

# African Economic History (III)



**Prof. Ewout Frankema**

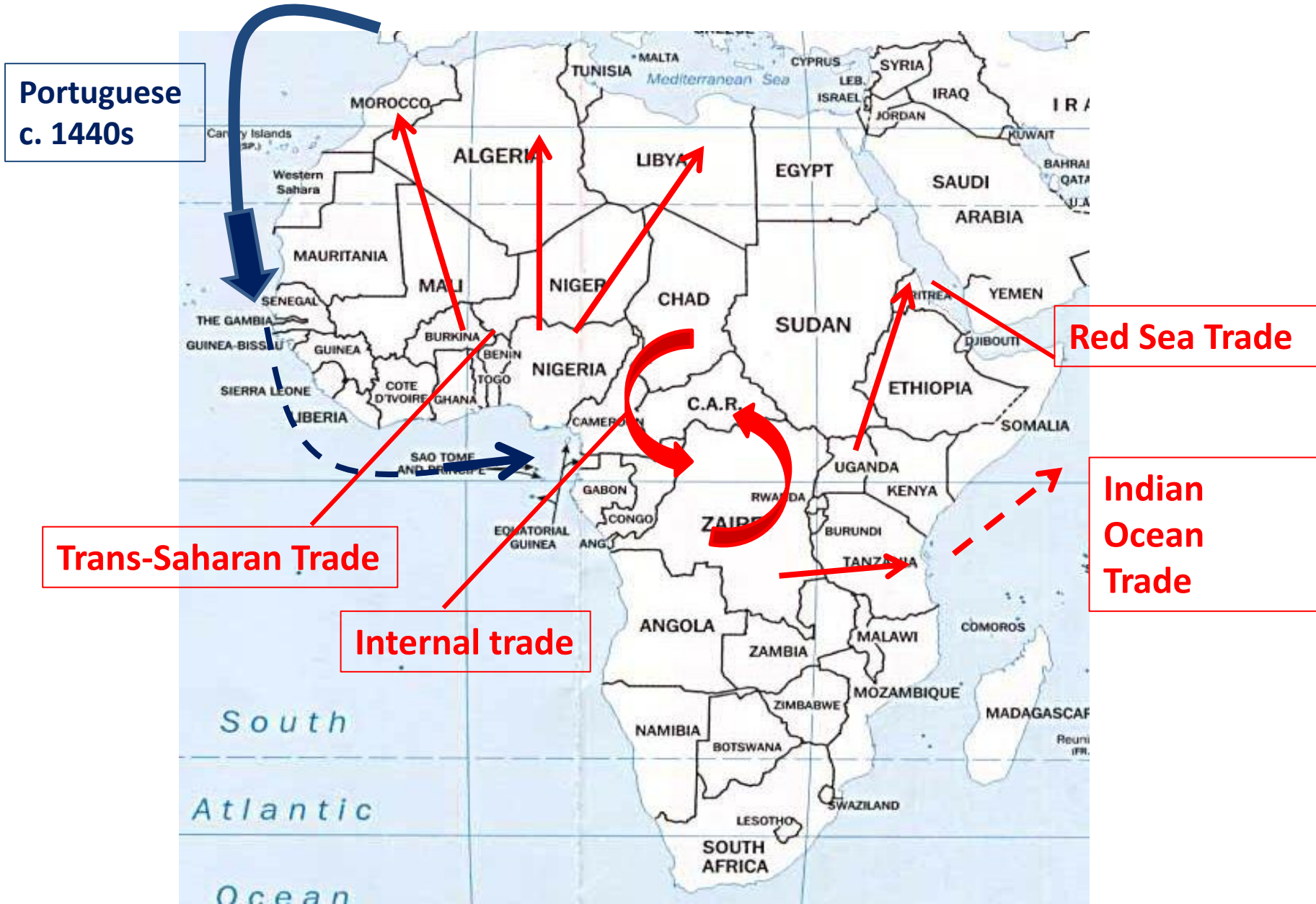
**Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Universidad de la República**

**Montevideo, 12 March 2015**

# Outline

1. Slavery and slave trades in African history
2. 'Stylized facts' of the Atlantic slave trade
3. Causes of the Atlantic slave trade
4. Abolition and the commercial transition of the 19<sup>th</sup> century
5. Conclusion

