

Five Centuries of African Trade

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through the Lens of Economics*

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A Long-term Trade Perspective

1. Africa's integration into a **globalizing** world economy
2. **Local** patterns of economic **specialization**
3. Recognize long historical **cycles** & phases of **transition**

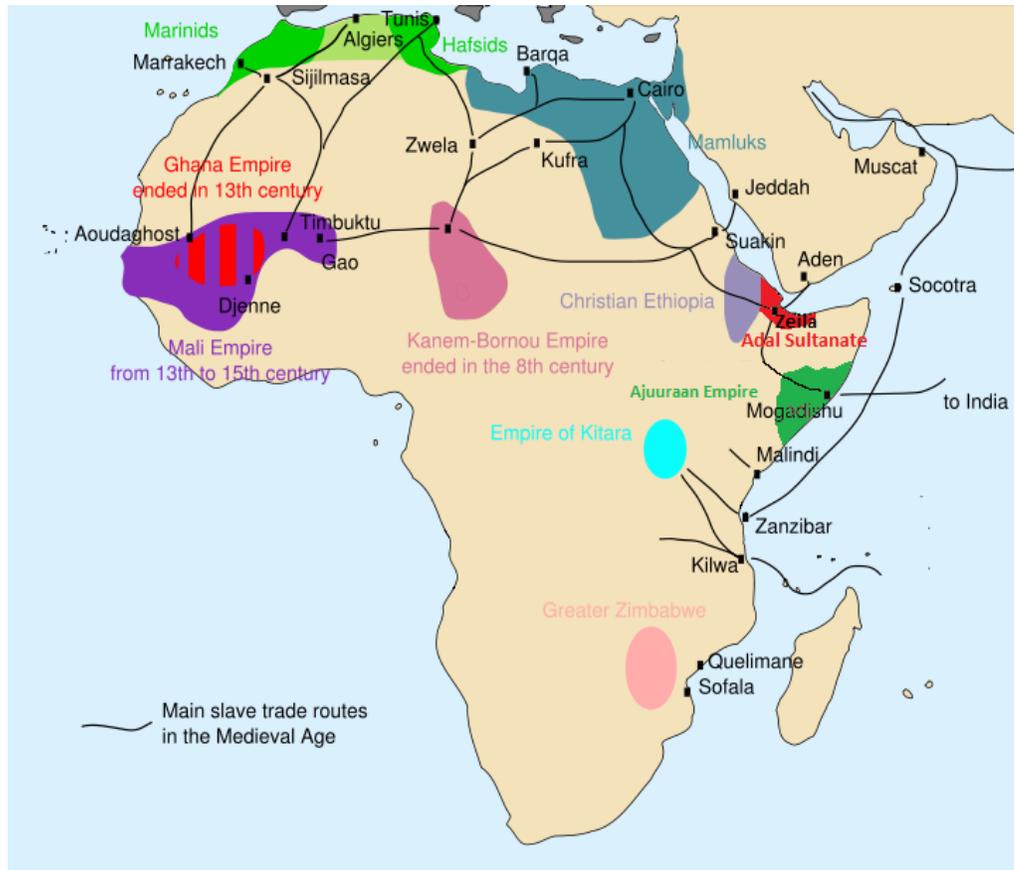
Three eras

**Two
transitions**

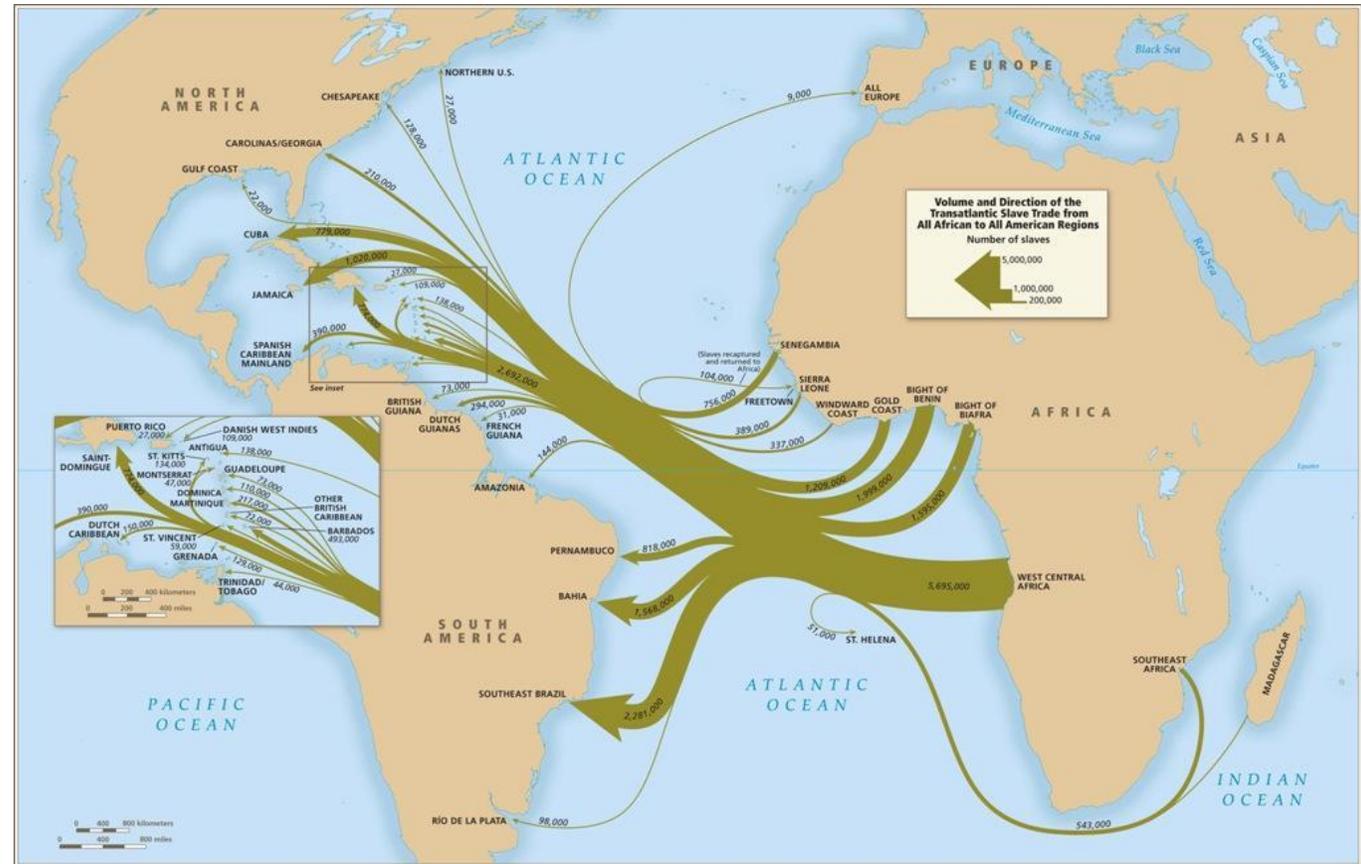
1. The Atlantic and Indian Ocean slave trades
2. The 'Commercial Transition' and 'Second Slavery'
3. The Mineral Revolution

