

Infanticide: what the experts say

I am convinced that among the Suruwaha infanticide represents nothing but occasional instances in which multiple factors are at work. There is no 'law' which condemns, nor 'custom' that requires, the elimination of unwanted newborns.

Prof Dr João dal Poz Neto, anthropologist, Federal University, Juiz da Fora, worked with Suruwaha, 1994

Infanticide among the Suruwaha is insignificant. The film (Hakani) was initiated by the fundamentalists, who have lost ground since the government prohibited them proselytizing. To get media attention and public opinion, the Suruwaha are the victims of a campaign to criminalize and 'animalize' them.

Dr Miguel Aparicio Suárez, anthropologist, CIMI (Indigenist Missionary Council) & OPAN (Operação Amazonia Nativa), worked with Suruwaha 1995-2001

Through my direct contact with indigenous people, and from working with indigenists and state health services, my strong opinion is that infanticide is an extremely rare practice in indigenous cultures. It most commonly appears as a consequence of the profound disruption caused to the health and social fabric of native cultures, through contact with the outside world.

Dr Nicole Freris, medical doctor, UNAIS (United Nations Association International Service), worked with various Amazon Indian communities, 1993-2002

All the historical records I know show that cases of infanticide among indigenous peoples are very low. We at (the missionary council) knew of isolated cases... but we have no recent reports about babies being abandoned in the forest.

Saulo Feitosa, vice president, Indigenist Missionary Council, Brazil

As far as the Kayapo are concerned... there are very occasional infanticides. They occur at birth, almost always involving babies with serious defects that would render their survival problematical.

Prof Terence Turner, anthropologist, University of Chicago & Cornell University, worked with Kayapo, Brazil, 1962-present.

Infanticide: what the Indians say

(These quotations, all by Indians, are from a report for UNICEF, resulting from a series of meetings, November & December 2009, between experts, Christian organisations, and Indians.)

Since the draft bill was presented, every time the Indians or their allies try to defend the constitutional right to the mapping out of their lands, the Indians' enemies invoke the practice of infanticide to invalidate their requests.

The draft law is racist because it does not consider or even mention that non-Indians kill their children much more. If the white people commit this crime more frequently than the Indians, why is a law just against Indians being pushed forward? The white people kill us and they are not detained. We face a racist law: our assassins are not incriminated by a specific law, but we are.

News of the 'practice of infanticide' never comes from official, unbiased sources: the Ministries of Health and Justice do not attest to the practice. The source of the news is always evangelical entities interested in missionary access to the communities, the removal of indigenous children to be trained as new religious agents, and intruding into Amazonian and indigenous lands.

The draft law [Muwaji Law] and the anti-indigenous propaganda in the media, through the accusations of infanticide, are used to justify the entrance of outside interests in indigenous people's ancestral lands.

The debate which focuses on 'indigenous infanticide' is of a political and ideological nature to support the imperial-colonial interests of appropriating all the natural resources from indigenous territories.