

Unit 21

Colonial Identities

Section 1

Unit Materials

Questions To Consider

Question 1.

In what ways did the colonial experience affect both colonizers and the colonized?

Question 2.

How did colonial subjects express new identities through clothing and the body?

Question 3.

In what ways were clothing choices related to colonial resistance and to decolonization?

Question 4.

How could clothing choices reflect or resist the process of economic globalization?

The Big Picture

How is this topic related to Increasing Integration?

Most of the world's population experienced colonialism — whether as colonizers or colonized — in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This common experience, although locally varied, helped integrate peoples of the world through trade, language, sports, food, music, and material culture.

How is this topic related to Proliferating Difference?

Colonialism also resulted in the formation of unequal relationships based on class, race, gender, and ethnicity. The recognition of these differences was often consciously displayed on the bodies of both colonizers and colonized peoples.

Unit Purpose

- Understanding the experience of living under a colonial system is as essential to understanding the history of imperialism as economics or politics.
- The colonial experience was not simply determined by the imposition of colonial rule by a foreign power. Rather, that experience was always negotiated and modified by the responses and reactions of colonized peoples.
- The colonial experience shaped the identities of both colonized and colonizing people.

Unit Content Overview

Discussions of colonialism often fail to address the complex and varied experiences of what it meant to live under such a system. Yet by 1900, the vast majority of the world's population lived under colonial rule as either colonizers or colonized people. And while colonialism varied from place to place — in part because of each colonizing power and in part because of the ways each power was modified by local realities — all peoples living under colonialism shared a common experience of profound cultural and social change from the past.

This unit explores the ways the colonial experience affected both colonizers and the colonized through an examination of clothing and the body. How were the forces of colonialism reflected on the bodies of individuals through expressions of conformity and difference? In all cultures, the body and its dress or adornment conveys messages of personal identity, historical memory, and empowerment. At a glance, one's ethnic affiliation and gender are communicated, and one's socioeconomic status expressed for the world to see. In the colonial period, clothing choices often signaled multiple — and sometimes conflicting — identities. Most middle-class Indian men, for example, had two types of clothing: a traditional type to be worn in the home, and British suits to be worn in public. Indeed, the seemingly simple act of choosing clothing could become a powerful statement of identity, expressing passive complicity, pragmatic adaptation, subtle defiance, or active rebellion.

Looking at clothing choices made by both colonizers and the colonized allows us to grasp some of the complexities of colonialism. In particular, these choices allow us to see how each group influenced the other. It shows us that the interaction of different peoples and cultures in colonial contexts was never simple and never unidirectional, and that power was modified by local and personal realities on a daily basis. These intimate realities, in turn, can reveal much about the wider world history of the colonial experience.

Unit References

Susan S. Bean, "Gandhi and Khadi, the Fabric of Indian Independence," *Cloth and Human Experience*, eds. Annette B. Weiner and Jane Schneider (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989).

Bernard S. Cohen, "Cloth, Clothes, and Colonialism in India," *Cloth and Human Experience*, eds. Annette B. Weiner and Jane Schneider (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989).

Laura Fair, "Dressing Up: Clothing, Class and Gender in Post-Abolition Zanzibar," *Journal of African History* 39 (1998), 63–94.

Michelle Maskiell, "Consuming Kashmir: Shawls and Empires, 1500-2000," *Journal of World History* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2002), 27–65.

Emma Tarlo, *Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

Global Historical Context

- Time Period: 1750–1950

- The two centuries between 1750 and 1950 were a period of intensive imperial expansion. By the nineteenth century, Europeans dominated this expansion, and by the end of the nineteenth century they were joined in empire building by both Americans and Japanese. Industrialization fueled this expansion because it gave rise to a demand for raw materials, and because it provided the means by which industrialized powers could dominate other societies — through technologies like the steam ship, rifle, railroad, and telegraph. Imperial expansion also generated deep rivalries and tensions between the imperial powers. Ultimately, these tensions contributed to the outbreak of both World Wars — wars that, ironically, helped to generate strong, successful independence movements within colonized regions.

AP Themes

- Examines interactions in economies and politics because colonization dramatically increased connections and interactions between colonizers and colonized.
- Explores systems of social and gender structures because colonization frequently resulted in social changes. These changes included shifts in gender ideology, as a result of blending the beliefs and traditions of existing cultures with those of the colonizers' cultures.
- Discusses cultural and intellectual developments by exploring the ways that colonization altered the cultures and traditions of both indigenous cultures and colonizing cultures.