From intra-African to trans-Atlantic slave trading

Medieval African slave trades

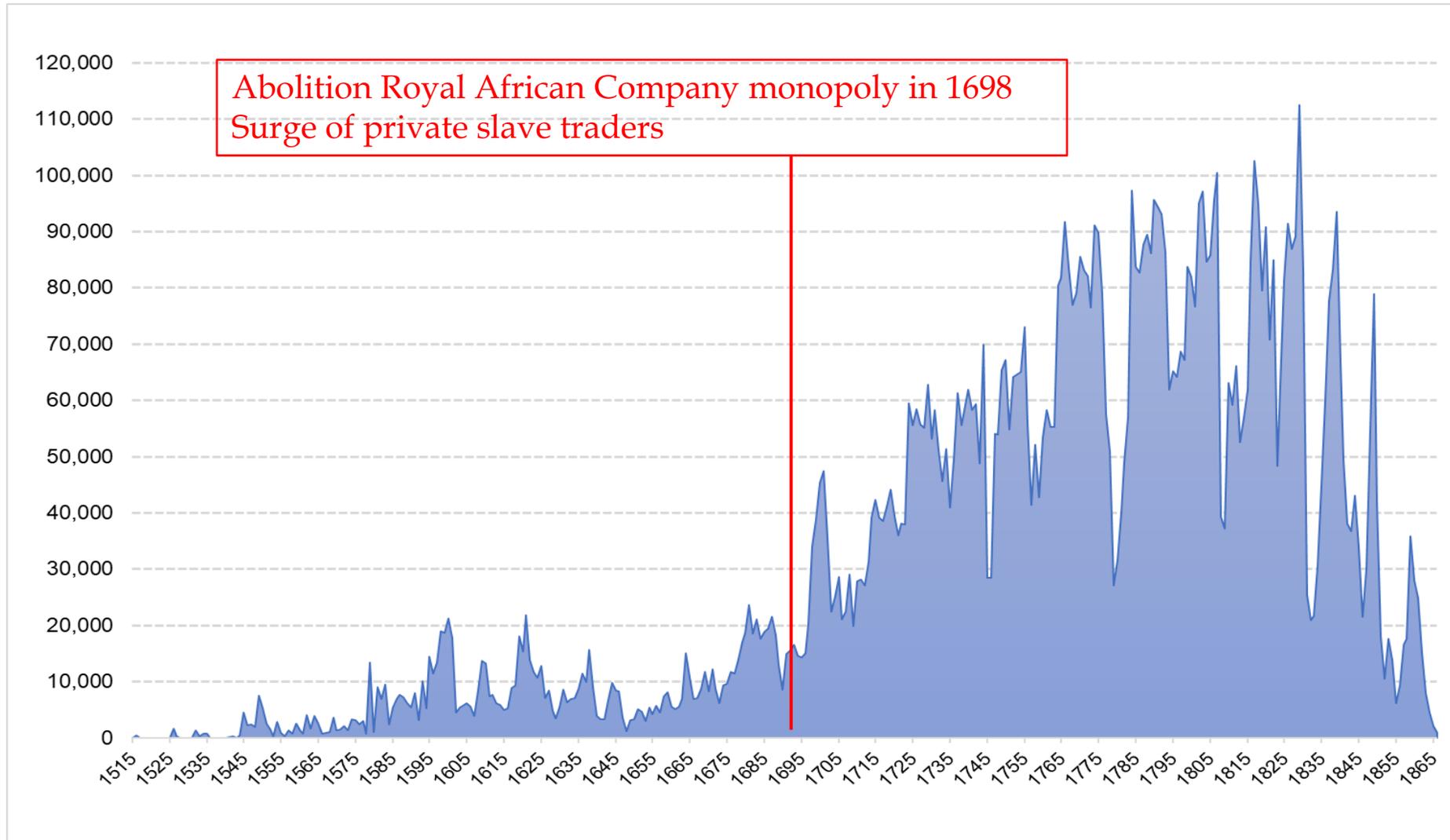


Trans-Atlantic trade taking over in the 17th Century



Sources: Runehelmet derived from Aliesin (left); slavevoyages.org (right), both accessed 30-01-2022

