

# 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**

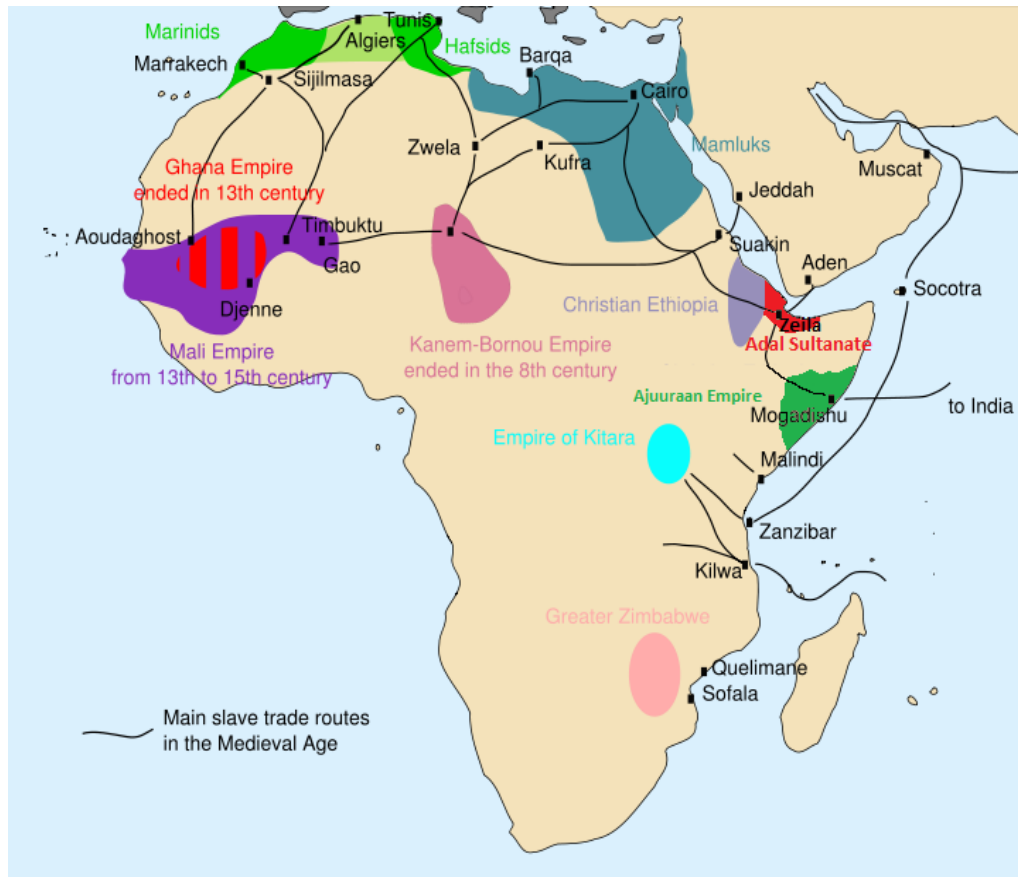
Three eras

Two  
transitions

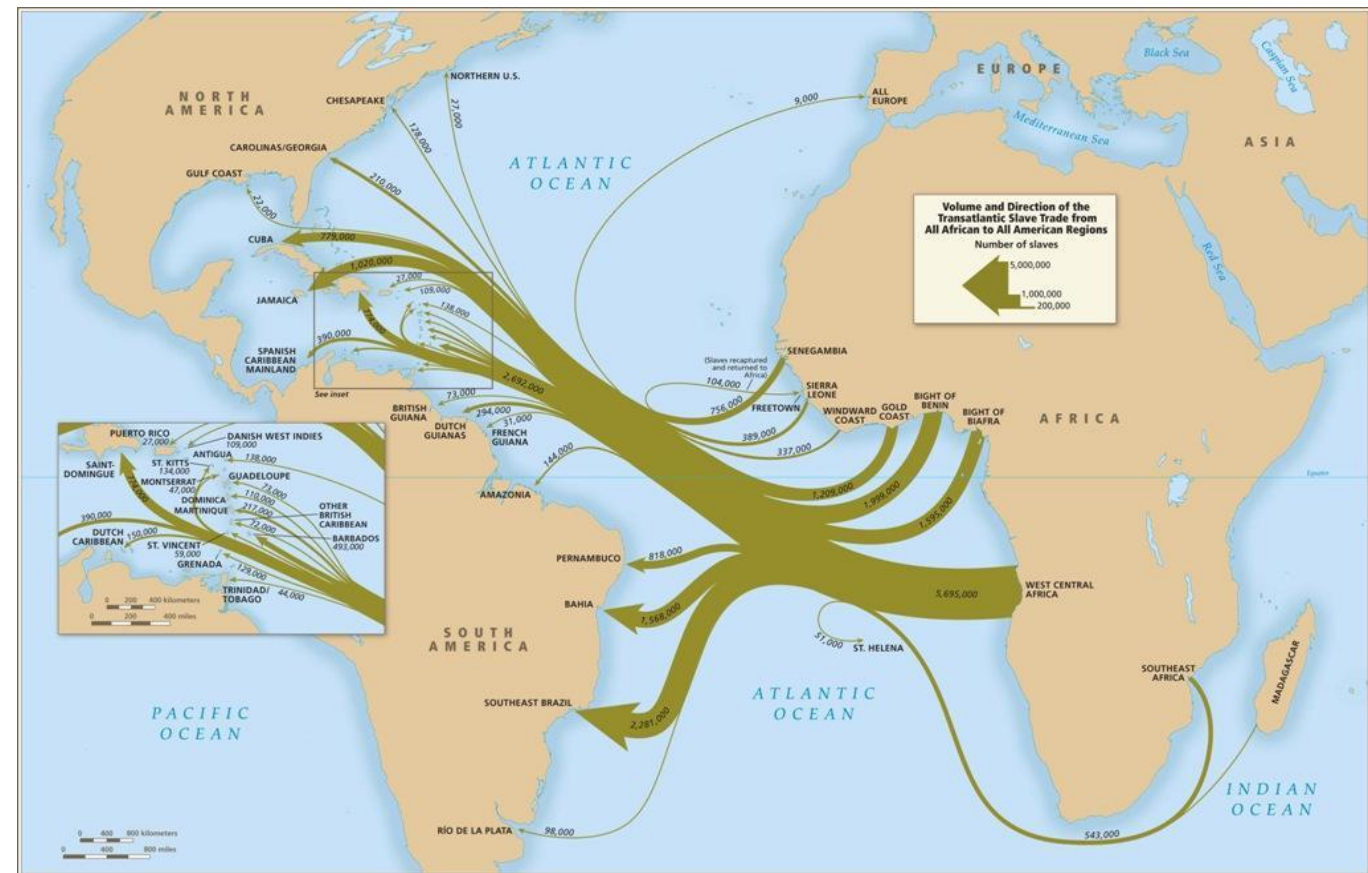
1. The Atlantic and Indian Ocean slave trades
2. The 'Commercial Transition' and 'Second Slavery'
3. The Mineral Revolution

