

Eastern Kentucky University

From the Selected Works of Joe Molinaro

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Shards: A Letter from Joe Molinaro

Joe Molinaro, *Eastern Kentucky University*



Available at: https://works.bepress.com/joe_molinaro/15/

SHARDS

A letter from Joe Molinaro

With regard to the term "political," we are sympathetic with your position as editor of the magazine. Yet we would like to have an opportunity to offer clarification on our position, knowing it will not likely be met with complete understanding. I am not trying to suggest we are at loggerheads, but still feel there is an important issue at stake with the term. We are not necessarily demanding anything here, but hope you will better understand our reasons for stating things as we do.

You see, Mary, I know you are using the Webster's definition of "indigenous" for the purpose of this issue, but our work with the indigenous has allowed, or rather demanded, that our understanding of this term be expanded upon and not limited to the more generally accepted use of the word. It is indeed a political definition for us, and them. The struggles between the indigenous and the government (and by extension corporations both in and outside Ecuador) have created a very tense political environment for those most affected by laws that marginalize the people who, as Webster's might say, "live naturally in a particular region." And it can be difficult to live "naturally" in any particular area when the government imposes itself on you and your "region" in ways that make any type of natural living complicated. Sure, the political definition we claim here may not be found in Webster's, but 24 years of work with the indigenous peoples of the Ecuadorian rainforest, and feeling their struggles with the higher powers of government firsthand – struggles that come about through laws imposed upon them and their lands – give us, we feel, the necessary permission to make

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that claim. We state it as we do on behalf of those affected by these laws, and proudly state it knowing good and well that it is indeed a political reference, regardless of the limited scope defined by the dictionary. It would be our hope that *SP* would be willing to expand upon this as a way to offer another view of how the term "indigenous" is used both in the past and present. Your wish to state it as "historical", while alright, does not necessarily identify the problem as it exists today.

We are sorry to be so defensive about using the term "political" here, and of course in the end you will use what you feel best for your magazine. But for us, it is much deeper. We have witnessed contentious marches on the capital of Quito by the indigenous over land rights (with the government using the term "indigenous" in the pejorative sense when discussing them and their concerns); we have been with the indigenous when they were tear-gassed for trying to state their claims as indigenous peoples and their rights of property use; we have known of indigenous friends who have lost their lives in this struggle with the government, when trying to make their voices heard as a matter of political discourse; and we still continue regularly to read articles in the Ecuadorian and U.S. newspapers about the struggles between the indigenous and the government regarding land rights and opposition to oil and lumber extraction from the rainforest.



It is not easy for us to simply sit back and allow Webster's to use a narrow definition in describing people who are indeed affected on such a political level.

I am sorry to go on so about this, but our work comes from a place deep within our beings and formed through many years of personal contact, working with people we are proud to call family and friends. We want nothing less than to describe them in a way that most accurately represents their lives in the rainforest.

Joe Molinaro, co-author with Richard Burkett of the article on p.6, wrote this in response to a question about the word "Indigenous", and it seemed to touch on many of the issues and questions that underlie the theme.

Nan Coffin is a studio potter living in San Diego, California.

ABOVE: Richard Burkett, Joe Molinaro, and Nan Coffin stand behind two Andean potters in Ecuador.