The development of Commercial Agriculture in Pre-Colonial West Africa[1]

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the development of commercial agriculture in pre-colonial West Africa. The evidence shows that subsistence agriculture was overwhelmingly dominant on the eve of European colonial rule. The historical explanation for this long-delayed development of commercial agriculture in the region is the central analytical task in the paper. Given the initial conditions of a predominantly subsistence agricultural economy, sustained long-run population growth and inter-continental trade are identified as the main drivers of the commercializing process in the long run. The analytical task, therefore, boils down to examining the development of these critical factors over long time periods. We find that both factors grew steadily (with some breaks as would be expected) up to the mid-seventeenth century, when population declined absolutely up to the mid-nineteenth century, at the same time that inter-continental trade in West African commodities also declined. The paper argues that these developments explain satisfactorily the delayed development of commercial agriculture during the period of study. We reject arguments in the literature which attribute the decline of population and inter-continental trade to West Africa's ecology. We argue instead that the violent procurement of millions of captives shipped across the Atlantic and their employment in large scale production of commodities in the Americas for Atlantic commerce — with the abiding support of mercantilist European states — had profound adverse effects on West Africa's population and the development of the region's competitiveness in commodity production for Atlantic commerce.

Introduction:

For agriculture to be technologically and organizationally developed and respond effectively to market signals, it must first transit from the predominance of subsistence

[1] The earlier version of this paper was presented at the African Economic History Conference, Vancouver, BC, Canada, April 2013. I want to thank all those who commented on the paper when it was presented.

production to market-based production, similar to the commercialization of peasant crafts (proto-industrialization) before mechanized, factory manufacturing could develop. The problem of West African agriculture over the years appears to emanate largely from a prolonged delay of transition from subsistence to competitive commercial agriculture, as the recent invitation of Zimbabwe commercial farmers by the Nigerian government testifies.[2] This paper examines the level of development of commercial agriculture in West Africa on the eve of European colonization and seeks to identify, in a long-run historical analysis, the factors responsible for the level of development.

Establishing a terminal date for pre-colonial Western African history is debatable. The Portuguese colonized islands off the coast of Western Africa in the fifteenth century – Cape Verde Islands, São Tomé, and Principe. Angola was established as a Portuguese colony in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. The British crown colony of Senegambia was established in 1765 and later handed over to France in 1783. The British Navy attacked Lagos, Nigeria, in 1851; Lagos became a British crown colony in 1861. In 1884-1885, ambitious European powers held the Berlin Conference to lay down the ground rules for sharing African territories among them. These developments make it difficult to pin-point some specific terminal date for pre-colonial Western African history. Given the issues that matter most in this paper, we believe the terminal date for the transatlantic slave trade is more analytically helpful than the terminal date for pre-colonial Western African history. We, therefore, take the middle decades of the nineteenth century as the terminal point for the analysis in the paper.

Reading history backwards, as it were, the first part of the paper examines the extent of development of commercial agriculture in West Africa by the mid-nineteenth century. For purposes of identifying the factors that matter most in the commercializing process, the second section contains a theoretical and comparative historical discussion of that process in some selected regions of the world – pre-industrial England, the Americas, and South Africa. The third and main section of the paper examines in detail the development of the identified factors over the long time periods, early times to 1450,

[2] With the cooperation of the Federal Government, the Kwara State Government invited a group of farmers (thirteen in number) from Zimbabwe in 2005 to assess the potential for developing commercial farming in the state. Satisfied with what they saw, they relocated. They were each given 1,000 hectares of land in Shonga, Kwara State, with a long lease for commercial farming purpose. They have been in production since. I interviewed two of them on May 25, 2013.

1450-1650, and 1650-1850. The historical development of these factors over these periods helps us explain what happened to the commercialization of agriculture in West Africa during our period of study. The conclusion is drawn up in the fourth section.

I. Extent of Commercial Agriculture in West Africa in the Mid-Nineteenth Century

To what extent had commercial agriculture developed in West Africa by the mid-nineteenth century? For purposes of clarity, a distinction must be made between commercial agriculture per se and capitalist (or large-scale) agriculture. As capitalist production is defined generally by the employment of legally free wage laborers,[3] capitalist agriculture exists when wage labor is the numerically dominant form of labor employed in agriculture. Of course, capitalist agriculture is commercial agriculture. But commercial agriculture can exist without capitalist agriculture. For agricultural production to be commercial, all that is needed is the predominance of production for market exchange, as opposed to the predominance of self-sufficient or subsistence production (production for the immediate consumption of the producers without market exchange). Thus, family farms employing no wage labor but producing largely for market exchange are commercial farms. This is consistent with the notion of commercial agriculture employed in the World Bank study of competitive commercial agriculture in Africa.[4] Also, large-scale farmers employing slaves or serfs to produce mainly for market exchange are, by definition, not capitalist farmers but are commercial farmers. However, large farms employing servile labor to produce mainly or exclusively for the provisioning of the owners (farms owned by the state to provision state functionaries or farms owned by trading houses to provision the members) are subsistence farms, not commercial farms.

John Iliffe's survey of forms of production in West Africa found no evidence of capitalist production in agriculture by the mid-nineteenth century[5]. Writing as late as

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[3] Joseph E. Inikori, *Slavery and the Rise of Capitalism: The 1993 Elsa Goveia Memorial Lecture* (Mona, Jamaica: The Department of History, The University of the West Indies, 1993), pp. 2-9; John Iliffe, *The Emergence of African Capitalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. 3-4.

[4] World Bank, *Awakening Africa's Sleeping Giant: Prospects for Commercial Agriculture in the Guinea Savannah Zone and Beyond* (Washington, DC: FAO and the World Bank, 2009).

[5] Iliffe, *The Emergence of African Capitalism*, pp. 5-7.

1926, Allan McPhee still stressed that "there is an almost total lack as yet of native capitalists" in agriculture in British West Africa.[6] But was there much commercial agriculture? On this, the literature is rather unclear. Substantivist social anthropologists writing in the 1950s and 1960s argued generally that market-oriented production was peripheral in pre-colonial West African economies, for which reason, they argued, production decisions were not influenced by market principles.[7] The scathing critique of this view by Hopkins provoked a fifty-one-page response.[8] Hopkins notes the problem of measuring the relative importance of the market in West African economies of the period:[9]

> Even if it is assumed that the market principle was in some sense peripheral, this insight turns out to be less helpful than it appears at first. The crucial problem is to find a way of measuring the degree of peripherality, but this, admittedly daunting, task is not one which Bohannan and Dalton have attempted.

The point by Hopkins concerning the application of the concept of the market as an organizing principle means that production decisions by West African producers were influenced by the extent of market opportunities. Thus, the logic of the market can be applied to explain choices made by the producers even if production for market exchange was not the dominant form of production. As Hopkins put it, "The extent to which market activity failed to mobilise the factors of production fully is better explained in terms of economics . . . than in terms of social controls based on anti-capitalist values."[10]

Several historians influenced by social anthropology have tended to follow the Dalton/Polanyi/Bohannan approach, giving rise to what is characterized as a unique African political economy based on the accumulation of people rather than a market

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[6] Allan McPhee, *The Economic Revolution in British West Africa* (second edition, London: Frank Cass, 1971; first edition, 1926), p. 276.

[7] Paul Bohannan, "Some Principles of Exchange and Investment among the Tiv," *American Anthropologist,* 57 (1955), pp. 60-70; Karl Polanyi, *Dahomey and the Slave Trade* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966); Paul Bohannan and George Dalton (eds.), *Markets in Africa* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1962).

[8] A. G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa* (New York: Longman, 1973), pp. 52-53; George Dalton, "An Economic History of West Africa by A. G. Hopkins," *African Economic History,* No. 1 (Spring, 1976), pp. 51-101; A. G. Hopkins, "An Economic History of West Africa: A Comment," *African Economic History*, No. 2 (Fall, 1976), pp. 81-83.

[9] Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa*, p. 52.

[10] Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa*, p. 52.

oriented system of material wealth accumulation.[11] Other historians have responded to the substantivist social anthropologists by insisting on wide-spread production for market exchange in pre-colonial Africa without showing empirically the actual extent of production for market exchange relative to self-sufficient/subsistence production. Thus, one author declared in the introduction to a collection of essays on agricultural development in Africa: "As a point of departure, it is useful to dispel one of the most common myths about African agricultural history, the myth of subsistence production."[12] It would seem what is being dispelled is the extreme position of the substantivist social anthropologists, as subsequent elaboration shows: "the allocation of some portion of farm production to goods that could be exchanged for cash or traded was probably universal", adding, "If production solely for subsistence was ever the dominant characteristic of African rural society, the onset of European colonialism put an end to it."[13]

There is no doubt that "the allocation of some portion of farm production to goods that could be exchanged for cash or traded" was a widespread practice by West African farmers by the mid-nineteenth century.[14] But how large was the marketed portion relative to the unmarketed portion? If the unmarketed portion was overwhelmingly large, then, the extent of commercial agriculture was very limited. The literature abounds with general statements which leave us only with impressions even concerning the twentieth century:

> The majority of agricultural producers in the developing countries of the tropics are semi-subsistence farm households. Thus part of the total product is retained within the household for home consumption. The remainder, often referred to as the 'marketed surplus' is offered for sale. The total quantity of an agricultural commodity offered for sale in a given market (e.g. nationally) over a given period (e.g. a year) is influenced by the price of the commodity, the prices of alternative

[11] Iliffe, *The Emergence of African Capitalism*; John Iliffe, *Africans: The history of a continent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Joseph C. Miller, *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade, 1730-1830* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988); Randy J. Parks, *The Two Princes of Calabar: An Eighteenth-Century Atlantic Odyssey* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1680* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[12] Michael F. Lofchie, "Introduction," in Robert H. Bates and Michael F. Lofchie (eds.), *Agricultural Development in Africa: Issues of Public Policy* (New York: Praeger, 1980)), p. 2.

[13] Lofchie, "Introduction," p. 3.

[14] William O. Jones, "Agricultural trade within Tropical Africa: Historical Background," in Bates and Lofchie (eds.), *Agricultural Development in Africa*, pp. 10-45.