Annual no. of slaves embarked at African shores

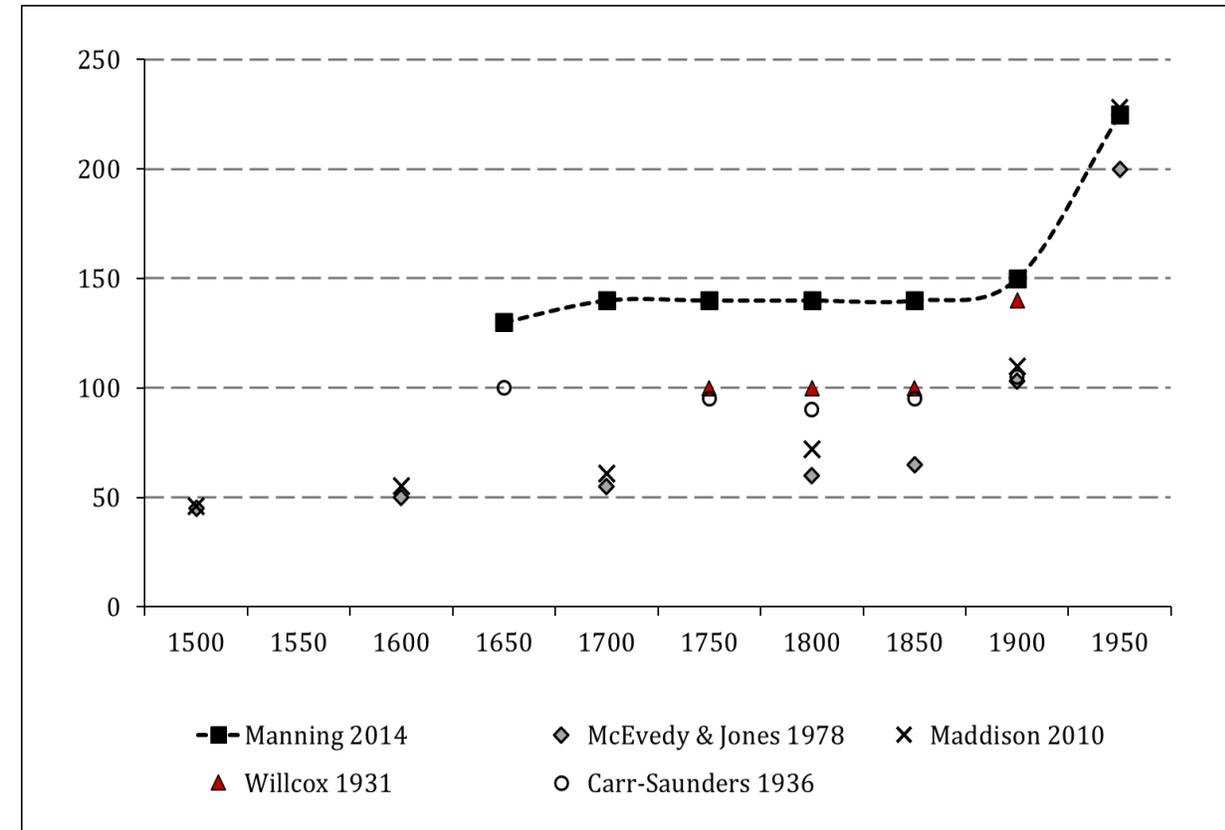


Source: slavevoyages.org, accessed 30-01-2022

Demographic impact?

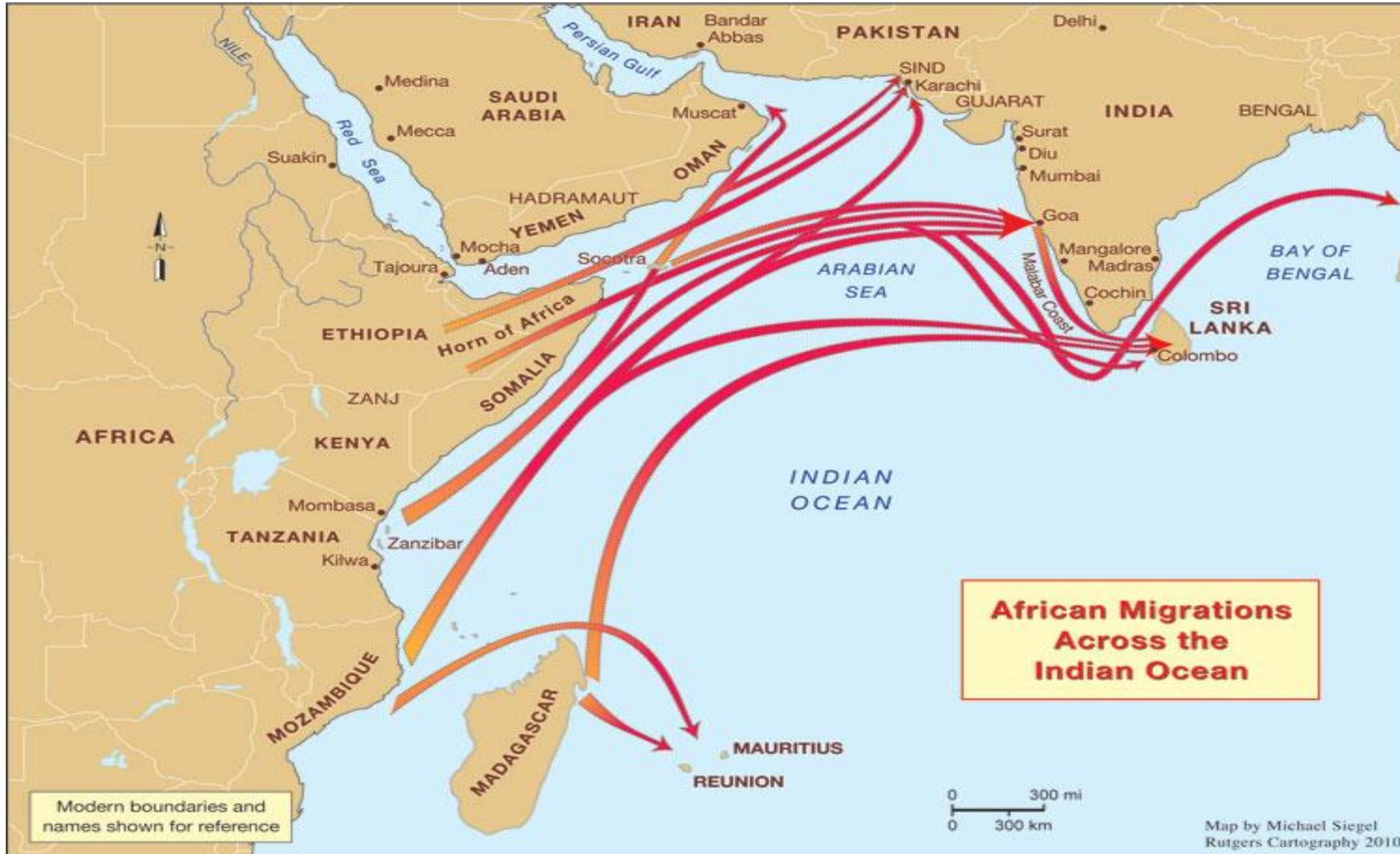
- **1700-1865:** c. 55,000 embarkations per year. Size of a big city!
- = 0.05% to 0.10% of total African population (estimates vary from 55 to 140 million).
- Two factors cushioned long-term loss:
 - Male majority (c. two-thirds)
 - American food crops (maize, manioc)
- Two centuries of demographic stagnation, while European and Asian populations double in size.