# From intra-African to trans-Atlantic slave trading

## Medieval African slave trades

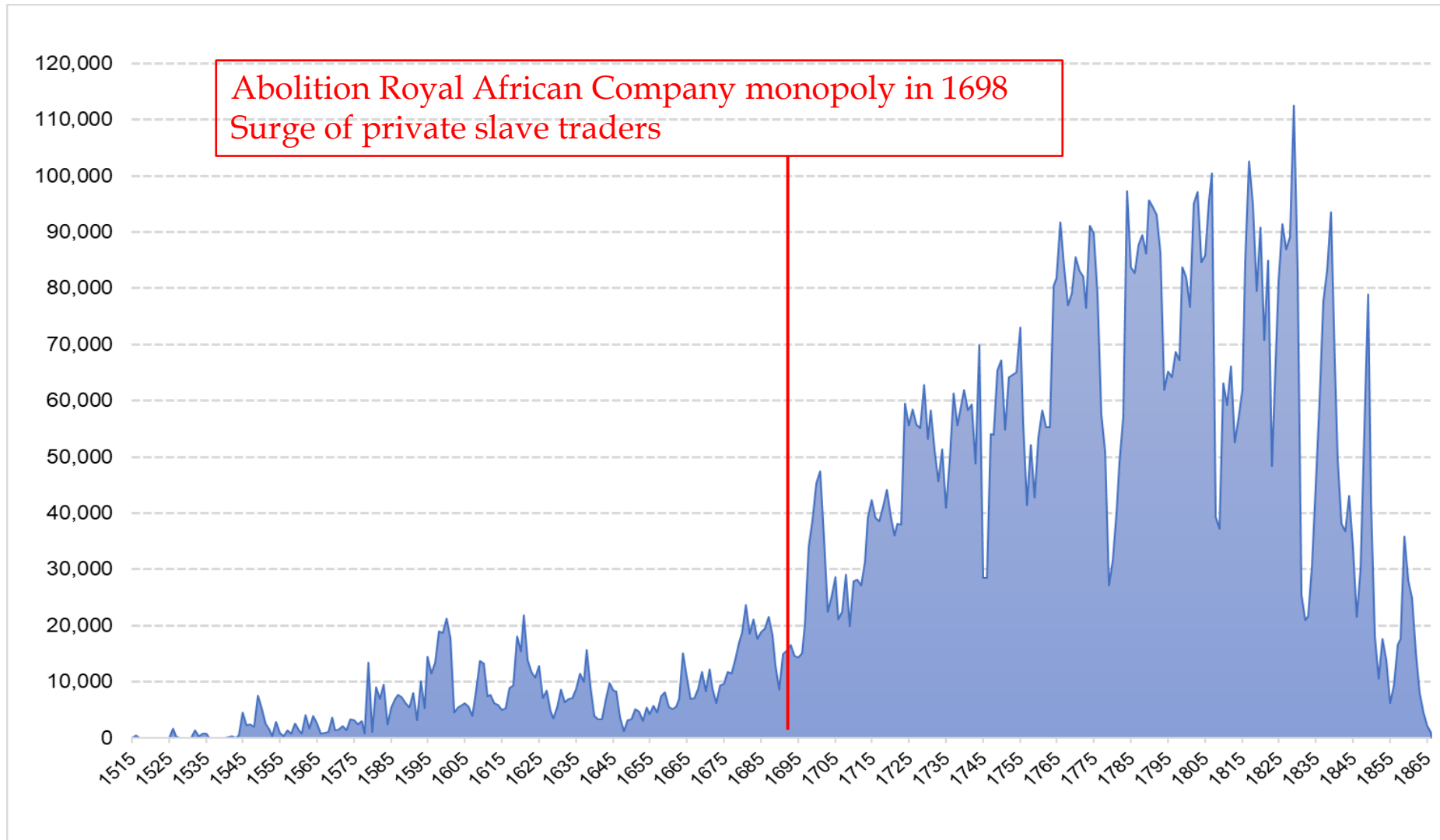


## Trans-Atlantic trade taking over in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century



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

# Annual no. of slaves embarked at African shores

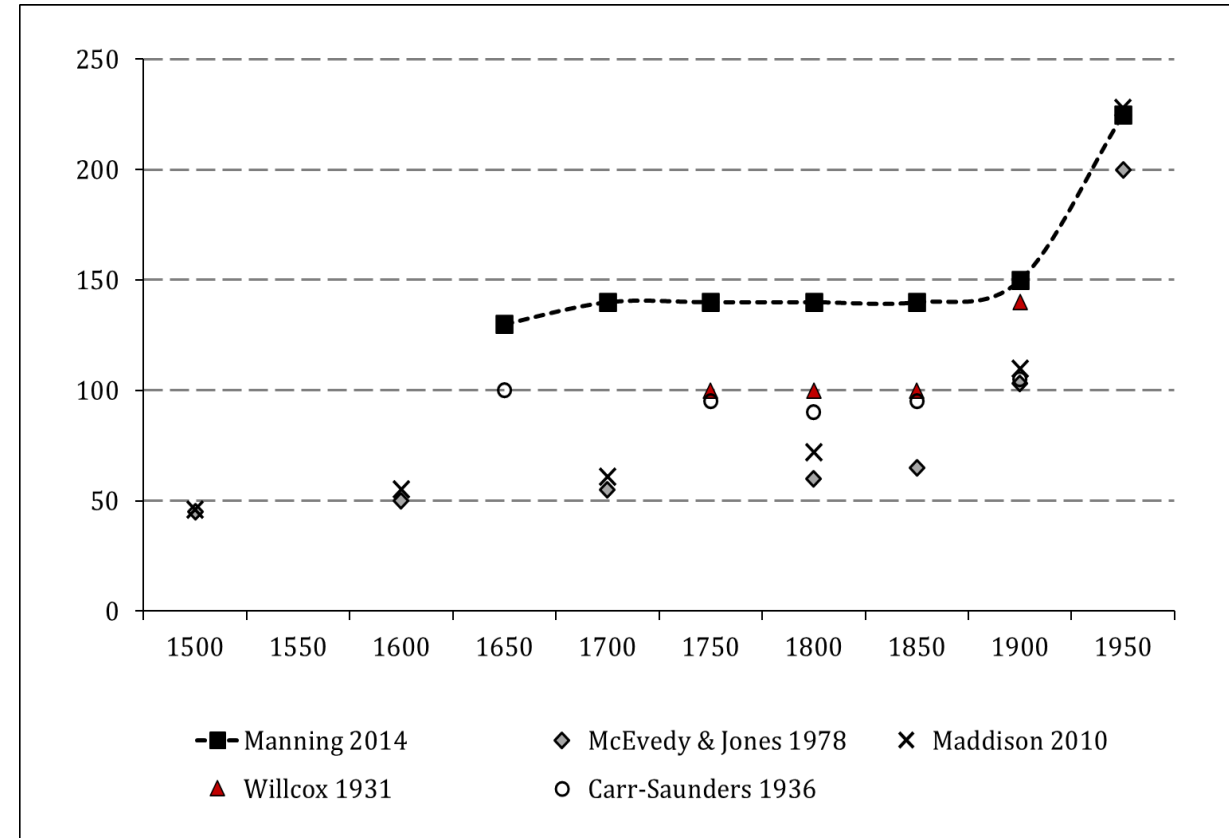


Source: [slavevoyages.org](http://slavevoyages.org), accessed 30-01-2022