> products and of purchased inputs, the size of the agricultural labour-force and the production technology.[15]

Statements such as this are helpful in knowing the general characteristics of the agricultural systems in the developing countries of the tropics and, theoretically, the factors that would help explain the extent of agricultural commercialization or factors that would determine future commercialization. But they do not tell us explicitly the proportion of the total output that was marketed. We are left with the impression that, even in the twentieth century, the "marketed surplus" was much smaller than the household consumption. We get the same impression from Mcphee's discussion of agricultural production in British West Africa in the 1920s, talking about "The transition from subsistence farming to commercialised agriculture, and from a natural economy to a monetary economy."[16]

Philip Curtin's study of Senegambia offers some helpful hint. Like the writers mentioned earlier in the paper, Curtin begins his discussion of production for the market in pre-colonial Senegambia with a critique of the substantivist social anthropologists:

> Perhaps the most durable of all myths about precolonial Africa is the belief that it contained myriad, isolated economic units — 'subsistence economies,' where the village group if not each individual family actually produced all it consumed. The myth survived partly because former economies were more self-sufficient than their present-day successors, but it was even more useful as an imaginary model of production without exchange beyond the household. . . . Senegambia, where the [sahel] of the desert meets the shore of the sea, has had a monetized exchange and a network of interconnected markets for centuries.[17]

However, after considerable details on the production and marketing of several products, the discussion concludes:

[15] Martin Upton, *The Economics of Tropical Farming Systems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 10.
[16] McPhee, *Economic Revolution*, pp. 276, 276-281.
[17] Philip D. Curtin, *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa: Senegambia in the Era of the Slave Trade* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975), p. 197. For similar statements, see several chapters in Claude Meillassoux (ed.) *The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).

> In spite of an active market in all of these goods [gold, iron, cotton textiles, gum, cattle and cowhides, horses and transport animals, beeswax, ivory, salt, kola nuts, millet, peanuts, and fish], the market sector of the eighteenth-century Senegambian economy was smaller than the self-subsistence sector. Most goods and services were produced and consumed within the household . . . But it is not simply the bias of the sources that makes the Senegambian economy of two hundred years ago appear more market oriented than some other African economies . . . It was more market oriented.[18]

Curtin, thus, gives us some concrete evidence that the market sector of the pre-colonial Senegambian economy was smaller than the subsistence sector. Given the close geographical location of Senegambia to the Niger Bend, the commercial center of West Africa in the first half of the last millennium,[19] Curtin's claim that the pre-colonial Senegambian economy was more market oriented than some other African economies of the period is certainly credible. The Senegambian evidence can, therefore, be reasonably generalized for pre-colonial West Africa. What is more, Curtin's footnotes provide even more concrete evidence:

> Investigation in Fuuta Tooro during the 1950's indicated that 70 per cent of agricultural production was consumed by the producers, but the sedentary people tended at that time to produce about 25 kgs of millet per capita per year above their own consumption, while the pastoral Fuulbe consumed about 53 kgs of millet per capita above their own production. . . . [20]

The close proximity of grain producers and pastoral farmers in this region suggests that its agricultural production would be more market oriented than production in other Senegambian regions. This is the more reason why this piece of concrete evidence says a lot about the extent of commercial agriculture in West Africa in the mid-nineteenth century. Given the intensive and extensive commercialization of socioeconomic life in West Africa during the one hundred-year period, 1850-1950, that the marketed surplus was about 30 percent of the total agricultural product in the 1950s, in the leading

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[18] Curtin, *Economic Change*, p. 232.

[19] Joseph E. Inikori, "West Africa's Niger Bend in Global Perspective, 1000-1591," Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association, San Diego, January 7-10, 2010.

[20] Curtin, *Economic Change*, fn. 1, p. 218. Growing up in an agricultural village in Mid-Western Nigeria in the late 1940s, the 70 percent figure is consistent with my general recollection of household production and consumption at the time.

commercialized region of one of the most market oriented West African economies, is a clear indication that the subsistence sector of West African agriculture was overwhelmingly dominant in the mid-nineteenth century. What historical processes gave rise to this limited development of commercial agriculture in mid-nineteenth-century West Africa? The answer to this question constitutes the focus of the rest of the paper. The section that follows attempts to identify the factors that are generally central in the process of agricultural commercialization over time.

I I. Theoretical and Historical Perspective on Agricultural Commercialization

The first step in explaining the extremely low level of commercial agriculture in mid-nineteenth-century West Africa is identifying the factors that matter most in the long-run process of agricultural commercialization. It is commonplace knowledge that all societies with long ancient roots were overwhelmingly dominated by subsistence agricultural production at some point in their history. It is possible to identify some generalizable pattern (a model), with clear explanatory factors whose long-run historical development could be studied across the globe. A combination of theoretical and historical perspective would be helpful in this exercise.

First and foremost, commercial agriculture presupposes the existence of markets for the products of agriculture. Given the fact that all societies with long ancient roots were dominated by subsistence agricultural production early in their history, the question for economic and historical analysis is how the market for agricultural products came into being and grew. Smithian economics would lead us to believe that the market emerged from specialization among producers of goods and services. Logically speaking, such specialization, under the specified conditions, could result from sustained long-run population growth and/or international/inter-continental trade. The stylized economic logic of the process may be stated as follows. Because specific territories in the major regions of the world were settled at different points in time, extensive areas of unsettled or lightly settled lands existed beyond the areas of early settlement. Sustained long-run population growth in the areas of early settlement meant an unsustainable ratio of people to cultivable land at some point, compelling some to migrate to regions with abundant cultivable land. This process of migration, provoked by long-run demographic change, gave rise over time to regions with differing resource endowments — particularly in terms of land-labor ratios and other gifts of nature. The differing resource endowments stimulated the growth of inter-regional trade and the long-run process of specialization: The gains from inter-regional trade induced the regions with very high ratios of labor to productive land to engage in relatively labor-intensive activities, such as manufacturing and commerce, while regions with very high ratios of productive land to labor were encouraged to engage in relatively land-intensive activities, such as agriculture. The growth of international or inter-continental trade offered similar market opportunities for specialization.[21]

The foregoing theoretical outline of the commercializing process is remarkably consistent with the real historical process across the globe. A few examples should suffice. In Western Europe, the southern regions, northern Italy in particular, had the highest population densities in the medieval era, followed subsequently by the Low Countries (modern Belgium and The Netherlands). The high population density regions were the centers of manufacturing and commerce in Western Europe for centuries. The commercializing process in pre-industrial England was aided externally by trade with the centers of manufacturing and commerce in Europe and internally by population growth. The production of raw wool (a major land-intensive activity) for export to the continent contributed considerably to the commercializing process in agricultural production from the Middle Ages to the early modern period. The role of the wool trade interacted with that of population growth. When the population of England grew from about 2 million in 1086 to 6 million in 1300, and population density increased from 40 to 120 per square mile, internal colonization filled up the vast wilderness that had separated manors and

[21] The theoretical and historical literature on the origins and development of the market is surprisingly limited. The following are some of the closest to the subject: Douglass C. North and Robert P. Thomas, "An Economic Theory of the Growth of the Western World," *Economic History Review*, second series, Vol. 22, No. 1 (1970); Douglass C. North and Robert P. Thomas, *The Rise of the Western World: A New Economic History* (New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 1973); Richard H. Britnell and Bruce M. S. Campbell (eds.), *A Commercialising Economy: England1086 to c. 1300* (Manchester and New York: University of Manchester Press, 1995); Richard Britnell, *Markets, Trade and Economic Development in England and Europe, 1050-1550* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2009); Victoria N. Bateman, *Markets and Growth in Early Modern Europe* (London: Pickerring & Chatto, 2012).

added fuel to the commercializing process.[22] Adding the growth and development of woolen textile manufacturing from the fourteenth century, which was heavily dependent on exports to continental markets, market opportunity for agricultural commercialization expanded from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century, paving the way to the rise of the celebrated yeoman farmer. At the beginning of the fourteenth century, the peasant cultivator who dominated English agriculture had a family farm of 12 to 24 acres devoted largely to subsistence production. By the seventeenth century, the yeoman farmer, who now dominated English agriculture, had a family farm of 60 to 100 acres employed primarily to produce for the market.[23] By this time, English agriculture was fully commercialized, though not yet capitalist. The growth of proto-industrialization (1660-1750) and mechanized industrial production (1750-1850) ultimately created the market conditions for the transition to capitalist agriculture in England.[24]

In the Americas inter-continental trade was the prime mover for agricultural commercialization. In 1492, the economies of the Americas were overwhelmingly dominated by subsistence production, especially the extremely low population density regions like Brazil and what later became the United States of America and Canada. The demographic catastrophe which decimated the Native American populations, following European conquest and colonization, meant that the total population of the Americas by 1850 was barely equal to the 1492 total, the millions of migrants (free and forced) from Africa and Europe notwithstanding.[25] Yet, by 1850, agricultural production in the major regions of the Americas was fully commercialized. The commercializing process was led by the plantation and mining zones in the Americas, which produced highly valued

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[22] John Hatcher, *Plague, Population and the English Economy, 1348-1530* (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 68; J. A. Tuck, “The Occupation of the Land: The Northern Borders,” in Edward Miller (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales: Volume III, 1348-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 34; T. H. Lloyd, *The English Wool Trade in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Eileen Power, *The Wool Trade in English Medieval History: Being the Ford Lectures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941); North and Thomas, *The Rise of the Western World*, pp. 46-89; Joseph E. Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England: A Study in International Trade and Economic Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 22-43.

[23] Cicely Howell, “Stability and Change 1300-1700: The Socio-Economic Context of the Self-Perpetuating Family Farm in England,” *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (1975), pp. 468-469.

[24] Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution*, pp. 43-46; Robert C. Allen, *The British Industrial Revolution in Global Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 57-58.

[25] Joseph E. Inikori, “Reversal of Fortune and Socioeconomic Development in the Atlantic World: A Comparative Examination of West Africa and the Americas, 1400-1850,” in Emmanuel Akyeampong, Robert Bates, Nathan Nunn, and James A. Robinson (eds.), *Africa’s Development in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming), Chapter 2.

commodities for Atlantic commerce. The expansion of production in these highly specialized large-scale export-producing zones over the period 1501-1850 gave rise to large domestic markets which encouraged intra-American trade and pulled producers over time from subsistence to production for the market.[26]

Similar to the Americas, South Africa offers an early case of agricultural commercializing process among black African producers induced by large-scale commodity production for export — gold and diamonds production for export. The process went beyond yeoman farmers; it produced thousands of black capitalist farmers. Iliffe's search for evidence of capitalist production in sub-Saharan Africa in the nineteenth century found none in western and eastern Africa. South Africa was the only exception, with extensive capitalist agriculture among black Africans. The process had begun in the 1830s, stimulated initially by trade with the Europeans at the Cape. But the main period of the development was in the 1870s and 1880s, when large-scale production of gold and diamonds for export created expansive domestic markets for agricultural products. In the 1880s and 1890s, there were substantial black capitalist farmers in many areas of South Africa, some owning over 3,000 acres of land, 200 cattle, 40 horses, ploughs and wagons, and employing large numbers of free wage workers. In the end, however, the process was halted and reversed from the 1890s by the unfair competition with white farmers for land, labor, and markets, under conditions of rising white political power.[27]

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[26] Peter Bakewell, "Mining in Colonial Spanish America," in Leslie Bethell (ed.), *Cambridge History of Latin America*, Vol. II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 150; Mark A. Burkholder and Lyman L. Johnson, *Colonial Latin America* (5th ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 171; Louisa S. Hoberman, *Mexico's Merchant Elite, 1590-1660: Silver, State, and Society* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1991); Douglass C. North, *The Economic Growth of the United States, 1790-1860* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966; first published by Prentice Hall, 1961); James F. Shepherd and Gary M. Walton, *Shipping, Maritime Trade, and the Economic Development of Colonial North America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972); John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1985); Francisco Vidal Luna and Herbert S. Klein, "African Slavery in the Production of Subsistence Crops: The Case of Sao Paulo in the Nineteenth Century," in David Eltis, Frank D. Lewis, and Kenneth L. Sokoloff (eds.), *Slavery in the Development of the Americas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 120-149; Francisco Vidal Luna and Herbert S. Klein, *The Evolution of the Slave Society and Economy of Sao Paulo, from the 1760s to the 1850s* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); B. J. Barickman, *A Bahian Counterpoint: Sugar, Tobacco, Cassava and Slavery in the Reconcavo, 1780-1860* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998); Joseph E. Inikori, "Africa and the Globalization Process: Western Africa, 1450-1850," *Journal of Global History*, Volume 2, Part 1 (March 2007), pp. 73-77.