Guesstimated African population (in millions)



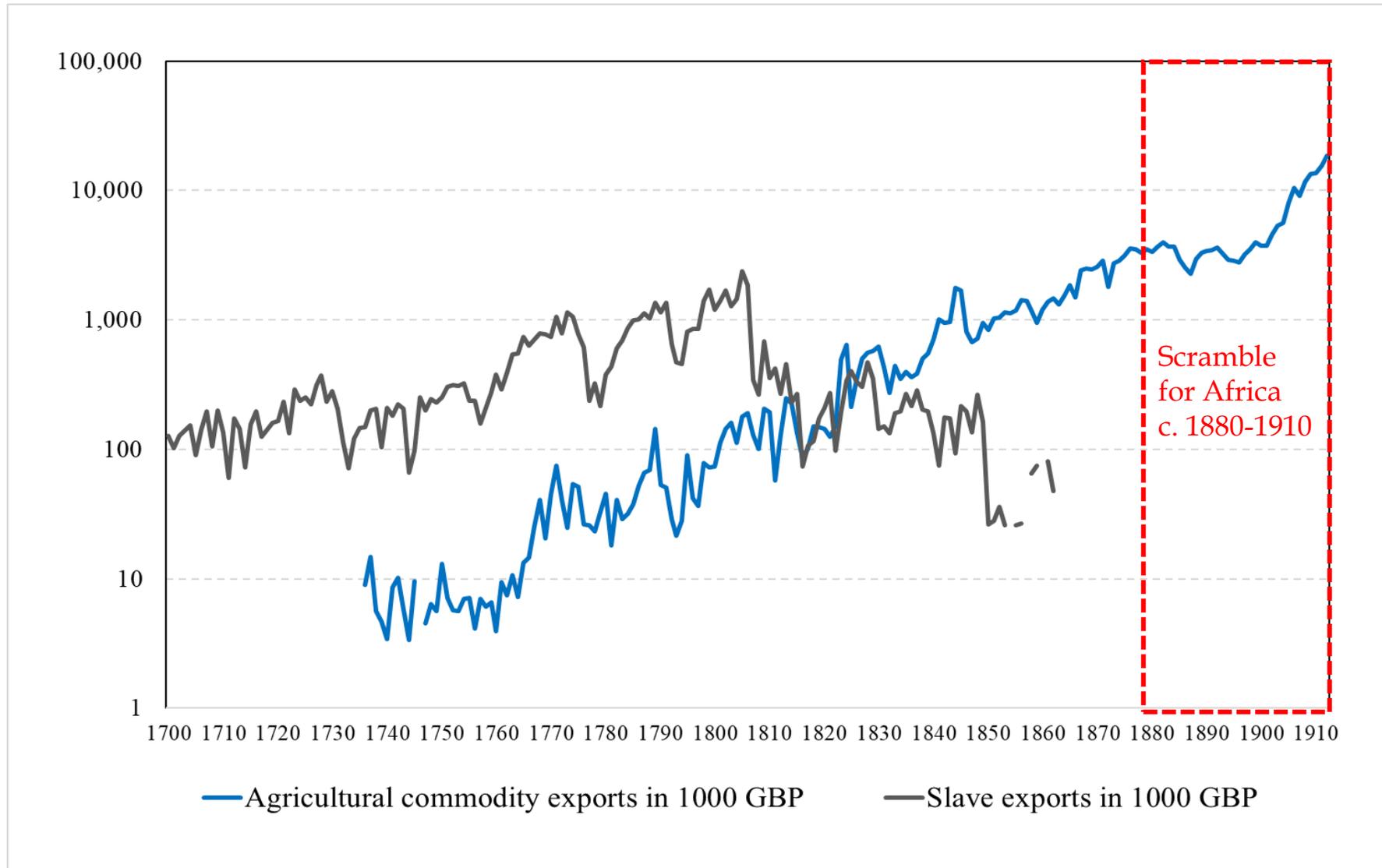
Source: Frankema 2019

The Indian Ocean slave trades were different



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1. The Atlantic and Indian Ocean slave trades
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The 'Commercial Transition' in 19th Century West Africa