# Demographic impact?

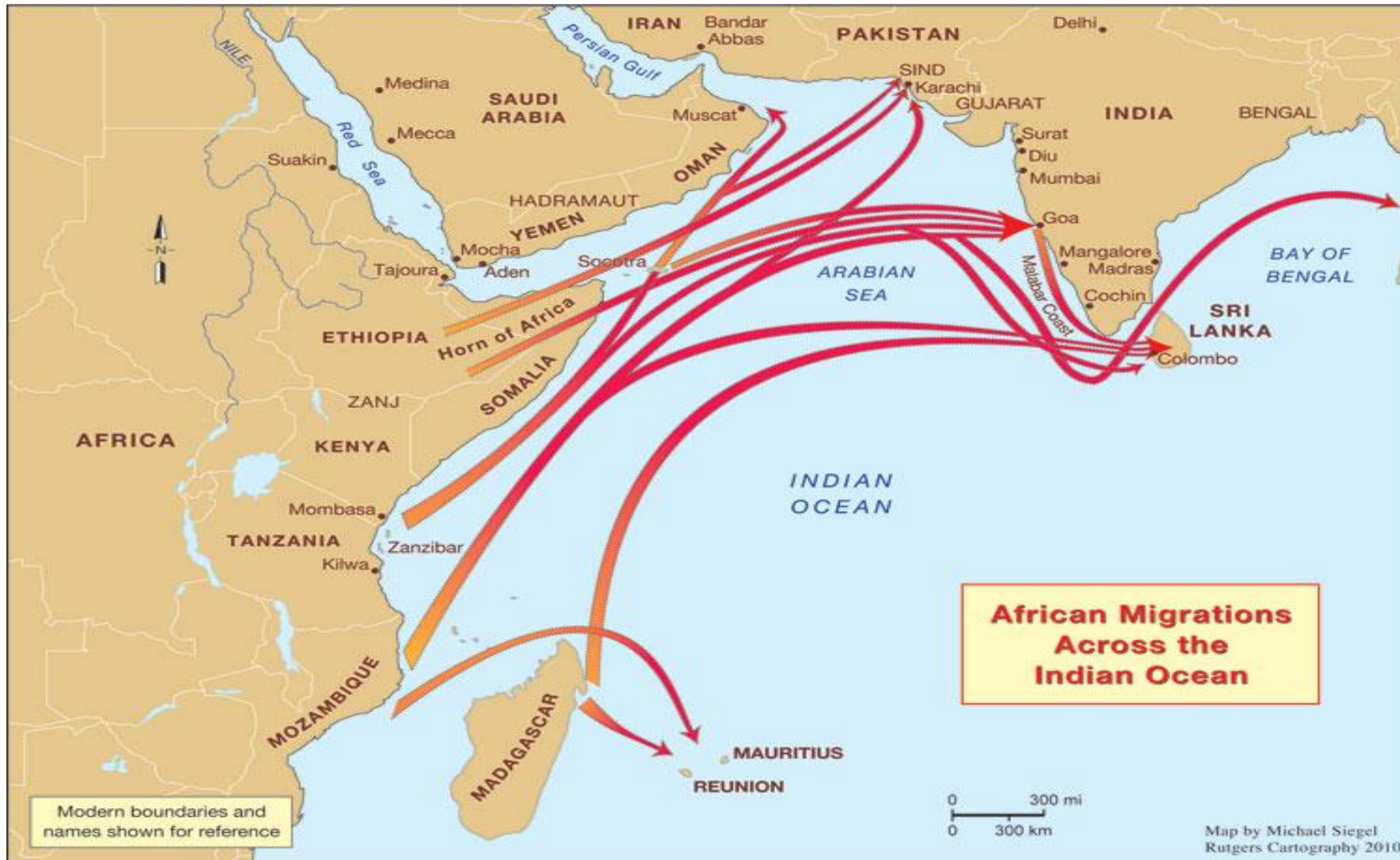
- **1700-1865:** c. 55,000 embarkations per year. Size of a big city!
- = 0.05% to 0.10% of total African population (estimates vary from 55 to 140 million).
- Two factors cushioned long-term loss:
  - Male majority (c. two-thirds)
  - American food crops (maize, manioc)
- Two centuries of demographic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