# Before the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

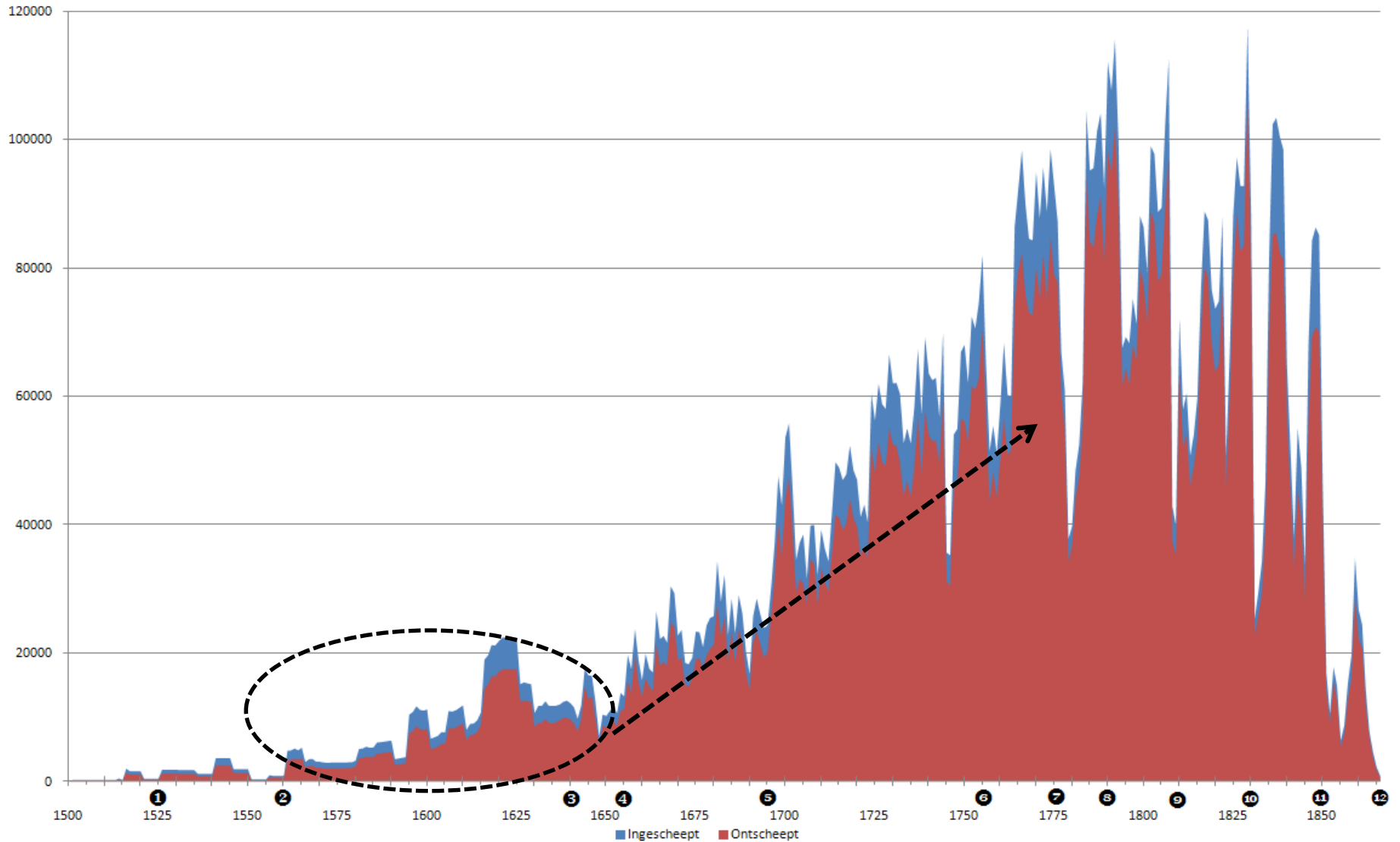


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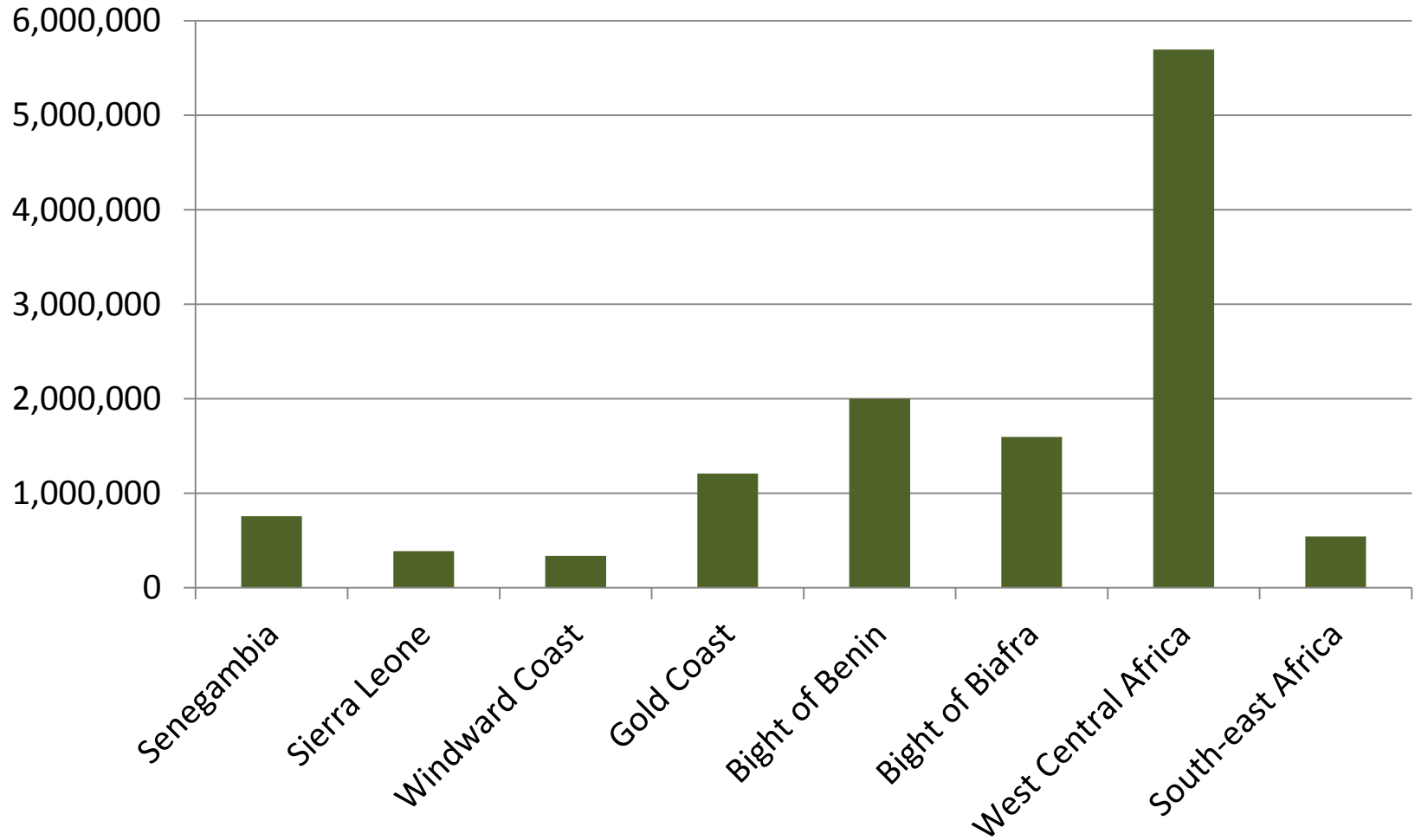
# Some 'stylized facts'

- 12.5 million embarked; 10.7 disembarked (c. 85%)
- Brazil alone accounts for c. 45% of embarked slaves (5.8 million)
- Gender and age selection (c. 25-30% females, 10% children). Explained by supply conditions (Klein 1990). BTW: not common in other trades.
- **1650-1850** is the big wave > rise of plantation economies in Caribbean, Brazil, US etc.
- Despite British abolition act of 1807, ca. 3.8 million slaves are exported in first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (ca. 30% of total between 1500-1850).
- Spain retreats in 18<sup>th</sup> century, Northwestern Europe expands.
- Trade is volatile. (e.g. 1756 start 7-years war; 1776 American Independence war; 1830 Anglo-Brazil Treaty)
- Its, not just slaves being traded, also the commodity trade grows.