Source: Frankema, Williamson and Woltjer 2018

Leading export commodities in the mid-19th Century

Western Africa



Palm oil



Groundnuts



Gum Arabic

Eastern Africa



Ivory



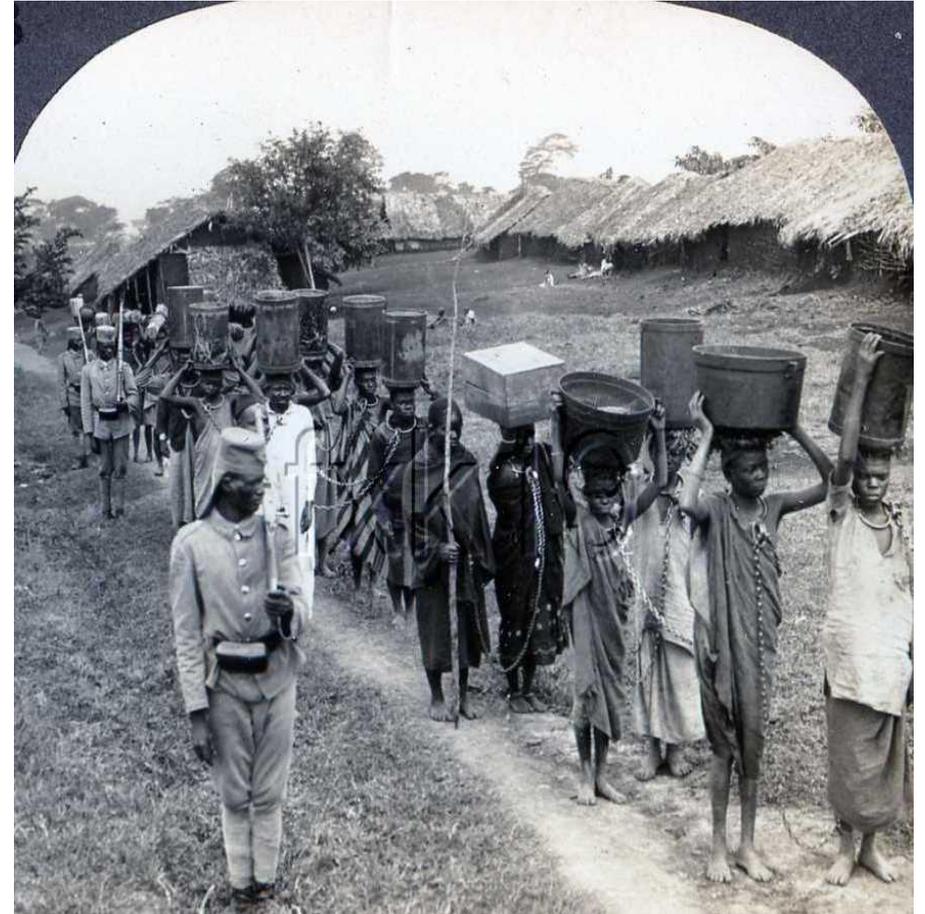
Cane sugar



Cloves

'Second slavery'

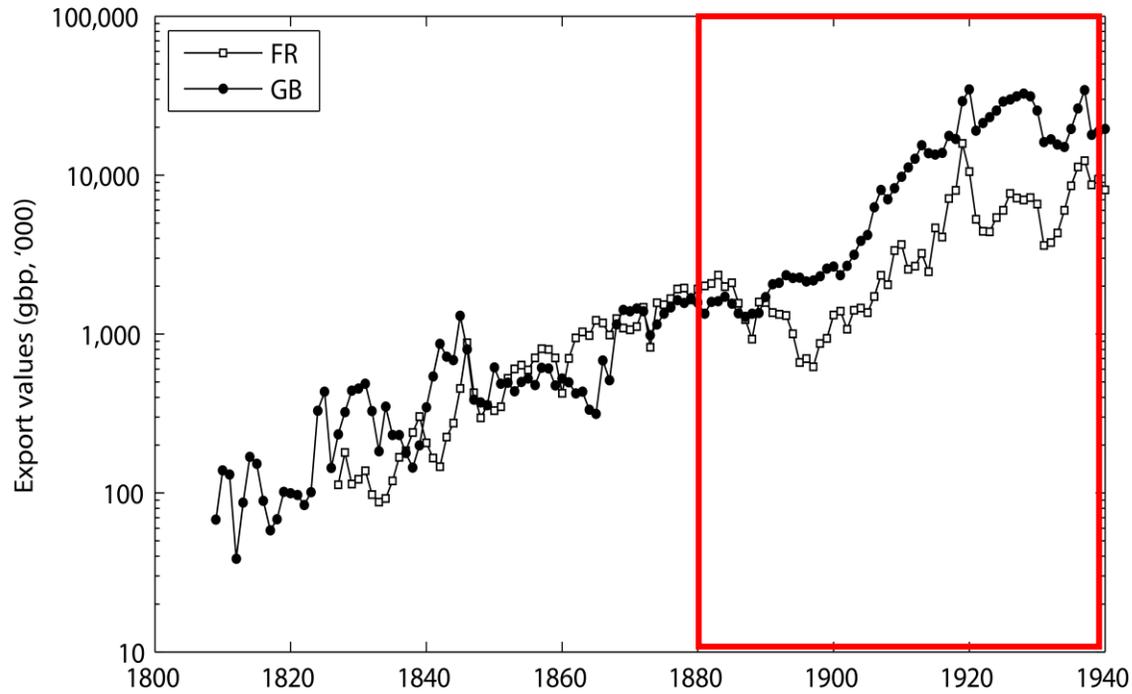
- New zones of slave commodity production in the US South, Cuba, and Brazil driven by 19th Century industrialization and globalization. (Tomich 2018)
- This concept also applies to parts of West and East Africa, where slaves were increasingly used to work on local plantations, or to facilitate the production and transportation of tropical crops such as palm oil, cocoa, cloves and sugar.



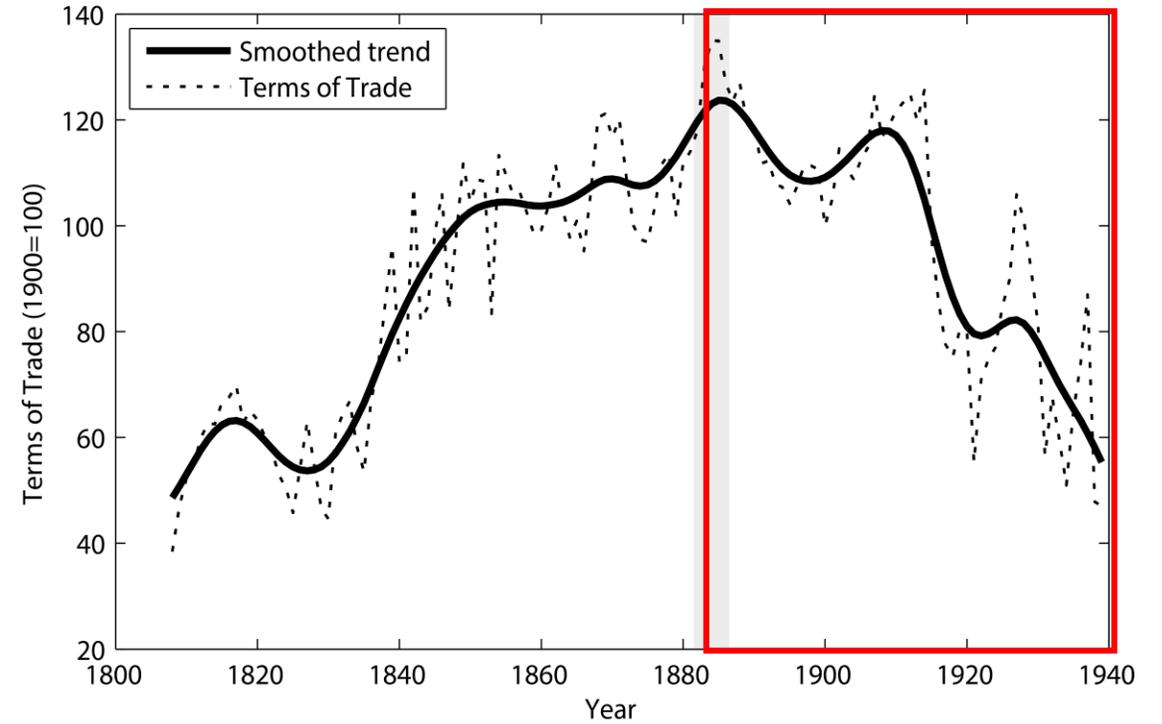
Source: Oman and Zanzibar virtual museum;
omanisilver.com; accessed 30-01-2022

Trade under colonial rule (to 1940)