[27] Iliffe, *The Emergence of African Capitalism*, pp. 17-19; Colin Bundy, *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry* (London: Heinemann, 1979).

Economic logic and historical evidence, thus, make it clear that, given initial conditions of overwhelming dominance of subsistence production in a predominantly agricultural society, sustained long-run population growth and/or international/inter-continental trade are the factors that matter most in the long-run process of agricultural commercialization. To explain the extremely limited level of agricultural commercialization in mid-nineteenth-century West Africa, we need, therefore, to examine the historical development of both factors and related developments from early times to the mid-nineteenth century. That is the main focus of the rest of the paper. It is a two-part analysis — pre-Atlantic slave trade up to the mid-seventeenth century; the Atlantic slave trade period, from the mid-seventeenth century to the mid-nineteenth.

III.1. Population, Trade, and the Commercializing Process in West Africa: Pre-Atlantic Slave Trade up to 1650

From the last centuries of the first millennium to the mid-seventeenth century, population growth and inter-continental trade pushed forward steadily the commercializing process in West Africa. The process was centered in the Niger Bend, the region watered by the inland delta of the River Niger from the modern city of Segu to where it enters modern Nigeria. In general, the available evidence suggests that all regions in West Africa, from Senegambia to southeastern Nigeria, experienced sustained long-run population growth during the period, with a probable break by the mid-fourteenth century (the time of the Black Death in Eurasia, 1349-1350), followed by further rapid growth from the late fourteenth to the sixteenth century.[28]

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[28] D. T. Niane, "Conclusion," in D. T. Niane (ed.), *General History of Africa, IV: Africa from the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Century* (London, California, Paris: Heinemann, University of California Press, UNESCO, 1984), pp. 683-684; Patrick Manning, "African Population, 1650-1950: Methods for New Estimates by Region," African Economic History Conference, Vancouver, BC, April 2013. Manning points out that "archaeological research, especially in Ghana, has brought up the possibility that African populations, dense in the early fourteenth century, declined sharply at the time of the Black Death in Eurasia," then rose "rapidly from the late fourteenth century in parallel to those of Europe and Asia." All of this brings very close Niane's educated guestimate of the continental population of Africa at 200 million in the fourteenth century and Manning's more statistically sophisticated estimate of 130 million in 1650. Niane, "Conclusion," pp. 683-684; Patrick Manning and Scott C. Nickleach, "Retrospective Estimates of African Population, 1950-1650," International Conference on Understanding African Poverty over the Longue Durée, International Institute for Advanced Studies, Accra, Ghana, July 15-17, 2010. Estimates by L. M. Diop-Maes, who has done much work on the subject, are much higher than Niane's and Manning's, 600

Arabic and other sources indicate, however, that population growth in the Middle Niger (Niger Bend) was earlier and more spectacular. The region experienced the growth and spread of urban centers from the early centuries of the first millennium to the late sixteenth century.[29] A fourteenth-century Arab visitor recorded 400 towns in the Mali empire; Niani (the capital city of ancient Ghana) had about 100,000 people in the fourteenth century; estimates put the population of Gao (the capital of Songhay) at 76,000-100,000 in the sixteenth century, that of Timbuktu at 80,000, and that of Jenne at 30,000-40,000.[30] With due allowance for the general weakness of statistical sources in the distant past, these figures do provide a general order of magnitude of city populations in the Middle Niger during the period. These demographic developments made the region the center of commerce and manufacturing in West Africa in the first five and a half centuries of the first millennium. Its merchants diaspora connected the rest of West Africa to its trading cities, such as Jenne, Timbuktu, and Gao. This regional globalization stimulated an embryonic process of inter-regional specialization in West Africa during the period, with the Niger Bend and the rest of the interior savanna trading mostly their manufactures for the primary products of the guinea savanna and the forest belt (Atlantic Africa) to the south.[31]

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million for sub-Saharan Africa in 1500-1550: L. M. Diop-Maes, "The Population in Sub-Saharan Africa from 14th-20th Century," *International Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (2012), p. 298.

[29] John O. Hunwick, *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire: Al-Sadi's Ta'rikh al-sudan down to 1613 and other Contemporary Documents* (Leiden, Boston, Koln: Brill, 1999); Roderick James McIntosh, *The Peoples of the Middle Niger: The Island of Gold* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998); —, *Ancient Middle Niger: urbanism and the Self-Organizing Landscape* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); —, "Before Timbuktu: cities of the Elder World," in Shamil Jeppie and Souleymane Bachir Diagne (eds.), *The Meanings of Timbuktu* (Cape Town, South Africa: HSRC Press, 2008), pp. 31-43; P. F. de Moraes Farias, *Arabic Medieval Inscriptions from the Republic of Mali: Epigraphy, Chronicles, and Songhay-Tuareg History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); D. T. Niane, "Mali and the second Mandingo expansion," in D. T. Niane (ed.), *General History of Africa, IV: Africa from the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Century* (London, California, Paris: Heinemann, University of California Press, UNESCO, 1984), pp. 117-171; D. T. Niane, "Relationships and exchanges among the different regions," in Niane (ed.), *General History of Africa, IV*, pp. 614-634; D. T. Niane, "Conclusion," in Niane (ed.), *General History of Africa, IV*, pp. 673-686; S. M. Cissoko, "The Songhay from the 12th to the 16th century," in Niane (ed.), *General history of Africa, IV*, pp. 187-210.

[30] Niane, "Mali and the second Mandingo expansion," p. 156; Cissoko, "The Songhay from the 12th to the 16th century," p. 206; Hunwick, *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire*, p. xlix; Diop-Maes, "Population in Sub-Saharan Africa" (p. 291), estimates the population of Timbuktu and Gao before 1591 at 140,000-170,000.

[31] Joseph E. Inikori, "West Africa's Niger Bend in Global Perspective, 1000-1591," Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association, San Diego, January 7-10, 2010.

The driving force of the demographic engine was further reinforced by two other developments of the period — the rise of large centralized states in the Niger Bend and the rest of the interior savanna (ancient Ghana, Mali, Songhay, Kanem-Borno, and the Hausa city-states) and their embrace of Islam, and the entrepôt trade of the Middle Niger cities, which linked the south Saharan salt and copper producers and the global trade of the Mediterranean world to all regions in West Africa. These two developments further intensified the developing process of inter-regional specialization.

The Gold Coast (southern modern Ghana) was a major point in the evolving inter-regional specialization. Its main contribution was gold and kola nuts, traded with the Middle Niger and the interior savanna in exchange for the latter's manufactures and re-exports of textiles and cowries from Europe and Asia.[32] The Gold Coast was also a major market for cotton cloths (Benin cloth) from Benin, some or all of which were produced in northeastern Yorubaland and Nupe.[33]

Internal developments in southeastern Nigeria during the period were also further stimulated by links to the inter-regional trade centered in the Middle Niger. Population growth in the Igbo heartland (northern Igbo in the southern guinea savanna) from the ninth to the fifteenth century had been the main driver of specialization and trade in southeastern Nigeria in those centuries. The more densely populated northern Igboland sent migrants to other parts of the region, while at the same time specializing in manufacturing and commerce. It traded its manufactures with the agricultural communities in the inland river valleys and the salt and fish producers of the Atlantic coast.[34] The rise of the Aro as traders is traceable, in the first instance, to the growing specialization and trade of this early period. Their founding of Arochukwu in the seventeenth century was intended at the time to locate them strategically as middlemen in

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[32] Ivor Wilks, "A Medieval Trade Route from the Niger to the Gulf of Guinea," *Journal of African History*, III, 2 (1962), pp. 337-338; Hunwick, *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire*, p. xxix; Mahdi Adamu, *The Hausa Factor in West African History* (Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University Press, 1978), p. 11.
[33] A. F. C. Ryder, "Dutch Trade on the Nigerian Coast During the Seventeenth Century,'"*Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. III, No. 2 (December 1965), pp. 203-204; S. A. Akintoye, "The North-Eastern Yoruba Districts and the Benin Kingdom," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. IV, No. 4 (June 1965), pp. 544-546.
[34] Kenneth Onwuka Dike and Felicia Ekejiuba, *The Aro of South-eastern Nigeria, 1650-1980: A Study of socio-economic formation and transformation in Nigeria* (Ibadan: University Press, 1990), pp. 109, 115; A. E. Afigbo, "The Spell of Oral History: A Case Study of Northern Igboland," *History in Africa*, Vol. 33 (2006), pp. 39-52.

the trade between the communities in the river valleys and Atlantic coast and those in the interior, particularly the northern Igbo.[35] The link to the larger West African network of inter-regional trade brought, among other things, copper rods (produced in the southern Sahara) which functioned as the main exchange currency in the expanding regional trade,[36] thus, promoting the growth and spread of the market economy in the region.

The ongoing commercializing process in West Africa got a boost from the establishment of a seaborne trade following the Portuguese explorations in the fifteenth century. Between 1450 and 1650, European commercial enterprise stimulated expanding export production of gold, hides and skins, cotton cloths, red pepper, gum, ivory, and wood in West Africa. Gold, hides, and gum were the most important export products by value during the period. The main regions of production were Senegambia and the Gold Coast (modern southern Ghana). There are no reliable records for measuring the volume and value of production and export in the two hundred years from the mid-fifteenth to the mid-seventeenth century. Senegambia (or Greater Senegambia, including the Futa Jallon, by Boubacar Barry's usage) produced and exported all three. The Gold Coast produced only one of the three, gold, of which it was the main producer.

