

Settimo Cielo



di Sandro Magister

09 ott

Infanticide in the Amazon. There Are Those Who Defend It, Even in the Church

**QUE CADA POVO TRAME OS FIOS DA SUA HISTÓRIA:
Em defesa de um Estado restituidor
e garantista da deliberação no foro étnico**

(Arguição lida na Audiência Pública realizada em 05/09/2007 pela Comissão de Direitos Humanos da Câmara dos Deputados sobre o Projeto de Lei nº 1057 de 2007 do Deputado Henrique Afonso sobre a prática do infanticídio em áreas indígenas) ¹.

Rita Laura Segato
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> **Italiano**

> English

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> **All the articles of Settimo Cielo in English**

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At the jam-packed press conference on Tuesday October 8 on the synod for the Amazon, the Swiss journalist Giuseppe Rusconi posed the following question:

"One of the leitmotifs of this synod is the representation of the Indian peoples as if they dwell in the earthly paradise before original sin. They are lauded for their primitive purity and exalted for their harmonious relationship with nature. From them we are supposed to learn to coexist with the environment. However, still today, around twenty of the Amazonian peoples practice infanticide. And on a website of the Brazilian episcopal conference there appears a contribution in which this practice is justified. So I am asking if for you human rights have a universal application, or if they are valid for some and not for others."

The first to reply was one of the twelve "special guests" at the synod - on a par with Ban Ki-Moon, Jeffrey D. Sachs, Hans J. Schellnhuber - the Filipina Victoria Lucia Tauli-Corpuz, special rapporteur at the United Nations on the rights of indigenous populations, who recognized that "not all the indigenous, the original peoples, are perfect." And she added: "Some have practices not consistent with human rights. We have discussed the question at length. In the declaration of the UN it is emphasized that, if states must respect the rights of the indigenous populations, the indigenous must act in such a way that their traditions may be in keeping with international law on human rights. The indigenous have said that they will seek to change certain traditions of theirs."

After her spoke Peruvian cardinal Pedro Ricardo Barreto Jimenez, archbishop of Huancayo, Jesuit, vice-president of the pan-Amazonian ecclesial network and co-president of the synod, who also recognized that "it's not all a bed of roses with the indigenous peoples." For which one cannot speak of "primitive purity, because that would mean disowning human nature," and yet "we must recognize their ancestral wisdom, because they have enriched this biome which Europe is using."

Then, however, the cardinal denied that the Amazonian populations practice infanticide: "I have never heard of it." And, taking off his headphones, he added that "those who make such statements must present documentary evidence." He did however observe that "every human life is sacred. If someone affirms that such practices are possible, he is in violation of the message of the Gospel. One must defend life always." And he stated: "I have been evangelized by the Indians, and they continue to evangelize me." At the end of the press conference, while conversing, Cardinal Barreto once again refused to believe that on a website of the Brazilian Church a statement has been published in defense of infanticide among the Indians.

But he was wrong. At dawn the following day, Rusconi put online on his blog "**Rosporpora**" precisely that "documentary evidence" which Cardinal Barreto was demanding, and which he condensed as follows, in four points:

1. The Brazilian parliament is discussing the bill PL 1057/2007 by member of parliament Henrique Afonso, which aims to prohibit the practice of infanticide in indigenous areas. The proposal was approved by the chamber of deputies on August 26 2015 with 361 for and 84 against. Now the senate is considering it. In the debate, which was rather lively, the universal rights of the human person recognized by the Brazilian constitution were contrasted with the rights of the Indian communities, in particular the most isolated, to preserve their practices and customs. The opposition to the bill was made up above all of anthropologists extreme in their devotion to Indian identity.

2. Among the best-known anthropologists in opposition to bill PL 1057/2007 is Rita Laura Segato of the University of Brasília, whose statement before the human rights commission of the chamber of deputies can still be read on the website of the **Conselho Indigenista Missionário** (CIMI), "organismo vinculado à Conferência de Bispos do Brasil." The title of Segato's hearing is: "Que cada povo trame os fios da sua história [That every people may weave the strands of its history]," the text of which states among other things: "What state is there today that presumes to legislate on how the indigenous peoples must protect their children? What authority does such a state have?"

3. That infanticide is a practice still in use among some indigenous peoples of the Amazon has been noted by the sociologist and anthropologist Giuseppe Bonazzi during a visit to the Consolata missionaries among the Yanomami people. Interviewed by "la Repubblica" on November 16 2010, Bonazzi said: "Among this people the frailest newborns, or those the mother cannot attend to because she is still occupied with the siblings born before, are not accepted and they die." And this is the opening of another article published on "Lettera 43" with the title "Will Brazil change the law that allows the indigenous to kill children?" "Some indigenous tribes in Brazil practice infanticide. And as strange as it may seem, Brazilian law permits them to do so. Now, however, the South American country is discussing a bill that, if approved, could make this practice unlawful. The debate is very heated. [...] The journalist Cleuci de Oliveira has written an interesting analysis for 'Foreign Policy.' It must be said however that the issue concerns only a minority of the Brazilian tribes: according to the estimate of 'Foreign Policy,' only 20 groups out of about 300 practice it: among these are the Yanomami and the Suruwaha."

4. "O infanticídio indígena" is the object of numerous comments on the Brazilian legal website "**Jus**." One reads for example in the introduction to a statement of October 2017: "The traditional practice of 'indigenous infanticide' consists in the homicide of creatures undesired by the group, and is common to various Brazilian tribes." And in the conclusion: "In no way can the right to cultural diversity legitimize the violation of the right to life. Thus any attempt to justify the practice of infanticide cannot find support in any international legislation." Moreover, the Brazilian newspaper "O Globo" published on December 7 of 2014 the results of a survey on the Yanomami. The survey confirms that, when a child is born, the mother goes with the child into the forest, examines the child, and if he has a disability, normally returns home alone. Or: if there are twins, the mother acknowledges only one. The act of acknowledgement is symbolized by breastfeeding, and the child is then considered as a living being by the community.

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That's all for the documentation published by Rusconi at dawn on Wednesday October 9. Meanwhile, however, in Brazil someone has tried to run damage control.

And how? By removing from the website of the CIMI, the indigenous missionary organism "vinculado" with the Brazilian episcopal conference, none other than the text cited by Rusconi at point 2, meaning the statement of the anthropologist Rita Laura Segato to the human rights commission of the chamber of deputies, in defense of infanticide.

Today, in fact, this statement is no longer there. But there has been left on full display, on the same website of the CIMI, another article, entitled "**Estudo contesta criminalização do infanticídio indígena**," in which Segato, commenting on the essay of one of her fellow anthropologists, Marianna Holanda, calls the bill intended to ban infanticide "uma forma de 'calúnia' aos povos indígenas."

In any case, the twelve pages of Segato's statement against bill PL 1057/2007 are in the possession of Rusconi and of Settimo Cielo, photocopied before their disappearance from the website of the Conselho Indigenista Missionário of the Brazilian Church.

Condividi:



09 ottobre 2019

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CHI SONO



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1 3 5 6

7 11 13 20

15 17 19 20

23 24 27

28 29 31

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