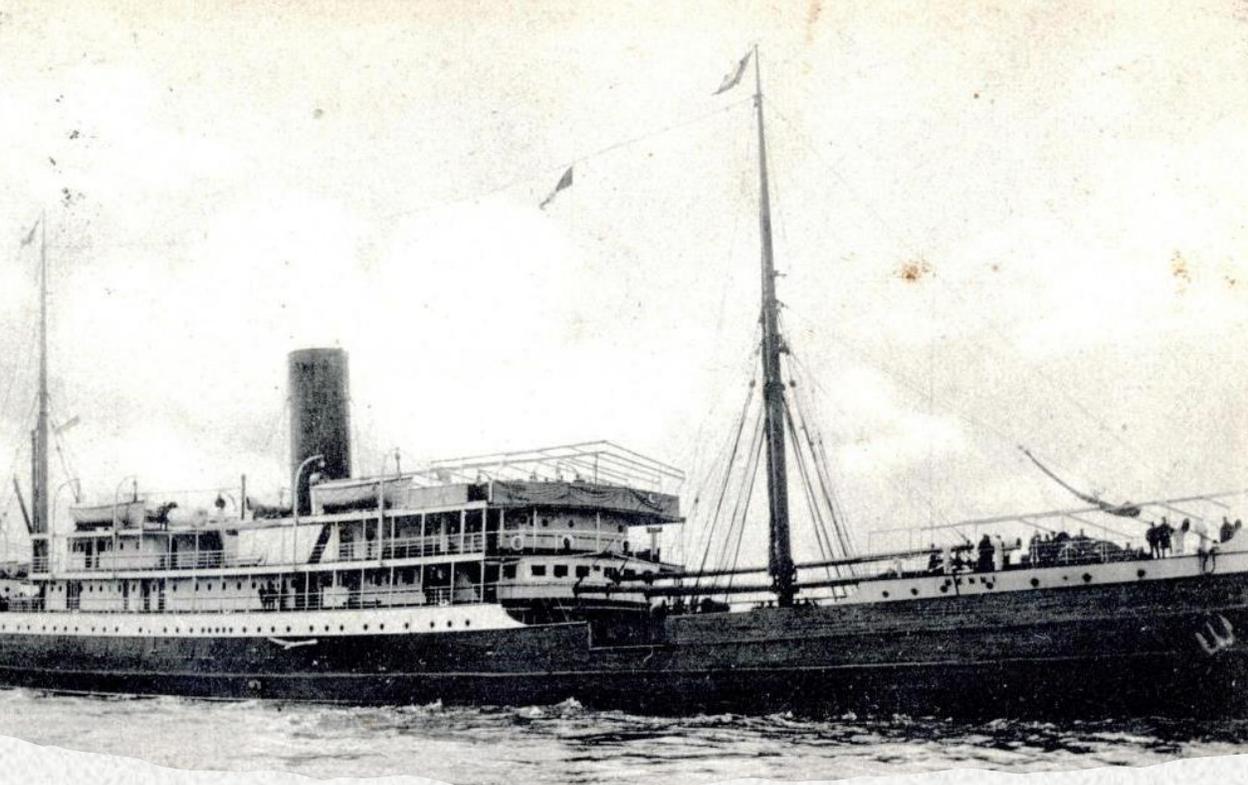
Expansion and diversification



Declining terms of trade



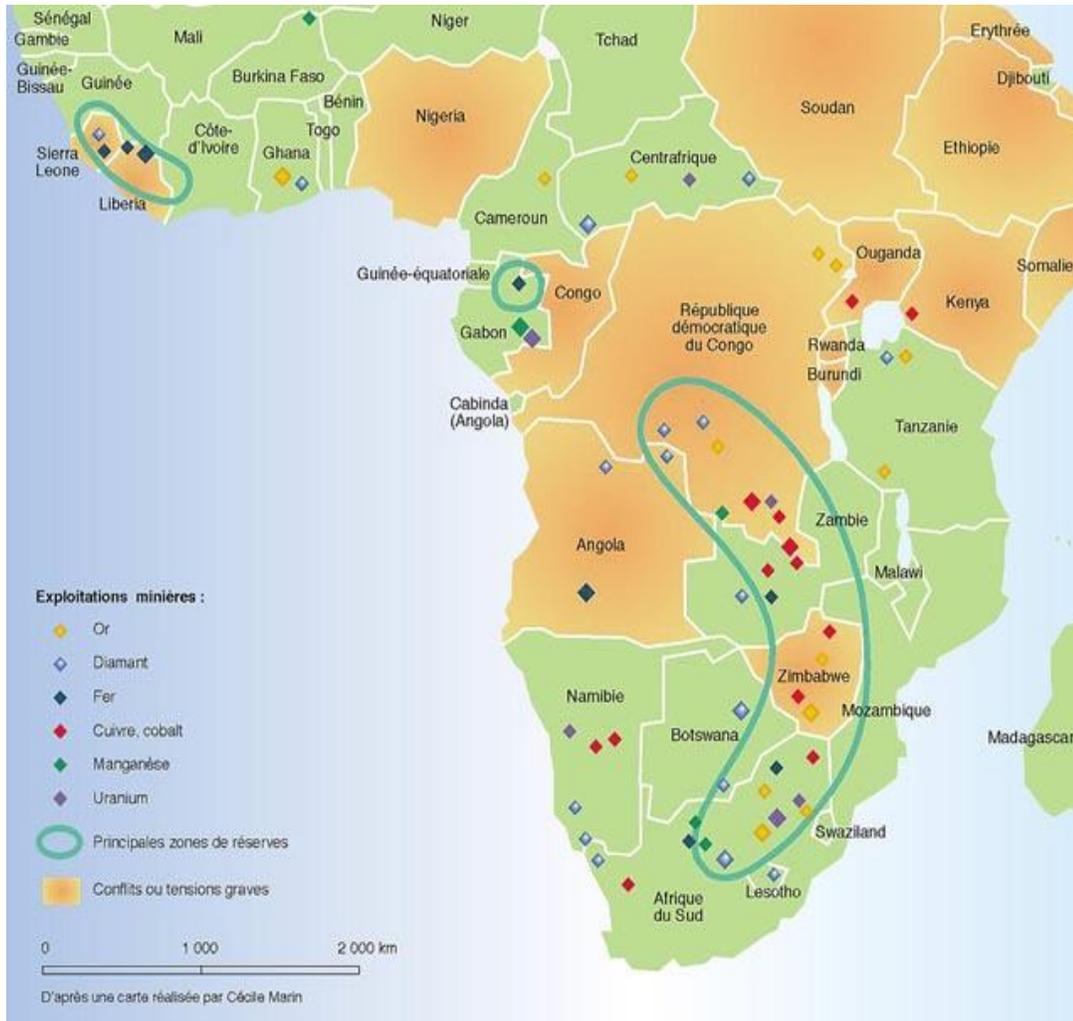
Source: Frankema, Williamson and Woltjer 2018



The transportation revolution

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The 'mineral crescent'