For Senegambia, Curtin and Barry provide figures which indicate some order of magnitude: 35- 410 kilograms of gold a year in the sixteenth and seventh centuries; 30,000-150,000 hides per year (1590-1660); 773 and 1,175 metric tons of gum in 1688 and 1693, respectively.[37] There are various estimates and recorded figures for Gold Coast gold production and export. One estimate put total exports by all European nations at 1,243 kilograms per year, 1471-1750; another, 659 kilograms a year, 1471-1900; yet another put the annual average export by the Portuguese alone at 450 kilograms, 1450-

[35] Dike and Ekejiuba, *The Aro of South-eastern Nigeria*, p. 117.
[36] Thurstan Shaw, *Igbo-Ukwu: An Account of Archaeological Discoveries in Eastern Nigeria*, 2 volumes (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970); Thurstan Shaw, "Archaeological Discoveries: The Example of Igbo-Ukwu," in Thurstan Shaw (ed.), *Discovering Nigeria's Past* (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 47-57; Thurstan Shaw, *Unearthing Igbo-Ukwu: Archaeological discoveries in eastern Nigeria* (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1977); David Northrup, "The Growth of Trade Among the Igbo before 1800," *Journal of African History*, Vol. XIII, No. 2 (1972), pp. 217-236; A. J. H. Latham, "Currency, Credit and Capitalism on the Cross River in the Pre-colonial Era," *Journal of African History*, Vol. XII, No. 4 (1971), pp. 599-605; E. Afigbo, "Pre-colonial Trade Links Between Southeastern Nigeria and the Benue Valley," *Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (1977), pp. 128-129.
[37] Curtin, *Economic Change in Pre-Colonial Africa*, pp. 202, 220; Philip D. Curtin, *Economic Change in Pre-Colonial Africa: Supplementary Evidence* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975), pp. 62, 64, 66; Boubacar Barry, *Senegambia and the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 36-38.

1520.[38] An estimate of total production, "over a period of several centuries," put it at an annual average of 1,016 kilograms, employing about 30,000 miners.[39] This estimate includes exports to the Niger Bend entrepôt. Given the nature of the sources, none of these figures is likely to be accurate; they are all likely to have large margins of error, either way. But, taken together, they certainly show an order of magnitude that points to the fact that seaborne trade from the mid-fifteenth to the mid-seventeenth century stimulated growing production of commodities for export large enough to add a significant amount of fuel to the engine driving the commercializing process in Senegambia and the Gold Coast. And there is evidence to show this, especially on the Gold Coast; it will be discussed shortly.

The other export products of the period were not particularly large in volume and value. But some of them, such as cotton cloths and red pepper, were important enough to warrant a brief discussion. Cotton cloths were very different from the other products, because the European traders acted mainly as carriers in intra-West African trade; very little of the product was exported to Europe during the period. As John Vogt noted more than three decades ago, the Gold Coast had been an export market for other West African cotton cloth producers in the centuries preceding European Atlantic traders,[40] apparently because the production of gold and kola nuts was lucrative enough for the Akan entrepreneurs to import cloth from other West African producers. The entry of the Portuguese, Dutch, and English traders as carriers in this intra-West African trade in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries expanded the local cloth trade considerably.[41] Producers in south-west Nigeria (northeastern Yoruba, Nupe, and the Benin Kingdom)

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[38] Raymond E. Dumett, *El Dorado in West Africa: The Gold-Mining Frontier, African Labor, and Colonial Capitalism in the Gold Coast, 1871-1900* (Athens, Oxford: Ohio University Press, James Currey, 1998), pp. 2-3.

[39] A. Texeira da Mota and P. E. H. Hair, *East of Mina: Afro-European Relations on the Gold Coast in the 1550s and 1560s, An Essay with Supporting Documents* (Madison: African Studies Program, University of Wisconsin, Studies in African Sources, 3), p. 27.

[40] John Vogt, *Portuguese Rule on the Gold Coast, 1460-1682* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1979), p. 67.

[41] A. F. C. Ryder, "Dutch Trade on the Nigerian Coast During the Seventeenth Century," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. III, No. 2 (December 1965); S. A. Akintoye, "The North-Eastern Yoruba Districts and the Benin Kingdom," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. IV, No. 4 (June 1965); Kwame Yeboa Daaku, *Trade and Politics on the Gold Coast, 1600-1720: A Study of the African Reaction to European Trade* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 24; Marion Johnson, "Technology, Competition, and African Crafts," in Clive Dewey and A. G. Hopkins (eds.), *The Imperial Impact: Studies in the Economic History of Africa and India* (London: The Athlone Press, 1978), pp. 262-263.

were the main beneficiaries. Generically, these were what the European traders called "Benin cloth". Though some may have been produced in the Benin Kingdom, they were produced largely in northeastern Yoruba and Nupe. Benin traders imported and sold them to the European traders who carried them to the Gold Coast. As the trade grew, the Benin traders developed a sort of quasi proto-industrial organization of the production in northeastern Yoruba: The former specified the quality of the product and the latter produced cloths with the specified quality and quantity specifically for the Benin traders. The Yoruba producers called them cloths for the Benin or Benin cloths.[42] As A. F. C. Ryder pointed out, the growth of the European carrying cloth trade in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries stimulated the expansion of Benin regional trade with its northeastern neighbors, the Yoruba and Nupe;[43] it, thus, initiated a process of inter-regional specialization. Adding the export trade in red pepper, early European commercial enterprise must have contributed significantly to the commercializing process and the extension of the market economy in southwestern Nigeria. To a lesser extent, the ivory trade made a somewhat similar contribution in southeastern Nigeria.[44]

The combined contribution of population growth and inter-continental trade to the commercializing process and the evolution of the market economy in West Africa, discussed in the preceding paragraphs, created favorable conditions for the long-run gradual transformation of West African agriculture from subsistence to commercial farming. Consistent with its long history of population growth, entrepôt trade, and urbanism, evidence in the Niger Bend shows agriculture moving increasingly from subsistence to commercial farming by the fifteenth century. While the millet, guinea corn, and rice consumed by the thousands of state functionaries in the Songhay capital of Gao were procured directly from the personal estates of the Askiyas in the sixteenth century, those consumed by the rest of the city's population, estimated at 76,000-100,000 at the time (including thousands of professionals and craftsmen), were brought from

[42] Akintoye, "The North Eastern Yoruba," pp. 545-546.
[43] Ryder, "Dutch Trade," pp. 203-204.
[44] Inikori, "The Development of Entrepreneurship," pp. 63-65.

territories about a hundred miles south of the city.[45] The other cities of the Niger Bend provided similar markets for agricultural products.[46]

Given its proximity to the Niger Bend, Senegambia shared some of the developments in that region. The growth of European Atlantic trade from the mid-fifteenth century — the production of gold, cowhides, and gum for seaborne export — added more force to the growth of market opportunities for the long-run process of agricultural commercialization. Available evidence shows that the growth of Atlantic trade in cowhides from the sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth century expanded cattle rearing, which enriched the cattle-rearing Fulani and raised their political status, especially in the Futa Jallon area.[47] The growth of cattle rearing must have created a domestic market for arable farmers. The growth of gold and gum production for Atlantic trade extended that market further to encourage grain producers to expand the marketed surplus. As Curtin noted, the major changes in Senegambia's pre-colonial agriculture occurred in the two hundred years from the mid-fifteenth to the mid-seventeenth century, after which there was "comparative stability in agricultural technology" in the following two hundred years.[48]

There is no direct evidence on agricultural development in southwest and southeastern Nigeria in the period, 1450-1650. But it is reasonable to presume that the expansion of the cotton cloth trade, with its quasi proto-industrial organization of production, must have created some market opportunity to encourage increases in the marketed surplus by food producers, while also expanding cash production of raw cotton. The production of red pepper for Atlantic trade certainly added something to production for market exchange in the Benin trading area. For southeastern Nigeria, the demographic developments and their specialization effects discussed earlier in the paper must have created market opportunities for the long-term process of agricultural commercialization. And we have some evidence to that effect. The Portuguese explorer, Duarte Pacheco

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[45] Hunwick, *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire*, pp. l-li.
[46] Joseph E. Inikori, "Transatlantic Slavery and Economic Development in the Atlantic World: West Africa, 1450-1850," in David Eltis and Stanley L. Engerman (eds.), *The Cambridge World History of Slavery, Volume 3: AD 1420-AD 1804* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 658-659.
[47] Barry, *Senegambia*, p. 25.
[48] Curtin, *Economic Change*, pp. 13-15.

Pereira, reported in 1505 on the trade between the communities on the Atlantic coast of southeastern Nigeria and the communities in the interior:

> At the mouth of this river within the creek above mentioned [Rio Real] is a very large village of some 2,000 inhabitants, where much salt is made. The bigger canoes here, made from a single trunk, are the largest in the Ethiopias of Guinea; some of them are large enough to hold eighty men, and they come from a hundred leagues or more up this river bringing yams in large quantities, which, in this district, are very good and nourishing…[49]

Internal evidence in the source makes it clear that the large village mentioned is Bonny. The relatively large population of this coastal town at the opening of the sixteenth century is clear evidence of the population movements of the fifteenth century triggered by developments in northern Igbo between the ninth and fifteenth century, as discussed earlier in the paper. A hundred leagues will be about 400 miles, as the Portuguese league was four miles.[50] The large canoes bringing large quantities of yams from 400 miles in the interior are a clear indication of the growing regional specialization and trade, thus, creating market opportunities for the long-run process of agricultural commercialization in southeastern Nigeria.

Probably the most intensive and best documented developments in the commercializing process in West Africa during the period, 1450-1650, occurred in modern southern Ghana (the Gold Coast). The process of agricultural commercialization in the region reached a high point during the period. The growth of seaborne trade in gold from the mid-fifteenth century and the continuing expansion of gold and kola nut trade to the Niger Bend entrepôt and other areas of the interior savanna interacted with population growth and urbanization to create a growing domestic market for agricultural products. Urbanization and trade encouraged the development of division of labor between town and country, as growing specialization dissolved the integration of agriculture and

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[49] Duarte Pacheco Pereira, *Esmeraldo De Situ Orbis*, Translated and edited by George H. T. Kimble (London: The Hakluyt Society, 2nd series, No. 79, 1937), p. 132, cited in Inikori, "Transatlantic Slavery," p. 661. Kimble's analysis of the evidence indicates that the *Esmeraldo* was written by Pereira between 1505 and 1508 (pp. xvi-xvii).

[50] Edwin Ardener, "Documentary and Linguistic Evidence for the Rise of the Trading Polities between Rio del Rey and Cameroons, 1500-1650," in I. M. Lewis (ed.), *History and Social Anthropology* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1968), p. 84.

manufacturing, the latter moving to the towns. [51] There must have been a shift in relative prices in favor of agriculture, encouraging wealthy Asante merchants to invest their accumulated profits from the gold and kola nut trade in forest clearing to create farmlands in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[52] The magnitude of this development is indicated by the amount of purchased labor imported from other parts of West Africa (brought by Niger Bend traders from the north and by European carriers in the Atlantic trade) from the mid-fifteenth century to the mid-seventeenth, estimated at about 100,000 (or an average of 500 a year) by Ray Kea.[53] The evolution of a land market was also in progress during the period. As Kea noted, “there was clearly a lively market in the buying and selling of land.”[54] Peasants were drawn into production for the market for two basic reasons. Their rents were paid in money (money rents) during the period. They, therefore, had to sell to secure cash to pay their rents. They also had to produce for the market in order to buy the manufactures they needed from the craftsmen in the towns and cities.[55]

Taking together the foregoing evidence, we can say with a good amount of confidence that the long-run process of agricultural commercialization in West Africa progressed steadily from early times to the mid-seventeenth century, propelled by population growth and inter-continental trade. The evidence shows developing local (division of labor between town and country) and inter-regional specialization and trade — the growth of trade and specialization mutually reinforcing each other in a virtuous circle. Growing agricultural commercialization was one component of the expanding local and inter-regional trade and the development and geographical extension of the market economy during the period. These developments are clearly captured by the evolution of exchange currencies and the growth over time of their volume. The main

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[51] Ray A.Kea, *Settlements, Trade, and Polities in the Seventeenth-Century Gold Coast* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), pp. 11, 85-91. Ray Kea notes that “Various orally transmitted histories refer to the importance of towns, or urban centers , in many parts of the Gold Coast region prior to 1700. Indeed, they indicate explicitly that certain districts were more urbanized and populous in the seventeenth century than they were in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries. Both archaeological evidence and contemporary written accounts support this view” (p. 11).

[52] Ivor Wilks, ‘Land, Labour, Capital and the Forest Kingdom of Asante: A Model of Early Change,’ in J. Friedman and M. J. Rowlands (eds.), *The Evolution of Social Systems* (London: Duckworth, 1977); Kea, *Settlement, Trade, and Polities*, pp. 85-91; Ivor Wilks, *Forests of Gold: Essays on the Akan Kingdom of Asante* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1993).

[53] Kea, *Settlement, Trade, and Polities*, pp. 105-106.

[54] *Ibid*., p. 90.

[55] *Ibid*., p. 165.

currencies which developed and spread during the period were cowries and copper rods. They were already well-established before the growth of European Atlantic trade.[56] The overwhelming dominance of these currencies in the commodity composition of the imports brought by the European traders in the early decades of their commercial enterprise in West Africa is a reflection of the growing local and inter-regional trade, continuing from the preceding centuries. To illustrate, cowries imports were 59.2 and 52.4 percent of the total value of imports into the Bight of Benin in 1681 and 1684, respectively; copper rods and manillas (the local currencies of southeastern Nigeria) were 67.6 and 69.4 percent of the value of imports into the Bight of Biafra in 1661 and 1662, respectively.[57] These exchange currencies were sold as commodities by the European traders; they functioned as exchange currencies only in internal trade among Africans. The volume of their imports was, therefore, a measure of local and inter-regional trade and of the increase in the quantity of currency in circulation at a given moment in the West African sub-regions of import.[58] If by the mid-seventeenth century much progress had been made in the commercializing process — the growth of the market economy in general and agricultural commercialization in particular — why was the extent of commercial agriculture still extremely limited two hundred years later, as shown earlier in the paper? This is the question for the section that follows.

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[56] Marion Johnson, "The Cowrie Currencies of West Africa," Part I, *Journal of African History*, Vol. XI, No. 1 (1970), pp. 17-49; Marion Johnson, "The Cowrie Currencies of West Africa," Part II, *Journal of African History*, Vol. XI, No. 3 (1970), pp. 331-353; Inikori, "Transatlantic Slavery," pp. 657-658.

[57] Joseph E. Inikori, "Changing Commodity Composition of Imports into West Africa, 1650-1850: A Window into the Impact of the Transatlantic Slave Trade on African Societies," in James Kwesi Anquandah (ed.), *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: Landmarks, Legacies, Expectations: Proceedings of the International Conference on Historic Slave Route held at Accra, Ghana, on 30 August – 2 September, 2004* (Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2007), pp. 67-71.

[58] Analyses by Patrick Manning and Jouke S. Wigboldus, concerning the coastal region of modern Republic of Bénin in 1470-1660, are generally consistent with the conclusion reached here, but with a major difference in detail. Manning's is about the same. Wigboldus disagrees with Manning's emphasis on developments before 1470 and believes most developments occurred in 1470-1660, stimulated by European Atlantic trade and the adoption of American and Asian crops. Wigboldus completely ignores the far-reaching effect of the several centuries of intra-West African trade centered in the Niger Bend and grossly exaggerates the positive impact of early European Atlantic trade: Patrick Manning, *Slavery, Colonialism and Economic Growth in Dahomey, 1640-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 22-27; Jouke S. Wigboldus, "Trade and Agriculture in Coastal Bénin, 1470-1660: An Examination of Manning's Early Growth Thesis," *A. A. G. Bijdragn* (1986), pp. 299-383. Manning was not persuaded by the argument, but he did not formally respond (personal correspondence). I do not find the argument convincing either. Manning's analysis is generally consistent with recent research.

III.2. Population, Trade, and the Commercializing Process in West Africa: Atlantic Slave Trade Era, 1650-1850

To show what happened to the commercializing process in West Africa in the two hundred years from the mid-seventeenth century to the mid-nineteenth, we need to examine what happened to population growth and inter-continental trade, the two factors that were the main drivers of the process in the preceding centuries. Population movement was certainly one of the most important developments in the Atlantic world in the three and a half centuries, 1500-1850. In the first one hundred years of the period, the population of the Native Americans experienced a well-known catastrophe (mentioned earlier in this paper). The attempt to fill the void left by that catastrophe with people transported against their will from sub-Saharan Africa created another demographic crisis on the eastern shores of the Atlantic, largely western Africa. Scholarly efforts to document and measure the magnitude of the crisis is ongoing. We now know a good deal about what can be known, but not much about the unknowable.[59] The most recent estimate puts the total number of the forced migrants from Africa across the Atlantic at 12,521,334, of which 6,284,091 (50.2 percent) were from West Africa.[60]

Patrick Manning, in his ongoing project on African population, has attempted to incorporate this estimate in his construction of the decennial population of Africa by region, 1650-1950. Computed adaptation of his data is shown in Table 1.

Apart from the export figures, it is not clear how much consideration, if any, Manning gave to the adverse demographic effects of the socioeconomic dislocations caused by the political conflicts and wars associated with the violent procurement of the captives shipped across the Atlantic during the period, 1650-1867. Be that as it may, Manning's figures can be used with some degree of confidence to demonstrate what happened to one of the main drivers of the commercializing process. Manning is yet to

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[59] Joseph E. Inikori, "The Known, the Unknown, the Knowable, and the Unknowable: Evidence and the Evaluation of Evidence in the Measurement of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade," in Toyin Falola (ed.), *Ghana in Africa and the World: Essays in Honor of Adu Boahen* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2003), pp. 535-565.

[60] David Eltis and David Richardson (eds.), *Extending the Frontiers: Essays on the New Transatlantic Slave Trade Database* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 46-47; Joseph E. Inikori, Review of *Extending the Frontiers: Essays on the New Transatlantic Slave Trade Database*, edited by David Eltis and David Richardson. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), *Journal of Economic History* (2011), pp. 249-251.

Table 1: West African Population by Region, 1700-1880

	1700	1800	1840	1850	1860	1870	1880
Senegambia	2,668,813	2,282,692	2,271,993	2,273,257	2,285,537	2,297,860	2,310,366
Upper Guinea Coast	4,424,478	3,989,025	3,880,851	3,870,150	3,867,614	3,871,696	3,877,779
Ivory Coast	1,954,686	1,762,105	1,714,724	1,710,097	1,709,007	1,710,869	1,713,611
Gold Coast	4,442,941	3,667,014	3,530,742	3,507,571	3,486,979	3,466,058	3,445,319
Bight of Benin	7,112,105	5,322,667	4,753,748	4,639,508	4,589,394	4,558,,732	4,530,727
Bight of Biafra	9,218,019	7,923,635	7,357,374	7,337,775	7,320,904	7,311,602	7,302,018
Western Sudan	5,782,316	5,693,443	5,629,462	5,626,,137	5,662,170	5,618,299	5,633,347
Central Sudan	14,606,469	15,138,391	15,174,428	15,219,635	15,266,081	15,333,157	15,401,286
WEST AFRICA	**50,209,827**	**45,788,972**	**44,313,322**	**44,184,130**	**44,147,686**	**44,168,273**	**44,214,453**
Western Nigeria	5,802,771	4,319,756	3,847,280	3,752,054	3,710,098	3,683,968	3,659,959
Eastern Nigeria	6,365,541	5,496,718	5,121,733	5,110,176	5,100,573	5,096,193	5,091,816
Northern Nigeria	11,899,558	12,332,902	12,362,260	12,399,090	12,436,928	12,491,589	12,547,108
NIGERIA TOTAL	**24,067,870**	**22,149,376**	**21,331,273**	**21,261,320**	**21,247,599**	**21,271,750**	**21,298,883**
Southern Gold Coast	3,319,592	2,746,951	2,637,531	2,620,191	2,604,780	2,589,123	2,573,589
Northern Gold Coast	766,082	760,586	754,997	755,128	755,259	755,483	757,672
GOLD COAST TOTAL	**4,085,674**	**3,507,537**	**3,392,528**	**3,375,319**	**3,360,039**	**3,344,606**	**3,331,261**
Mali	2,246,868	2,209,522	2,183,367	2,181,819	2,179,983	2,178,149	2,183,909
Upper Volta	2,769,366	2,723,335	2,691,098	2,689,190	2,686,928	2,684,667	2,691,766

Sources and Note: Constructed from Patrick Manning, "African Population,1650-1950: Methods for New Estimates by Region," African Economic History Conference, Vancouver, BC, April 2013. Southern Gold Coast is Akan plus TVT (non-Akan on the Gold Coast); Togo is not included.

extend the decennial estimates by region from 1700 to 1650. We, therefore, limit our discussion to the period shown in Table 1, 1700-1880.

As the table shows, the population of West Africa did not only stop growing from 1700 to 1880, it actually declined absolutely during the period. For most regions, the decline continued up to 1860; it ended in 1840 for Senegambia and 1850 for the Western Sudan. For the Gold Coast, the Bight of Benin, and the Bight of Biafra, the decline continued up to 1880. The regional distribution allows us compare the demographic impact of the trans-Saharan trade with that of the trans-Atlantic. While all other regions experienced population decline during the period, the Central Sudan (largely Northern Nigeria) — the main region for the trans-Saharan trade, but little affected by the trans-

Atlantic trade — experienced growth, from 14.6 million in 1700 to 15.4 million in 1880. This means that the magnitude of decline in the regions most seriously affected by the trans-Atlantic trade — the Gold Coast, the Bight of Benin, and the Bight of Biafra — was relatively greater than the West African overall figures indicate. Taken together, the population of the Gold Coast, the Bight of Benin, and the Bight of Biafra decreased from 20,773,065 in 1700 to 15,336,392 in 1870. For these three most seriously affected regions in West Africa, their population in 1870 was 73.8 percent of what it was in 1700; they were 26.2 percent less populous in 1870 than they were in 1700. The situation was even worse still in Southern Nigeria (Western Nigeria plus Eastern Nigeria), a decrease from 12,168,312 in 1700 to 8,780,161 in 1870: 27.8 percent less populous in 1870 than in 1700. During the same period, the population of Northern Nigeria increased from 11,899,558 to 12,491,589, rising from 49.4 to 58.7 percent of the national total. This is significant for the relative development of commercial agriculture in pre-colonial southern and northern Nigeria. It is even more significant for the political economy of the country in later years.