# The Trans-Atlantic slave trade in numbers, 1500-1870

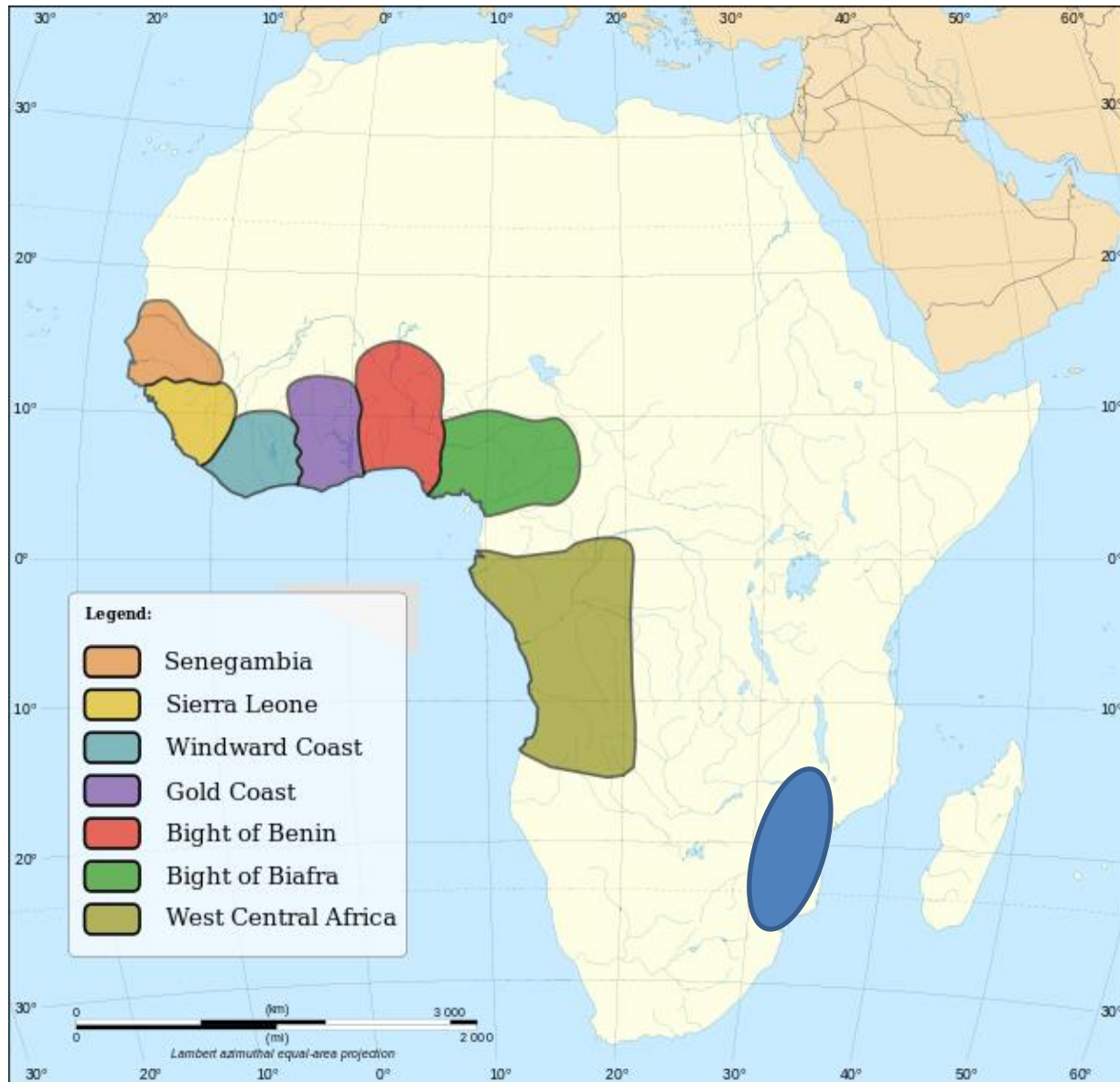


# Regions of African origin



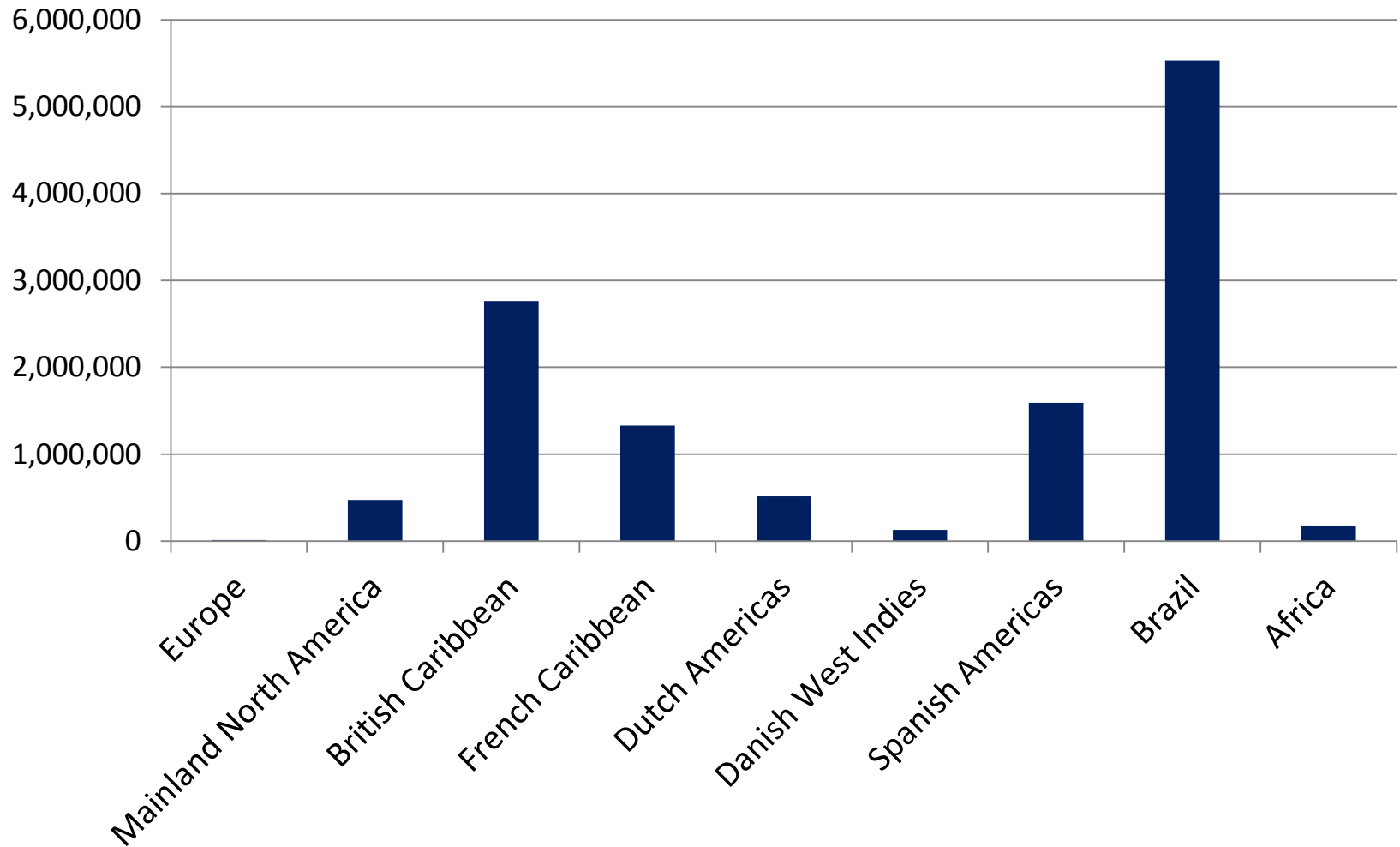


# Major slave trading regions on