe, too, which would later settle between the delta of the Volta and the Mono, would name one of their settlements on the northern shore of one of these lagoons simply "Togo" ("behind the water"). Under German colonial rule this village became the namesake of Togoland.

Despite the ever-advancing conquest of the Americas and the beginning slave trade dominated by Portugal in the early 15th century, African populations were at first able to limit European domination to the coastal forts and the area they were able to secure within range of their cannons.⁴ Since the number and the power of the coastal forts remained limited, the competing European powers depended for four centuries on African regents whose role in the incipient triangular Atlantic trade was that of slave procurers for the plantations and mines in the Americas. The slave trade along the coast was so important that from the 17th century onwards, Europeans marked the once Portuguese-coined "Gold Coast" on their maps as the "Slave Coast."⁵

2 Theories about the origin of the name "Guinea" assume either a corruption of "Ghana," the African kingdom the Portuguese heard about in the Maghreb, or "aguinaou," the Tamazight word used to refer to Black people south of the Sahara.

3 Sebald, *Die deutsche Kolonie Togo 1884–1914*, 11.

4 In any case, this limited exercise of power was primarily directed against European competitors: Even today, the cannons on the fortifications of Elmina point out to the ocean. Consequently, the ships of the other European powers, such as the Dutch, Prussians, Danish, Swedish, British, and French, sailed past Elmina at some distance and built their own forts on the Gold Coast. Even the Hohenzollerns, trying to tap into the transatlantic slave trade, maintained fort "Großfriedrichsburg" near today's Princes Town between 1683 and 1717.

5 Sebald, *Die deutsche Kolonie Togo 1884–1914*, p. 13.