*Guesstimated African population (in millions)*



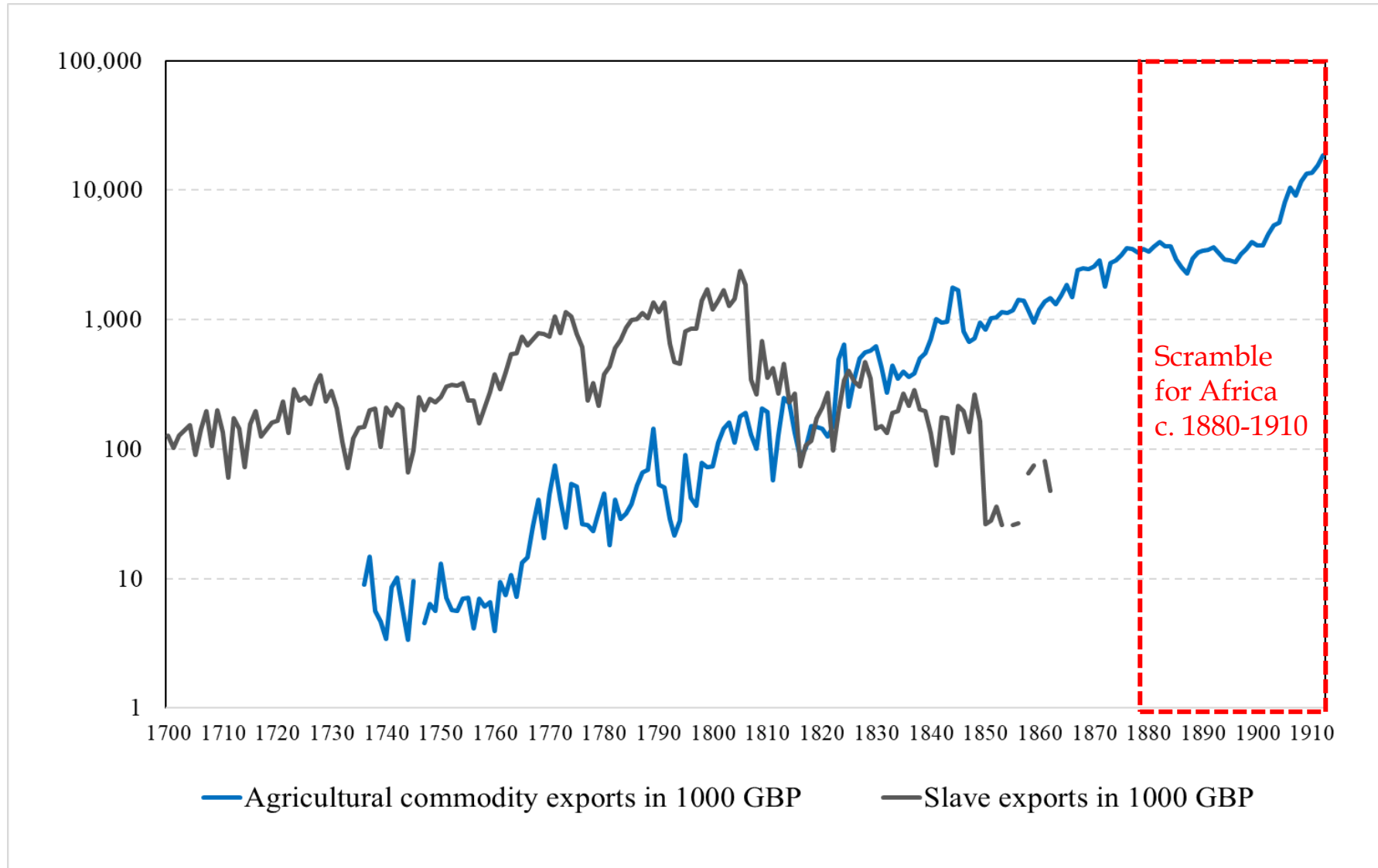
Source: Frankema 2019

# The Indian Ocean slave trades were different



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

# The 'Commercial Transition' in 19<sup>th</sup> Century West Africa



Source: Frankema, Williamson and Woltjer 2018

# Leading export commodities in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century

## Western Africa



Palm oil



Groundnuts



Gum Arabic

## Eastern Africa



Ivory



Cane sugar



Cloves