African West Coast

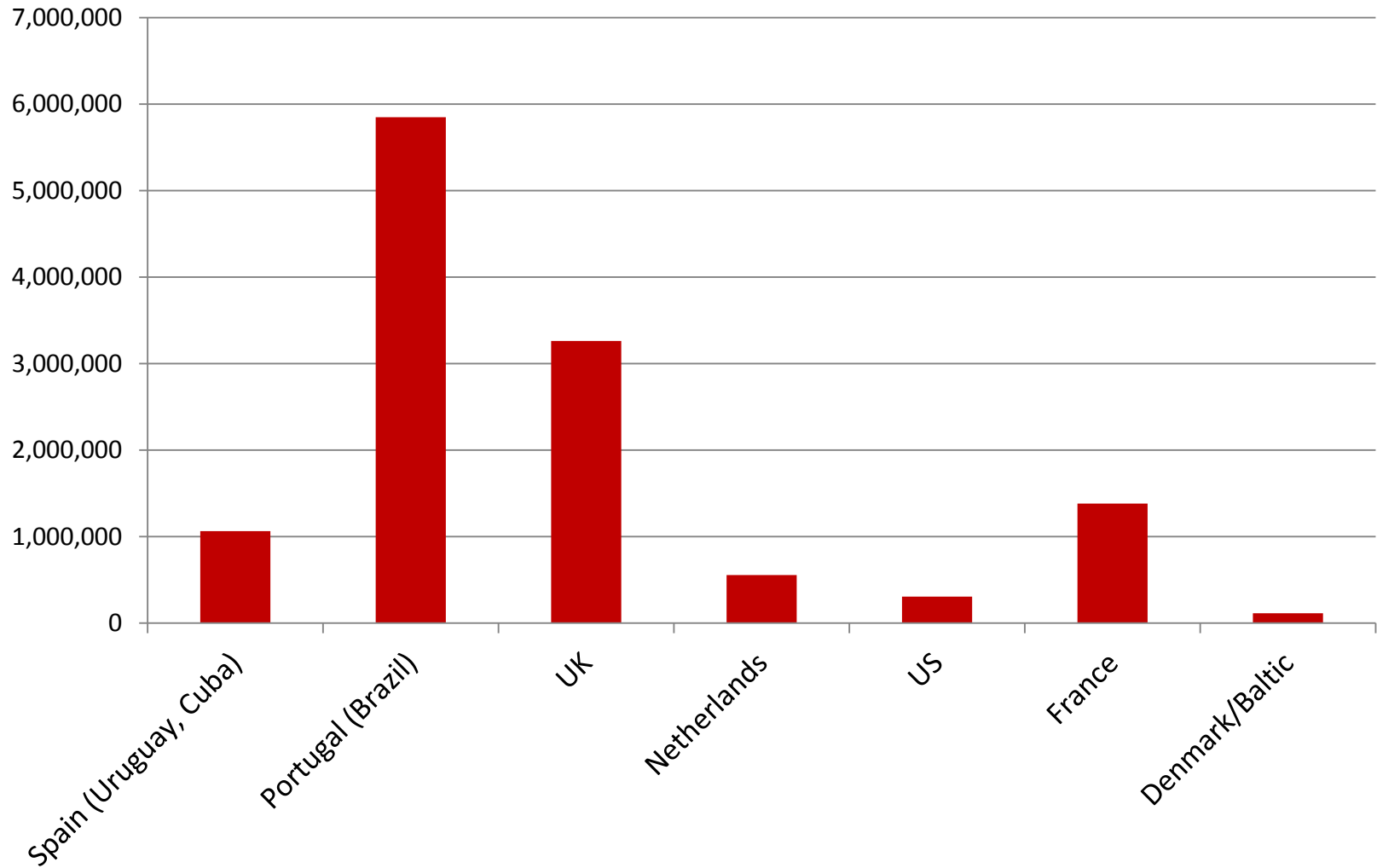




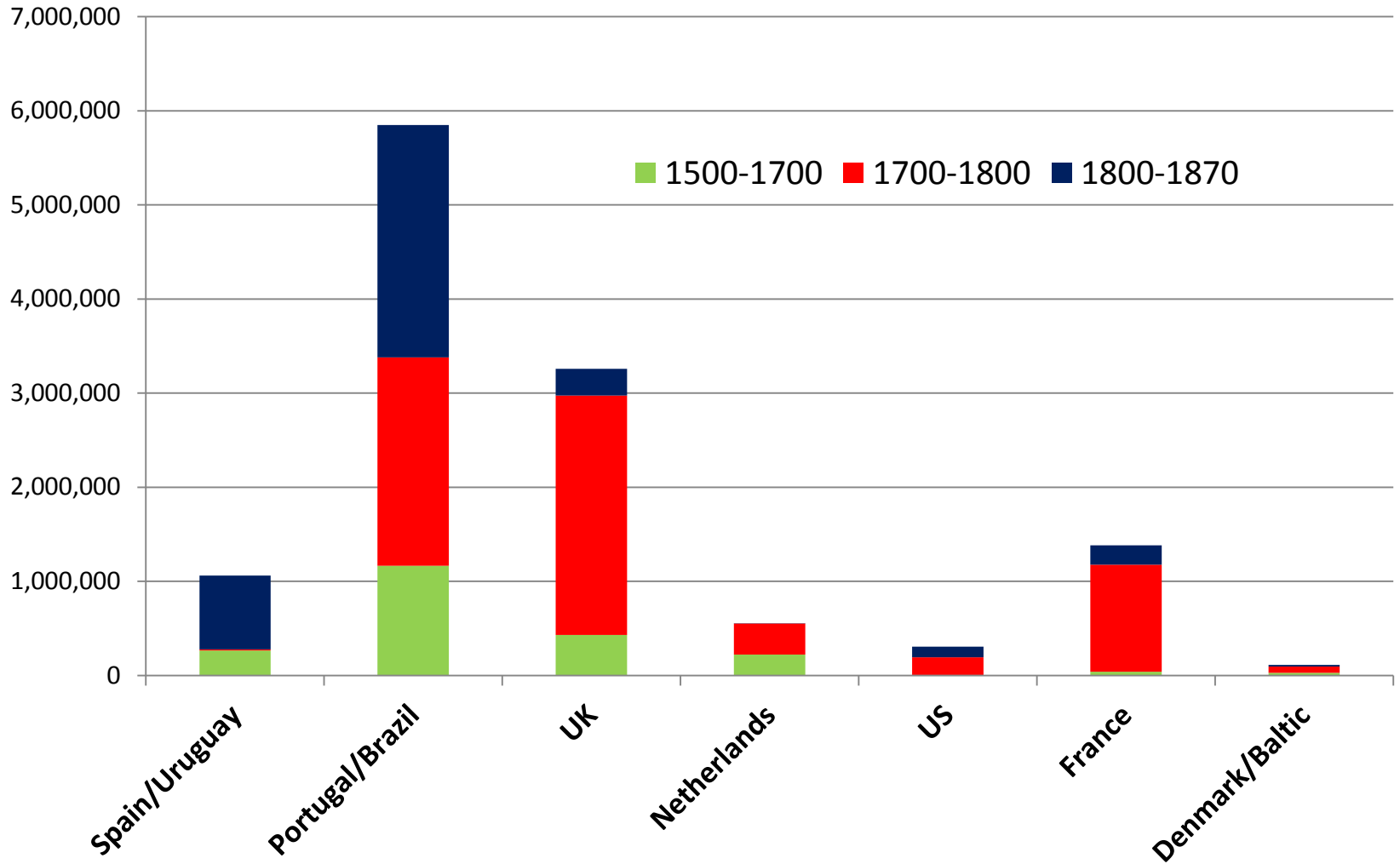
# Regions of New World destination



# Origin of slaver traders

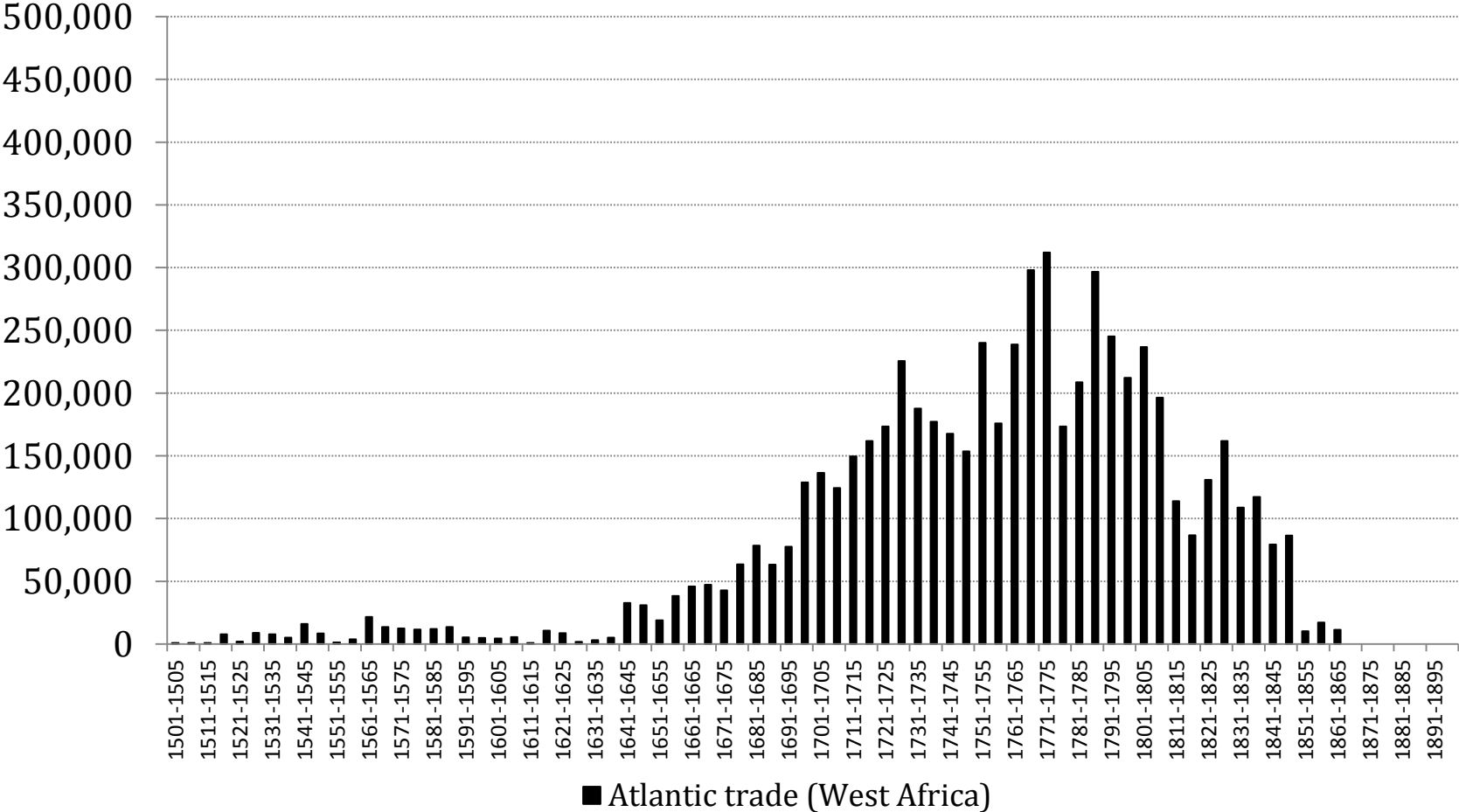