For a region that was just breaking through the early stages of the commercializing process in the mid-seventeenth century, there can be no doubt that the demographic developments from the mid-seventeenth century to the middle decades of the nineteenth were very damaging to that process. Other things equal, stagnant population growth for over two hundred years in the given circumstances would mean no growth in the market for agricultural products; an absolute population decline meant a decrease in market activities and, therefore, a decrease in demand for agricultural products. Hence, there would be no market incentive for producers to move from subsistence to production for the market. In fact, other things were not equal during the period. The other major driver of the commercializing process in the preceding centuries, inter-continental commodity trade, was also adversely affected. To compound the problem, the generalized violence associated with the forceful procurement of the captives shipped to the Americas interacted with other developments to inflict a fatal blow on inter-regional trade within West Africa and create enclave economies on the Atlantic coast and the immediate hinterland. Let us examine the details of these developments.

As shown earlier in the paper, European commercial enterprise in western Africa centered on commodities in the early centuries. The dominant commodity was gold. But the Portuguese also established plantation colonies in the Atlantic islands off the coast of western Africa — Cape Verde Islands, São Tomé, and Principe — in the second half of the fifteenth century. The most commercially important of the fifteenth-century Portuguese African colonies was that of São Tomé and Principe, which became a leading producer of sugar for the European market in the sixteenth century, producing for export over 2,800 tons a year in the 1570s.[61] As the European traders responded to growing demand for slave labor in the Americas and the export of captives from western Africa expanded from the mid-seventeenth century, Atlantic trade in western African commodities declined over time. By the late eighteenth century, the value of commodities was about 9 percent of western Africa's total Atlantic export trade, the value of captives exported to the Americas making up a staggering 91 percent.[62] In the period, 1650-1850, commodity production for Atlantic commerce shifted decisively from western Africa to the Americas, where captives shipped from western and southeastern Africa were enslaved and employed in large-scale commodity production.[63] The export of African labor to the Americas during the period amounted to the transfer of western Africa's relative advantage (labor) to the Americas, which enhanced the competitiveness of the Americas in commodity production for Atlantic commerce, while damaging that of western Africa.[64] It is no surprise that while the total value (f.o.b.) of western Africa's Atlantic commodity exports in the 58 years, 1750-1807, amounted to ₤12.1 million (sterling), that for the Americas in the 40 years, 1761-1800, was ₤610.2 million (sterling), over 80 percent of which was produced by the labor of enslaved Africans and their descendants. The figure for Brazil alone, ₤71.5 million (virtually all produced by the labor of enslaved Africans and their descendants), was about six times that of western

[61] Tony Hodges and Malyn Newitt, *São Tomé and Principe: From Plantation Colony to Microstate* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988), p. 20.
[62] Joseph E. Inikori, "West Africa's Seaborne Trade, 1750-1850: Volume, Structure and Implications," in G. Liesegang, H. Pasch & A. Jones (eds.) *Figuring African Trade: Proceedings of the Symposium on the Quantification and Structure of the Import and Export and Long Distance Trade in Africa in the 19th Century (C. 1800-1913), St. Augustin 3-6 January 1983*, Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1986), pp. 53-60.
[63] Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution*, Chapter 4, pp. 156-214.
[64] Inikori, "Reversal of Fortune."

Africa as a whole.[65] As stated earlier in the paper, it was this growth of specialized large-scale production of commodities for Atlantic commerce which transformed the predominantly subsistence economies of the pre-Columbus Americas into predominantly market economies, with highly commercialized agriculture, by the mid-nineteenth century.

It is clear enough that the massive export of African labor to the Americas and the negative externalities generated by the forceful procurement of that labor were extremely damaging to West Africa's competitiveness in the development of commodity production for Atlantic commerce, while at the same time considerably enhancing that of the Americas. What is debated is why European entrepreneurs preferred to employ African labor to develop commodity production for Atlantic commerce in the Americas instead of doing the same in western Africa, a development that had already begun in the fifteenth century. The literature contains a number of contending arguments — arguments centered on the influence of mercantilist calculations in Europe;[66] arguments based on the politico-military capability of western African states to deny European entrepreneurs access to resources needed for European managed large-scale commodity production in Africa;[67] various strands of arguments stressing the role of ecology and agricultural labor productivity in western Africa.[68] This subject deserves a long paper devoted entirely to it.

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65 Computed from Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution*, Table 4.4, p. 181, and Inikori, "West Africa's Seaborne Trade," p. 53. The western Africa's total is computed from the value of exports to Britain estimated in the latter source at 45 percent of the total.

66 Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution*, pp. 381-393; Joseph E. Inikori, *The Chaining of a Continent: Export Demand for Captives and the History of Africa South of the Sahara, 1450-1870* (UNESCO Project, published by Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, Kingston, Jamaica, 1992), pp. 45-52.

67 David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 137-149. Eltis concludes that "African resistance resulted in Europeans taking slaves away in ships as a second-best to working slaves on African plantations or mines" (p. 149). Simplified versions of the Eltis argument are being incorporated into textbooks: "Africans repelled efforts to establish plantations in Africa, so Europeans transferred African labor across the ocean for the burgeoning plantations there." Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *The Atlantic in World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 54.

68 H. A. Gemery and J. S. Hogendorn, "Comparative Disadvantage: The Case of Sugar Cultivation in West Africa," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, IX: 3 (1979), pp. 429-449; H. A. Gemery and J. S. Hogendorn, "Assessing Productivity in Precolonial African Agriculture and Industry, 1500-1800," *African Economic History*, 19 (1990-91), pp. 31-35; Patrick Manning, *Slavery and African Life: Occidental, Oriental, and African Slave Trades* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 21; Gareth Austin, "The 'Reversal of Fortune' Thesis and the Compression of History: Perspectives from African and Comparative Economic History," *Journal of International Development*, 20 (2008), p. 996; Gareth Austin, "Resources, techniques, and strategies south of the Sahara: revising the factor endowments perspective on

Before that paper is written, we present in brief what the application of historical methodology to the evidence currently available compels us to believe.

One common weakness in the contending arguments is the lumping together of Europeans in the Atlantic world and treating them as a single group with a common purpose at all times from the mid-fifteenth century to the mid-nineteenth. Thus, we ask why the Europeans forcefully transported Africans across the Atlantic to produce commodities on a large scale in the Americas instead of doing so in western Africa. This question presupposes that all the participating European nations and their nationals had the same costs and benefits in the proposed choices during the entire period. This conceptual error blinds us to the historical reality and conceals from us the sequence of causation, making it difficult for us to see the main factors in the causal process and accurately assess their relative causal weights. When the European nations and their nationals are disaggregated and the social and private costs and benefits (to the nations and their nationals) of mercantilism and the attendant conflicts are properly considered against the political and economic changes in the Atlantic world over time, then, we can observe the causal sequence and the causal factors more clearly. From the point of view of the costs and benefits calculus of the European participants, we must not under-estimate the role of the mercantilist state in creating conditions that affected the private costs and benefits of the nationals of the competing mercantilist European nations and the endogenization of that role in the choice making process of those nationals.

In the first one hundred years of European commercial enterprise in western Africa (1450-1550), Atlantic trade in African captives was by the Portuguese and it served the labor needs of Portugal and Spain in the Atlantic world. The 1494 treaty of Tordesillas, which settled the dispute between Spain and Portugal over the newly explored territories in the Atlantic world, gave western Africa and much of modern Brazil to Portugal and the rest went to Spain. As the Spaniards settled down to exploit the silver and gold mines in their conquered American territories in the sixteenth century and enslaved African labor was needed, the Spanish state and its nationals had nothing to gain leaving those Africans employed in export commodity production in Africa, having been excluded there by

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African economic development, 1500-2000," *Economic History Review*, Vol. 61, No. 3 (August 2008), pp. 587-624.

treaty, but everything to gain paying traders to ship them to Spanish America. The Portuguese were happy to oblige, because they could do it at no cost to the labor needs of their African plantation colonies, the largest of which was São Tomé. The Portuguese had established those plantation colonies on the Atlantic islands off the African coast in the fifteenth century soon after they discovered them, but for several decades they made no effort whatsoever to establish plantation or mining colonies on the African mainland. They built forts on the mainland not to protect themselves against Africans, but against other Europeans. The main business of the Portuguese during the period was the trade in gold, supplemented with the trade in red pepper, hides, cotton cloths, ivory, and other products mentioned earlier in the paper. The Portuguese saw no need for colonies to prosecute the trade in these products. The French and the English, who came several decades later, also showed no inclination to colonize. As Teixeira da Mota and P. E. H. Hair conclude from their examination of the sixteenth-century records,

> European activities, including proposals for the setting up of forts on the coast, are more comprehensible in the context of contemporary European recognition of the need for voluntary African participation and co-operation in commerce than in the context of an assumed European lust for domination of the coast. . . . A final, somewhat speculative conclusion is that the over-competition in the gold trade evidenced by the events of the 1550s and 1560s led the Europeans to shift inexorably to a trade capable of greater expansion and therefore profit, the trade in slaves.[69]

Without mainland colonies in the first one hundred years of their commercial enterprise in western Africa, mercantilist Portugal and her nationals made no efforts to develop on the mainland plantations for the production of export commodities. When the king of Portugal sent a trade mission to the king of Kongo in 1512, the objective was the supply of captives to meet the labor needs of the plantation colony of São Tomé; the development of plantations for export production in mainland western Africa was not included.[70] The early Portuguese trade in captives from the mainland, thus, served Portuguese African island colonies, Akan entrepreneurs on the Gold Coast, and southern European buyers. Spanish American demand in the sixteenth century was met by

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[69] Da Mota and Hair, *East of Mina*, pp. 3-4.
[70] Anne Hilton, *The Kingdom of Kongo* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 55-57.

expanding the early trade. There is no evidence of Portuguese efforts to develop plantations for export production anywhere in mainland western Africa being repelled by Africans in the first one hundred years of Portuguese commercial enterprise in the region.

Portuguese colonization in their sphere of the Atlantic world moved from the unpopulated islands off the coast of western Africa to the extremely thinly populated Brazil in the sixteenth century. Initially the Portuguese had intended Brazil to be a place for trade like mainland western Africa, the early traded product being brazilwood, from which the colony's name was derived. Ultimately, the extremely sparse population and encroachment by other European powers led to colonization and the development of large-scale plantation agriculture.[71] Once established as a colony, with a colonial administration and a military organization capable of keeping away competing European powers and their nationals, Brazil and its vast cultivable lands became the central focus for Portuguese-led development of plantation agriculture similar to São Tomé, but on a vastly greater scale. While continuing to ship African captives to Spanish America, the Portuguese trade in African captives served Brazil primarily from the late sixteenth century.