# 'Second slavery'

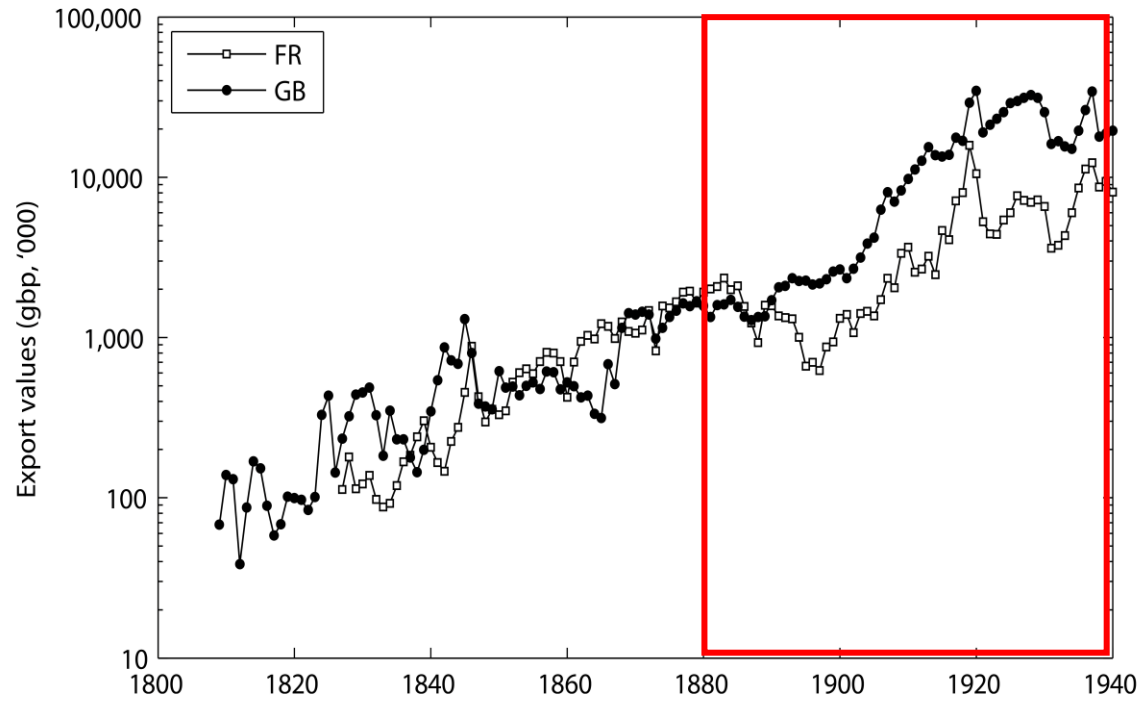
- New zones of slave commodity production in the US South, Cuba, and Brazil driven by 19<sup>th</sup> Century industrialization and globalization. (Tomich 2018)
- This concept also applies to parts of West and East Africa, where slaves were increasingly used to work on local plantations, or to facilitate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



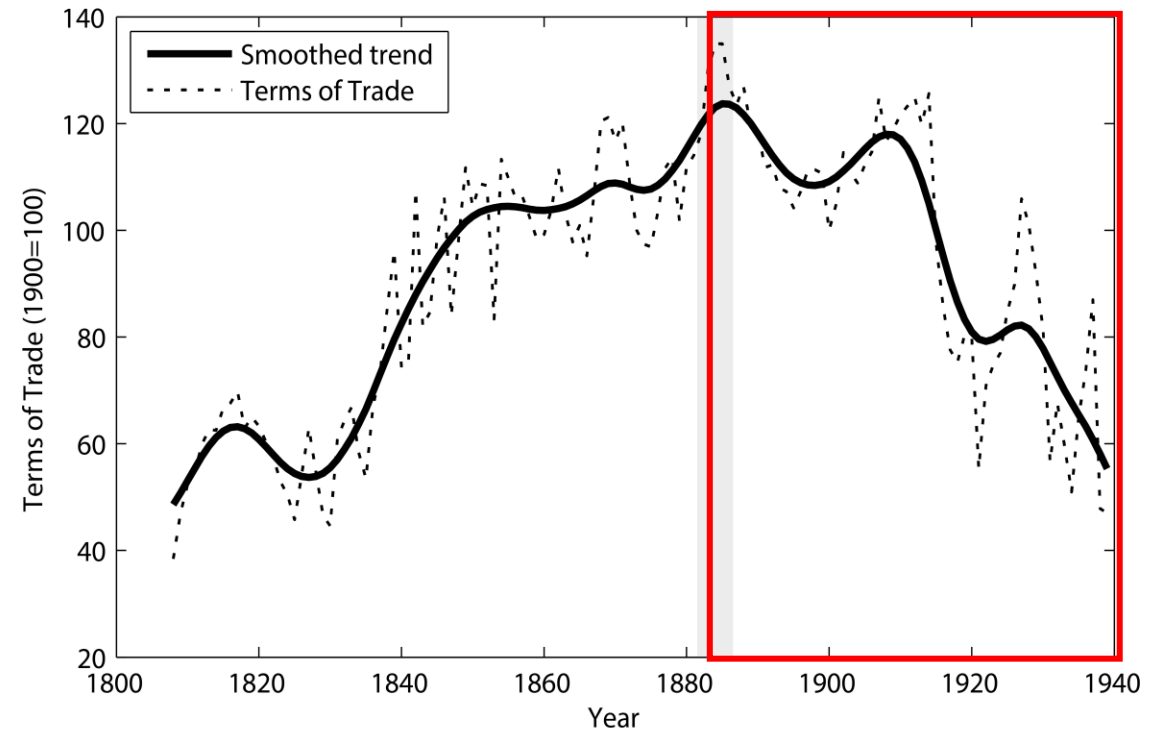
Source: Oman and Zanzibar virtual museum;  
omanisilver.com; accessed 30-01-2022