# Different engagements in different periods

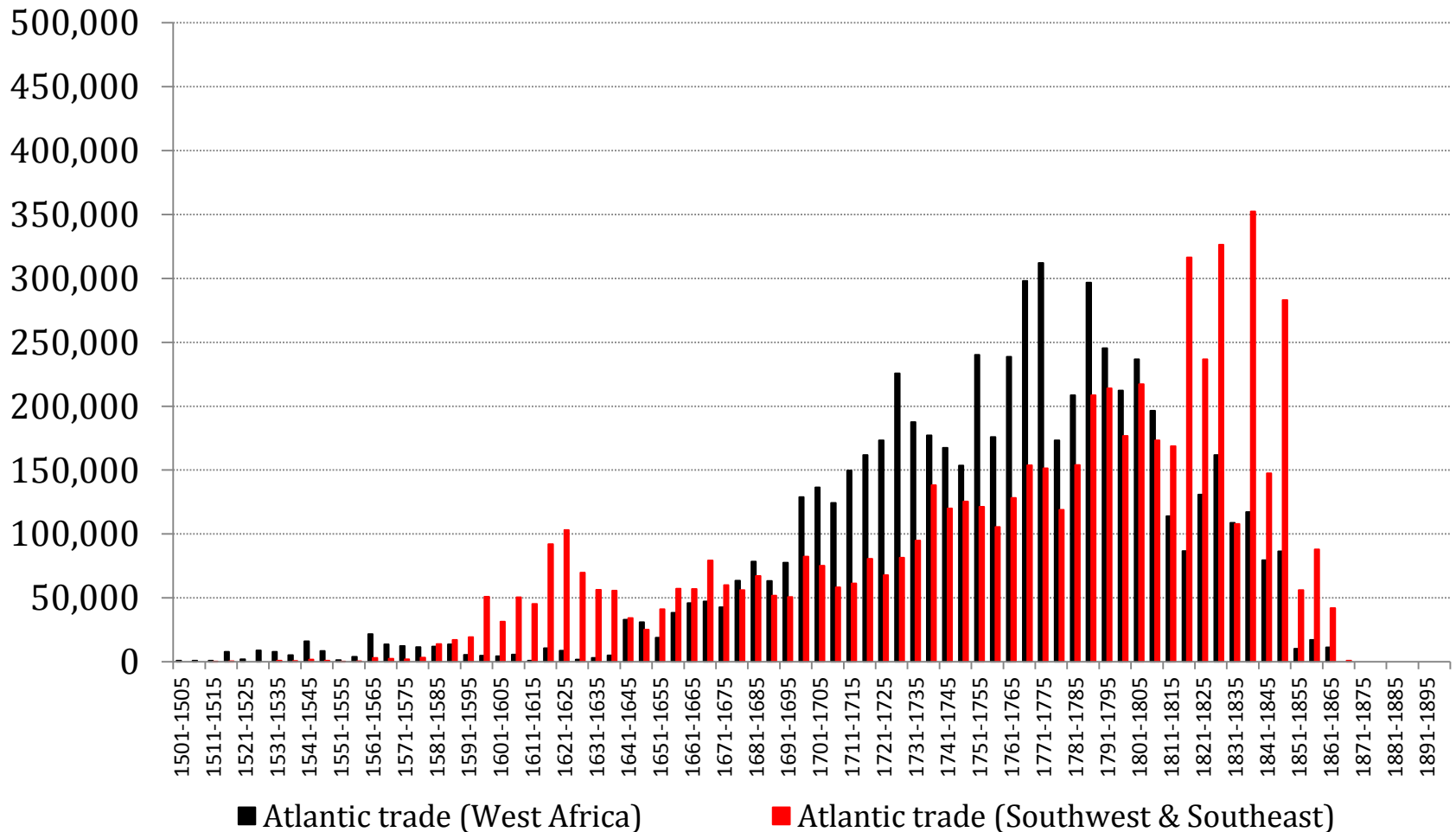




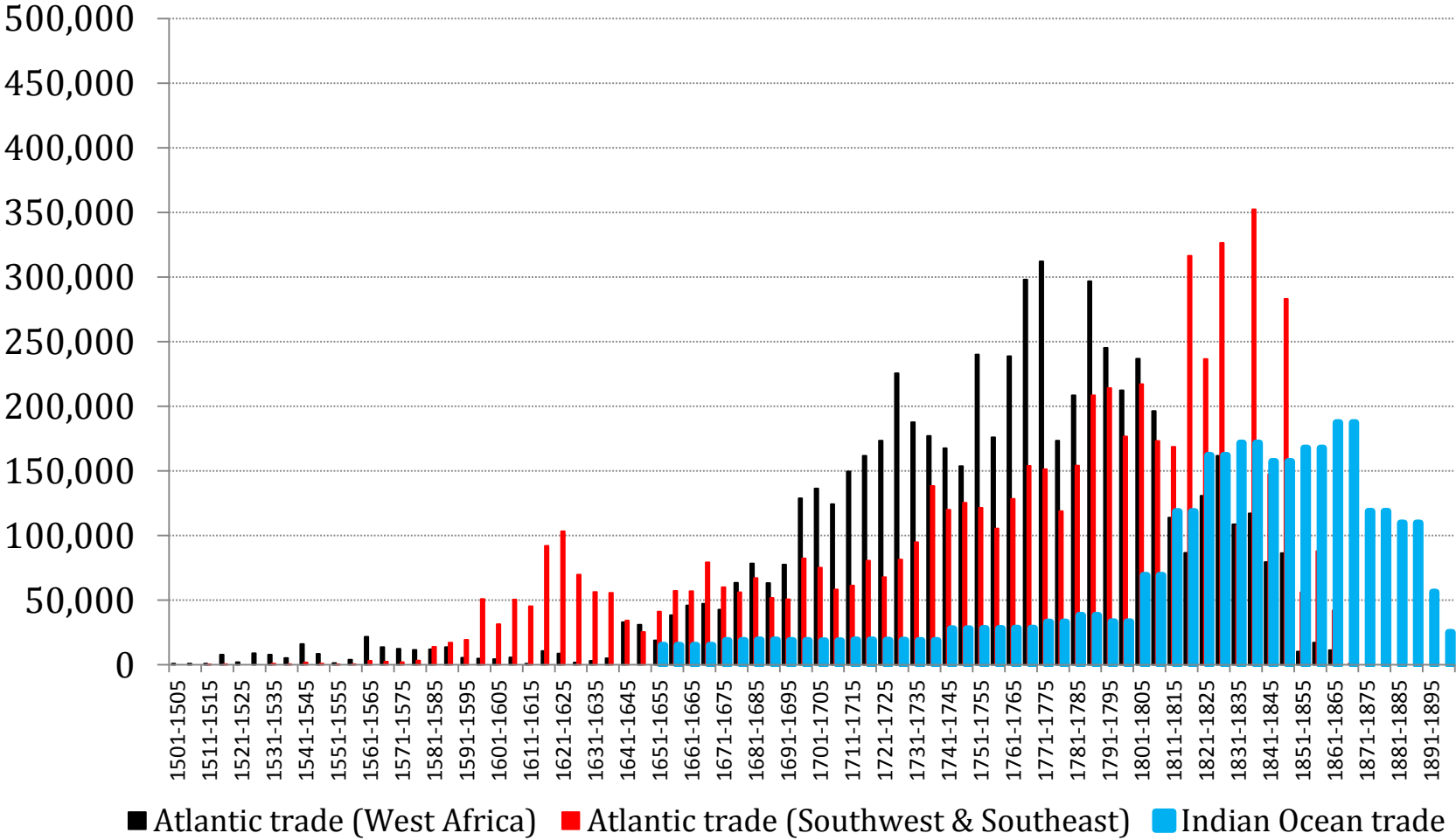
# Three waves of African Sea-born slave exports (1500-1900)