We may ask why the Portuguese shipped African captives to Brazil instead of employing them to produce export commodities in western Africa. It is because, given the reality of the mercantilist Atlantic world of the time, that was the winning alternative for the mercantilist Portuguese state and its nationals. There was no Portuguese colony on the western African mainland in the mid-sixteenth century to compete with Brazil, and São Tomé, the main Portuguese plantation colony in western Africa at the time, had more or less reached its limit of expansion.[72] Once the profitability of sugar production in Brazil and the profitability of the captive trade to supply the labor were established, and Brazil became the main supplier of sugar to Europe in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, the trade in captives across the Atlantic increasingly dwarfed other forms of trade in western Africa. From the seventeenth century, English, French, Dutch,

[71] James Lockhart and Stuart B. Schwartz, *Early Latin America: A history of colonial Spanish America and Brazil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 181-182. As Lockhart and Schwartz put it, "In the beginning, then, Portuguese contact with Brazil was limited to a series of *feitorias* (factories) analogous to those on the African coast; in the course of the sixteenth century, however, a number of internal pressures and external threats forced the Portuguese to initiate colonization and settlement" (p. 182).
[72] Hodges and Newitt, *São Tomé and Principe*, pp. 20-22

and other Europeans saw the captive trade across the Atlantic as the main attraction in western Africa. When, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, the Portuguese decided ultimately to establish a colony on the western African mainland, the Portuguese colony of Angola, the main objective was the procurement of captives for export to Brazil.[73]

The evidence shows unambiguously that efforts to develop export trade in western African commodities in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were made by European companies largely to supplement their declining trade in captives (as private European traders captured a growing share of the trade) or by nationals of European countries whose governments had abolished (or about to abolish) the trade in captives. By the time these efforts were made, the socio-political conflicts engendered by the violent procurement of captives for export had already created socioeconomic conditions which made it increasingly difficult to develop the peaceful production of export commodities on a large scale in mainland western Africa. At the same time, the employment of enslaved Africans and their descendants had advanced considerably the competitiveness of the Americas in large-scale commodity production for Atlantic commerce, as mentioned earlier. A considerable body of evidence points directly to a combination of the mercantilist policies of the European states and these socioeconomic and political conditions as the main reason for the failure of these efforts.[74]

The underlying mercantilist calculations, which blocked out European-led development of export commodity production in mainland western Africa from the activities of the Portuguese in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, were made explicit by

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[73] Hilton, *Kingdom of Kongo*, pp. 148-178; Jan Vansina, "The Kingdom of Kongo and its Neighbours," in B.A. Ogot (ed.), *General History of Africa. V: Africa from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, Berkeley, Paris: Heinemann, University of California Press, UNESCO1992), pp.546-587; Linda M. Heywood and John K. Thornton, *Central Africans, Atlantic Creoles, and the Foundation of the Americas, 1585-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,2007), pp. 109-168; Miller, *Way of Death*. Heywood and Thornton mention the Portuguese Jesuit Order owning slave plantations in Angola in the mid-seventeenth century, 50 plantations with 10,000 slaves in 1658, but present no details of what was produced. Apparently they produced foodstuffs for the Luanda market (Heywood and Thornton, *Central Africans*, p. 186). According to Herbert Klein, captive exports made up 94 percent of the total value of exports from the Portuguese colony of Angola in 1815: Herbert S. Klein, "The Portuguese slave trade from Angola in the eighteenth century," *Journal of Economic History*, Volume XXXII, No. 4 (1972), pp. 894-918, reprinted in J. E. Inikori (ed.), *Forced Migration: The impact of the export slave trade on African societies* (London and New York: Hutchinson, Africana, 1982), fn. 46, p. 328.

[74] Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution*, pp. 381-392; Inikori, *The Chaining of a Continent*, pp. 45-52.

the British government when the English Royal African Company attempted to develop European-led production of export commodities in western Africa in the early eighteenth century, as it waged a losing battle with private British traders in the captive trade. The company's director on the Gold Coast, Sir Dalby Thomas, who initiated the project, had written to the board of directors in London in 1708 that with adequate numbers of slaves from Gambia and Sherbrow (Sierra Leone) he could establish plantations on the Gold Coast to produce as much cotton, sugar, indigo, ginger, and provisions as the company desired. But before the project could proceed beyond the teething stage, the director complained about a bill in the British Parliament intended to prohibit the cultivation of indigo, sugar, and cotton on the Gold Coast.[75] Similar efforts by some private British traders in the 1750s also incurred the wrath of the British government. The British Board of Trade made it clear that the employment of enslaved Africans to produce export commodities in western Africa would compete with producers in British America and deprive them of African labor on which they depended. The Board of Trade stated the underlying mercantilist calculation explicitly:

> That our Possessions in America were firmly secured to us, whereas those in Africa were more open to the Invasions of an Enemy, and besides that in Africa we were only tenants in the Soil which we held at the good will of the Natives.[76]

Given the extraordinary role of the mercantilist state in the political economy of the Atlantic world during the period, these state pronouncements cannot be taken lightly. They ultimately influenced the cost and benefit calculations of the European investors. They added significantly to other negative factors, especially short supply of slave labor which featured prominently in the correspondence of the Dutch and British officers on the coast. Contrary to the arguments in the literature, there is no evidence that the late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century plantation projects failed because the European investors could not secure land in mainland western Africa and/or because the quality of

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[75] Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution*, p. 386.

[76] Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution*, p. 390. A member of the African company's governing committee that had approved the project accepted and reinforced the Board of Trade's argument, saying: "the whole of the question rested upon the point whether our property and possessions in Africa were established & secured with respect to the natives, for if our possession was dependant upon the natives, and we were only tenants at will, it was clear that the introducing of culture and produce might prove of bad consequence" (*Ibid*., p. 391).

the soil and the amount of water made labor productivity too low. The evidence shows consistently that the European investors were able to secure from the African states as much land as they needed. In the early eighteenth century, the Royal African Company's officers on the coast assured the company there was "Extent of ground enough that we can secure your [Honours] the property of . . ."[77] In all the Dutch and English correspondence concerning their plantation activities on the Gold Coast in the early eighteenth century, there is not a single mention of poor soil quality, inadequate water, and low labor productivity. On the contrary, they consistently talked about the productivity of the land they cultivated in superlative terms. Shortage of slaves and white workers was mentioned frequently, followed by the wars and the socio-political conflicts in mainland western Africa.

The most elaborate of the European-led plantation projects was that of the Danes from the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century. The Danes secured from the African states extensive choice lands in well-selected regions on the Gold Coast. They planted thousands of cotton plants and coffee shrubs. In 1805, the Ejebo plantation on the coast had 5,000 cotton plants, reported yielding a good harvest. It also had coffee shrubs. Probably the largest of the early nineteenth-century Danish plantations were in the Akwapim, "a mountainous forest district with a fertile soil and suitable climate," where the Dacubie plantations, measuring about two kilometers in length, had in 1809 no less than 40,000 coffee shrubs and a nursery garden with 100,000 plants.[78] The Danish planters never mentioned any problem of poor soil quality, inadequate water, or low labor productivity. As Georg Nørregård declared, after observing the initial success of the Dacubie plantations: "Proof had at length been given that it would be possible to bring African soil under cultivation and make it yield important products for densely populated Europe."[79] Consistently, their main problems came from local socio-political conflicts

[77] Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution*, p. 387.

[78] Georg Nørregård, *Danish Settlements in West Africa,1658-1850* (Translated by Sigurd Mammen, Boston, Mass.: Boston University Press, 1966), pp. 173, 181, 183. See also Selena Axelrod Winsnes, *Letters on West Africa and the Slave Trade: Paul Erdmann Isert's Journey to Guinea and the Caribbean Islands in Columbia (1788)* (Legon-Accra, Ghana: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2007); Ray A. Kea, "Plantations and labour in the south-east Gold Coast from the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century," in Robin Law (ed.), *From slave trade to 'legitimate' commerce: the commercial transition in nineteenth-century West Africa, Papers from a conference of the Centre of Commonwealth Studies, University of Sterling* (Cambridge: Cambridge university Press, 1995), pp. 119-143.

[79] Nørregård, *Danish Settlements, p. 183.*

arising from persisting conditions long created by the violent procurement of the captives shipped to the Americas. Thus, in 1811, a Fanti-Ashanti war, into which pro-Danish states were drawn, destroyed the flourishing Ejebo and Akwapim plantations; an estimated harvest of 100,000 pounds of coffee at the Akwapim plantations was lost.[80] Occasionally, crisis within the Danish administration on the coast added to the problems.

In summary, it is fair to say that arguments explaining the limited production of commodities in western Africa for Atlantic commerce during the trans-Atlantic slave trade era in terms of low labor productivity arising from ecological conditions in western Africa are speculatively deductive. There is no direct evidence from the Europeans who were actually involved in the development of plantations during the period to support it. What is particularly important, those arguments do not consider what would have happened if the Americas did not have enslaved Africans to employ in large-scale commodity production for Atlantic commerce during the period. There can be no doubt, given the body of available evidence, that in the absence of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and its ramifying consequences, the Americas would not have been able to outcompete western Africa in the production of commodities for Atlantic commerce from the sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth century. Ecologically speaking, it can be argued that the tropical territories in the Americas, such as Brazil, where much of the export products were produced are in no way superior to western Africa. This is the conclusion reached by a recent World Bank sponsored study of the prospects for the successful development of competitive commercial agriculture in selected countries in Africa (including Nigeria), based on comparable regions in Brazil and Asia that have developed globally competitive commercial agriculture.[81] The evidence collected recently from the Zimbabwe large-scale

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[80] *Ibid*., pp. 188-189. As Nørregård put it: "Thus the native wars reduced to total ruin all that the Danes had tried to build up for two decades. The belief that plantations would enable Denmark's Guinea settlements to bring in revenue in the future had been fundamentally shaken" (p. 189). The Danes were possibly the first to conduct a scientific study of soils anywhere in western Africa, sending a medical student in 1800 to study Gold Coast botany for purposes of identifying plants that could be cultivated commercially. While the medical student noted that the Volta River district was not as fertile as rumored, the soil being too salty, he was satisfied with the plantation on the coast, and he believed rice and sugar cane would thrive on the islands in the Volta River (*Ibid*., p. 181).