# Trade under colonial rule (to 1940)

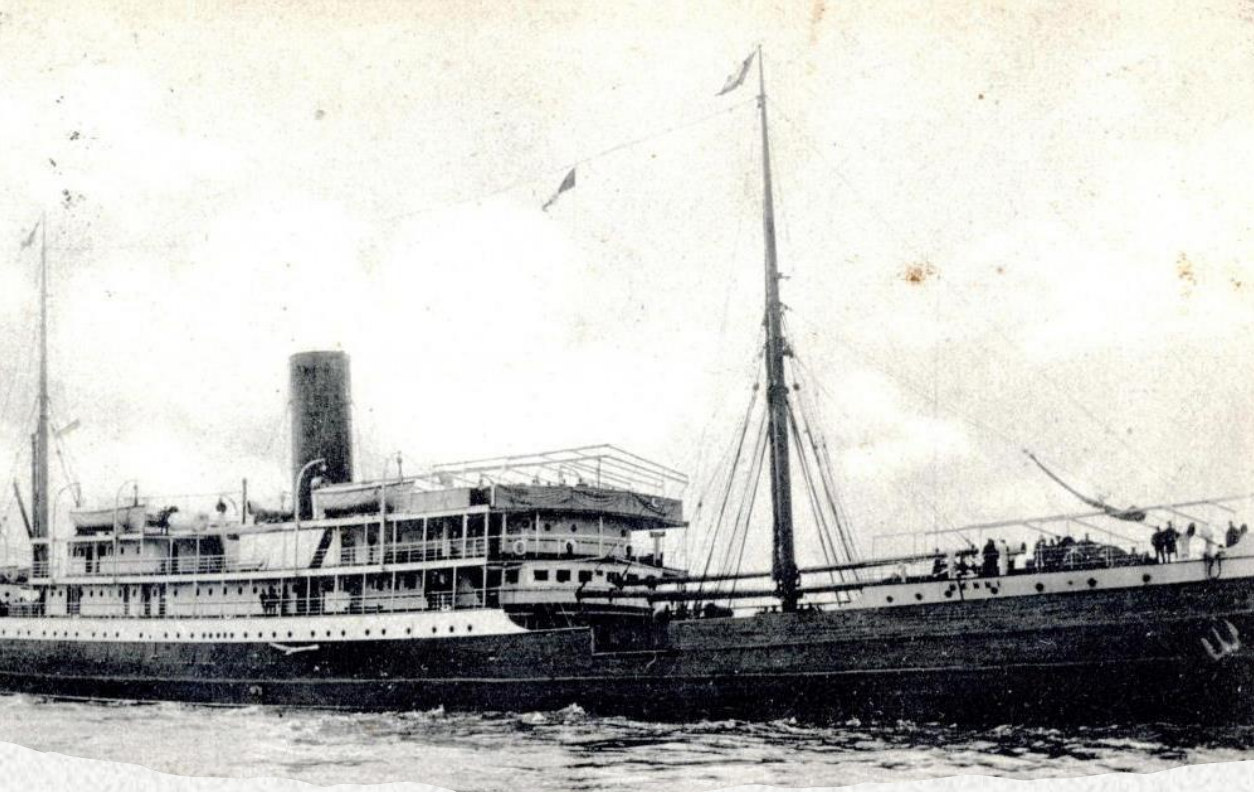
## Expansion and diversification




## Declining terms of trade



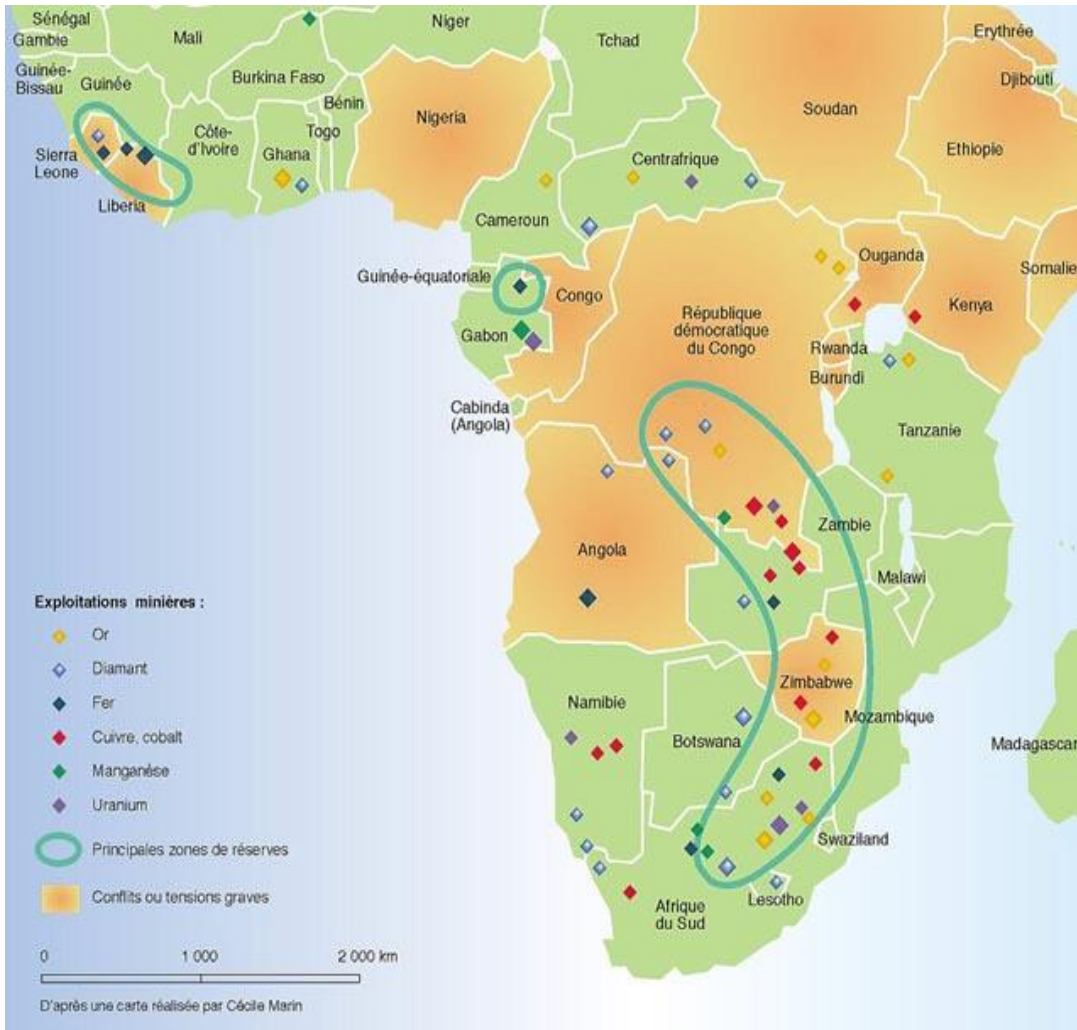
Source: Frankema, Williamson and Woltjer 2018



The transportation revolution

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1. The Atlantic and Indian Ocean slave trades
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# The 'mineral crescent'