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**African perspective:**

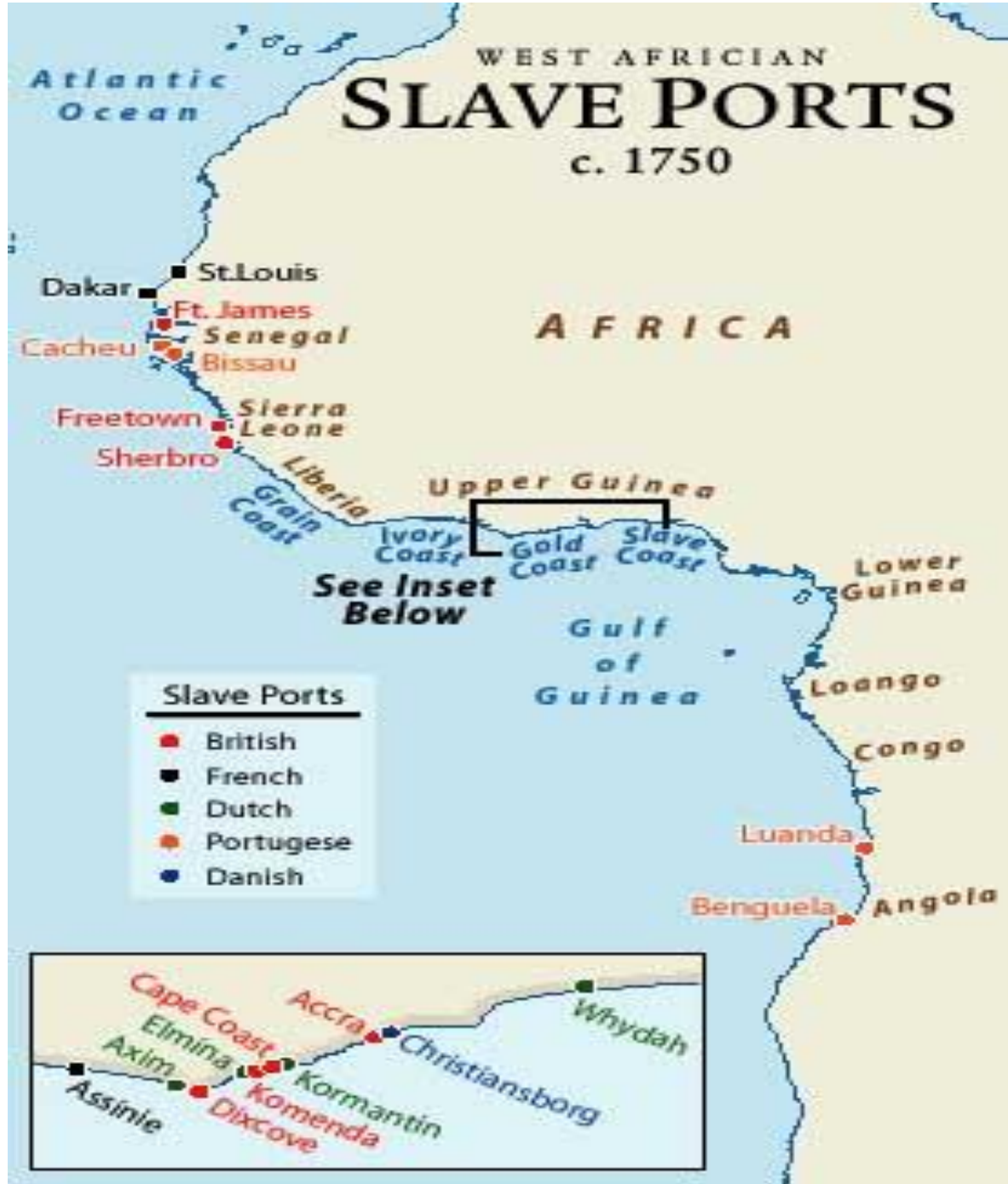
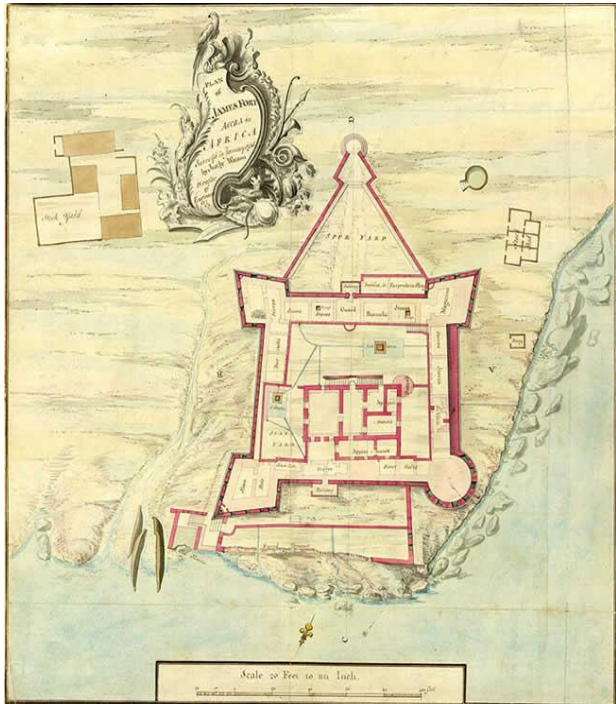
Why export people from a labour scarce region?

**European perspective:**

Why not set up plantations in Africa, instead of investing so much in shipping slaves?

# European rationale

- Difficult to control areas beyond the coast, their presence (slave forts) was 'tolerated', but not more than that.
- Ecological conditions for cash-crop cultivation were probably better at Atlantic shores in the New World (sugar, cotton, tobacco etc.).
- Slaves were easier to 'control' outside of their homelands.
- Prevailing wind systems made a direct return trip from West Africa to Europe quite complicated.
- Africans were preferred over European indentured workers for a) cultural/racial/religious reasons; b) their resistance against tropical diseases (they would live longer/work harder); European states that protected its own subjects? (Inikori 2003).



# African rationale

- Use of slaves and, hence, trade in slaves had deep historical roots before the Atlantic trade (control over people; social security)
- Rents! it was a highly profitable business.
- Elites consumer aspirations: access to new consumer goods that Europeans could offer (Indian textiles, alcohol, guns)
- Once it got off, it may have produced its own dynamics. A vicious spiral caused by the *prisoners dilemma*: 'eat or be eaten' (slaves for guns cycle). Opportunities to get rid of political rivals...
- Choice to retreat from slave trade must have something to do with the realization that it was socially, politically or economically unsustainable in the long-run, since terms of trade were not falling.

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# British abolition campaign gains momentum in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century



William Wilberforce (1759-1833)







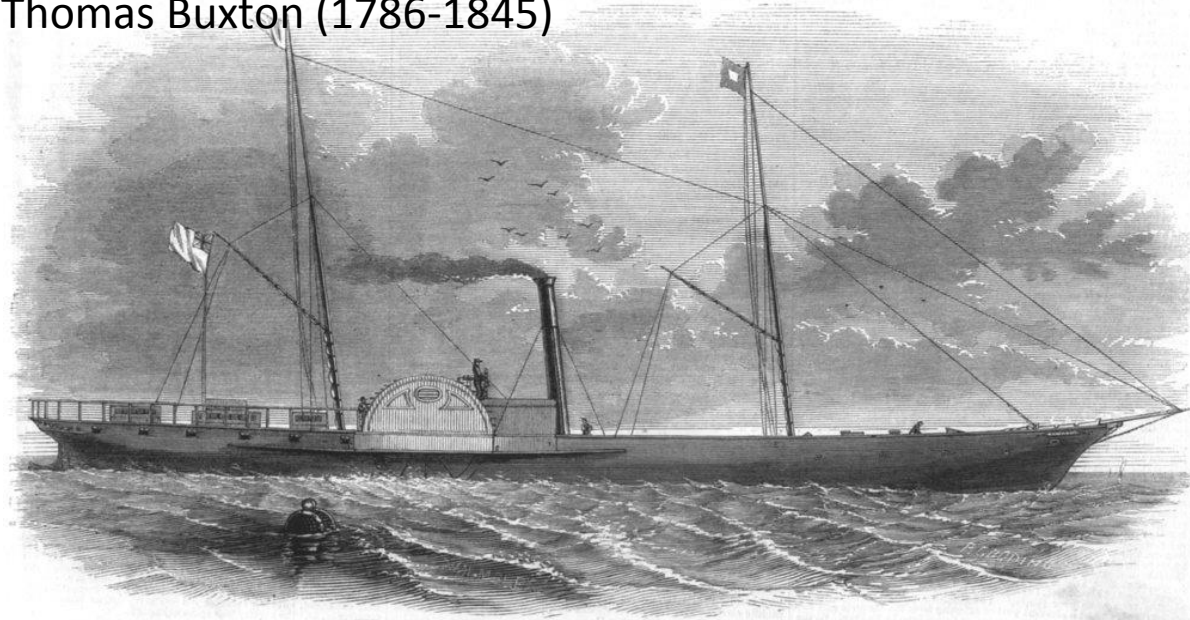
## The Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery

*Attempts to increase 'legitimate commerce' played a key role in later stages of the (total) abolition campaign*

Niger Expedition, 1841



Thomas Buxton (1786-1845)



# Hopkins (1973) 'Crisis of adaptation'

- Commodity export were expanding in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.
- But shift from slave exports to commodity exports involved political and social ruptures.
- Slave trade involved concentration of power and capital by elites. Agricultural commodities favoured smallholder production or domestic plantations (e.g. palm oil).
- Ban of slave exports gave extra impetus to indigenous slavery (also involved in commodity export production).

## Top 5 export commodities Sub-Saharan Africa (excl. South Africa, North Africa, Islands)

<i>Rank</i>	<i>1820</i>	<i>1850</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1890</i>	<i>1913</i>	<i>1929</i>
1	Palm oil	Palm oil	Kola nuts	Kola nuts	Oil seeds	Cocoa
2	Ivory	Wood, tropical	Gum	Palm oil	Cocoa	Oil seeds
3	Hides and skins	Ivory	Palm oil	Gum	Rubber	Cotton
4	Beeswax	Hides and skins	Oil seeds	Rubber	Palm kernels	Coffee
5	Ground nuts	Beeswax	Palm kernels	Palm kernels	Kola nuts	Palm kernels