Related Units

- Unit 11. Early Empires: “Empire” is a familiar term, with examples throughout history and across the globe. Through case studies of the Eurasian Mongol Empire, the West African Mali Empire, and the Andean Inka Empire, this unit traces the construction of empires, the administrative structures that made empires work, and the ideas that legitimized them. It also looks at the environmental and technological conditions that shaped these empires and influenced their rises and falls. It is related to Unit 21 because it provides a comparative framework for understanding this later period of colonialism.
- Unit 19. Global Industrialization: Industrialization was and is a global process, not just a European or American story. This unit links Latin America, Europe, Africa, Australia, and India, examining the impacts of industry on trade, environment, culture, technology, and lives around the world. It is related to Unit 21 because industrialization was a critical factor in allowing a few nation-states to become powerful enough to dominate much of the world through imperialism.
- Unit 20. Imperial Designs: Modern imperialism reorganized more than the maps of the world: It imposed ways of knowing and being within a global community. The profound consequences of imperialism are examined in the Wild West, the South African frontier, East Asia, and South America, where politics, culture, industrial capitalism, and the environment have been shaped and re-shaped. This unit is related to Unit 21 because it explains how imperial structures functioned, and why these structures created new relationships between once-distant peoples.
- Unit 22. Global War and Peace: This unit traverses the familiar territories of World Wars I and II by asking: How global were these conflicts? How did local, national, ethnic, and religious conflicts shape these wars and their aftermaths? How were identities reshaped by these global conflicts? It focuses on the Spanish Civil War as a case study in

nationalism, fascism and communism. It also tracks the personal story of a Jewish family that emigrated from Europe to the United States, whose original home was destroyed by war. This unit is related to Unit 21 because the World Wars set the process of decolonization in motion, partly because colonized peoples could no longer be convinced that their colonizers had monopolies on “civilization” and cultural superiority.

Section 2

Video-Related Materials

Video Segment 1: Colonial Zanzibar

This segment explores the way clothing was used in colonial Zanzibar as a means of marking status and class differences. Zanzibar, an island off the coast of East Africa, became a thriving port in the 1600s due to the influence of traders from Oman. By the nineteenth century, Zanzibar had become the main trading center for the Omani people in the Indian Ocean region. Although Omanis did not formally control Zanzibar in a political sense, they had a profound effect on the economy. In particular, Omanis were responsible for bringing large numbers of slaves from east Africa and Asia to the island. East African cultural traditions had long emphasized the importance of clothing to signal class, status, and ethnicity, and under Omani influence this tradition persisted. In particular, free Zanzibaris wished to emphasize their differences from slaves. To display their free status, male and female Zanzibaris — most of whom were Muslim — covered themselves from head to foot. In contrast, slaves were only allowed to wear minimal clothing. In 1897, seven years after Zanzibar became an official protectorate of Britain, slavery was abolished. Although the British did not make it easy for slaves to become free, once individuals did gain their freedom they often signaled their new status by choosing to cover themselves in once-forbidden ways. Women began wearing brightly colored garments called “kangas,” which visually announced their freedom. Moreover, having numerous kangas became one way that freed peoples defined their new prosperity.

Video Segment 2: Colonial India

This segment looks at the ways that cloth, clothing and identity were deeply intertwined in colonial India. In the eighteenth century, as the British began gaining control over India, British manufacturing firms began to exert influence on India’s thriving textile industry. Within a half-century, Indians were forced to buy finished cotton goods from the British rather than the other way around. Also by the early nineteenth century, British colonizers had shifted their habits away from adapting to Indian culture — including wearing Indian clothes — to scrupulously marking themselves as British by wearing European-style clothing. At the same time, some Indian colonial subjects sought to fit in with their British rulers — and thereby gain access to jobs and power — by adopting European clothing. Although the British did not treat such Indians as equals, they tended to treat those who adopted European styles with greater respect. By the early twentieth century, many Indians began to reject the idea that they should adopt British styles and manners. Instead, they began to argue that Indians should signal their difference from Britons through wearing Indian clothing produced with Indian cloth. Mahatma Gandhi was an active supporter of this idea; led by his leadership and example, Indians substantially decreased their reliance on foreign textile imports. In this way, cloth became one of the most potent symbols of the struggle for Indian national independence.

Perspectives on the Past: Fashioning Colonialism: The Kashmiri Shawl

What impact did the Kashmiri shawl have on European society? Historian Anand Yang argues that such shawls demonstrated the globalization of indigenous traditions in the age of colonialism. In the case of Kashmiri shawls, Britons began by buying and trading for them, then moved to mass-producing their own imitations. Soon, Kashmiri shawls were naturalized into many cultures around the world.

Video Details

Who Is Interviewed

- Anand Yang
- Laura Fair

Primary Source Materials Featured in the Video

- Zanzibari folk tale
- Mahatma Gandhi, Indian nationalist
- Krishna Das, Indian author

Program Contents

Begins	Ends	Contents
00:00	01:49	Show tease, show opening credits
01:50	05:05	Program overview/introduction
05:06	13:03	Video Segment 1. <i>Colonial Zanzibar</i>
13:04	24:56	Video Segment 2. <i>Colonial India</i>
24:57	26:18	Perspectives on the Past: <i>Fashioning Colonialism: The Kashmiri Shawl</i>
26:19	28:25	Show close and program credits