## South Africa

Diamonds 1867; Gold 1886

## Southern Congo / Northern Zambia

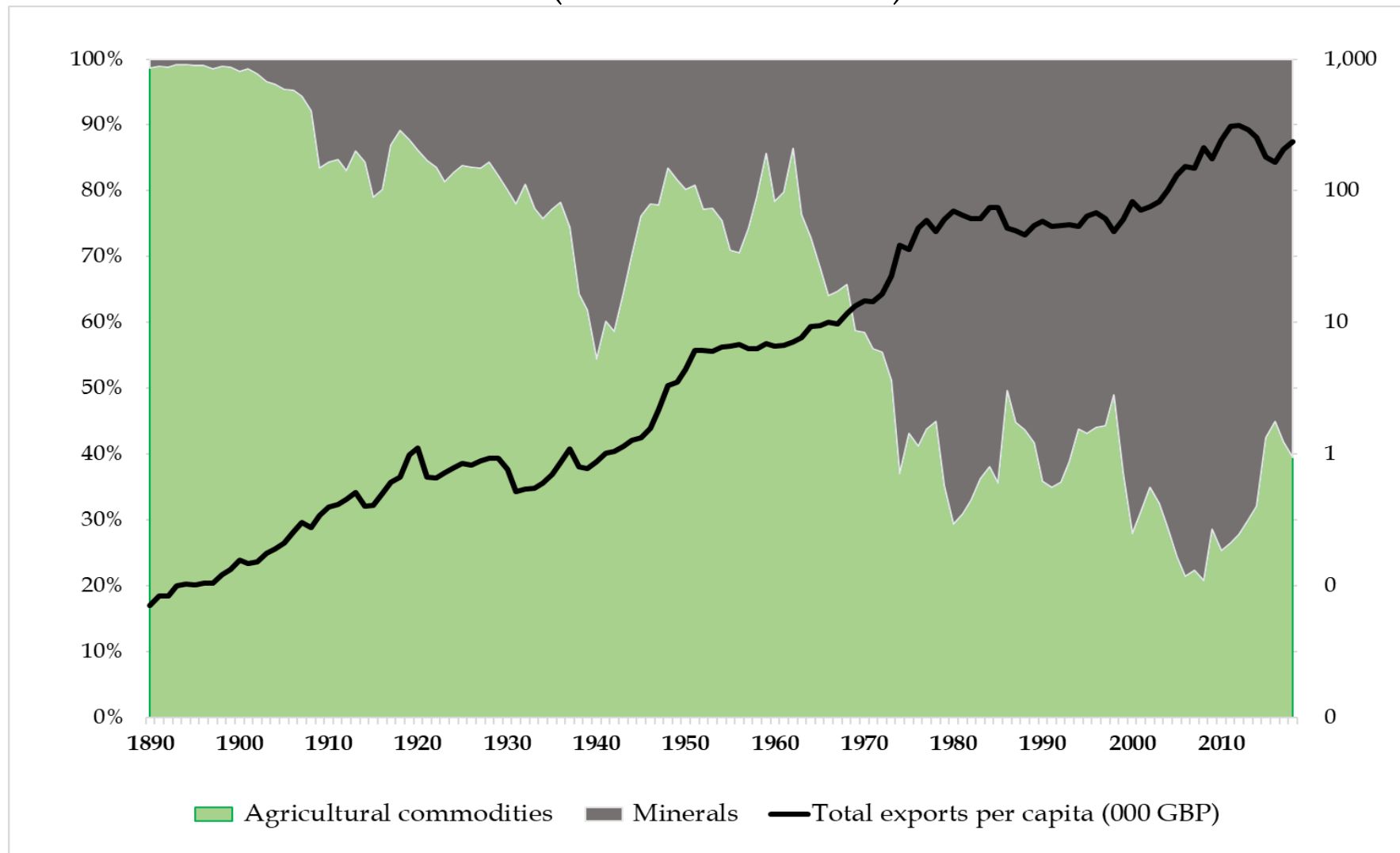
Copper 1900s; Uranium 1940s

## Several parts of Sub-Sahara Africa

Oil 1960s + other metals

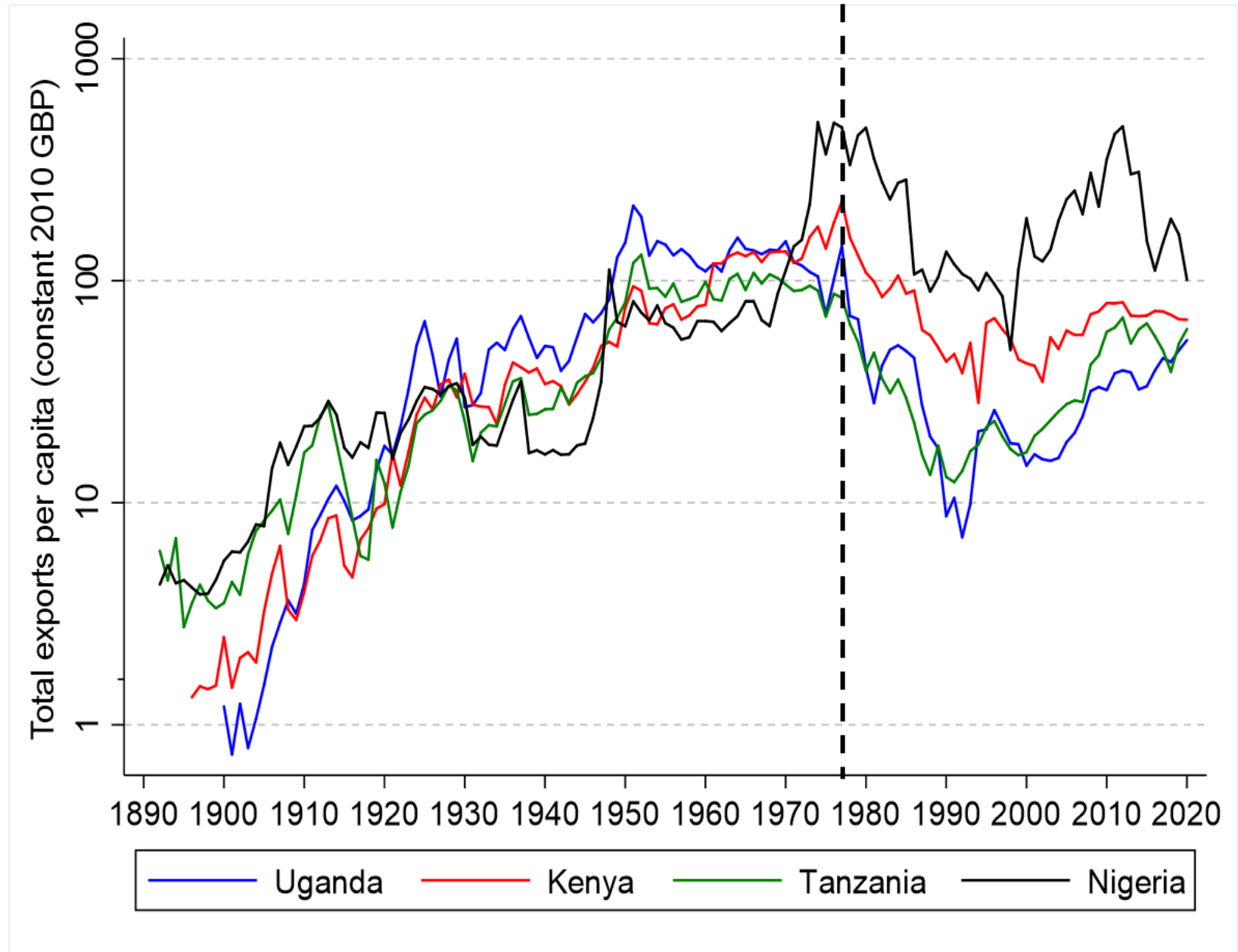
# Minerals as % share of total exports from sub-Saharan Africa, 1890-2018

(excl. South Africa)



Source: Frankema and Meier zu Selhausen 2022

## 20<sup>th</sup> 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
<b>Africa</b>	<b>6</b>	9	0	4	80	<b>4</b>
Asia & Pacific	3	<b>47</b>	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	<b>65</b>	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. 20<sup>th</sup> 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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.aehnnetwork.org/textbook/](http://www.aehnnetwork.org/textbook/)