# Commodity export volumes Sub-Saharan Africa, 1850-1939 (1900-1909=100)

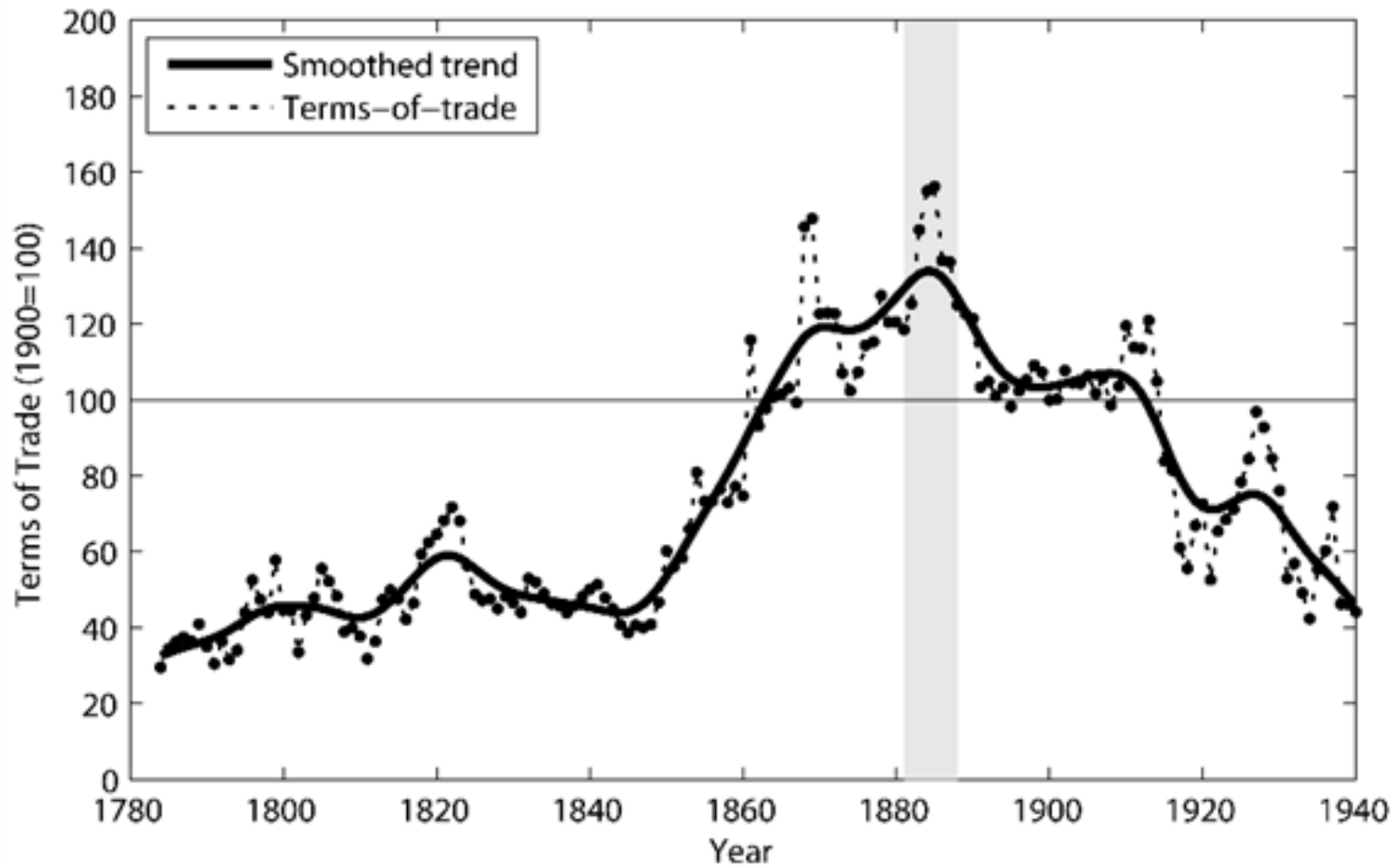
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	<i>British West Africa</i>	<i>French West Africa</i>	<i>British East Africa</i>	<i>Mauritius</i>	<i>Madagascar and Reunion</i>
1850-1859	8	42		75	
1860-1869	7	36		91	
1870-1879	15	58		96	
1880-1889	21	64		98	32
1890-1899	50	57		93	59
1900-1909	100	100	100	100	100
1910-1919	208	188	435	174	185
1920-1929	327	337	899	166	297
1930-1939	459	581	2,573	176	349

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# Terms of Trade West Africa, 1780-1940

(1900 = 100)



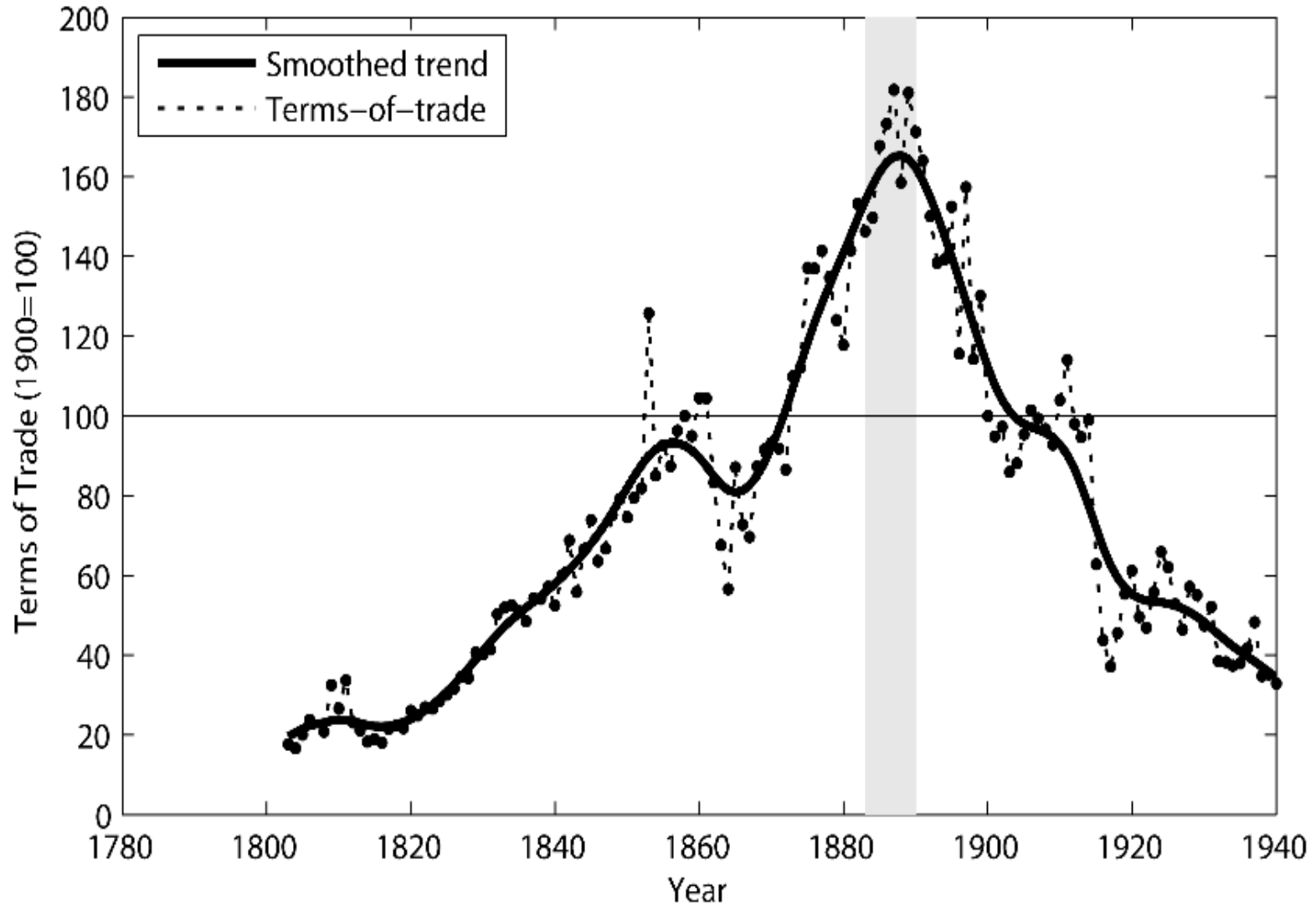
# Dutch Disease effects in East Africa?





# Terms of Trade East Africa, 1780-1940

(1900 = 100)





# Conclusion

- Popular literature is full of unsupported claims (Klein 1990). The Trans-Atlantic trade is by far the best documented and has disproven many of these claims.
- Among the many slave trades of Africa, the Atlantic trade stands out because of its **intensity**, the nature of **slave demand** (plantation labour, insufficient reproduction) and **slave supply** (male bias) and **demographic** impact on areas of origin and destination.
- African traders were certainly not forced. African merchants experienced favourable terms of trade trends, were selective in what European merchants offered, managed to avoid monopolies by a single European power and set most of the exchange conditions.
- The slave trade had dramatic consequences: demographic, violence, disease spread, local economic decline, but also initiated long-term growth dynamics (commodity trade, New World crops, iron imports etc.).