

Indigenous or natives

On the concept of native

The English word native is derived from the Latin *nativus*, meaning 'born' or 'innate'. In the etymological sense of the word, we may say that everyone is a native of one place or another. During the early colonial period, however, anthropologists tended to use native in a pejorative sense.

This usage placed subjects in the early stages of social evolution as represented by Lewis H. Morgan, who classified human 'progress' into three successive stages – 'savagery', 'barbarism' and 'civilization'. We may say that the unequal relationship between the colonizer/civilized and the colonized/primitive is thus inscribed in the word native. The study of one's own culture in Europe or the United States is ordinarily called insider research, whereas the same type of study elsewhere is called either native or indigenous.

The distinction between native and indigenous is ambiguous and complex. Generally, scholars in the Third World prefer the latter because it is more or less free from the colonial implications of the former (Fahim 1982).