[81] World Bank, *Awakening Africa's Sleeping Giant: Prospects for Commercial Agriculture in the Guinea Savannah Zone and Beyond* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2009).

commercial farmers in Nigeria is consistent with the World Bank study.[82] All of this surely backs R. A. Pullan's point made over four decades ago:

> There is no resource more important to West Africa than soil. *Whatever its capabilities may be in terms of supporting plant and animal life (and these are very variable), and however maligned it may have been in this respect (often quite unjustly)*, the soil has furnished indirectly adequate food for the population. Agricultural exports have dominated the economies of West African countries for many years and will continue to do so.[83]

The application of historical methodology to the analysis of the evidence, thus, compels us to say that the trans-Atlantic slave trade adversely affected the two major drivers (population growth and inter-continental trade) of the commercializing process and the development of commercial agriculture in West Africa from 1650 to 1850. What is left to do is demonstrate, with evidence, the mechanisms which transmitted the adverse effects on the driving factors and related developments to the commercializing process and the development of commercial agriculture in West Africa during the period.

To start, the absolute decline of population and inter-continental trade combined with the socio-political conflicts engendered by captive exports to reverse earlier trends in market development — urbanization; the movement of manufacturing away from agricultural villages to urban centers; growing division of labor between town and country; increasing monetization and the geographical spread of the market economy; expanding inter-regional trade and specialization. The case of the Gold Coast is well-documented by Ray Kea's research and the testimony of resident European traders. As Kea narrates, the Akani commercial system, which had been central to the development of trade and markets in the centuries preceding the mid-seventeenth, collapsed, accompanied by "the deurbanization and depopulation of a number of coastal and forest districts, a relative decline in gold production and in peasant market production, and the ruralization of crafts."[84] An important development during this crisis period was the

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[82] Evidence from my interview of Hunter Coetzee and James Peter Crouch of the Shonga Farms Holding Limited, Shonga, Kwara State, Nigeria, May 25, 2013.

[83] R. A. Pullan, "The Soil Resources of West Africa," in M. F. Thomas and G. W. Whittington (eds.), *Environment and Land Use in Africa* (London: Methuen, 1969), p. 147; emphasis added.

[84] Kea, *Settlements, Trade, and Polities*, pp. 286-287.

backward movement from money rent paid by peasants to rent in kind (produce).[85] This amounts to a significant demonetization of the economy. The employment of imported labor to clear forest and create farmlands also ceased; forest clearing was now done by the corporate peasant village. Adversely affected by the general crisis, some of the nobility moved with their families and retainers from the towns to the villages. Others who remained in the towns had to employ servile labor to produce their subsistence in nearby servile farming villages, leading to “the expansion of slave-based agricultural production in the hinterlands of the central townships.”[86] While some of the produce from the servile farming villages may have been sold, their primary function was the provisioning of their owners’ families and their retainers, what has been characterized as “provision” or “subsistence” slavery.[87] The growth of servile labor in agricultural production in other coastal regions of West Africa during the period was very much like the Gold Coast development. Thus, in southeastern Nigeria Latham found that “Duke Ephraim, perhaps the greatest Efik trader of all time, peopled the vast agricultural area of Akpabuyo to the east of Calabar with slaves purchased from the profits of his trade,” but did not employ them to produce for the market.[88]

Kea’s description of late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Gold Coast is consistent with the testimony of resident European traders. To cite just one among many others, the resident officers of the Dutch West India Company wrote in 1679:

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[85] *Ibid.*, p. 165. As Kea wrote, “For most of the seventeenth century peasants were under the pressure of land revenue demands to sell part of their harvested produce in the town markets for gold, a portion of which was handed over to the revenue collectors as rent. The peasants were obliged to live within easy walking distance to a market, hence the central townships were invariably surrounded within a radius of five to six miles by peasant farms and villages. The concentration of peasant communities around the towns was a salient feature of Gold Coast settlement patterns before the late seventeenth century. This pattern changed when money rent was converted to rent in kind. Peasants were no longer compelled to sell part of their produce in the town markets . . . Towns received less produce from peasant farms, and in some localities town markets declined” (*Ibid.*, p. 165).

[86] *Ibid.*, pp. 165-167. Kea wrote: “Peasants ceased to be the main producers of subsistence for towns people and of economic surplus for the class of overlords. Slaves and bonded freemen, on the other hand, became the principal sources of subsistence for nonfarming urban dwellers and of social wealth for the dominant class. These developments . . . are clearly indicated by the changed nature of settlements located around the central townships. Thus around the mid-seventeenth century, Great Accra was surrounded by peasant villages, while at the end of the century Nyanaoase was surrounded by slave farming villages” (*Ibid.*, p. 165).

[87] Joseph E. Inikori, "Export Versus Domestic Demand: The Determinants of Sex Ratios in the Transatlantic Slave Trade," *Research in Economic History*, Vol. 14 (1992), p. 122.

[88] Latham, “Currency, Credit and Capitalism,” p. 604.

> The Accanists [Akani], who are real traders, used to trade in all these areas, and they alone controlled all trade, travelling with large numbers of slaves to carry their goods through all those places. But as a result of the wars . . . this trade is suddenly stopped … the passages are closed … and especially since musket and gunpowder have been introduced, things have become much worse, the natives having become much more war-like …. Consequently the whole Coast has come into a kind of state of war. This started in the year 1658, and gradually this has gone so far, that none of the passages could anymore be used, and none of the traders could come through.[89]

The movement of domestic agricultural prices relative to captive export prices and declining demand for currency as reflected by currency imports all mirror remarkably these well-documented developments. They indicate market conditions that had no incentives or pressure for agricultural production to move from subsistence to predominantly market-based production.

Preliminary analysis of a large body of price data shows that in the 51 years between 1697 and 1747, while the yearly mean price of men and women exported from the Gold Coast increased by 330 percent and 238 percent, respectively, the price of yams on the domestic market increased by a mere 34 percent. Between 1747 and 1776 (30 years) the export price of men captives increased further by 53.33 percent, while the domestic price of yams decreased absolutely by 6.25 percent in the 25 years between 1747 and 1771. After the 1807 British abolition of the transatlantic slave trade and Atlantic trade in gold, rubber, and palm produce began to expand, in addition to the growing trade in kola nuts to the interior savanna, yam prices began to rise. By 1880 the price had risen 567 percent from the level of 1771.[90]

The demand for currency, as reflected in the movement of currency imports, is remarkably in line with the domestic price deflation evidence and points to long-run decline of local and inter-regional trade in domestic products, especially agricultural products. Marion Johnson had talked about large quantities of cowries imported into the Gold Coast by European traders between the mid-fifteenth and mid-seventeenth

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[89] Cited in Inikori, "The Struggle Against the Transatlantic Slave Trade," p. 184. The conditions described by the Dutch official — the disruption of internal trade — partly explain why merchants and other wealthy town dwellers had to employ servile labor to produce their subsistence in nearby farming villages.

[90] The processing of the price data collected from the National Archives, Kew Gardens, England, is in progress. It is part of a book project.

century.[91] By the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there were hardly any cowries in the cargoes shipped to the Gold Coast by European traders. The growth of cowrie imports resumed from 1827 to 1850 as the product trade grew once again; the annual average quantity was 304.4 tons in 1845-1847.[92] Similar long-run changes occurred in the Bight of Benin and the Bight of Biafra. The percentage shares of currency (cowries) in the total value of imports into the Bight of Benin in 1681 and 1684 were 59.2 and 52.4, respectively; comparable currency (copper rods) shares for the Bight of Biafra were 67.6 and 69.4 in 1661 and 1662, respectively. By 1791, currency imports into the Bight of Biafra had declined to 2.9 percent of the total value of imports. Because large-scale captive exports in both regions continued to the mid-nineteenth century, the shares of currency imports (cowries and copper rods) remained extremely low throughout the first half of the nineteenth century.[93] Like the Gold Coast, the growth of currency imports resumed when product exports began to increase from the mid-nineteenth century. In 1855-1860, total cowrie imports into Lagos and Whydah averaged 2,750 tons a year; imports into Lagos alone averaged 2,812 tons in 1865-1870, and 2,121 tons in 1871-1880.[94]

The significance of the domestic price stagnation and the drastic decline of currency imports for market development and the commercialization of agriculture is hard to over-emphasize. Our understanding of these developments will be helped if we recall that the sixteenth-century price revolution — caused by a combination of population growth and the massive import of silver and gold from Spanish America — contributed greatly to the development of the market economy and the commercialization of agriculture in Western Europe. [95]

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[91] Johnson, "The Cowrie Currencies," Part II, pp. 332-333.
[92] Inikori, "Changing Commodity Composition of Imports," pp. 67-68; Inikori, "The Economic Impact of the 1807 British Abolition," p. 179.
[93] Inikori, "Changing Commodity Composition of Imports," pp. 70-71.
[94] A. G. Hopkins, "The Currency Revolution in South-West Nigeria in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. III, No. 3 (1966), pp. 474, 475; Inikori, "The Economic Impact of the 1807 British Abolition," pp. 179-180.
[95] Stanley J. Stein & Barbara H. Stein, *Silver, Trade, and War: Spain and America in the Making of Early Modern Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); E. J. Hamilton, "American Treasure and the Rise of Capitalism," *Economica*, 9 (November 1929), pp. 338-357; J. D. Gould, "The Price Revolution Reconsidered," *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 17 (December 1964), pp. 249-266; Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England*, pp. 203-206.

IV. Conclusion

Contrary to popular belief, our analysis of the evidence presented in the paper makes it clear that the export of captives did not stimulate the growth of internal trade in West Africa; it retarded it. The growth of inter-regional trade and specialization that had been advancing in the centuries preceding the mid-seventeenth — driven by population growth and inter-continental trade — was terminated. The trade in locally produced cotton cloths between the Benin kingdom and its northeastern neighbors (northeastern Yoruba and Nupe) and between Benin and the Gold Coast, which was advancing to proto-industrial production of cotton cloth, was cut off by the direct exchange of captives for imported European and Asian textiles on the Gold Coast. Similar developments occurred in southeastern Nigeria. The inter-regional trade and specialization, in which the densely populated northern Igbo produced and traded manufactures with the communities on the Atlantic coast and in the river valleys, was replaced with violent procurement of captives from the densely populated northern Igbo and taken to the middlemen traders on the coast without market exchange, in the first instance. The direct exchange of these captives for manufactures brought by the European traders created enclave economies on the coast and the immediate hinterland, as it did on the Gold Coast and elsewhere in the coastal regions of West Africa. Much of what scholars thought was booming trade in West Africa, stimulated by the trade in captives, was largely limited to these enclaves, while the much larger victim areas in the interior lost much of their stimulating inter-regional and local trade, as violence raged. All this reinforced the adverse effects of the absolute population decline and the decline of inter-continental trade, the two main drivers of the commercializing process in the centuries prior to the mid-seventeenth. This is what is reflected by the stagnant agricultural prices and the decline of demand for local exchange currencies. This is also the reason why Curtin found lack of progress in agricultural technology in Senegambia in the two hundred years preceding 1850, after the changes in the earlier two hundred years. It is, thus, no surprise that the process of agricultural commercialization stalled in the two hundred years period, 1650-1850, resulting in the overwhelming dominance of subsistence agriculture on the eve of European colonial rule in West Africa.