South Africa

Diamonds 1867; Gold 1886

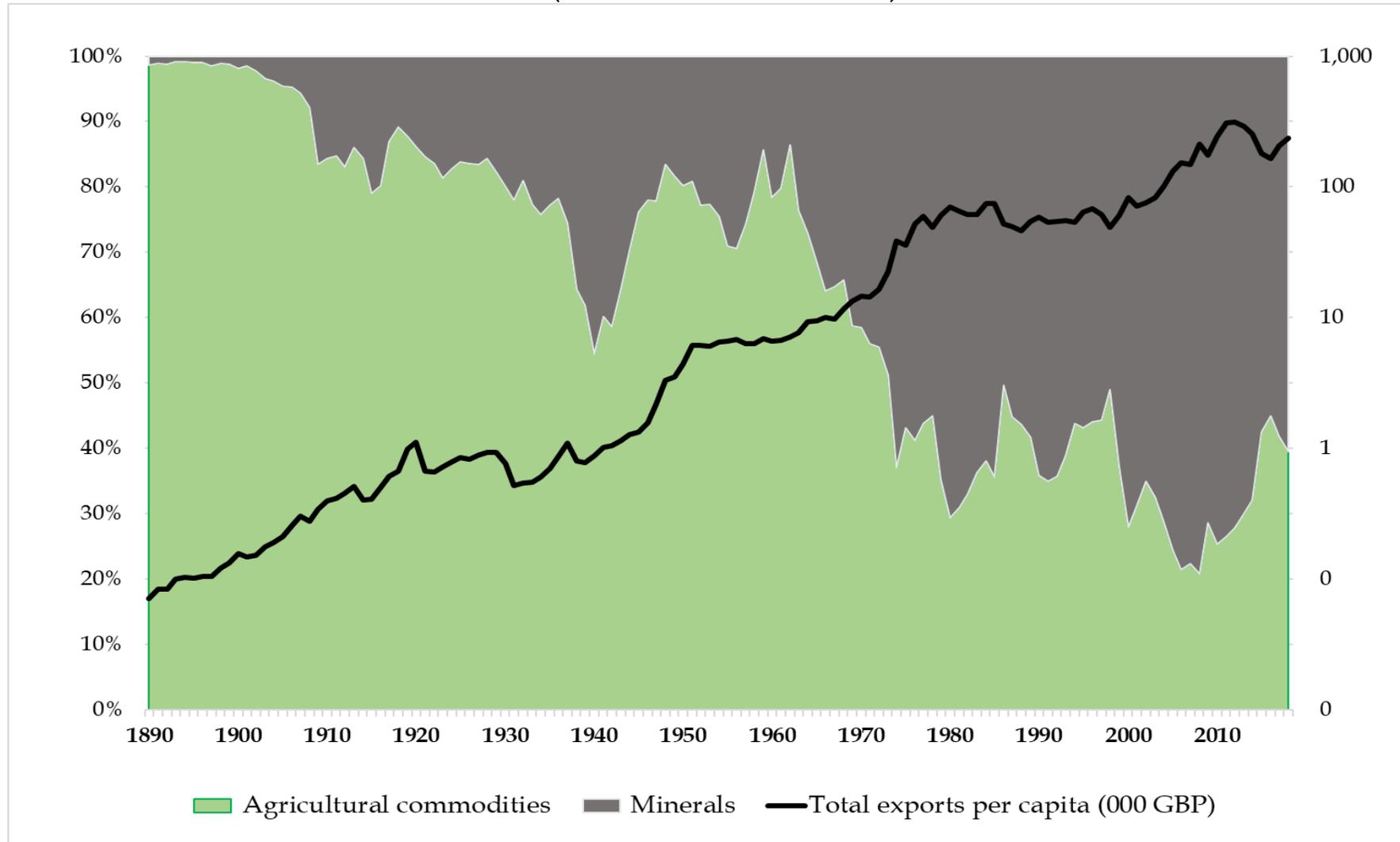
Southern Congo / Northern Zambia

Copper 1900s; Uranium 1940s

Several parts of Sub-Sahara Africa

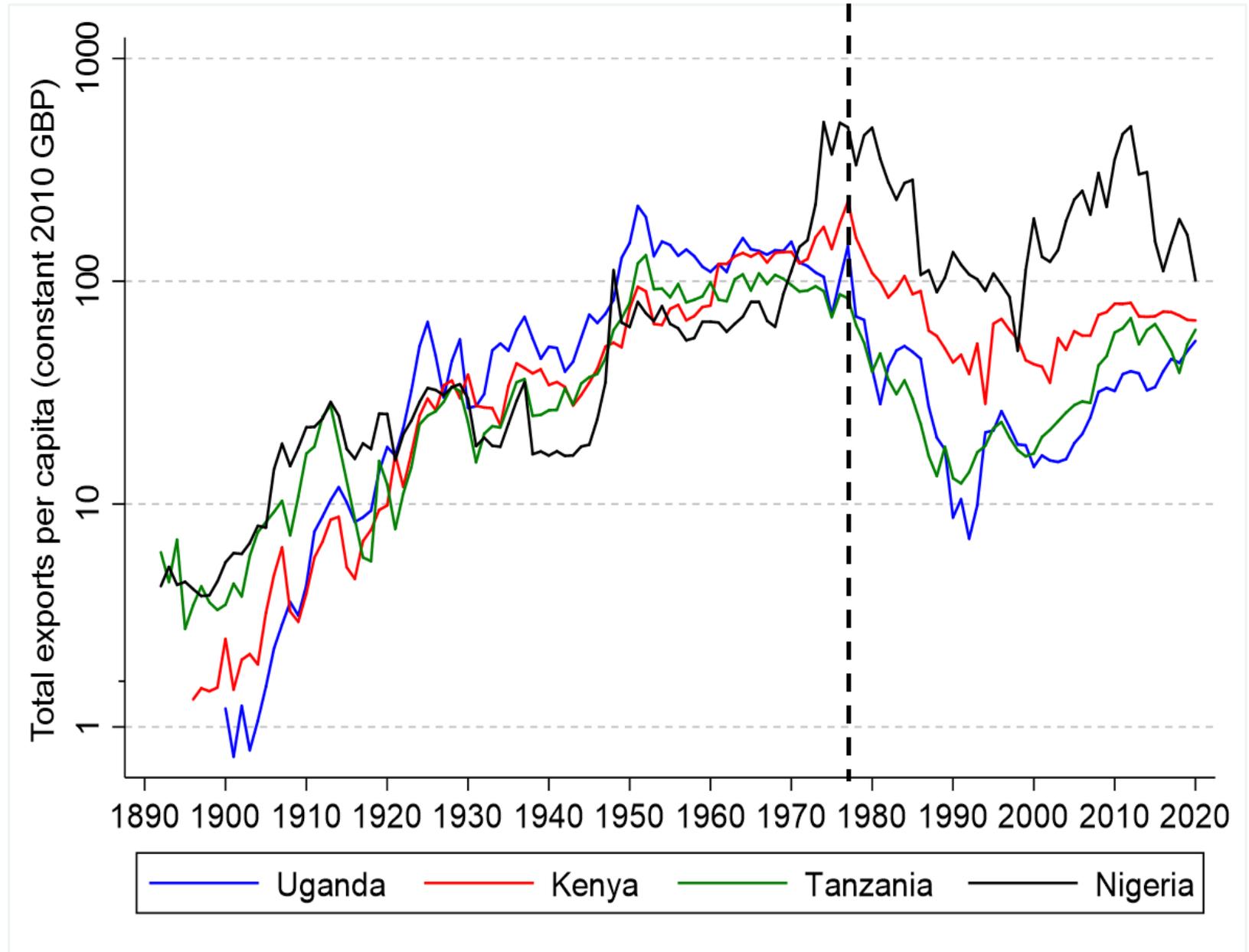
Oil 1960s + other metals

Minerals as % share of total exports from sub-Saharan Africa, 1890-2018 (excl. South Africa)



Source: Frankema and Meier zu Selhausen 2022

20th Century boom and bust



Source: Frankema and Meier zu Selhausen 2022

Share of trade *within* Africa in %, c. 1940

Exports to >>>	Africa	Asia	Latin America	North America	Europe	% share of world exports
Africa	6	9	0	4	80	4
Asia & Pacific	3	47	1	11	36	21
Latin America	1	5	8	31	49	8
North America	4	19	13	19	45	17
Europe	8	16	6	7	65	46

Source: Frankema and Smits 2006

Summing up

1. Three overlapping eras:
 - **Slave exports 1650s-1870s**
 - **Tropical crops (1780s - 1970s)**
 - **Minerals (1860s - present)**
2. Profound changes in Africa's economic relations with the rest of the world.
3. 20th Century export boom was impressive but followed by a deep crisis. Not fully recovered!
4. Share of intra-African trade has dwindled, especially during the colonial era, and it has remained small since.

Key issues for the 21st Century?

1. Mineral exports not sustainable in the long-run, what are the alternatives?
2. More intra-African trade is likely and important, but do African producers need protection?
3. Manufactured products part of the next cycle, or not?

Thank you!

Teaching Materials on African Economic History?

Go have a look at:

www.aehnetwork.org/textbook/