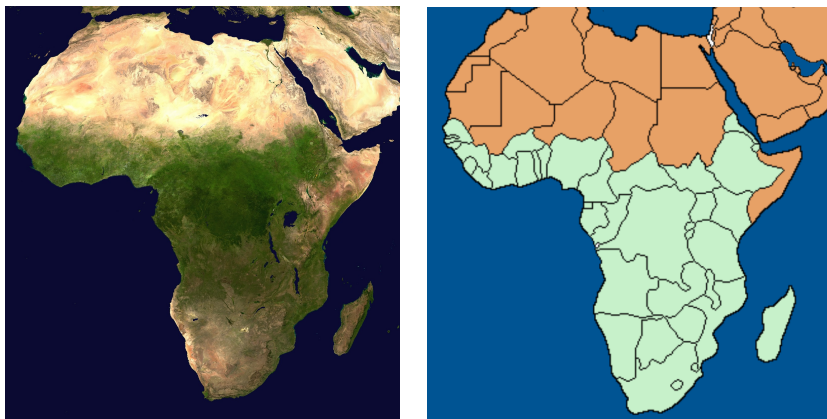


VI. Africa and the World We Live In

A. A Focus on *Sub-Saharan* Africa

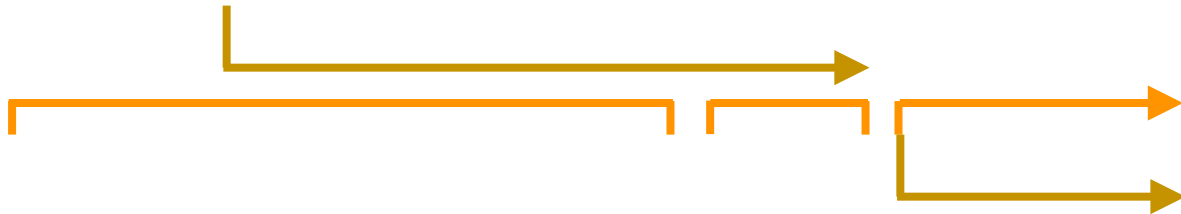
1. Africa is a huge continent, larger than China, the United States, India, and Europe combined! It is also comprised of many dozens of countries. Studying such a culture is challenging, because its many parts constitute a “plethora,” if we don’t have a way of simplifying and integrating the picture.
2. The first step in making the story accessible is to recognize that although Africa is one continent, it is divided into *two* cultural blocks.
3. The cultural blocks are a reflection of the physical geography and the related history of the continent. Northern Africa, on the Mediterranean Sea, has long been part of Islamic culture, which spread from Arabia (c.622-32^h) in a great wave of jihad across to Iberia (c.711AD^h).
4. The Sahara Desert, however, formed an almost impassable barrier for cultural change over the centuries. A caravan trade linked Sub-Saharan Africa (Africa “below” the Sahara) to Northern Africa, but there seemed little reason to engage in jihad in that direction when Europe represented the fundamental challenge to Islamic culture.
5. Thus, far to the South, tribal Africa evolved on its own, detached from the history of world in clusters of people only infrequently and inconsequentially organized into local kingdoms or “empires.” Like South Asia, the cultures of the region never developed to the point of studying history. They were *a-historical*.
6. Then came the Europeans, seeking a way to navigate around the obstacle of **Triumphal Islam** to East Asia and the trading opportunities it represented. Contact with European civilization thus dominated the story of Africa as contact with Triumphal Islam dominated the story of northern Africa.



The physical geography (left) and cultural geography (right) are an almost perfect match. Northern Africa is part of Islamic Culture. Sub-Saharan Africa is its own distinct cultural block.

B. The Unique Challenge of African History

1. Because Africa was a tribal (politically un-integrated) and a-historical culture prior to the arrival of Europeans, it has no history of its own.
2. The story of Africa begins when the Europeans arrive, and thus its story is the story of a culture dominated from without for almost its entirety.
3. This is similar to South Asia, whose complete history, as we have diagrammed it in class with the impact of **Triumphal Islam** included, is symbolized as follows.



4. The difference is that although South Asia has a long story of a-historical development that is vaguely understood in outline, including, for instance the invasion of India by Alexander the Great, Africa has no such markers in its early story.
5. There are fragments of information, including Bible stories, about a kingdom called “Aksum” in ancient Ethiopia. There are similar fragments about a culture in West Africa, with its capital at Timbuktu. These bits of information do not permit a meaningful story to be constructed. The story of Africa (in black lines below) thus only begins when the historical civilization of Europe (in green) begins to record its interactions with Africa.



6. The template of African history is thus the basic template for all cultures whose interactions with Europe are the main thrust of history. The first period is the period of *European Domination*, followed by the *World Wars*, and then the modern struggle for independence, which has two parts: 1) *decolonization* (the withdrawal of European colonial powers from Africa), followed by 2) the post-colonial phase of contemporary history, where there is a profound and still ongoing *struggle for identity*.
7. A labeled outline of African history is thus:

